



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

Deliverable

D5.1 Local Reports Revised

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	23
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: BELGIUM.....	26
1. Methods of the study.....	26
2. Professional experiences – an overview	27
Teachers.....	27
Social Workers	28
Interpreters.....	29
3. The experience of migrant children from professionals’ perspectives	30
Teachers.....	30
School performance	30
Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations.....	32
Discrimination.....	33
Challenges	33
Social Workers	39
School performance	39
Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations.....	39
Challenges	40
Relationships with children and teenagers	41
Factors influencing participation and performance	42
Interpreters.....	42
4. Working with children and their families	42
Teachers.....	42
Learning as a sensory experience.....	44
Opposition to new pedagogy as a key challenge	44
Parents’ involvement and expectations.....	45
Communication/Language	46
Accessing and Accepting support services	47
Social Workers	49
Practices in working with children.....	49
Communication with parents	49
Interpreters.....	49
5. Framing integration and evaluating policies.....	50

Teachers.....	50
Language as an obstacle to and necessity for integration	51
Efficacy of specific classes for newcomers	52
Intercultural Mediation and Understanding	52
Social workers	53
Interpreters.....	54
6. School during pandemic.....	54
Teachers.....	54
Lack of resources	54
Mental health and school performance of students.....	55
More and new work for teachers.....	55
Social workers	56
Interpreters.....	56
7. Recommendation	57
Teachers.....	57
Institutional	57
Additional/Sufficient Resources	57
Training for Teachers.....	57
Teaching exchanges and learning between countries	57
More types of professionals on-site at the school	57
Fully equipped classrooms.....	57
Streamline bureaucracy.....	58
Interpersonal.....	58
Better Communication	58
Classroom and Teaching.....	58
Sharing of Culture.....	59
Social workers	59
Institutional	59
Interpersonal Communication.....	60
Interpreters.....	60
Institutional	60
Interpersonal.....	61
Conclusions	61

References	62
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: FINLAND	63
1. Methods of the study	63
Target group: teachers	63
Target group: social workers	63
Target group: interpreters	64
Target group: reception centres	64
2. Professional experiences – an overview	65
Professional experiences: teachers	65
Professional experiences: social workers	67
Professional experiences: interpreters	68
Experiences of professionals in reception centres	69
3. The experience of migrant children from professionals’ perspectives	70
Teachers’ views on migrant children’s situation	70
Social workers’ views on migrant children’s situation	72
School and social services as sources of support	72
Intersections of gender and culture	73
Sources of vulnerability: language deficiency and societal prejudice	74
Interpreters’ views on migrant children’s situation	76
Migrant children’s situation from the perspective of reception centres	77
4. Working with children and their families	78
Relationship and communication with parents	78
Teachers and parents	78
Social workers and parents	79
Interpreters and parents	80
Reception centre staff and parents	80
Professionals’ roles and tools in working with children and their families	81
Teachers	81
Social workers	82
Interpreters	85
Reception centre staff	86
5. Framing integration and evaluating policies	87
Teachers on integration policy	87

Social workers on integration policy	88
Interpreters on integration policy	89
Integration policy from the perspective of reception centres	90
6. School during the pandemic.....	92
Teachers.....	92
Social workers	92
Interpreters.....	92
Reception centres.....	93
7. Recommendations	93
Recommendations by teachers	93
Recommendations by social workers	93
Programmes and policies	93
Collaboration.....	95
Communication.....	95
Recommendations by interpreters	96
Recommendations by reception centres	96
8. Conclusions.....	97
Summary.....	97
Situation of migrant children in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic	98
Discussion.....	98
References	99
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: GERMANY	101
1. Introduction.....	101
2. Methods of the study.....	101
Sample	101
Place of research	101
Sampling	102
Relation to WP4 and WP6	103
Potential risk, possible difficulties	103
Course of the study.....	103
Recruitment phase.....	103
Interview format.....	103
Basic model.....	104

Interpretation.....	105
Methodological reflections.....	105
3. Professional experience an overview.....	107
Professional experiences and professional experiences of working with migrant families and children.....	107
Teachers.....	107
Social workers.....	110
Mediators/Interpreters.....	113
4. The experience of migrant children from professionals’ perspectives.....	115
Perception and interpretation of the situation of migrant children.....	115
Teachers.....	115
Social Workers.....	116
Mediators.....	117
Social, cultural or political factors that are considered crucial regarding the situation of migrant children.....	117
Teachers.....	117
Social Workers.....	119
Mediators.....	120
Educational opportunities, aspirations and difficulties of migrant children.....	120
Teachers.....	120
Social Workers.....	122
Mediators.....	122
Gender (and other) differences in relation to migrant children, and the situation of migrant children compared to children without a migrant background.....	122
Teachers.....	122
Social Workers.....	124
Mediators.....	124
5. Working with children and their families.....	125
Working with children.....	125
Teachers.....	125
Social Workers.....	126
Mediators.....	128
Working with families.....	128
Teachers.....	128

Social Workers.....	130
Mediators	131
6. Framing integration and evaluating policies.....	132
Integration: definition and personal and institutional involvement.....	132
Teachers	132
Social Workers.....	134
Mediators	135
Policy instruments and experiences.....	136
Teachers	136
Social Workers.....	139
Mediators	140
Inter-institutional cooperation (good practices)	140
Teachers	140
Social Workers.....	142
Mediators	144
Impact of inclusive programmes on children/communities	144
Teachers	144
Social Workers.....	146
Mediators	147
7. School during the pandemic.....	147
Situation of pupils during the pandemic.....	147
Teachers	147
Social Workers.....	149
Measures taken	150
Teachers	150
Social Workers.....	152
Mediators	152
8. Recommendations.....	152
Teachers.....	152
Social Workers	154
Mediators.....	155
9. Conclusions.....	156
Key findings	156

Situation of migrant children in the era of Covid-19	157
Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research.....	158
References	158
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: ITALY	159
1. Methodology	159
2. Professional experiences – an overview	160
Teachers.....	160
Social workers	161
Mediators	162
3. The experience of migrant children from professionals’ perspectives	166
Teachers.....	166
School achievement.	166
Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations.....	168
The fourth need is preserving and valuing cultural traditions.	168
Challenges	169
Factors influencing participation and achievement.	172
Discrimination.....	174
Function of peer networks.....	175
Social Workers	176
Problems of unaccompanied children	176
Resources	177
Families	177
Gender.....	178
Mediators	180
4. Working with children and their families	181
Teachers.....	181
Parents’ involvement.....	181
Parents’ expectations.....	183
Social workers	184
Mediators	186
Family expectations	186
Challenges and strategies	187
5. Framing integration and evaluating policies	189

Teachers.....	189
Representations of integration.	189
Support of integration	190
Collaboration.....	193
Social workers	194
Representations of integration.	194
Actions	194
Collaboration.....	195
Mediators	197
Representations of integration.	197
Actions	197
Collaboration.....	197
6. School during the pandemic.....	198
7. Recommendations.....	200
Teachers.....	200
Social workers	201
Mediators.....	202
8. Conclusions.....	202
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: POLAND.....	204
1. Introduction.....	204
2. Methods of the study.....	205
3. Professional experiences – an overview	207
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff	207
Social Workers	213
Intercultural assistants	214
4. The experience of migrant children from the perspective of professionals.....	217
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff	217
Educational functioning: achievement, aspirations, and agency	217
Educational and linguistic functioning	217
Cultural differences in educational contexts	219
Cultural differences between the culture of the parents and the country of immigration.....	220
Social-emotional functioning: peer relationships, discrimination, and sense of belonging.....	223
Sense of belonging	225

Discrimination.....	226
Social workers	228
Adaptation problems and their consequences.....	228
Socio-emotional functioning of migrant children.....	229
Intercultural assistants	230
Educational challenges: Language barrier, exams.....	231
Socio-emotional functioning of migrant children.....	232
5. Working with children and their families	233
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff	233
Polish language and remedial classes	233
Methods of teaching.....	233
Openness and flexibility of teachers, building a safe atmosphere.....	236
Intercultural assistants.....	236
Specific work challenges for teachers.....	237
Working with the parents.....	237
Social Workers	239
Areas of work.....	239
Social needs and the sources of vulnerability/security of migrant children	240
Tools and measures.....	240
Bureaucracy	241
Social workers' competences.....	241
Professional challenges	242
Intercultural assistants	242
Daily work: tasks, roles, and tools to work with children.....	242
Language and communication with children and parents.....	243
6. Framing integration and evaluating policies.....	244
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre's staff.....	244
Cooperation with institutions.....	245
Integration concepts	247
Integration programs	248
Social workers	248
Integration concepts	248
Cooperation with institutions.....	250

Intercultural assistants	252
7. Schools during the pandemic	253
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff	253
Access barriers	253
Invisible children.....	254
Insufficient parental support	255
Social isolation.....	256
Increased teacher workloads	256
Social workers	257
Intercultural assistants	258
8. Recommendations.....	258
Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff	258
Meta-recommendations.....	258
Detailed recommendations.....	260
Recommendations from teaching during a pandemic.....	263
Social workers	263
Intercultural assistants	265
9. Conclusions.....	266
References.....	267
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: SWEDEN	270
1. Introduction: Context and method of the study	270
Migration, segregation and schooling inequality in Malmö.....	270
Collaboration with three schools	271
Interviews with professionals	272
2. Professional experiences – an overview	273
Teachers.....	273
Social workers	274
Mediators.....	275
3. The experience of migrant children from professionals’ perspectives	275
Teachers.....	276
Educational difficulties and challenges.....	276
Lacking basic educational skills	276
Lacking sufficient language skills in the language of instruction.....	276

Educational needs	279
Key factors	279
The importance of having multilingual staff.....	280
Gender dimensions.....	280
Social workers	281
A mix of (migration) backgrounds.....	281
The situation of newcomers	283
Social problems in the school and neighbourhood	283
Gender dimensions.....	284
Mediators.....	285
Educational performance and needs of the children (from mediator’s perspective)	285
Factors and challenges influencing children’s performances	286
Gender dimensions.....	286
School inequality.....	287
4. Working with children and their families	287
Teachers working with children	287
Something more is needed of the teacher profession.....	287
Multilingualism as a resource	288
Language-oriented teaching	289
Scaffolding strategies	290
Digital tools.....	290
Teaching strategies enhancing student agency	291
Extra support – study guidance in mother tongue.....	292
Challenges – not enough time and resources	292
Teachers working with families	293
Parents as important resources	293
No interference from the parents	293
Communication and parent meetings.....	293
Parental support.....	294
Social workers	295
Holistic approach to education, also outside of school	296
Systematic tools and social relations as a tool	296
Mentoring and relations with families	297

Mediators	298
Task and role of mediators	298
Content of work	299
Strategies/tools	300
Challenges	300
Working with parents	301
5. Framing integration and evaluating policies	302
Teachers	303
Teachers' definition of integration	303
Collaboration with institutions	304
Internal collaborations	304
External collaborations	306
Social workers	307
Social workers' definition of integration – Enabling diversity	307
Inclusion measures	307
Collaboration	308
Mediators	308
Recommended actions for school equality	309
Collaborations	309
6. School during the pandemic	309
7. Recommendations	311
Teachers	311
Social workers	311
Mediators	312
8. Conclusions	312
Summary of the results	312
Teachers	312
Social workers	314
Mediators	315
Summary of the situation of migrant children during the pandemic	315
Theoretical implications of the Swedish case	316
Integration and diversity in schools	316
Language and children's agency	316

Children’s identities, trust and enhancement of agency	316
References	317
CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: United Kingdom	319
1. Methods of the study	319
Introduction	319
Participants’ background	320
Teachers	320
Social workers	321
2. The experience of migrant children from the perspective of professionals working with them	322
Teachers	322
Educational performances	322
Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations	325
Challenges	327
Factors influencing participation and performances	328
Function of peer networks and discrimination	328
Social Workers	330
Problems of unaccompanied children	330
Families	331
Gender	333
3. Working with children and their families	334
Teachers	334
Parents’ involvement	334
Parents’ expectations	335
The effect of the pandemic on family-school partnership	335
Social workers	336
4. Framing integration and evaluating policies	338
Teachers	338
Representations of integration	338
Support of integration	339
Collaborations	341
Evaluation	341
Social Workers	342
Integration	342

Evaluation of Policies/Resources	343
5. Recommendations	344
Teachers.....	344
Social workers	344
6. Conclusion	345
Student solidarity as an expression of agency amongst Belgian students	351
1. Methodology	351
2. School as lived space	353
Real school - ideal school.....	353
Environment and Routine.....	353
Course content and activities.....	355
Affective and relational dimensions of school	357
Hierarchal relationships between students and school staff	358
Discriminatory behaviour of teachers	360
Confidentiality and trust	361
Classmates	361
Educational aspirations.....	362
School during the pandemic	363
3. Intercultural relations at school.....	365
4. Identity and belonging	367
5. Conclusions and recommendations.....	369
References.....	370
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children’s perspectives. Finland	371
1. Methodology	371
A note on the effects of COVID-19 on research.....	373
2. School as a lived space.....	374
3. Intercultural relations at school.....	377
4. Identity and belonging	379
5. Conclusions and recommendations.....	380
References.....	381
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children’s perspectives. Germany.....	383
1. Methodology	383
Introduction	383

The sample.....	383
Place of research	383
Sampling	384
Course of the study.....	388
Interview description.....	388
Methodological reflections	390
Impact of the pandemic on the survey.....	391
Interpretation.....	391
2. School as a lived space.....	393
Real school / day care – ideal school / day care	393
Day care from the perspective of pre-school children (ISCED0).....	394
School from the perspective of pupils (ISCED1, ISCED2, ISCED3)	397
Affective and relational dimensions of day care / school.....	407
Affective and relational dimensions of day care (ISCED0)	408
Affective and relational dimensions of school (ISCED1, ISCED2 & ISCED3)	410
Educational aspirations.....	417
Participation	417
Emphasis on the motivation to learn.....	421
Challenges and opportunities to educational aspirations	422
Social embeddedness of educational aspirations	424
L2- classes as an ambivalent special case	425
Envisioning future.....	425
School during the pandemic	426
Consequences for school live.....	426
Experience of home-schooling.....	427
Support during the pandemic	430
3. Intercultural relations at school.....	431
Intercultural relations.....	432
Peer networks	434
Agency.....	434
Hybrid integration	435
4. Identity and belonging	435
Identity.....	436

Hybridity.....	436
Belonging	437
Language	437
Transnationality.....	438
5. Conclusions and recommendations.....	439
Summary of all results.....	439
German as a teaching language.....	439
Teacher assessment from the children's perspective.....	440
School as a social space	440
(Not) Experiencing opportunities of participation	440
Summary of the situation of migrant children in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic	441
Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research.....	441
Recommendations arising from the interviews with children regarding their functioning in the school environment	443
References	444
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Italy	445
1. Methodology	445
2. School as a lived space.....	447
Ideal school.....	447
Real school	450
Affective aspects and relationships within schools	454
Conflict at school	456
Social trust.....	458
The role of parents	460
Peer relationships	461
Educational aspirations.....	464
School achievements.....	464
Education and professional plans.....	468
Gender.....	470
Future of (migrant) children.....	472
School during the pandemic	475
Online learning.....	475
Attending school during a pandemic	479
3. Intercultural relations at school.....	480

4. Identity and belonging	486
5. Conclusions.....	491
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children’s perspectives. Poland	495
1. Methodology	495
2. The school as a lived space	500
Real school.....	500
Between countries and school systems – a comparison of schools in the country of origin and Poland.....	500
Positive and negative aspects of Polish schools.....	501
Ideal school.....	503
3. The affective and relational dimensions of school.....	504
Factors hindering/facilitating peer relations	504
Language as an important factor in peer relationships	504
Sports	505
Proximity to friends	506
Cultural differences: between curiosity and hostility	506
School environment	507
Children’s agency in conflict situations	509
School and family environment as a source of support for the children	511
Intercultural assistants.....	511
Teachers	512
Cooperation between teachers and parents in conflict situations	513
Siblings.....	514
Educational aspirations.....	515
Learning support	518
Children’s agency: the classroom context.....	519
Educational aspirations and future plans	520
Schools during the pandemic.....	521
Extra-curricular activities	526
Relation with friends and family.....	526
4. Intercultural relationships at school	528
Peer relationships.....	528
Conflicts	533
Intercultural practices	536

5. Identity and belonging	537
Emotions related to the country of origin.....	538
Language aspects.....	541
Family practices.....	543
6. Conclusions and recommendations.....	543
Summary of all results.....	543
Language acquisition: Polish as a language of instruction	544
School achievement and education plans	544
Real school – ideal school	545
Peer relations and the school environment	545
Conflict and disagreements in school spaces	546
Identity and the sense of belonging.....	546
Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research.....	547
Summary of the situation of migrant children in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic.....	549
Recommendations	550
References	550
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children’s perspectives. Sweden.....	553
1. Introduction: Contextualisation and methodology.....	553
Migration, segregation and schooling inequality in Malmö.....	553
Collaboration with three schools	554
Access and selection.....	556
Focus group interviews with children	557
2. School as a lived space.....	558
Ideal school – real school	558
Positive aspects of real school	559
Negative aspects of real school.....	560
Best activities	562
Not so good activities.....	562
Affective and relational dimensions of school	562
Educational aspirations.....	566
Student participation	566
Imagined future	567
School during the pandemic	567

3. Intercultural relations at school.....	569
Experiences of schooling in different countries	569
The role of language in relations with friends and classmates	571
Support – study guidance in mother tongue	573
Communication.....	573
Mainly Swedish is used during class	573
Use language differently depending on who you are communicating with.....	574
Home languages used in different situations	575
Mixing languages	576
4. Conclusions and recommendations.....	577
School as a lived space	577
Ideal school and real school	577
Affective and relational dimensions of school.....	577
Student participation	577
Imagined futures	578
School during the pandemic.....	578
Intercultural relations at school	578
Experiences of schooling in different countries.....	578
The role of language in relations with friends and classmates	578
Support – study guidance in mother tongue.....	579
Communication.....	579
Recommendations	579
References.....	580
CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children’s perspectives. UK.....	581
1. Introduction and Methodological notes	581
2. Schools as the context of children’s lived experiences.....	584
The school I’d like.....	584
The school as it is.....	589
3. Relationships and affectivity at school	593
4. Making decisions	597
5. Aspirations	600
6. Gender.....	604
6. Schooling during the pandemic.....	606

Online learning and the challenge for children’s agency as interpersonal relationships	606
Working to maintain interpersonal relationships	609
Online learning and social distancing for family relationships	609
Learning to cope with online schooling	611
7. Intercultural dimension of school experiences.....	612
8. Identity and belonging	615
9. Conclusions.....	617

Introduction

This deliverable is a collection of local reports based on qualitative research that included individual and focus group interviews. The field research was done during the pandemic and this impacted on its methodology, including the necessity to update the consent forms to new conditions of online collection of some data.

This deliverable is preliminary to the final report of the WP5, which is labelled as Milestone 16 and which summarises and reflects on the general results of this analysis for what concerns the whole consortium, providing suggestions for educational policies about migrant children’s participation and hybrid integration in the education system. The objective of this preliminary deliverable is accounting in details the research findings in each participating country.

The deliverable is divided into two parts. The first part concerns the results of the analysis of individual interviews to professionals (teachers, educators, social workers and interpreters or mediators). The second part concerns the analysis of the results of individual and focus group interviews with children.

Each local report includes a methodological section, also reporting on explanations of methodological changes determined by the outbreak of the pandemic. For what concerns the professionals, each report includes further sections about general experiences, specific experiences with migrant children, work with children and their families, views of (hybrid) integration and policies concerning (hybrid) integration, views about the pandemic and recommendations for policies. Concerning children, each national report includes further sections about school life, including the assessment of real and ideas about the ideal school, intercultural relations at school, identity and belonging, and recommendations (in the UK case, views about the pandemic are also included).

In the methodological section, the local reports include specific tables summarising the data collected in each country. The following table shows the overall data collected by the consortium comparing them with the planned research activities (last line). This table shows the big effort done despite the fact that the research was done during the outbreak of the pandemic (see Milestone 16 for separate tables for professionals and children).

I= individual interviews; F= focus group interviews.

CH= children; TE: teachers; SW= social workers; centres = reception centres; MED = interpreters/mediators

Part = participants in the interviews

Country	CH I/F	N. Part.	TE I/F	N. Part.	SW I	N. Part.	Centres I/F	N. Part.	MED F	N. Part.	N. I/F	N. I/F

Belgium	11I/4F	100	10I	10	2	2	-	-	1I/1F	5	34	29
Finland	7F	16	13I	13	7	7	3F	10	4I	4	85	34
Germany	23F/27I	79	8I/4F	22	9	9	-	-	2I/1F	5	47	74
Italy	33F	513	43I	43	6	6	3F	6	1I/8F	22	88	97
Poland	27I/6F	67	17I/1F	22	8	8	1F	2	1F	7	37	62
Sweden	10F	30	12I	12	8	8	-	-	5I	5	37	35
UK	20F	500	42I	42	14	14	-	-	-	-	75	76
Total	168	1305	148	164	54	54	15	18	24	48	403	407

The table shows that, despite the pandemic, the objective regarding the number of interviews was overcome (407 vs. 403), although in Finland the number was very low. The involvement of 1305 children in the field research, based on 168 interviews, is a very important result, as well as the involvement of 164 teachers (vs. 161 planned). The initial objective was also overcome for what concerns the number of social workers (54 vs. 51 planned). More problems concerned reception centres, in particular in Belgium, Germany and Sweden and partially in Poland. Further details about the impact of the pandemic are included in the final report of WP5 (Milestone 16), in the first policy brief (D2.10) and in the final research report, labelled as Milestone 21.

The methodology of this research respected what was planned in the proposal that is a qualitative methodology promoting the involvement of professionals and children as active informants about migrant children's integration and agency, in the framework of the whole classroom. Some changes concerned the transformation of focus group interviews into individual interviews in some countries, to promote children's access during the pandemic. This did not change the overall plan of data collection and the type of involvement of children in the field research. In particular, this qualitative methodology aims to enhance migrant and non-migrant children's agency through research activities, giving them voice about their experiences and views concerning hybrid integration in schools, and their relations with professionals, peers and families.

The local reports stress the opportunities for migrant children to exercise agency and participate in processes of hybrid integration. According to the interviewed professionals, hybrid integration can be supported in different ways: (1) through bilingualism or translanguaging, (2) through children's active participation in education and children's manifestations of need to change education; (3) by creating dialogue with migrant children beyond schoolwork, (4) focusing on all children's personal stories also by introducing creative approaches to promote children's self-expression. According to the interviewed children, first of all hybrid integration can be supported by peer relations that is talking and thinking about things together, engaging with each other, collaborating, arguing, valuing friend's personal differences more than their cultural or national belonging. Second, hybrid integration can be supported by dialogue with teachers, recognised by children as being important for their school experience. Although some professionals manifest still traditional, unidirectional

understandings of integration, both interviews with professionals and children show an interest in the enhancement of spaces for dialogue and for self-expression, which highlights how the co-construction of hybrid integration - and thus its bi-directional orientation - can promote hybrid identities.

The most important opportunities for hybrid integration, based on the interviews, are summarised in the final report of WP5 (Milestone 16) and connected with the other parts of the CHILD-UP research, as well as the relevant literature, in the final research report (Milestone 21).

In this deliverable, the section on professionals' views is presented before the section on children's views. In each of these two sections, the local reports are presented in alphabetical order.

CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: BELGIUM

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1. Methods of the study

The research team invited teachers, educators, social workers, interpreters, and staff working in reception centres to participate in interviews. Most of the professionals who agreed to participate were from schools other than those included in the questionnaire, but some also participated in observations for WP6. There were various reasons for this, namely that it was possible for individual teachers to participate in interviews without obtaining consent from their school directors. Particularly during the period of new rules and regulations as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, it was more difficult to gain access to schools, but still very possible to conduct remote individual interviews.

Participants include a mix of professionals from Flemish and French Community education systems (see below for exact numbers). Interviews with teachers from the French Community education system were conducted in French and interviews with teachers from Flemish Community schools were conducted in English. All of the teachers from the French Community counted French amongst their mother tongues and one of the main researchers on the project is a native speaker of French. The teachers from the Flemish Community all stated being comfortable with conducting an interview in English, and this was preferable to hiring a short-term Dutch-speaking researcher for these interviews since no Flemish Community schools agreed to take part in observations. This meant it was not feasible to hire a Dutch-speaking researcher for the duration of the project. Due to COVID 19 restrictions, interviews were all conducted remotely using digital platforms such as Lifesize or Messenger. Also, due to these restrictions, it was necessary to replace certain foreseen focus groups with individual interviews. In the case of interpreters, only one focus group and one interview were conducted, instead of two focus groups.

Professionals were contacted via phone, email, and Messenger in order to inquire about their interest and availability. Because professionals were working remotely, they often had no access to scanners and so the consent forms were emailed to them and oral consent was obtained. Care was also taken to avoid placing extra stress on professionals during a particularly stressful and chaotic time. For this reason, most interviews were conducted well into the lockdown in order to allow professionals time to adjust to the new working environment. In some cases, certain professionals had extra free time at the start of lockdown before remote learning began, and so interviews were conducted with those who felt no added stress by making time for the interview, which usually lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Extra precautions were also taken to remind interviewees that privacy was of the utmost concern, but they should be attentive to their home environment and ensure they had privacy should they want it. Despite the difficult circumstances, most teachers were eager to share their experiences and many spoke about the value they saw in the project.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

	Total	Males	females	migrant	Flanders	Wallonia	BXL
Teachers/educators	10	1	9	1	4	5	1
Staff in reception centres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Workers	2	1 (works in a reception centre)	1	0	0	2	0
Interpreters	5	1	4	5	0	4	1
Total	17	3	14	6	4	11	2

2. Professional experiences – an overview

This section offers an overview of the professional and educational background of teachers, social workers and interpreters and their experience in working with migrant children.

Teachers

BE_T1_F: Teacher at a secondary school for the hospitality profession. Has been teaching for 3 years, formerly in Brussels and currently in Wallonia. Great deal of experience with migrant students as the school in Brussels had students of 35 different nationalities.

*BE_T2_F: Teacher for 20 years. Works in a primary school in Wallonia.

*BE_T3_F: Teacher for 10 years. Teaches physical education in a secondary school in Wallonia.

*BE_T4_F: Teacher for four years. Working as a science teacher in a secondary school in Wallonia.

*BE_T5_F: Assistant in a pre-primary school in Wallonia for 20 years and 14 years in a group home for children.

BE_T6_F: Teacher in Flanders for 11 years. Has taught OKAN¹ and philosophy in secondary and primary schools. No longer teaches OKAN, but the students in her current school are mostly migrants.

¹ “OKAN stands for ‘onthaalklas voor anderstalige nieuwkomers’, translated: ‘Reception education for non-Dutch speaking newcomers.’” <https://www.onderwijsinbrussel.be/en/faq/what-onthaalklassen-voor-anderstalige-nieuwkomers-or-okan>

BE_T7_M: Teacher for 18 years, 17 in the same secondary school in Flanders as a physical education teacher. The students are predominantly migrants.

BE_T8_F: Teacher for 10 years. Has taught OKAN, Dutch, English, religion and French. Currently teaches at a Catholic secondary school. Used to teach in Wallonia, now teaches in Flanders.

BE_T9_F: Teacher for 5 years, 4.5 of those in the current secondary Catholic school. Teaches OKAN and religion. Completed part of her teacher training in Suriname.

*BE_T10_F: Teacher for 1 year. 2 months in a Catholic school in Wallonia and 10 months in a public school in Brussels. French teacher in ISCED2. She did the FLE 'Français Langues Etrangères' [French as a Foreign language] Master.

The teachers had a wide range of experience, from relatively new teachers (who had been teaching 1 to 3 years) to those with decades of experience (20 was the most). About half of them worked for many years, or most of their career, in the same school, and half moved around a great deal during their careers. They also represent diverse experience in terms of subject matter (see list above) and different types of education and competencies. Of the 10 teachers interviewed, 6 were working in Wallonia (one of whom had also worked in Brussels, 4 were working in Flanders (one of whom had also taught for a time in Wallonia). All of the teachers were from different schools (see list above) and they worked with age groups ranging from ISCED 1 to ISCED 3. All of the teachers have experience teaching migrant children. Three of the teachers interviewed from the Flemish Community education system had worked in OKAN classes, and of these, two had also worked in mainstream classes.

Most of the teachers never had never been trained in intercultural awareness, and most stated that they would welcome this type of training. Neither did they have easy access to learning new teaching techniques, even when their school administration was supportive of them implementing new practices. Teacher 8, for example, found the school administration in her previous school very resistant to supporting teachers in being trained in new types of pedagogies. She and her fellow teachers sought out training on their own. None of the interviewed teachers had been trained in working with illiterate students, and even in cases where the school administration was supportive of a new kind of training, and was willing to pay for it, teachers had to attend the training sessions in their free-time and not during working hours. Aside from regular meetings, and the various topics covered in them, there was a lack of systematic, school supported training.

Social Workers

*BE_SW1_F: Educator in a group home for female teenagers. 6 years working experience.

*BE_SW2_M: Educator in a reception centre for asylum seekers. 10 years working experience.

Both interviewed social workers worked in several different domains and their type of work changed a great deal from one institution to another. Social worker 1 used to work in a school for disabled

*Indicates an interview that was conducted in French and then translated to English by the authors.

teenagers and in two different institutions for individuals with mental and physical disabilities. She is currently working in a group home for female teenagers, some of whom are migrants. The mission of the group home is to reach educational and family reinsertion. Social worker 2 also worked with different populations such as with children with behavioural issues, and individuals with disabilities. For the last three years he has worked with migrants in two different reception centres for asylum seekers. While Social Worker 1 only works with a female audience, Social Worker 2 explained that in the reception centre, they only have unaccompanied male minors from 15 to 17 years old.

There are two different training pathways one can take in order to become a social worker and the social workers from our study each took one of these paths. Social Worker 1 holds a bachelor's degree in social work and Social Worker 2 has a secondary school degree specialised in social work. Even if the educational paths differ, it seems that there is a similar gap in their competence; neither was specifically trained to work with a migrant population. Social Worker 1 said that the only way to get this kind of specific preparation was if one chose to work with a migrant population for one's internship.

No. There were no such courses. It depended more on the internship. When I started, I was obliged to do 6 internships with 6 different audiences (...) in three years. In fact, you chose the public you wanted to work with. I, for example, did not do the internship with people with a migrant background. (BE_SW1_F)

The social workers stated that it was difficult to find training sessions for working in multi-cultural environments and with migrant populations. "Yes, I think there are trainings about the work with those persons, but still you have to find them" (BE_SW1_F). Moreover, this social worker stated that she did not find this type of training helpful. Social Worker 2, however, had attended a training session on multicultural issues when he was working in a reception centre for asylum seekers. The philosophy in this institution was that employees should attend training twice a year: "It could be on LGBT, radicalism, plenty of trainings. Here in Caritas, we have a lack of funding though" (BE_SW2_M). In this quote we see another issue that hinders social workers in their work with migrant populations: the lack of funding for the reception centres. As we will see below, this lack of funding doesn't only erect barriers to the necessary training of the employees but can also negatively impact asylum seekers in their integration process.

Both social workers currently work with migrant populations. Social Worker 2 works exclusively with migrant children. Social Worker 1 describes her audience as diverse, characterised by a mix of origins. "We have a lot of girls with migrant background. It is a real mix of all origins in the end. There are not more Belgians than there are people with migrant background" (BE_SW1_F). However, throughout the interview, it is quite clear that Social Worker 1 conflates migrant background and religion, more specifically, the Islamic religion.

Interpreters

The interpreters included here represent one focus group (which was made up of 3 female interpreters and 1 male interpreter from the SETISw-*Service de Traduction et d'Interprétariat en milieu social, wallon* - Social Translation and Interpreting Service, Wallonia) and one individual interview with a

female interpreter (working as a freelancer with BruxellesAccueil)². Both of these organisations are not-for-profit and offer interpreting services in the social sector free of charge and they both receive some type of support from the local government. Interpreters work in a triangular relationship with two other parties who do not have a common language and need to communicate. The interpreter is expected to convey the content and tone of what one party says to the other, and in doing so the interpreter is meant to remain neutral. They are not supposed to convey their own emotions, only those of the two other parties, and they are not expected or allowed to mediate.

The interviewed professionals had a wide range of experience, both in terms of work environment and populations served, as well as in terms of length of experience (from 1.5 years to more than 18 years of experience). The interpreter from BXL Accueil had a 4-year university degree in translation and interpreting. She stated that there were not many required training sessions after being hired, but she attends various training sessions on her own time. There was one required training session she could remember, which was about how to conduct yourself in different environments, like in the hospital. The interpreters from the SETISw had a range of backgrounds, from those who had studied interpreting formally to those who only began interpreting when they were hired by SETISw. In order to be hired they have to prove competence in the necessary languages and when they begin working, SETISw organises weekly mandatory training sessions during working hours. The range of topics is broad and includes things like how to remain neutral, how to manage one's emotions, how to handle interpreting in emotionally loaded situations - such as giving bad news to someone in the hospital, etc. The interpreters have experience working in schools, hospitals, with psychosocial services and in reception facilities for asylum seekers.³

3. The experience of migrant children from professionals' perspectives

Teachers

School performance

It's first important to note that we could not offer specifics about the background of students, because teachers typically did not know exactly where their students were from. Most of them are not given this information by default from the school administration and they do not make a habit of asking students where they and/or their parents are from. Teachers usually know when their students are not native speakers of the local language, and sometimes know which languages the students speak with one another in class, but this does not mean they know the students' origins or cultural background. OKAN teachers knew more about the migratory background of their students because the OKAN programme is designed mainly for newcomers and because the class sizes are often smaller than mainstream classes. Even OKAN teachers, however, struggled to speak specifically about groups of migrant students because the migratory make-up of their classes often changed dramatically from year to year. When we asked teachers about the demographics in their schools, they could only speak

²The focus group was conducted in French and then interview in English.

³They do not work in courts where specialised interpreters are provided.

in quite vague terms about what they guessed was the percentage of migrant students in the school and where they might be from. This was often a long list of countries and they stressed how diverse their schools were. This is an interesting finding as it can have numerous meanings. It may mean that teachers are trying to understand students' individual needs from the classroom context rather than working from preconceived ideas based on students' backgrounds. At the same time, this can also mean that teachers may be unprepared to create a classroom environment that offers multicultural education. Many teachers generalised the background of students, for example, by saying they were 'Muslim', 'Arabic' or 'Arabic-speaking', and lacked precise information. Multicultural education, however, is meant to include the entire educational system, so it is not solely up to teachers to understand the cultural background of each student. They should be supported by their school administration who must make multicultural education a priority and ensure that each student has the same educational opportunities regardless of background (Banks et al. 2010). In general teachers themselves are not the weak link in the multicultural education chain, but it is school governance that does not offer them training opportunities and necessary support (McAndrew 2013; Banton 2015; Shepherd and Linn 2015).

School performance was something most teachers were hesitant to talk about because of their concern about the understanding of the words, 'performance' and 'success'. For example, teachers expressed that the wellbeing of students and their effort in school should be more important than the kind of success that can be measured by being able to speak the local language and getting good marks. Teacher 8 was once an OKAN teacher and now she offers extra help in Dutch to students outside of regular classes. Most of the students who come to her are migrant students. Overall, she would say that more students of a migrant background "do less well" in terms of marks, but she said it's difficult to talk about this in simple terms. She explained that many migrant students have a great number of obstacles to overcome. Other teachers echoed this sentiment explaining that these obstacles include things like 1) illiteracy. A great number of migrant students have not learned to read and write and may not have been in the same type of school system, or in school at all, before arriving in Belgium. 2) Some migrant students have fewer resources, such as study space, access to technology and an internet connection. This is particularly true for undocumented students and asylum-seekers living in reception centres - an issue also highlighted by social workers. 3) Refugees often have trauma to cope with that makes school more difficult for them. 4) Migrant families often don't know about the resources that are available to them and how to access them. 5) Migrant students dealt with lower expectations from teachers, discrimination and being placed in special schools when these were often not the best places for them. This 'misplacement' is something that teachers say happens less frequently to non-migrant students.

If we speak about school performance in terms of behaviour, desire to learn and relationships with classmates, rather than simply class marks, then the teachers didn't notice a difference between migrant and non-migrant students - with two exceptions. Sometimes cultural differences might keep students from participating in an activity (as will be described below) and sometimes teachers noticed that, on the whole, migrant students worked harder than non-migrant students. Most teachers were also hesitant to generalise on this point, however.

Children's needs, aspirations and expectations.

Rather than children's expectations, many teachers talked about the problematic expectations of parents and teachers. Teacher 6 and Teacher 8 talked about the way migrant students are often assumed to have learning disabilities when they are merely struggling to learn a new language or are dealing with emotional trauma. They also reported that teachers often have lower expectations of migrant students. "I think there is some kind of subconscious bias towards foreign students, definitely. They [teachers] underestimate them [foreign students] from the beginning" (BE_T8_F). This is exemplary of what Oakes explains as a key problem for migrant students in education, the low expectations of teachers (1985).

Teacher 6 used to be an OKAN teacher and now works in a vocational school, which is a type of secondary school. She, and other teachers, explained that students who struggle in school end up in these kinds of vocational secondary schools. This is a type of 'lower-track' school and the teachers explained that students who graduate from these schools do not often enter higher education. Teacher 6 describes her school as a place for students with 'behavioural problems' and said that students who do not have special needs end up in special needs schools. In her school, there's a very large proportion of migrant students and students of colour, 90% according to her own estimate. She said it's treated like a "garbage school" [her own words] for the students who were too difficult or who struggled in other schools. Teacher 9 said that according to federal law children can be in any school that they and their families choose, regardless of need or ability. This means that some parents, mostly non-migrant parents, fight for their children to stay in advanced classes, even if their child has special needs. She finds that this means special schools aren't well used and that teachers who aren't properly trained are working with special needs students.

Mostly white, privileged parents negotiate to keep their children in these advanced classes and POC [People of Colour] and migrant parents don't know that they can negotiate, so they don't. If you don't have a parent with a strong fist on the table, you will get lost in there. (BE_T6_F)

Teacher 6 also pointed out that students from her school can only aspire to the type of job that they're being trained for in the school. She calls these jobs (cleaners, construction workers, metal workers etc.) "modern slavery" jobs and talked about how these jobs aren't valued or given the wage that corresponds with how difficult the work is. Additionally, in the schools of Teacher 6, Teacher 7 and Teacher 1, there aren't any other school options if students should not succeed. "In this school, if the children have major issues, they will just drop out and not get an education. They have to be really self-motivated" (BE_T6_F). Teacher 7 said something similar about his school. "If you work hard in this school you will succeed. But this school is a last hope for students. If they drop out they have to go to work, and if they don't find jobs ..." (BE_T7_M).

Teacher 6 leads the student council in her school (a Flemish Community school), which had a high proportion of migrant students, and explained that it was an effort of the student council that led to having 'language days' where they could learn French or English. In other schools, these languages are mandatory, but in 'special schools' they are not. Her students wanted to be challenged and so they had to challenge themselves in an environment where little was expected of them. These students proved to be self-motivated and proactive. They hoped to learn more languages in order to have more options in the future and also to be better integrated in Belgium. Here we see an example of migrant

students who suffer from the low expectations imparted on them from the educational system (Oakes 1985).

Some teachers also noticed a difference in the aspirations of migrant girls and boys. Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 stated that newcomer migrant girls, were more likely to be planning to stay home and have children. She did not specify, however, if these were migrant girls from a specific background (see the section on children's school performance). When asked, she said she assumed they were Muslim. When it came to boys, however, she didn't notice any difference between migrant and non-migrant children. Teachers reported that migrant students often had aspirations similar to those of their non-migrant classmates, but only after they had dealt with certain difficult issues such as adjusting to a new culture, school system, and language and, for some, after having dealt with their trauma. As they progressed through school however, their aspirations were sometimes muted by their lack of success - as measured by their marks in classes - or by being placed in a school where little was expected of them.

Discrimination

Teachers found that even the expectation of discrimination made students feel uncomfortable and left them feeling there were few people who understood them. This was based on visible differences and not necessarily on migrant vs. non-migrant background. One teacher, who was overall very sensitive to the experiences of marginalised students, spoke about a time students thought she was being racist because she mixed up their names.

In the class, there are two black students. I confused, it's not that I confused the two but I changed the first names. But I do that with all the students ... sometimes if I go too fast ... and actually he was taking it badly because I had traded his name with another black student. And so he said, "Madame, you are a racist". But I thought he had taken it the wrong way. And so I said to him, "Well no, I assure you, I often get the names wrong, it's not on purpose". But ***** that I am, I think two to three weeks later, I made that mistake again, and there I found it really sad that he told me "you are racist." Because, in fact on their side, I think they feel attacked faster maybe. (BE_T4_F)

She understood why certain students may feel attacked more often and saw that it made things hard for them. In fact, many teachers spoke about the racist attitudes of their colleagues. Teacher 1 spoke about seeing colleagues repeatedly yelling at the same students, "and the bottom line was [for her colleagues] 'there are too many Arabs in this school'" (BE_1_F). She could see that teachers were more often punishing and reprimanding migrant students who looked visibly different, and it seemed excessive and unnecessary. This is an example of teachers having low expectations of migrant students, and researchers highlight teacher's differing expectations negatively impacts migrant children's educational outcomes (Oakes 1985, Oakes and Lipton 1999).

Challenges

Language

Language learning was one of the main obstacles that migrant students were faced with, and all of the interviewed teachers spoke about its influence. The teachers reported that their school policy, if they knew of one, required that students speak only the language of instruction, even during recreation time. With one exception, however, teachers were flexible and felt that students, in some instances, needed to be able to speak other languages. Both the school policy concerning the only use of the

language of the instruction and the teachers' flexibility about this are aspects that would deserve further reflection in relation to the possibilities of enhancing hybrid integration. For example, during recreation, 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. Other teachers, particularly in OKAN, found it useful to allow students to explain directions to each other in languages they understood better than the language of instruction. One teacher spoke about learning to say a few phrases in the most common languages of the students in order to build rapport. "I'm learning Arabic now so I try to say something in Arabic. They really like that" (BE_T8_F). She also described this as a way to show them that their culture and background is important and respected. This is an important step in the attempt to create spaces for the enhancement of hybrid integration. Other teachers said that they used any foreign language knowledge they had to speak with students in class and help them understand the lesson and instructions. Teacher 8 is also tasked with developing the language policy of the school. She said that rather than forcing students to speak Dutch all the time, the focus should be on what she calls language-based or language-directed teaching. She felt that in her school, the administration and teachers "focus a lot on the individual, like the lack of knowledge of the students, and less on 'what can I do as a teacher?'" But I think that's quite general for every school" (BE_T8_F).

According to teachers, one of the main challenges that migrant students face in school is a lack of understanding and simply 'being listened to.' While teachers agreed that students need to be listened to, they also said that this was often difficult for teachers to do. Five teachers stated that their relationships with the students were good mainly because they listened to the students, and that this was not always the case with other teachers. One teacher highlighted the problems that occur when students, and in particular migrant students, don't feel listened to. She stated that her relationship with her students was,

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)

Teacher 5 also spoke about the fact that she found it important to listen to students and that other teachers commented on the fact that she was very 'social' and always talking with the students. She felt that her own migrant background helped her to be more understanding and empathetic.

So, just in recreation, 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 diversity of children, from many different cultures, we must also be able to share and listen to them. (BE_T5_F)

Teacher 2 echoed this sentiment

I: You spoke earlier that the fact that you have Spanish origins can help you with migrant children?

Teacher: I think it's not the fact that they know it, but me, in my way of thinking and being, yes yes yes. Because I know very well that here, if I am told, all foreigners must go home, half of my family is going back to Spain. To me, that doesn't make sense. (BE_T1_F)

This meant that she could tell co-workers that her distaste for xenophobic comments was also personal. In many of the schools though, there was a notable lack of diversity amongst the teachers. They were mainly non-migrant, white women.

Of the 50 teachers who are teaching mainly children of colour, only one is of migrant background. Sometimes I ask friends of 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)

All of the OKAN teachers also stated that students do better and feel better in class when they feel listened to. Teacher 8 said that she builds rapport with the students in the following ways:

I think it's important to try to acknowledge them all. ... To try to get them to discuss things with you. I mean in class, when you teach something, to get their opinions. And little small talks after class also. (BE_T8_F)

Being OKAN teachers, they devoted a lot of time to trying to understand students even across the language barrier. They did this by, for example, letting other students interpret and using teaching techniques like creative writing. When students aren't listened to, this becomes a key challenge for them at school. One teacher recounted that a student, whom she knew was a migrant and whom she believed was Muslim, was often having problems with a teacher because he felt she didn't let him explain himself and she drew conclusions about him and his family that he found painful.

Because he says "I'm not doing anything wrong, I'm kidding. Ok, it's true, I haven't stopped..." He admits his wrongs. He said he didn't necessarily quit but here it is, it's not that he insulted her. He is respectful. And in fact, she told him [his behaviour] was due to a lack of education and he told the teacher that "my father does everything for us, our education is good. You don't have to criticise my upbringing ... ". But deep down he's right, but we don't tell him he's right straight away. (BE_T1_F)

In this instance the other teacher was highlighting this student's cultural difference and migratory background as a reason for what she considered his bad behaviour. The student and Teacher 1 both felt the other teacher would have reacted differently if she had been speaking to a non-migrant student with a different cultural background.

On the positive side, however, this issue got resolved because the school director, according to Teacher 1, listens to students and teachers alike. "The director does not necessarily always side with teachers. He listens to everyone and the students are not afraid to go to him with concerns, even if the concerns are about teachers" (BE_T1_F). Indeed, this is the type of behaviour from school professionals that supports children's agency. In this environment, children are likely to feel more able to share their views, tell their side of a story, and generally be more open with adults.

Listening to students was highlighted as important at every level. Teachers, social workers, guidance counsellors and school directors all have an important part to play in making students feel heard. [This attention to listening and empathy are important preconditions to hybrid integration.](#)

Factors influencing participation and performance

The feedback from teachers on this point is difficult to generalise because the OKAN teachers work primarily with newcomers and have very specific experiences. However, teachers did highlight some common factors that hindered participation and performance including gender, language learning, a lack of resources, discrimination and traumatisation.

Gender

Teachers, both in OKAN and in mainstream classes, spoke about the fact that girls, and particularly girls of a migrant background, are quieter than boys. One OKAN teacher noticed that girls more often stayed after class to ask questions rather than asking their questions during class. “Mostly girls will tell me they’re scared to ask for help” (BE_T8_F). Another OKAN teacher said the differences between male and female students in class were “huge”. It was clear to her that this was more a cultural issue than a gender issue. She found that girls were more organised and struggled much less with working in silence, sitting in their seats and following instructions. “But I think culture is more important than gender. Students who come from another European country do have these skills, even the boys. I can see from how they sit on a chair sometimes what their background is” (BE_T9_F).

A physical education teacher, however, had a different interpretation of this gender dynamic. He saw no difference between migrant and non-migrant students or between different groups of migrant background students.

Boys are generally more interested in physical education. And boys are more active, but the girls work harder. They have less trouble doing what the teacher asks, but it’s not a migrant non-migrant question. Boys need to have a competition to engage and girls don’t seem to need this motivation. (BE_T7_M)

He worked in a similarly diverse context as Teacher 9, but he found that the differences between boys and girls were the same despite cultural differences and different backgrounds. While teachers agreed on the differences that they noticed between boys and girls, they did not agree on the causes of these differences.

Language

All teachers, except physical education teachers, found that the language barrier was a key obstacle for newcomer and second-generation migrant students. Even students who were highly motivated sometimes continued to struggle with the language, and this inhibited their school success.

One student, who is Pakistani, struggles in French but excels in all his hotel classes. But he is behind three years because of French. So it’s hard to make friends because his classmates are all younger and he gets along better with grownups. But he’s very determined. He could drop out now because he’s 18, but he keeps trying. (BE_T1_F)

Several teachers reported that students who struggled with the local language began to lose motivation, especially when they were not able to access extra support, such as speech therapists or extra time with language teachers. While one physical education teacher noted that students who didn’t understand instructions might not volunteer/participate, those who did understand wanted to *prove* their comprehension by volunteering. The other physical education teacher said he noticed no difference in participation based on language comprehension, saying that a sport was the same no matter which country you played it in.

Lack of resources

Teachers noticed that many migrant background students lacked the resources that could contribute to their success. This ranged from things like not having computers or an internet connection at home, to having under equipped classrooms, to not having speech therapy or support from social workers. “So I think the kids, a lot of kids in our school, need outside help to get by, like speech therapists,

PMS⁴, social workers. And migrants find it more difficult to reach these people” (BE_T5_F). This teacher then told a story about a migrant girl who was doing really well in class after having received support from a speech therapist, which was a resource that was provided by the PMS. At some point, she was no longer able to access the transport she needed to get to her appointments and teachers saw her regress. There are several issues at play here. First, it’s not clear who is meant to direct students and families to various support resources. Is it teachers, social workers, school officials or all of the above who hold this responsibility? Teachers often make a recommendation for students to get PMS services, but beyond the PMS there are other services, such as interpretation and cultural mediation, that teachers and school officials appear to be unaware of. Teachers’ lack of knowledge concerning these resources was highlighted in the findings from the questionnaires in WP4, and the findings from the interviews presented here are similar. In addition to this lack of awareness on the part of the educational actors, there is also the obstacle of family resources and whether or not families are able to support their child in accessing these services. Families often don’t understand how these systems work and why they are useful, and there is often no one to guide them.

Traumatisation

All of the OKAN teachers spoke about the fact that many of their students were traumatised, and they wished there were better/more resources for students who had suffered trauma. They felt that school performance should be secondary to the students’ emotional wellbeing. One OKAN teacher estimated that 70% of the students in her class were traumatised. “I sometimes don’t deliver happy pupils to the regular classrooms...” (BE_T9_F). She worried that too much time was spent focusing on if students were academically ready to enter mainstream classrooms and not enough on if they were emotionally ready. OKAN and DASPA programmes are meant to be time limited so students move to mainstream classes as quickly as possible, feel less isolated and are better able to integrate. The criteria to move to mainstream classes mainly considers language level and academic ability. OKAN teachers worried that some students could be negatively impacted by making this move too soon. They also stated that more time and resources should be devoted to students’ emotional health, as opposed to such an intense focus on language learning.

Peer networks

Teachers had various concerns when it came to students’ peer relationships. While teachers noticed migrant students sometimes feeling isolated, OKAN teachers found that students in OKAN classes were very supportive of each other and made lasting friendships. These connections offered them support even when after they had moved to mainstream classes. Teacher 8 noticed that a migrant student from Russia who was in a mainstream class didn’t have any friends. There were no other students who spoke Russian and she struggled in Dutch. She cried in class and seemed depressed. The teacher felt this student would have performed better, felt better and made friends more easily if

⁴ PMS - Psycho-Medico-Social centres. “Free-at-source public services that have a high profile in schools. They provide psychological, medical and social support to children throughout their school career. They also provide information and advice to parents and schools.”<https://be.brussels/education-and-training/an-introduction-to-secondary-and-further-education>

she had been placed in an OKAN class before entering the mainstream class. The problem, according to the teacher, is that many families who could send their children to OKAN may not know it exists or may think it slows down their student's education (because it typically involves spending a year outside of the mainstream classroom).

Teacher 1 explained how in her mainstream classroom the students were helping migrant students to integrate. She told a story about a migrant student who she assumed didn't speak French because she was very quiet and shy in class. She and the other students gave her time and space and were very patient with her. Finally, she felt comfortable and started speaking in class. It became clear that she did in fact speak French, but just needed time to feel comfortable and open up. Teacher 4 similarly found that students are generally respectful of one another, even if they have very different ideas and have had tense discussions in class. "Yeah, after when it's tense, they're never mean to each other, but when there is really overall class level opinion, they can be mean to the idea. So never between them but vis-à-vis the idea" (BE_T4_F).

Similarly, Teacher 6 said that students helped each other understand cultural norms in her OKAN class. After swimming together, one new student was very upset with the teacher for having worn a swimming suit. According to the teacher, the student was Muslim and found the swimming suit to go against what she was taught to be proper attire by her religion and culture. The teacher tried to explain to her that in her own culture this did not mean something bad, but she said the student was not receptive to her explanation. The other students in the class asked if they could help the teacher to explain this issue to the new student, and together they made a PowerPoint about different gender norms. The new student finally seemed to be receptive after hearing things explained by students, some of whom shared her cultural background and her religion.

In mainstream classes in diverse contexts, teachers also found students being supportive of one another. Teacher 1 said that in the school where she used to work in Brussels, where there were 35 different nationalities, the students got along really well. When asked why she thought the students had so few problems between them, she said:

I believe they have no choice because the person they have next to them is not of the same nationality and, therefore, they are obligated. Frankly, they all fit in really well. And so when there was a new one, they really wanted to teach them. I had some who didn't speak French very well, it was complicated, but there were others who helped. For example, when there was something to ask, there were other Portuguese students who came to help the Portuguese speaking student. At least at the student level it was my best experience. I think. Yet, I am always told, "In Brussels, they are delinquents", but frankly they were super cool and it was really diverse there was no hatred between them. In other schools I have already seen "ah Italian! ", " Spanish ah! ", " Arabs! ". But this was not at all how they were. They were all best friends and no problem. They all got along well. It was really cool. (BE_T1_F)

Again, as can be seen in other examples, there were certain supports that students could offer each other which teachers could not. Some of this could be due to their shared age, but it's also likely that it's about having had common experiences and the fact that certain information or support is not being offered by a person of authority.

Social Workers

School performance

The social workers included here are both speaking from their experience working in group homes for young people or reception centres. In these contexts, they found that the children were, in general, very hardworking and that they were more motivated to succeed than their non-migrant peers.

We have their school reports, and frankly I am amazed because they work very well. Some speak French and they are here only for 7 months. They came here and knew nothing about French and now they can manage a discussion. (BE_SW2_M)

The social workers also stated that migrant children are well behaved and the feedback they get from schools about migrant students is nearly always positive. “In school they really are perfect”. (BE_SW2_M).

They also noted the wide range of ability of migrant children from their group homes who are placed in DASPA classes. Sometimes these students were more advanced in certain subjects, such as math or foreign language learning, than their non-migrant peers of the same age. They were placed in DASPA classes solely to learn French and to adjust to the Belgian education system. When asked by the interviewer if this was demotivating for students and if it put them at risk of dropping out, social workers said they did not find this to be the case. According to Social Worker 2, there is very little risk of their residents dropping out of school because the educators in the reception centres who support students in their studies are able to challenge the more advanced students.

Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations

The social workers did not think that the children they worked with had specific needs that set them apart from other children. Social Worker 1 highlighted that the only specific need that might have to be accommodated were the religious practices of some children in the centre. “But from those we welcomed in the house, it was really like the others. I mean, they did not have specific needs I would say. No” (BE_SW1_F). The difference seen in the responses from teachers and social workers is perhaps due, at least in part, to the fact that most of the social workers had experience working with diverse populations who suffered from many different types of trauma. The teachers, however, are not by default expected to deal with students’ trauma. Additionally, non-migrant students are more likely have existing knowledge of where to go for support and may be less likely to go to teachers.

Social Worker 2 pointed out that sometimes the young migrants in the reception centre had particular problems based on their family situation/background. He gave an example of a child whose father had been an important military figure in Afghanistan, but then said that these kinds of situations were quite rare. Social Worker 1 held a similar view.

I think that it is more case-by-case. There is nothing to do with the migration background. Well, I think that if they have migrant background or not, it doesn’t change anything. I mean, each family has their own issues and problems. It could be domestic or educational. I think it is the same in fact. (BE_SW1_F)

This mindset was also shared by some teachers who felt that an individual approach to each student was imperative, and that focusing on differences based on migratory background was not useful. It is important to reiterate that the included social workers both worked with migrant children who lived in centres or group homes. Their experience may differ greatly from social workers in PMS centres who have to wait for students to come to them for services and who may have different types of needs.

Additionally, while the social workers were in favour of an individual approach, and focused less on group differences, they still spoke about the particular challenges faced by migrant children - as will be discussed below.

Challenges

Discrimination

According to social workers, migrant children living in reception centres were subjected to discrimination that other children their age are not likely to experience. Social Worker 2 explained that the neighbours of the reception centre were not welcoming to the residents and that there was noticeable discrimination, but this was not much elaborated on.

Language

The interviewed social workers both had experience working in group homes with young migrants and flagged language as a key area of difficulty. Social Worker 2 explained that the group home where he worked had a very diverse population. This meant they spoke many different languages and there was often a barrier to communication. At the time of the interview, he said residents spoke Arabic, Pashto, Russian, and Romanian, among others. Despite this, he still stressed that they managed to understand each other.

So, yes there is the language barrier... Fortunately, there is the English language and google translation, even if it is not always effective. We try to understand each other this way. During the day, we can call interpreters because if we have to explain different procedures it would be complicated. (BE_SW2_M)

Here the social worker explains that general communication is possible, but when it comes to particular procedures or legal issues, where it is imperative to have a thorough understanding, it's necessary to use interpreters. This social worker also stated that the organisation where he worked ensured that the social workers knew how to contact interpreters should it be needed. He also reported that he didn't hesitate to make use of this resource.

Religion

While Social Worker 2 highlighted the language barrier as a key challenge in his work with migrant children, though one that was readily overcome, Social Worker 1 spoke more about impact of religion. Accommodating religious differences was not something they often had to do at her centre, but she spoke about the ways they adjusted when necessary.

It depends on their religion, some just don't want to... For example concerning the meal, we ask them to note on a white board what they want to eat. We want to please everybody but, when there is pork noted, of course we change it. We would never say to them 'but no, you have to eat pork.' We adapt. We adapt to the religion and customs. (BE_SW1_F)

While she stressed that they always found ways to adapt, she still wasn't sure how they would accommodate residents who strictly observed Ramadan, for example. The established rules in the house would not allow for the observance of the hours of fasting, praying and eating during the Ramadan period.

Maybe if there were teenagers, because now it is Ramadan, who would say to us "I want to say the prayer, I need to get up at a certain time, I need to eat at a certain time". In this

case, I think it would be an issue. But we have never encountered this problem. We have never had a young lady who practices Ramadan strictly. (BE_SW1_F)

She went on to say that the centre would adapt if there was a need, but she didn't know exactly how that would work. She also stated that none of the residents where she worked wore a veil.

I never had a teenager who wore the veil. And quite the contrary, you would think that Muslim women dress... well you would not know. If wearing the veil and covering up your body is imposed by the religion, here it is the contrary. The young women who came and were Muslim, you would never know because they dress provocatively.... (BE_SW1_F)

This social worker appeared to have certain preconceived ideas about practicing Muslims and, as can be seen in the following quote, about what a 'normal' teenager is.

So she was Muslim and in fact at her home, she was beaten with a stick by her father when she broke the rules. Finally, she arrived at our shelter in order to gain autonomy and live a normal teenage life, have her own home and get away from her father's dictatorship. So, yes, I think that when they are with us, they are freed. (BE_SW1_F)

She felt that teenagers should have a certain degree of autonomy and that the centre offered them this. It's also interesting to note that she found it necessary to specify the religion of the young woman in this story. She may have been relying on stereotypes, particularly about religion, and various culturally situated ideas about the degree of autonomy children should have at different life stages. She appeared to value children's agency and was pleased that the centre where she worked offered them the opportunity to make choices about their lives.

Relationships with children and teenagers

Gender

The social workers felt they had good relationships with the children they worked with. Social Worker 2 highlighted that building relationships with unaccompanied minors (MENA – mineurs étrangers non accompagnés) required extra effort because they have done a great deal on their own and are not hesitant to enact their agency. He stated that people working with them need to respect this. He also explained, however, that gender could be an impediment to building relationships, particularly for female social workers and male MENA.

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. Because, it is not racist to say this, but they disrespect women and they show it. Now, I have a female colleague who managed to earn their respect (...), she succeeded to earn the respect and trust. It is the first challenge that you have to impose on yourself: to have a good relationship with them. (BE_SW2_M)

He then went on to speak about a female colleague who was spat on by an Arabic-speaking resident. The resident also made threatening and sexist remarks towards her when she asked him to adhere to the rules. When saying, "they disrespect women", the social worker was referring to unaccompanied minor males, but he could not elaborate further on who these residents were or their background, and continued to speak in general terms.

Factors influencing participation and performance

Both social workers felt that migrant children living in centres where they worked participated fully in school and performed well. They did say that sometimes those who were more comfortable in the local language participated more in school, but overall the main obstacle towards participation and performance was the psychological trauma the residents had suffered.

Interpreters

One interpreter from SETISw (BE_I3_F) came to Belgium when she was an adolescent. She said she was very disoriented. She thinks things in the reception and education system have improved since then. She stated that there is more focus on orienting children, rather than only focusing on adults. When working with migrant children, interpreters also spoke about the fact that actors in the Belgian school system often did not understand the adjustments migrant children must make. Therefore, being a migrant child means often being misunderstood. For example, one interpreter recounted an incident when she was asked to interpret during a test. The test was being conducted to determine if the child had a learning disability. “In this case you have to adjust not only the language, but also make sure you get the children to say more than ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (BE_I1_F). In fact, the child in question did not have a learning disability, but the issue was that he was learning so many languages at once that it was taking him time to keep from confusing them in his head. What further complicated the situation was simply that the child was unused to the way of teaching in Belgium. According to the interpreter, the psychologist who asked for the test was not sensitive to these issues of transition, migration and language learning. “The psychologist really didn’t know that things were done differently and explained differently in different countries” (BE_I1_F). This meant that children often felt like they were doing something wrong, simply because they were still in a period of adjustment.

4. Working with children and their families

Teachers

Practices in working with children in the classroom

Teachers’ Autonomy in the classroom and Active Learning

Teachers appreciated having autonomy in the classroom and the ability to choose their own teaching methods based on what works best for them and their students. One of the teachers’ biggest concerns, and an issue that they felt hindered the learning and integration of children, was the school administration’s (and some teachers’) resistance to new teaching methods and pedagogy. When asked about their teaching, some of the teachers described their style, techniques and personality in the classroom.

Many of the interviewed teachers said it was important to be open with students, but some had freer styles than others. Teacher 7 described his teaching style in the following way, “I’m a loose teacher. Not the general who punishes. More the chill-out teacher. That’s how you get the big results” (BE_T7_M). Other teachers had this same feeling and approach, and this was often accompanied by methods that made space for students’ agency and allowed them to express their own identity, both important aspects for hybrid integration. For example, this same teacher said that he is open to having classes or units based on sports that he is not an expert in, or even that he doesn’t like. At the beginning of the year he asks the students what they are interested in and then he has them give input on the

curriculum. When a student is particularly passionate about a sport or topic, he asks them to give the lesson and/or to act as the coach. He then takes the place of a student and learns from them. He found this to be very effective because it gives the students a sense of ownership and means they invest more in the class and take responsibility. This was a very clear example of a teacher valuing students' agency and hybrid integration, and finding that it had very positive outcomes. He said students were more enthusiastic and their leadership was also well received by their classmates.

Teachers 1, 2 and 9 also praised their schools for being open to new types of pedagogy, but of course, there were still limits to this openness. Teacher 2 was very pleased with Montessori teaching methods and the active pedagogy it offered. She also praised her school administration for paying for the training, which she said was very expensive. In fact, she regrets the time she lost teaching in other ways that were less active.

It makes the children happy and it makes me happy too. I live my job completely differently because I have children who I have real relationships with and who are engaged. Before it was more a pedagogy of 'I know, and I give you the knowledge, and you do with it what you want. (BE_T2_F)

The Montessori methods also mean that learning is more self-directed, because even if students forget things, they learn how to go back to their material and find the answer or the methods to get to the answer.

Teacher 1 also criticised the type of teaching that asks students to be silent and simply accept knowledge from the teacher. In this more traditional type of teaching, it is assumed that the teacher is always right. In the following quote, she describes what students like about her way of teaching.

They like that we listen to them, that we understand them and not when we tell them that you must be silent and that's all. That's the problem, in fact. It's when you say to the student, 'you're shutting up, I'm right'. Even if I'm wrong, I'm right because I'm a teacher. (BE_T1_F)

She stated that it was important to use methods where students could be active, but also where they had a choice of how much and in what way to participate. She lets students choose whether or not to participate. She explained that she will push them a little, and give them a lot of chances, but they are never put on the spot and forced to speak.

Teacher 9 stated that the best part of her job is the freedom she has to teach how she wants. She has the trust of the school director and she feels that the way she teaches, even her unconventional methods, is valued. She often uses creative writing in OKAN classes, and while some were sceptical about how this could work with students who often had a low level of Dutch, one of her students won a poetry competition. In line with an approach aimed at enhancing hybrid integration, she thinks it's necessary to let the students express themselves in diverse ways and to share their stories, even when language is a barrier. She found that poetry is a way that people can be creative with the language even when they don't feel fully comfortable in the language or are still struggling to express themselves. She and other teachers also allow students to choose the order in which they complete necessary tasks, encourage them to assist each other and have them choose their own groups for group work. These teachers find that making space for students' agency has had positive outcomes. Teacher 4 also allows students to choose the manner in which they will make presentations - whether that's with PowerPoint, on their phone, with paper, etc.

I: How do the students react to this?

P: They are happier. They are motivated faster and they get to work fairly quickly. The girl who did it on her phone, for example, was a girl who didn't necessarily work at the start, and it was one of the best jobs she's done, and even one of the best in the class... (BE_T4_F)

In this practice we can see the teacher valuing and giving space to students' agency and to processes of hybrid integration. She is also one of the teachers who encourages students to help each other, and as a result began to see the students enacting their own agency and helping one another without being asked. "And usually, even without asking them, yes they're still with someone who works less well than themselves and it still feels like they are raising the bar". (BE_T4_F). In regard to her use of active pedagogy, she stated, "This is how they learn best because they do more, they think more for themselves. Now it is a little more complicated pedagogy because it is a pedagogy that requires a lot of time at the start" (BE_T8_F). She felt that the extra time needed to successfully employ this pedagogy might dissuade teachers from using it, but prioritising students' agency was worth the extra time and effort.

Learning as a sensory experience

Teachers also spoke about learning as a sensory experience and the importance of having many different types of sensory input in teaching. For example, Teacher 2 explained that specialised teachers came to her class to work with newcomer children on their French pronunciation. The specialists and students made a song together, and this helped the students with the sounds as well as their vocabulary. « Everything is a sensory question », she stated. Similarly, teacher 9 prefers to take students outside of the classroom as much as possible. She takes her OKAN students on walks to learn vocabulary, and she has them buy ice cream to practice their Dutch in real life situations. In addition to being a sensory teaching practice, this technique also supports students in enacting their own agency. Teacher 8 spoke about the necessity of using movement, photographs, drawings, and sounds to present an idea in many different ways. While she started using these techniques with newcomers who were still learning Dutch, she found them to be useful in all of her classes and now uses them regularly. Teacher 1 stated that teachers needed to be prepared to adjust the ways in which they gave information, as well as the requirements for students. She made sure to teach with both oral and visual methods and also to include lessons that didn't require writing. She said it was rare to see teachers using evaluation methods that didn't require writing, and therefore students who weren't strong writing were set up to fail. It is key to allow different types of strengths to be used and assessed in the classroom.

Opposition to new pedagogy as a key challenge

Alternatively, teachers who dealt with administrations and colleagues who were unsupportive of new pedagogies had lower job satisfaction and felt the students were negatively impacted. Teacher 1 was in charge of implementing new pedagogies in her school. While she found that, overall, teachers were willing and prepared to help students in creative ways, the more senior teachers were resistant. Teacher 8 found this kind of resistance from the administration in her previous school where teachers were very restricted in how they could teach, and teachers searched on their own for ways to learn new types of teaching methods.

We had lots of meetings talking about how to teach but it was not focused, for me, on the students. I mean, the students were there and it seemed to be all about the students, but in fact it was all about the teachers. (BE_T8_F)

She also taught students who were illiterate and she had no special training for this. “It was all just improvised.” She found that students and teachers could sometimes be creative in classes, but this was usually only in classes that weren’t the core subjects.

Teacher 6 had learned about teaching techniques in other countries and wanted to share this knowledge at her former school. To her dismay, she found that the administration and her colleagues were not interested in learning about her experiences, and she wished her former school had been more open to different approaches. Even teacher 9, who was generally very happy with her school administration and their support of her creative methods, still met resistance sometimes. “When I took them to get ice cream, the director said, ‘getting ice cream is not learning’” (BE_T9_F). Having to avoid these outings meant the students would not benefit from this kind of active learning and real-world experience. All of the teachers found that a lack of openness to new practices, and restrictions placed on their autonomy in the classroom, to be demoralising and said this hindered the learning of students.

Parents’ involvement and expectations

All of the interviewed teachers struggled with the involvement of and communication with parents. While it appears that involvement of parents was an issue for both migrant and non-migrant families, communication was more difficult with migrant parents. This was due to the language barrier and the fact that they were often overburdened with other responsibilities (particularly in the case of refugees, for example).

Often, if two students of similar abilities started to perform at very different levels, it could be due to familial involvement and support. Teacher 4 offered an example of this. She worked with two students of foreign origin who were struggling with French and who were offered extra lessons. As one began to fall behind the other, it became clear that she was not practicing at home. The teacher said it was not a priority for her parents.

One teacher also stated that, sometimes migrant parents did not support their male and female children equally. She also noted, however, that these kinds of situations were very rare. Teacher 2 shared an example of a brother and sister from the same migrant family, but she did not know where they were from specifically and she assumed they were Muslim. When the older brother was struggling in his classes, she was often in touch with the father who was very motivated to help his son. When the younger sister began to have the same problems, she saw that there was an absence of support from the father.

Teacher: I really had an incredible relationship with the father, and with the child, who felt really good in the class. When the son left, I had the little sister. It was not the same thing there. She was not entitled to speech therapy, and there was less help for the little sister. I could always communicate with mom about her, but not dad. There is still a difference. The little sister, yes she blossomed, but not as much as the brother. (...)

I: So you would sometimes say among parents of migrant children, the expectations are going to be different with regard to gender?

Teacher: Yes, it does happen, yes. Fortunately, it is not in the majority of cases. (BE_T2_F)

In this case the teacher said that, regardless of the gender of the child, the father was the main point of contact and support in the family (meaning that it wasn’t the case that one parent was the main contact for one child and the other parent for the other child). Without his support, the daughter in the

family was less successful than her older brother. Since the teacher stated that this is a rare occurrence, however, and because there were only two children in the family, it cannot be said that the difference in treatment was mainly based on gender – despite the assumption on the part of the teacher.

Communication/Language

When teachers were asked what could be done in order to better support the integration and well-being of migrant students, teachers often noted that better communication with parents would be key. It was interesting that, despite this clearly defined need, some teachers did not think the language barrier was the main obstacle in this communication. Therefore, many teachers did not see the need for professional interpreters to get involved. Most of the teachers had never worked with a professional interpreter, and those who had worked with them said that it was rare. OKAN teachers noted that the key issue, which is even more important than the language barrier, is that parents often don't know what resources are available, or they are hesitant to access them. Another issue was trying to help migrant parents understand the school system and the expectations.

In general, when teachers needed to communicate with parents who did not speak the local language, another family member was asked to interpret. In most cases this was a brother or sister or even the student him/herself. One teacher stated this was not a problem and she didn't see the need for professional interpreters. She said she trusted the students to pass the information faithfully. "Maybe it would be necessary if there was a student acting in bad faith. I don't see the use. We never had the problem" (BE_T4_F).

Teacher 9 felt that professional interpreters would be useful, but she understood why it was complicated for the school to use them. The school used to pay interpreters to come to parent meetings, but if the parents didn't show up then the school lost the money. This is why the director ended the practice. Currently, they try to have a diverse teaching team with the necessary language skills, and parent meetings are planned around when the team member with the necessary language skills is available. A key issue here, is that these team members aren't trained in interpreting, and it's still often necessary to use family members to support the communication. She finds that regular communication with parents is important, but it's very challenging. "I have contact with the parents every two months and it's very tiring" (BE_T9_F). She thinks that parents are aware of their children's emotional well-being and adjustment in school, but they don't seem to understand the school system and expectations. One way the school tries to ameliorate this problem is through the use of guidance counsellors who meet with families in their homes to make sure they understand what's happening in school, how the system works, etc. These counsellors also encourage parents to learn Dutch, which makes communication with teachers easier in the long-run. She found this practice and these guidance counsellors to be indispensable.

Teacher 3 said she had never used interpreters in school and she did not think this was a problem. She said that school did a good job of meeting with parents individually any time there was an issue. She also noticed a significant difference in the student population over the last 10 years. Currently, almost all of them speak some French, but there are still many parents who do not. This means that they often use students to interpret and pass information to their parents. Again, however, we see teachers stating that this is not a problem, but they don't address the fact that using untrained people to interpret during important situations can lead to information loss and more problems and misunderstandings and increased anxiety. Teacher 7 also saw no need for professional interpreters,

but he said this was because he is a physical education teacher, and he can more easily show students what's needed. He also said that he rarely had issues that required special meetings with parents. He could imagine how it could be necessary to have interpreters in other classes, however.

Most teachers saw parents far less often than teacher 9 (once every 2 months). Teacher 1, for example, stated that she had never had a parent come to a regularly scheduled parent meeting, but said that parents do get involved when students have problems. When asked why she thought parents were not very active in their student's school life, she said, "Because I think they know teachers do everything" (BE_T1_F). She also said that she saw big differences between the involvement of migrant and non-migrant parents, with migrant parents being more engaged. "I find that the parents of migrants are more present. To me, they want their children to be more successful. Maybe because they have more difficulties, so they say to themselves 'we have to be there too'" (BE_T1_F).

Teacher 7, however, had the opposite experience.

Communication with parents is always difficult, but especially difficult with migrant parents. Sometimes it's a language issue but sometimes they're not interested, and they're just happy their kids are in school. It's the biggest problem the school has and needs to work on, but it's difficult. (BE_T7_M)

He looks for informal ways to reach out to parents. He sees that mothers in Muslim families often bring food to the school for their kids and this is the way he has the most positive interactions with parents and gets them involved.

Teacher 8 stated that she almost never communicated with parents in person, and felt this was a big problem.

Sometimes we have to communicate with them about what's going on in school, but mostly it's by letter. ... I would say you don't have that much contact with parents. It's important to see the parents at least once a year, probably at the beginning. I would also like to see the students and their parents together, and maybe go on home visits. (BE_T8_F)

It also seemed to be the case that socio-economic status had a big role to play in the involvement of parents. Teacher 6 used to work a very privileged primary school for the arts. She noticed a big difference between the migrant students' families there and in her current school. At her previous school, the migrant children were very confident, and she stated that their parents were very supportive. They read to their children each night and were very involved in the school. Where she works now, however, parents rarely come because they don't have the time or resources, don't speak the language, or can't read themselves. She said that they struggle to help their children.

Accessing and Accepting support services

All of the schools are linked with a centre that provides social support services. Rather than a migrant/non-migrant divide in accessing these services, there appears to be a generational divide in the acceptance of this type of support. For the French community, there is the PMS (The Psycho-Medico-Social) centres are free-at-source public services that have a high profile in schools. For the Flemish Community, there is the CLB (The 'Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding' - Centres for School

Student Guidance) which provides information, assistance and guidance to students, parents and teachers.⁵

Teachers found that students were more open to accessing PMS services than their parents, and that the stigma against using these services has diminished over the years. They also felt positively about the interventions of social support services, but were critical of how these services needed to be accessed.

Teacher 1 explained how things are different from when she was in school. She stated that her students did not hesitate to use the PMS services and that they find it normal to access these kinds of supports.

I know it (the PMS) 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)

Teacher 5 said that it's hard to get help from the PMS sometimes because there is a very specific protocol to follow. Teachers are not allowed to simply contact the PMS on their own, unless there is a very severe situation. It is parents who need to reach out to the PMS. Teacher 2 similarly explained that the PMS does very good work, but said it was difficult to convince families to accept help from the PMS.

I see the PMS really as a pretty positive help but they [the parents] don't see it as a positive help. I think they have fear that the PMS will get too involved in their way of life, in their way of educating their children. There are still children who are educated with spanking and belt beatings. We do not realise, but there are really many, and it is difficult to bring someone from abroad into the house knowing that the type of education is not the same. So there you go. They don't see it as a positive help, but rather as a negative thing. So, in general, the parents don't ask for help. (BE_T5_F)

Teacher 3 explained how this sentiment from parents often kept students from reaching out to the PMS and accepting any kind of extra help from the teachers. Students were worried that their parents would find out that they reached out for help and would be upset that outside parties were getting too involved in their family.

But I want to give things to some students. Even a school bag, backpack or something. Or family problems, you ask students about them but they are afraid to say too much because they are afraid that we will help them and the parents will know. (BE_T3_F)

In general however, one-on-one help was viewed very positively by the teachers from the Flemish Community. Teacher 7 spoke about helping students to find sports clubs outside of school and being able to check in with students and families who were struggling during COVID. "It is very one on one". (BE_T7_F)

⁵CLB - "Every CLB has its own multidisciplinary team - doctors, social workers, educationalists, psychologists- to follow the students throughout their school career" <https://be.brussels/education-and-training/an-introduction-to-secondary-and-further-education>

Teacher 8 and Teacher 9 also spoke about social workers, either from the school or the CLB, who went to individuals' homes and helped them one-on-one. They felt that this type of targeted, holistic support was the most effective and was better than waiting for people to reach out to the CLB - as is often necessary when it comes to the PMS in the French Community. If parents struggle to understand how the school system works, and what resources are available and how to access them, then it logically follows that they will be unlikely to reach out and ask for help. It is necessary that targeted support is specifically offered and the resources thoroughly explained.

Social Workers

Practices in working with children

The interviewed social workers explained that in residential centres, MENA are supported in their independence as much as possible. There are daily routines and rules that need to be adhered to, and they get help with their homework in the centre if it's needed, but they also have a great deal of autonomy. The residents get themselves to school (usually meaning they take the bus), choose how to spend the allowance they are given from the centre and can choose how to spend their free time. While there are organised evening activities, Social Worker 2 stated that the residents prefer to spend their free time in their rooms speaking with family and friends.

But they don't appreciate the activities because they prefer staying in their room playing with their phones or calling their relatives. They would rather call their parents for 2 hours than play soccer. They prefer to prioritise their social relations with families and friends rather than doing activities. (BE_SW2_M)

The staff do not force the residents to engage in any organised free time activities, and in this way their agency is supported. They are also allowed to prioritise their social relationships, which are often people who are outside of Belgium. There are limits to their independence however, and the centre will dock their allowance if they find out that a resident did not attend school. In general, however, this practice is not much needed.

Communication with parents

Language barrier

Both of the social workers stated that communication with parents of migrant children was sometimes difficult, particularly when they were working with schools. Social Worker 1 had worked in a school for disabled children, and explained that there was no official help for communicating with migrant parents. She said they found their own solutions, which included finding colleagues who spoke the language of the parents, using gestures or calling family members who could interpret. Interestingly, as will be explained below, interviewed interpreters feel they are underused by schools and find that schools do not know that their services are available and can be accessed free of charge.

Interpreters

Interpreters expressed that things generally go well when working with migrant children and their parents. Again, the main issue is that migrant parents often don't understand the systems in Belgium, and children don't always understand how interpreting works.

The interpreters said that it is difficult to put children at ease and to earn their trust, especially because they are required to stay neutral and remain emotionally distant. It is also difficult for younger children to understand that interpreters are bound by confidentiality agreements, so they might still

be hesitant to speak in front of them. In order to put them at ease, they sometimes have to be more relaxed than they would be with adults.

It's hard to explain to children what professional secrecy is, and if they don't have trust in you, then they won't say anything. For example, when a kid calls me 'uncle', I can't say, 'use my name', because that will create too much distance. (BE_I2_M)

An example of the difficulty parents face in Belgium is choosing a school for one's children. This can be very difficult, and the process can be hard to understand. In many cases, parents bring a family member, friend, or neighbour to interpret for them, and then information gets lost. Then, when an interpreter is finally called, it's clear that there have already been many misunderstandings.

Another problem, which is rare and also not restricted to working with families and migrants, is that people do not always understand that interpreters are not mediators. "In some heated situations I stopped interpreting. There were too many insults, and I ended the interaction" (BE_I2_M). When it comes to parents and the wellbeing of their children, things can be emotional, and certain issues become more complicated when interpreters aren't used from the beginning. "If parents just hear their child has to go to a 'special' school, they are upset. They need to understand what the special school means and why their child will go there. When they do, then they are calm" (BE_I2_M). These types of nuances and particularities are hard to capture if not explained properly and if the person interpreting does not fully understand the terminology and systems at play. Interpreters stated that they felt they were not called often enough, and (as is seen to be true in the responses of teachers) people overestimate what they can express without the help of a professional interpreter. Interpreters also stated that teachers, parents and schools also do not seem to know what resources exist in terms of interpreting.

5. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Teachers

Teachers were not in agreement about most of the elements affecting the integration of students, nor were they on the same page about the meaning of integration or the state of integration in their schools. Some felt that being integrated simply meant the absence of conflicts based on group differences, and that integration was successful if people fully understood the local language and customs. Others considered that integration had occurred when students felt a sense of belonging and could openly share their differences and culture without fear of repercussions.

I think it's when you feel good here. You can work here and function socially and feel good. And I think language is needed for that, to a certain extent, but it's not the same for everyone. Maybe it's not needed in the amount we think for everyone to have a level of integration. And for parents, they don't have to know everything, but they need to know how the systems work so they can help their children in school. If you're struggling, or your child, you know where to go for help. And people who live here should have all the rights of a citizen. And we expect so much of children in terms of integration, and we think integration for children should be easy, like if you come here young enough, but it's not always this way. I think it's really complicated. (BE_T8_F)

Some teachers felt there was no more work to be done in this area, and others felt that integration was in a dismal state. Teacher 5, for example, had a negative evaluation of integration in her school.

We are far, we are really far from integration, I think. And the racism is still there, and it's sad. But I don't know if that's a good conclusion. When someone says to me, "Another Arab", these are the words of some people ... I say, "I would point out to you that our little ones, they work well, they are very polite, they give back to us, they are indeed our little migrants. (BE_T5_F)

Teacher 4, on the other hand, saw integration in her school in a positive light.

Given that we already have several students like that who already come from different origins, I do not see a big challenge in the sense that we are already in a very mixed school. Cohabitation, even relationships are made in a very mixed up way, so I don't see a big challenge. (BE_T4_F)

This teacher seemed to assume that having a classroom without major conflicts meant that integration was going well. Lack of conflict in a diverse setting, however, does not by default mean that students have found a significant peer group, feel integrated, and feel able to express themselves and enact their agency - all of which are key to migrant children's integration in the classroom (Fisher et al. 2002). From this assessment, though it is positive, we cannot be sure that migrant students are well integrated.

These views all ground on a quite traditional understandings of integration. Moreover, being promoted and supported by dialogue and self-expression, hybrid integration conceives conflicts as opportunities to develop communication processes, and therefore its aim it is not conflicts avoidance.

Language as an obstacle to and necessity for integration

Policy in all of the schools forbade the use of a language other than the language of instruction, even during breaks, or else, teachers didn't know if there was any language policy at all. Even teachers who were not sure if there was a policy, still assumed students weren't allowed to speak other languages. Teacher 8, who was working on creating a policy for language learning at her school, felt that there was a lack of "vision in our education about students with foreign languages." In her estimation, simply forbidding the use of other languages is not a language policy or vision for language learning. While many of the teachers shared the sentiment that speaking other languages in class was not problematic, or could even be helpful, some teachers had major concerns about this hindering students' integration. They also stated that the use of other languages in the classroom could make some students feel left out. Teacher 3 stated that she had two 'Muslim students' who spoke the same language and only spoke to one another.

They have big integration problems, these two, because there are only the two of them. They are in the same class and as soon as we have our backs turned, they speak again in the same language and they have trouble speaking French. So I tell them "but if you don't fit into the class you won't [be able to] go with the others" ... (BE_T3_F)

To counteract this problem, she separates the students so that they will have to speak French. Another teacher spoke about how language hindered some friendships

But then that means that somewhere, they get together and put aside those who speak French and that's it. You see, maybe that's not the right reason you see? I don't think it's racism, but it can be shocking for a friend when, during recess, he is put aside because he does not speak the language of the friend. But that's a discussion to have between us [at the school]. (BE_T2_F)

Other teachers, as explained in the section on the experience of migrant students, felt that sharing languages was part of integration and helped students to feel like they belonged. Additionally, it could aid their learning and was necessary in some cases.

Efficacy of specific classes for newcomers

Teachers also had mixed feelings about the efficacy of classes specifically for newcomers. OKAN teachers were critical of the program, but felt that with certain adjustments it could work much better. They felt that OKAN wasn't properly organised and it kept students too isolated from the mainstream classrooms. It, thus, highlighted their differences and became an obstacle to belonging. It would be better, teachers stated, if OKAN students had more opportunities to socialise with students from the mainstream classes and to share their culture and language. This way cultural differences could be honoured and celebrated, and migrant students would also feel less disoriented when finally making the move to mainstream classes. Also, to diminish the impact of this transition, teachers recommended that there be more steps involved when moving from OKAN to a mainstream class. They said that students should be integrated slowly into the mainstream classes – perhaps one class at a time. OKAN teachers felt strongly that placing students directly into mainstream classes, before they had gotten comfortable with the local language and understood the school structure, could have negative consequences, as explained in the section on migrant students' experiences. They explained that OKAN classes offered students a place where they could more easily build friendships because they were surrounded by other students who understood or had shared their migratory experience. OKAN classes were also often smaller than mainstream classes, which allowed teachers to more easily see when a student was struggling and offer individual attention and support.

Intercultural Mediation and Understanding

Teachers tended to feel that intercultural sharing was of key importance in their classrooms. None of the interviewed teachers, however, had ever worked with an intercultural mediator and wouldn't know where to direct families if they needed these services. "But if parents needed intercultural mediation or interpreters, I wouldn't know where to direct them. I think this information should be in the welcome letter that gets sent to parents" (BE_T5_F). Often this is information that PMS centres will have access to since they are more likely to work with interpreters and cultural mediators. Also, since it is the school that should request interpreters (such as from SETIS) for a parent-teacher conference or when there is an issue, it would make sense that the school director would have this information. We heard from school actors, however, that directors often did not know where to go for interpreting services.

At Teacher 4's school, there is programming at the beginning of the year that tackles orientation for new students, and addresses important issues that could help or hinder integration.

So for the start of the school year, what we tried to do is to finally integrate the students, to help them feel a little more integrated in the school, and if they feel a little more integrated in the school then, we think, well we are almost sure, that they will be better at the level of the class and, therefore, better with themselves and, therefore, also more able to work. [...] We made a day with activities on food, on school bullying, on different themes that seemed important to us. To start a year in a more serene and more united manner and, unfortunately, the subject should have continued. But, with lockdown, we are a little, we had to leave a little aside. (BE_T4_F)

She was hopeful that this programme would help when discussing issues in class that made certain groups of migrant students uncomfortable. When it came to topics of sexuality and evolution, for example, she found that many of her very religious students (who were also typically migrants), and particularly male students, were uncomfortable and “closed-minded”. “The words are sometimes very strong and very nasty, so there is questioning” (BE_T4_F).

Teacher 7 said that his school has had cultural diversity programmes in place for a long time, and he finds that they work well. Religions of all kinds are in the curriculum, and there are celebrations where cultural practices are shared. He finds that Flanders as a whole, functions less well than his school in terms of integration and sharing of culture. “It’s the biggest problem in Flanders - narrow thinking” (BE_T7_M). He wanted to be clear that what he considered to be the positive conditions of integration in his school, were not representative of Flanders as a whole. In terms of Flanders more generally, he felt that the population was closed-minded and held anti-immigrant attitudes. His school however, showed how things could be improved if people celebrated each other’s differences.

Social workers

When asked about integration, social workers spoke about providing the necessary conditions for people to live comfortably, and also about the obstacles that migrants face. Social Worker 2 said that integration is hard for everyone, even people who were born in Belgium (and he included himself in this). He stated that it’s particularly difficult, however, when you add in the language barrier and the fact that “we (Belgium) don’t implement the things that would help them (migrants) to integrate properly”. He elaborated and described the processes that make it difficult for newcomers to find a job and to earn a decent wage. On top of this, he described that newcomers face discrimination and negative stereotypes from the local population.

People really lack information, because when you speak about a Caritas or Fedasil centre (people say] “ah the ‘Bougnoules’ (pejorative term for a North African) who come to Belgium to take our money”. You are just like “Man, they earn 7euros a week!”. In order to find a job, they have to wait 3 months to get the ‘orange card’, then they have to register to the FOREM, do trainings. They have to do plenty of things. (BE_SW2_M)

Social Worker 2 felt it was imperative to simplify the process for newcomers to be able to attend training sessions and to begin working. Additionally, he said that Belgium needed to try to tackle negative attitudes in society. He also felt that schools were a key site of integration. He said that, if migrant children stayed in school until the age of 18 and got their diploma, they had a much better chance of being well integrated, or even simply being allowed to remain in Belgium after the age of 18. Again, we see here the pressure and expectations placed on schools as integration mechanisms.

Social workers also echoed the same sentiment we heard from teachers - that psychological wellbeing is key to integration. “We try to make everything possible for them, to build them up, because some were devastated by what they lived” (BE_SW_M). Many of the young migrants they worked with were the same demographic that would be in the OKAN and DASPA classes, and so the social workers and OKAN teachers saw similar trends. One of Social Worker 2’s strategies to help children integrate was simply to build trust and good relationships with them. He said he tried to be open with the mand play and joke with them. He found it important to listen to them, not talk down to them and to respect their agency and independence.

Interpreters

In terms of integration of migrants, there are a few key issues that interpreters highlight. Those who could benefit from their services do not know that these services exist and don't know that they can often get the services free of charge. Additionally, their state funding is always at risk of being cut. The work of social interpreters is often directly and obviously influenced by political shifts. In other areas, changes in leadership and political priorities may trickle down more slowly, but in interpreting services, there may be a much more immediate effect.

Yes, for example, as I said, I work for this NGO and I'm paid by the state. I think they have a budget that the state gave them, and that budget will rise depending on the year, of course. So, if this year we don't have more resources than last year, but we accept or receive more migrants here, what can we do? And because usually they don't think that it's necessary to have an interpreter, for example, they think "I can do it with Google translate" or "it's a city which is really really far and no interpreter wants to come". But did you ask interpreters? Did you ask? Did you ask them to go? Okay, how do you know? It's like they have a certain interest maybe, in my opinion, not to (call interpreters). Not like they are trying to isolate people, but like if there is not enough budget, for example for that, it's not so important. People don't appreciate so much the work you do, and maybe the communication between people, just because it's a right for them to have an interpreter or to be able to communicate with other people and to be able to communicate their needs. So if you don't value it, you don't give people the opportunity. Sometimes they don't ask, and yes, in a way, it changes with time, and I think sometimes it could be related to politics. (BE_I1_F)

6. School during pandemic

The government's response to rising cases of COVID 19 included closing schools for long periods of time starting in March 2020. Over the course of the following year, lockdowns were eased and re-imposed, and schools were obliged to follow the quickly changing rules limiting the number of students allowed in the classroom, restricting non-essential visitors, and using a hybrid learning approach (meaning fewer students would be in the classroom and the rest would attend courses online). This had many far-reaching implications and affected the students' school performance; teachers', parents' and students' emotional wellbeing; and the possibility to conduct fieldwork in classrooms. Teachers reported that they struggled because they and the students did not have the necessary resources to have classes in this new way, it made extra work for teachers, and it removed various socialisation and language-learning opportunities for migrant students.

Teachers

Lack of resources

Only one teacher, teacher 7, reported that their school was prepared for the closures from a technological standpoint. "We're one of the few schools that is totally digital, already for four years. No student is without a laptop, so we were prepared in that way for the pandemic" (BE_T7_M). Teacher 4's experience is more representative of what the rest of the teachers experienced. She said that she had been asking the school for interactive whiteboards long before the pandemic, and doesn't know if things will change, even after the move to hybrid learning became essential. At the time of the interview with teacher 8, it was the start of the pandemic and she said her school was already trying to ensure that all students were able to borrow a laptop from the school. "And a lot of students don't have an internet connection or a good computer to use for online learning" (BE_T8_F). It

quickly became clear that many migrant students did not have the necessary technology or skills to engage in online learning.

As teacher 9 explained, all of the students in her classes were lacking computer skills. Most didn't have computers or an internet connection, but they all had smartphones. She decided to try staying in touch with them using WhatsApp, but that destroyed the divide between her personal and private life. Finally, the school bought Chromebooks for all the students, and the internet/computer skills that normally take a year to teach were covered in 2 months. This was particularly difficult for students in OKAN who had never used a computer before and for those who had not yet learned to read and write. Teachers highlighted not only the differences between migrant and non-migrant students, but also the socioeconomic divide in terms of access to technology and technological literacy. It created more stress for parents who either did not have the technology at home, or did not know how to help their children to use these new tools.

With lockdown, they have difficulties with educational tools. So for example, the mother comes to school to pick up the copies. And everyone sends it to the manager who is going to print, and here we are. We try to do it with the means at hand, because not all of them have the possibility of having a computer with a printer. (BE_T1_F)

Mental health and school performance of students

Teachers were also very concerned about the wellbeing of students during remote and hybrid learning. Teachers found that working entirely from home was more difficult for younger students, and that the lack of opportunities for socialisation had negative impacts.

Teacher: Having students do all their learning from home is asking a lot of a 12-year-old. It also means a loss of peer support for both students and teachers.

I: Which students suffered the most?

Teacher: The sad thing is, you can already predict who it's going to be. (BE_T8_F)

This interview was done at the start of the first lockdown, and the teacher predicted that students who were already struggling with behavioural and mental health problems, those with difficulty in the local language, and those with lower socioeconomic statuses would suffer the most. Online learning meant teachers were restricted in the ways they could teach and, therefore, using certain methods that worked well for particular students was no longer possible. For example, teacher 9 found it useful to go out on walks with the students, and that this was especially good for illiterate students. This meant students could be shown things as they learned about them. When the pandemic started, this practice was no longer allowed. Similarly, all teachers who work with students in the process of learning the local language stated they regretted the loss of opportunities for students to practice the local language. They predicted that this would set the migrant students back in their learning, particularly for students whose parents did not speak the local language at all.

More and new work for teachers

In addition to new expectations for students and families, school closures also meant new tasks for teachers. Beyond teaching, teachers were often tasked with following up with students who were not coming to online classes or who were struggling in these classes. For teacher 3, this meant extra work. "Teachers had to check on students during lockdown. Those who are not doing their homework, etc. This means extra work for teachers, even though now it's technically not allowed to ask teachers to work overtime or to work unpaid hours" (BE_T3_F). At teacher 7's school, however, the task to

check-in on students was given to teachers who could not teach their subjects online. As a physical education teacher, this meant that he was tasked with contacting students and the families of students who weren't showing up for classes. He said that the opportunity to give more one-on-one attention to students was something he really appreciated, and he hopes they can find a way to continue doing it in the future. He was able to learn more about students' obstacles and offer targeted support.

Teachers were also required to come up with entirely new ways of doing their job, and had to quickly learn to use new technology. Teacher 1 stated:

What I've had with the lockdown here is that a lot is asked. They require us to work on programmes that are unknown. Well, I myself am young, there are things that Teams etc. I don't understand anything. Maybe I didn't try that well either, but suddenly to help the students, it's a bit complicated. (BE_T1_F)

This same teacher, however, also noted that these circumstances offered the possibility for students to take more control of certain classroom activities because they were often more familiar with new technologies than the teachers were. "Finally, it's the students who say, 'ah Madame we are going to make a group on messenger. It will be easier because not everyone manages to use the tools'. Finally we made a group on messenger and that's how we can make videos etc". (BE_T1_F)

The pandemic also underscored the need for more resources and the fact that too many tasks already fall to schools. "You see more and more that teachers and schools are relied on to be the answer for everything, but they cannot be. It's always said the schools are the solution, but they're not. We need more social workers. More mixing. Less gentrification" (BE_T6_F).

Social workers

Social workers also noticed the impacts of the pandemic on the students they supported. They were concerned about the loss of language learning opportunities and the lack of access to technology. First and foremost, however, was the fact that the children living the centres and the staff working there were at risk of contracting COVID. "Covid was awful. The schools were closed. We tried to give French class but we did not want to put everyone at risk. Because, of the 24 MENA, 24 had COVID at the same time" (BE_SW2_M).

In terms of technology, the residential centres faced the same lack of resources that many families faced. "The problem is that we did not have enough computers. Lack of budget, lack of work force, lack of a little bit of everything" (BE_SW2_M). The interviewed social workers also had more time to fill with the children each day because they couldn't go to school or leave the centre. This meant finding ways to entertain them in addition to supporting their learning without being trained as teachers.

Interpreters

Interpreters all stated that interpreting for schools and families was much harder during the pandemic. During lockdown, they were only allowed to interpret over video chat or telephone. When restrictions relaxed, wearing masks made understanding much more difficult. "The sound is very important and working virtually is really hard. Being on speaker, for example, is really hard. Sometimes things are very delicate and there's fear of using the wrong word" (BE_I1_F). Interpreting without being in the same room makes it difficult to read body language, to sense tensions, and simply to understand

everything that is being said. While technology made it possible for them to continue their work, they worked in conditions of increased uncertainty.

7. Recommendation

Teachers

Institutional

Additional/Sufficient Resources

Many of the suggestions of teachers were focused on the institutional level the of education and social support services. They often spoke about the lack of resources that they, the students, and the families had access to. In some cases the resource they mention did not exist, and in other cases they would have liked the resources to be more accessible or numerous. A lot of the suggestions have to do with the lack of funding and personnel, but others seem to focus on the lack of vision on the part of education/school officials.

Training for Teachers

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
- How to work with children who have been traumatised

Teacher 8 stated that they once had a psychologist come speak to the teachers about supporting migrant students and she found this very useful. Many of her students lived in reception centres or were unaccompanied minors and had been traumatised. “That one or two hours that she came to speak helped me like more than all the blah blah that was said in the meetings” (BE_T8_F).

Teaching exchanges and learning between countries

Several teachers spoke about having been able to attend international teaching conferences or to participate in international teaching exchanges. They found this to be enlightening and important in their growth as teachers. They wanted more teachers to be able to take part in such experiences and for there to be organised ways for them to share these experiences with colleagues.

More types of professionals on-site at the school

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. “Schools should have a social worker and a speech therapist, automatically” (BE_T5_F).

Fully equipped classrooms

The final resource that the majority of teachers said was necessary was simply about resources and having more teachers on staff. This would mean smaller class sizes and full equipped classrooms with the necessary materials and technology. Teachers were working with what they felt were too many students in one classroom for the teaching to be the most effective. Some teachers flagged the fact

that they had out of date textbooks, no computers, and even a lack of sufficient heating and cooling in classrooms in extreme temperatures. These things form the basic foundation of being able to be an effective teacher in the classroom.

Streamline bureaucracy

Even teachers who had only been teaching for a few years saw that the required paperwork had increased over time, and they felt this should not be such a large part of their work. They found that it distracted them from more important matters, like following up with students who had been struggling. “The bureaucracy and paperwork are too much. It takes time away from the students and teaching” (BE_T7_M).

Interpersonal

Teachers made it clear that a key component of children’s wellbeing and success in school hinged on the relationships between various actors in their lives.

Better Communication

Most teachers also recommended that two main types of communication be improved - the communication between teachers and families, and the communication between teachers and social workers.

In terms of families, as seen in the section above, the language barrier was not considered the most important barrier to communication and cooperation. More significant was the lack of time on the part of both teachers and parents and, in some cases, the fact that parents did not fully understand how the school system functioned.

Teachers were clear that they did not want to read a child’s entire file before getting to know them, thus avoiding the danger of putting them into a ready-made box. There was key information, however, that could help them in their work. “With a boy and his sister from Afghanistan, they had lived through the war, so that kind of information would have been useful to know early on” (BE_T2_F). Better communication between teachers and social workers would help teachers to have key information in a timely manner and allow for social workers to more quickly learn about any issues students are experiencing in class.

OKAN teachers specifically stated that they saw students who could have benefitted from OKAN miss out on the experience simply because their parents did not know they were eligible for the classes, or they did not know the classes existed at all. Better communication between the school administration and parents, social workers and parents, and even more knowledge about the OKAN classes on the part of mainstream teachers could help to ensure that students who can benefit from the program do not miss out.

Classroom and Teaching

Ability to use more active methodologies and evaluate students differently

Teachers overwhelmingly recommended that teachers be allowed a great deal of freedom to use active methodologies. They saw these methodologies have positive outcomes with students. “And then bet on active pedagogies, projects where everyone invests themselves with their strengths and realises

that here is ‘I am strong in that and I can give a hand’ and then there everyone finds their place, that's for sure” (BE_T2_F).

Teachers also wanted more flexibility to adapt classes and methods of evaluation to the needs of students.

We can also do an adapted course. Now it's done. We are doing adapted courses for those who are dyslexic, have dyscalculia etc ... so I don't see why we can't do it for those who have difficulty writing or understanding French or understanding. I think this is the best thing to do. (BE_T1_F)

A 70% for a kid like a newcomer or a kid who has dyslexia or dyscalculia disorder, a 70% is worth a 90%, so you see, be more personalised. (BE_T2_F)

In fact, some teachers wanted to be able to completely change how teachers were required to gauge a student's success. Teacher 8 said “the successful student is one who feels good”, (BE_T8_F) and many other teachers echoed this same sentiment.

Sharing of Culture

Finally, nearly all the teachers stated that more opportunities for culture sharing and for showing the students that their culture is valued would greatly improve the school lives of migrant children. They were in favour of having the children themselves be the ones to organise and speak about their culture, rather than having outside parties undertake this task.

I think it would help to really acknowledge their culture, their heritage and their language and to make space for that. Let's explore that. To let them speak it, to ask about it, to celebrate Ramadan and to also talk about Ramadan, for example. To really have their culture there as well and to talk to them about it. (BE_T8_F)

Often, the inflexibility of classroom requirements makes it difficult for teachers to prioritise these kinds of practices and thus to promote conditions of hybrid integration.

Social workers

Institutional

Social workers stated that it was important for migrant children in centres to be able leave the centre more often, participate in outside activities, and have time in nature. They felt this would help to improve children's mood, wellbeing, and integration. They were usually unable to plan these types of activities, however, due to budgetary restraints.

In the centre, having more budget [would help], because at the level of the activities there is a big obstacle to the youth's development. It is an obstacle because we try to organise coherent activities. For example, we wanted to book a week at [a kind of campground]... but they [the administration of the centre] said no because we did not have the budget. While some [residents] never saw a lake, we wanted to make them escape a bit, because they always stay in the centre. We wanted to make them discover the ‘outside’ society. Go hiking with them. But even this was impossible because they need good shoes and there is no budget for that. (BE_SW2_M)

This recommendation is similar to the teachers who speak about supporting students in their learning and integration by taking them out of the classroom. They and the social workers highlighted the importance of migrant children having contact with wider society and learning about the host culture by interacting with it in a more authentic way than what can be offered in the classroom or reception centre.

Interpersonal Communication

Teachers and social workers stressed that migrant students' success and wellbeing in school could be supported by more one-on-one communication between teachers and students. Social Worker 2 stated,

Teachers could maybe more willing to go more often to students. I have already attended a class when I was working in FEDASIL where it was - if you did not understand and you don't ask, too bad for you. So it could generate frustration, trigger drop outs because they [students] did not understand the course. [It would help to] listen more and really ask if everybody has understood. (BE_SW2_M)

Students, and particularly migrant students who may struggle with the local language, may hesitate to reach out to teachers if they do not understand the material. When it's discovered that they do not understand, after exams for example, it may be too late to rectify the situation in a timely manner. This situation may be avoided if teachers directly verify students' understanding, but this is not always possible. From the information drawn from teachers, many would agree that more communication and one-on-one attention would benefit students, but as stated in previous sections, they do not have sufficient time for this. Class sizes are too big, and the material that needs to be covered in a short class period is too extensive, to leave time for sufficient individual attention. This is why many teachers were in favour of migrant students being able to access OKAN or DASPA classes. The class sizes are often smaller, and students are able to get more individual attention. This way, they can gain confidence, come to better understand the local school environment and expectations, and improve their local language skills in an environment where they have more space to talk and where the teachers understand their particular needs.

Interpreters

The main recommendation from interpreters was to raise awareness about their services. Secondly, they stressed that it was key to have interpreters who are culturally aware, to have continual training and to offer plenty of opportunities for peer support and exchange between colleagues.

Institutional

All the interpreters found that many people and organisations did not know they could access interpreting services free of charge. Individuals, however, can't call them directly. The schools or the PMS must contact the interpreters. People who arrive don't know who they can call for help, and if the schools and teachers don't know how the interpretation systems work then people simply go without this support. The interpreters also find that, overall, there is not a good system of giving information to newcomers, whether it's about schools or where they can sleep if they are unhoused.

They often found that their work was undervalued and that the skill necessary to interpret is underestimated.

For example to raise awareness of the social interpreting service. For example, it's there and you can call. Because it's not just for the assistance in asylum centres or for hospitals just to pass the message of whatever, it's for everybody. Like if you need it, it's your right and it's paid by the state. Sometimes people don't call because yeah, it's subjective in that sense because the person who is talking to you doesn't consider that it's important enough to call an interpreter. Like, if the social assistant speaks a little bit of Spanish, they think maybe we can do this interview. But, if you don't properly explain the rules to the migrant.... (BE_I1_F).

This is particularly problematic when considering that most teachers found the use of family members and students to be sufficient for interpreting in school matters.

Interpersonal

Interpreters also made it clear that understanding of culture and the adjustment people face when migrating to Belgium was as important as having language skills. One interpreter called herself someone who “accompanies people in intercultural understanding” (BE_I4_F). Knowledge of the language is not enough for thorough understanding, and cultural competence is also necessary. Passing a message must be accompanied by insight into what systems and cultural particularities will also need to be explained. Cultural understanding also helps interpreters to pass the message in the best way in terms of word choice, tone, body language, etc.

The final recommendation from interpreters, opportunities for peer support, is essential because they are exposed to a great deal of difficult information. They must be able to speak with their colleagues about these experiences in order to digest and overcome them. Sometimes they are also asked to interpret in situations where they hear something that triggers their own past trauma. “It’s hard sometimes to hear things you passed yourself, so you might have to say, I can’t interpret. I’ll find someone else for you” (BE_I2_M). In these cases it’s important to know that they can protect themselves and find a colleague to interpret instead. Interpreters stressed that they needed to protect themselves emotionally so they were able to continue doing their work and be as useful as possible.

Teachers, interpreters and social workers were concerned that migrant families and school actors did not have sufficient knowledge of the resources that were available to them. A key way that these professionals felt the lives of migrant children, both inside and outside of school, could be improved would be for newcomers to be better oriented in the systems they must navigate. They wanted to see newcomers clearly connected with adequate support services.

Conclusions

The involved professionals also spoke about the importance of migrant children’s culture being understood and valued and children being able to share openly. This would aid their sense of belonging and their integration. Professionals felt that if children were able to be more active (in sharing their cultural and their personal histories, in securing services for themselves and making their needs known, and in directing their own learning in school) they would have a sense of agency and ownership in their lives and their school. They found that supporting children’s agency and their ability to make choices and direct their learning and social activities improved children’s integration and overall wellbeing. These are all important conditions for the promotion of hybrid integration. Therefore, although most of the interviewed expressed views on integration which resonates with a traditional, unidirectional understanding of this concepts, in practice many of them, especially teachers tell about approaches they adopt within the class which are relevant in supporting and promoting conditions for hybrid integration.

Finally, if those around migrant children were more open, willing to listen, and more understanding of the obstacles migrant children must overcome, then professionals felt that the school system would begin to re-evaluate the meaning of success. They would like to see this followed by an adjustment of expectations and evaluations in order to meet the individual situation of each child. Professionals

often felt constrained by organisational rules and policy and wanted more freedom to do what they felt was best to meet the needs of the young people they serve.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: FINLAND

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1. Methods of the study

The interview sample was a spin-off from the previous, quantitative phase of the project. While interviewees were recruited from already-existing networks in schools and municipalities, additional interviewees were searched for through substantial promotional work through contacting school-leaders and in social media, private e-mail, as well as print mail sent to schools. After making initial plans with several interviewees and conducting a couple of face-to-face interviews, the broke of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the research circumstances. First, schools were closed for everyone but pupils and school staff, and later, with a societal lockdown, teaching and learning started to take place in a distant mode through different IT and communication channels. This means that a majority of the interviews have been conducted remotely, mostly using a telephone line through Skype. This also meant a delay in data collection especially in relation to teachers, as their availability and willingness to engage in research drastically decreased because of the heavy burden caused by the major crisis in their everyday work.

Target group: teachers

Little by little, remote interviews were fixed in all respondent groups. For teachers, 13 interviews were conducted among 11 women and two men during 9.3.2020–3.2.2021. They were occupied at all ISCED levels; in addition, many of them worked regularly with pupils from various ISCED levels in preparatory instruction, an initial two-term period for newly-arrived pupils for acquiring some basic competence in the Finnish language before integrating fully to the Finnish-speaking classroom. In addition to the remote interviews, nine teachers answered in open-ended questionnaires via web links consisting of the same questions as the interviews.

The educational backgrounds of the interviewees in this sample included class teacher (Master of Education), subject teacher (Master of Arts; often specialised in language teaching), school assistant, and youth and leisure instructor.

Target group: social workers

As for social workers, they were interviewed in both school contexts and reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers. The latter group is introduced below after the section on interpreters. In school contexts, seven interviews were conducted: five for school social workers and two for social workers in a reception centre for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors going to school outside the centre. Five women and two men were interviewed in the period of 29.5.–4.12.2020. Each interview lasted for some 60 minutes. The individual interviews were conducted with the help of Skype phone

calls (without video). All school social workers were Finnish nationals. The educational backgrounds of the interviewees were Master's or Bachelor's Degree in Social Work or Social Services; Student Welfare Act (1287/2013)⁶ lays down educational qualifications for school social workers.

Target group: interpreters

As for the group of mediators/interpreters, the Finnish sample consists of three interpreters and one mother tongue counsellor. All the interviewees were women and they were recruited after their response to our call made via interpretation agencies as well as on social media. Individual interviews were conducted instead of the proposed focus group interviews because in Finland, the target group is not united but the members are scattered and work independently; thus, individual professionals were more easily available for interviews and more eager to engage in the research process. Interviews were conducted with Skype phone calls (without video connection) during 12.6.–19.11.2020 and their average length was 80 minutes. One of the interpreters wanted to participate in writing, that is, by giving written answers to the interview questions.

As to the educational backgrounds of the interpreters, all had a vocational qualification of an interpreter gained through a short-cycle study programme. One was gaining further education on interpreting in a university of applied sciences. They also had other experience in working life in such sectors as education and finance.

Target group: reception centres

In reception centres for asylum seekers and refugees, three focus group interviews were conducted. Six women and four men participated in these interviews in the period of 2.4.–1.10.2020. Each interview lasted for approximately 70 minutes. The group interviews were conducted with the help of Skype (without videos). Among the interviewees, there were three persons with a migrant background. Each focus group had a distinct profile; one an NGO working with migrant youth, second doing social work among migrant adults, and third a reception centre for asylum seekers.

The educational backgrounds of the interviewees included Master of Social Sciences, Bachelor of Social Services, Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Accounting, and Youth and leisure instructor. The job titles of the interviewees included social counsellor, leisure and peer counsellor, mother tongue counsellor, and nurse; in addition, some occupied the role of a leader or coordinator of activities.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

	Total	Males	Females	Migrant	South Ostrobothnia	Tampere region
Teachers/educators	13	2	11	2	9	4
Staff in reception centres	10	4	6	3		10

⁶ Student Welfare Act 1287/2013. Available in English: <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2013/en20131287>.

Social Workers	7	2	5		1	6
Interpreters	4		4			4
Total	34	8	26	5	10	24

2. Professional experiences – an overview

Professional experiences: teachers

All the teachers interviewed worked directly and regularly with pupils with a migrant background. Some of them had only recently started in working life but most had years of experience and had worked in various schools.

The specific field of most interviewees is preparatory instruction (detailed more in-depth in WP3 report on legislation in Finland⁷). This is a type of education Finnish municipalities may offer for school-aged children as part of their compulsory basic education. While the Basic Education Act suggests that municipalities organise preparatory basic education, there is no legal obligation for municipalities to do so. Hence, it is up to individual school to decide whether preparatory classes will be offered to newly arrived pupils, and it is up to individual teachers to design the content and syllabus of these courses. There is thus a high degree of autonomy in decision-making.

Usually the newly arrived pupils are placed to group of preparatory instruction for basic education. If a pupil is placed in preparatory class/group, the integration to the mainstream classes begins immediately in such subjects where knowledge of the local language is not particularly essential, and integration should proceed gradually and in close collaboration between preparatory teacher and regular class teacher.

The Finnish education system rests on the National Core Curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education 2016⁸) which has a section on *Finnish/Swedish as a second language*⁹. If the migrant pupil's competence in Finnish/Swedish is insufficient for attending regular language/literature courses in basic education, courses are offered in Finnish/Swedish as a second language. In the sample context, the mainstream language is Finnish, and in the following, this subject is referred to by its Finnish abbreviation *S2* (S for *suomi* 'Finnish language'; 2 for second language).

The interviews showed that teachers in preparatory instruction work essentially as special needs teachers but without the status and pay of such. By special needs, we refer to S2 teachers' constant need for dynamic action to meet the variety of needs to pupils have. Previously, it has been noted elsewhere that migration background can, as such, be expected to raise the need for pupils' *additional support* – "for example, social and emotional support." (Eurydice, 2019, 91.)

⁷ Available at http://www.child-up.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CHILD-UP_Report-on-legislation.pdf

⁸ Finnish National Board of Education. 2016. New national core curriculum for basic education: focus on school culture and integrative approach. Available: [new-national-core-curriculum-for-basic-education.pdf](#) (oph.fi).

⁹ The mainstream language in the pupil's environment may be Finnish or Swedish.

Preparatory educators are in constant flux also because “the arrival of new pupils throughout the academic year can render the design of a coherent teaching plan difficult” (OECD 2018, 178). In addition, the work involves and craves for fine pedagogic skills, language awareness, and interactional and emotional competence. Teachers’ work is, in essence, collaboration every day with both school assistants, class teachers, other S2 teachers in municipalities, and support services.

Despite the intensive and specific competences needed, there is no legislation on the qualification requirements for teachers in preparatory teaching. Most teachers are hired as teachers of Finnish or of Finnish as a second language; however, it is the case that some teachers have completed no studies in S2.

Because of the obscurities in qualifications and in The Basic Education Act, the teachers described themselves being in a situation where they need to prepare their teaching materials very far by themselves by using multiple sources. This is a complex and a constant process: pupils need material that not only suits their age but also their language skills. The same deficit shows in the teaching material of migrant/minority languages.

Preparatory class instruction has several challenges, as the teachers describe. The pupils are of different ages and have different skills, and their backgrounds may be different in many ways. It is also possible to receive preparatory education individually or in smaller groups, which also gives variation to the pedagogical approaches that the teachers need to adapt to. The context of language support or other forms of support varies. The support for S2 is provided either in a separate classroom or as differentiated teaching in the mainstream classroom. However, if any support is given to the pupils separately, they will be integrated to the mainstream class as soon as possible.

Teachers systematically showed affection towards their experiences at work. This they did not in order to say the work is easy but that the work they do is meaningful for both them and to the pupils. Part of the meaningfulness in teachers’ daily work seemed to partly arise from countering and overcoming challenges:

For the most part, they’ve been really motivated to learn Finnish and to go to school in general and have welcomed help. So that’s been really nice, and I’ve felt like I’m needed here. Like I’m here to teach and they make all out of it. (FI_T11_F)

What is notable, in case of teaching migrants, is that teachers’ expertise has wide regional or even school-wide variations. Yet, all interviewees say they need more education. Currently, the availability of teachers’ additional education for teaching multicultural groups varies regionally, most training focusing in the Helsinki area. The main reason for this is that the number of migrants has increased rapidly; there is not enough further training available in the first place, and there are municipalities where schools encounter migrant pupils for the first time. The interviewees argue that the education they have received (whether it is teacher or school assistant education) has not prepared them enough to develop their multicultural competences– they have learnt by doing, but now call for targeted training and thereby recognition as professionals in this area of special education: “Well I’ve learned a lot just by doing it. Of course in education I was taught how to simplify and clarify things and about taking it slowly and about pupils with special needs, but I really don’t think those studies prepare you for this.” (FI_T12_M)

Professional experiences: social workers

Social workers' experience in working life varied from one to 36 years; the average length of interviewees' work experience was some 10 years. Some of the interviewees had extensive work experience with low-threshold NGO work and special youth work. Three of interviewed had experiences in child protection and one as an interpreter and one in mental health issues. One school social worker mentioned that there was plenty of training available on different topics for staff; this may not, however, hold true in all areas or schools in Finland. Some social workers mentioned that the work itself with immigrants has helped them to better understand the asylum and immigration system.

School social workers provide preventive child protection services mainly consisting of preventive pupil/student welfare services, which are statutory duty (Student Welfare Act 1287/2013¹⁰) and from time to time they provide corrective welfare services. Based on Student Welfare Act, school social workers need to provide pupils an appointment time within seven days when requested, and in case of a crisis, within one day. The work of school social workers is fairly independent when compared to the work of social workers in child protection, for instance. They typically provide services for several schools with hundreds of students.

School social workers are part of the school welfare group, which is carried out as community work by all staff members and all pupils at school as well as by parents' association. School social workers are also part of a pupil's multi-professional team and a pedagogical team which focuses on individual cases and work together with the pupil, his/her parents, and other networked partners. This type of casework may also include targeted group interventions in classes, for example investigating cases of bullying, conducting a welfare survey, and so on. School social workers organise different group activities and thematic days for pupils in co-operation with different partners. School social workers also give consultation and counselling on neuropsychiatric and mental issues. Pupils turn to school social workers with challenges in behaviour, learning or peer-relationships, or when they wish to have some activities for their free time. Youth might also come and reflect on their thoughts with school social workers. Pupils may also share their home affairs with school social workers and also parents can receive consultations and appointment times from school social workers. The cooperation network of school social worker is large: child protection, family work, youth work, police, NGOs, and so on.

School social workers face a wide range of emigration in their work. Not only is it about refugees or asylum seekers; there are families who have migrated because of work. There are also families of mixed nationalities returning to the home country of one of the parents. Further, there are Finnish families resettling into Finland after years abroad. A (normal) school social worker does not meet with immigrant pupils regularly merely for the sake of them having migrated, but schools with preparatory classes do fall under their responsibility.

Common topics for school social workers' discussion with immigrant children are issues related to attending school and friendships; youth often wish to discuss dating issues when thoughts and views

¹⁰ Student Welfare Act 1287/2013. Available in English: <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2013/en20131287>.

of the parents and the child differs on the matter. Although immigrant families experience education as important, there might still be differences in their conception of time— duration of school days, and why be in school on time. School social workers provide counselling and guidance about Finnish society; with immigrant girls, there is a lot of discussion about the role of women and girls in society. Without specifying the cultural, ethnic, or religious background of immigrant girls, one interviewee pointed out how immigrant girls may start criticising gender roles in their own culture due to the influence of their Finnish peers, which causes conflicts at home. Some conflicts have even escalated to a placement of a child and/or taking into care.

...so, when parents didn't see it right that youth takes influences from Finnish peers. It created conflicts and sometimes they escalate even to a placement of a child for example if there is violence at home because of girl has confronted the rules. There have been emergency placements and even taking into care, of course then there are also some other problems.... (FI_SW4_F)

As migrant families have a variety of backgrounds and life stories, they might sometimes be cautious with social workers and other officials at the beginning. When social workers gain trust with a migrant family, it creates confidence between partners that all are on the same page working towards the best interest of the child.

It means the world in student welfare work that there is a relationship of trust in understanding the other and being confidential and listening to that client and his concerns and knowing when there is trust so that even difficult things can be raised and it arises in such a way that I think we value another person and start from the same line to work and be respected, and even if thoughts maybe what this Finnish way of life and school world sounds like suddenly special thinking, attitudes to things, they must be listened to and tried to understand. That's where it builds that trust, and then when it is there, it's easier to talk about difficult things. (FI_SW5_M)

The key competence areas of school social workers were perceived to be a developmental approach and continuous learning. Interviewees mentioned as developmental needs to find methods and ways to engage migrant youth in influencing, skills in scaling up cultural and gender-sensitive work to different environments and municipalities, knowledge on different benefits and services (especially for mother tongue counsellors), and psychological and trauma treatment skills. School social workers also raised as capacity needs gaining knowledge on different cultural and religious facts so that these could be better fostered and made visible in a school environment. One school social worker also wanted to have more knowledge about working with refugee children and families in general.

Social counsellors working among unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors act as assigned workers to the young person they support in everyday matters. Their task is to provide guidance throughout the asylum process and manage social security issues and, importantly here, cooperate with school and with other professionals. They continue working with their clients even after they have received their residence permits, so the young can receive continuous support from the same persons.

Professional experiences: interpreters

The professional backgrounds and years of experience in the group of interpreters vary. All pointed out they would like to participate in additional training but that there is not much available. When assessing their study programmes, interpreters maintain that the curriculum should also cover entrepreneurship (as many of them work as freelancers), communication in more detail, and even field-specific interpretation such as (mental) health care. As to their professional paths, all have in

some sense drifted to their current position; it has not been a professional goal for any one of the interviewees but due to different personal life events, societal circumstances, and professional openings, they have ended up working where they do.

In their everyday work, interpreters are occupied by various types of official situations where a client needs interpretation into his/her native language or has been assigned to such service by an officer wanting to make sure the client understands the issue right. Interpreters are usually ordered via an electronic system where available professionals can come forward and show their interest for the job. Thus, daily tasks vary to a great extent but, as *Marjo* describes, are predominantly demanding by nature:

It's pretty burdensome mentally when the situations pop up and they can be really heavy and you're there for just one hour, and after that you never get to hear from them. We never see a story coming to an end---I've rarely been in a joyful situation with a positive atmosphere. Usually we're only needed when there's trouble, so the emotional stimulus of the situation itself causes a load. (FI_I2_F)

Further aspects that make interpreting a challenging occupation is that the pay is low and there is not working community around, as official interpreting is implemented by individual interpreters who are paid on an hourly basis by the agency which takes in orders and transmits them to interpreters available. An issue to be noticed here is that officials follow the principle of the cheapest cost price independent of the service provider's formal education and competence. This means that orders may be competed for by both educated professionals as well as non-educated entrepreneurs. In sum, not only is the level of wages low but interpreters are also alone in organising their facilities and insurances, in managing their well-being at work (including finding peer support and possibilities for debriefing and recovery), as well as in upgrading their skills. Despite these flaws, interpreters feel their work is valuable and find joy in seeing how their presence and assistance helps people.

Experiences of professionals in reception centres

The reception centres in the sample were established to face the 2015 wave in asylum-seeking around Europe. Some of the interviewees had worked in the centres ever since. One social worker also was involved in different professional networks on multicultural work and acted as a human rights observer in a war zone.

Reception centre personnel had diverse experiences in terms of clients, everyday practices, as well as on receiving support and developing their professionalism. The main distinguishing factor related to the specific profile of their employer.

First, the NGO working with migrant youth operates with 12–25-year-old migrants. The activities especially aim to support the early integration of immigrants through volunteer work, peer support, as well as projects on active citizenship and social impact. All interviewees in this category advocate the voices of migrants at different forums, and they also welcome migrant parents to participate in activities, as requested by the young themselves.

The NGO interviewees exemplified early integration by telling that, in connection with their work, migrant youth learn new skills from each other and from volunteers; volunteers are crucial in fostering cross-cultural dialogue. These social workers provide young people with a safe space and community where they can be themselves and feel welcome.

Two, in migrant adult social work, clients include refugees, quota refugees, and persons who have obtained a residence permit/refugee status through an asylum application. Social workers here act as assigned workers (following Social Welfare Act 2014/1301, 42 §)¹¹, so all clients of immigration services have a social worker of their own, accompanied by a social counsellor as a pair. A mother tongue counsellor is asked to help clients if social counsellor requests so, for example in case of paperwork or visiting the police or bank together with the client. In addition to counselling, a mother tongue counsellor also organises information events. In this type of work, the focus is on adults' issues but affects and is affected by clients' offspring, as well.

Third, the interviewees placed in a reception centre for asylum-seeking adults and families describe their work involving a wide range of clients, from babies to the elderly, so there are also many different needs to meet. As reception centre provides independent housing for asylum seekers, children and youth remain mainly in the realm of their own families, and thus the counsellors working there do not have a direct working relationship with children. When they do, it happens in cooperation with parents, for example if parents share issues related to their children. However, an interviewee points out "it would be necessary to work directly with teenagers and young people especially, when at the reception centre...that is missing or rare." (FI_FGI3_SW4_F)

In their everyday work, social workers of the reception centre reported receiving professional guidance regularly, either individually or as a group. Debriefing and defusing methods were also utilised to support their work. It was also stated by some social workers that the general public do not know the real picture and content of working with asylum seekers and immigrants.

3. The experience of migrant children from professionals' perspectives

Teachers' views on migrant children's situation

When asked about migrant pupils' educational trajectories and needs, teachers are quick to say that migrant pupils are all but a uniform group. Some of the pupils have no previous experience on going to school; some have attended a religious school; some have had some education on a refugee camp; and some have studied on a more stable rhythm in an established educational institution. Not only are they educational backgrounds different, but they also differ from one other –as all pupils do– in terms of cognitive abilities, social and emotional skills, as well as motivation: "It's often up to the pupil's motivation towards language learning. If there's a trauma and the child has seen something... learning becomes difficult." (FI_T3_M)

Pupils' backgrounds give rise to pedagogical questions on special needs daily. The teacher takes account the pupils' experiences in pedagogy. One teacher described how she understands that migrant pupils of all ages may have challenges in learning: "In upper comprehensive school, it slows learning down extremely if the starting point is that you can't read or write." (FI_T5_F)

¹¹ Social Welfare Act 2014/1301. Available in English: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1982/en19820710>.

Despite the challenges, many teachers describe migrant pupils not as a differentiated special group but first and foremost as *children* and as *individual persons*. The Finnish teachers want them to be seen similarly to all other pupils, but through pedagogical approaches, migrant pupils can be supported in learning activities and in life. The teachers describe that migrant pupils' expectations for their lives are similar to those of their Finnish peers: they want to learn, make friends, have a family, build a career, and so on. Moreover, pupils' needs are human: they want to tell about themselves – who they are, where they come from, what their mother tongue is, and what is meaningful to them:

Yeah, like, I, like at first what it comes to my mind is that when you work with pupils, so we talk about all other kind of things and get to know each other and they get to know and they get to tell, what they want here at school. I've been noticing that they also like to tell about their own culture and about themselves and I have given them time for that. (FI_T10_F)

In the sample, it also becomes clear that it is important especially for newly arrived pupils that there is an adult present, speaking the same language than the pupils:

It's really important that when a newly arrived pupil doesn't know much Finnish yet, there's a mother tongue teacher who truly understands the challenges in learning, family life and health. So I sometimes get to hear about parents' break-up or other sensitive topics that you can't necessarily share with a teacher who doesn't know your language, or if you just trust the mother tongue teacher more. They do say that children are ready to open up much more... I think a mother tongue teacher is like a cultural antidote who can explain Finnish society to children in their own language and kind of helps in integrating and accepting some things that are new and that you just don't have in your own culture. We can talk about them in class. So really important stuff. The teacher is also like a role model that you can educate yourself although you have a migrant background and you can make it. (FI_T13_F)

In the interviews, teachers described gender differences when asked but did not want to stress a distinction between boys and girls nor did they want to point to any specific cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds: “Yes, maybe a little, when the child comes from a certain country and religion, so it is possible to see small differences between boys and girls (..) But is not flashy” (FI_T1_F). Gender equality seems to be well grasped by those migrant families that have stayed in Finland for a long time already. The interviewees had, however, made some observations on a slightly different position of girls vis-à-vis boys among pupils with a migrant background. For boys, there seems to be more freedom than for migrant girls. It seems that the sphere of migrant boys is more outside the home, whereas girls' place is inside the home. One interviewee said that outside the home, it is a task for migrant boys “to defend the honour of their family” (FI_T7_F). Migrant girls, on their behalf, have tasks at home, helping their mothers in cleaning and cooking. Parents can lay out strict rules for girls on how to behave and who they may meet outside the home. This kind of a narrow role of a kind daughter may prevent the integration of migrant girls. The same interviewee had also noticed that migrant boys may have close (physical) contacts with each other: “so the need for personal space is like smaller for them and they can like touch each other overtly” (FI_T7_F). In Finnish culture, physical proximity is generally not close, but people tend to retain distance to each other in public. For the interviewee, boys' hugging poses a question of whether and how it should be addressed and conveyed to the boys that their practice may give rise to speculations about their (homo)sexuality among their Finnish peers.

In contrast, another interviewee was eager to raise pupils' awareness about possibly different conceptions about gender in migrant vs. Finnish society today:

I might write a clause onto the board (..) that John and Jack are buying a house. Then a pupil may point out there's a mistake. Well, I ask, why is there is a mistake? They say John and Jack are going to move in together. Well, why not? "Because they are boys." Well, I say, in Finland boys can move in together and girls can, too. (FI_T 3_M)

The example shows how societal and cultural issues may be embedded in language teaching, all central for the integration process. Most interviewees, however, withdrew from addressing gender purposefully in their teaching unless the subject of the lesson is directly concerned with the "equal position between men and women [then] it is natural" to focus on gender (FI_T6_F). Here, the starting point in teaching is that pupils are children and individuals, not gendered subjects. A conscious gender-sensitive approach in teaching is highly appreciated in the Finnish National Core Curriculum.

Understanding that gender (and the possible limitations it may seem to cause) may be grasped differently in different cultures, teachers plan their teaching accordingly. What is important is that there are also various other levels that they need to pay attention to:

Peer relations are like multidimensional... what is the level of their language skills? What age are they? Are they a boy and a girl? So when you come from these kinds of cultures where the encounters between girls and boys are seen in different ways than in Finland, so that too plays a part. (FI_T3_M)

Consequently, to support integration at many levels, teachers support and encourage girls and boys to work together in class. All in all, the aim is that teaching is gender-neutral in Finnish schools. One teacher said that girls and boys can learn together in groups. It is a necessary skill for the teacher to arrange the learning environment in gender-neutral ways.

Social workers' views on migrant children's situation

School and social services as sources of support

As multiculturalism and diversity are normalised at schools in Finland and building blocks of the National Core Curriculum of Education, the school is a central institution enhancing the integration of pupils. School social workers highlighted that at Finnish schools, all are treated equally independent of their background: "...hardly come across any exclusion or bullying, we deal with such things quickly, and children are tolerant. We Finns are very used to having migrant friends in day care and long-term friendships can already be formed there" (FI_SW3_F).

Social workers in the sample reported that migrant children and youth are motivated to study and learn the Finnish language and they have prestigious plans for their future which is seen at school as well as reception centres. It was also stated by school social workers that also migrant families value education highly. Immigrant families are often thankful for the good and free-of-pay education system in Finland. In the school environment, migrant children get the image that anything is possible; they are encouraged to make their own decisions on optional courses, for example.

As a further source of security, social workers mentioned migrant youth's strong motivation and aspiration to be "normal Finnish youth" and school social workers migrant saw children as getting well integrated into the school environment in general: "The majority of children dive like fish in the

water in new places and situations ('we're here now and here we do like this') without any problems." (FI_SW1_F)

Migrant children want to make friends with Finnish peers and they actively seek social contacts; immigration is not highlighted in the normal interaction between children; children encounter each other as individuals. Often, there are many pupils with a migration background in one school in the first place, and they may all come from various places around the world. Children with a migrant background speak Finnish with courage and enthusiasm, although the level of Finnish may not always be so strong.

Children with a refugee background have usually received at least some education before arriving, so going to school is not something completely unfamiliar to them. Finnish education and pedagogy do, however, differ from authoritative school systems pervading in some parts of the world, characterised by violence, arbitrariness, and intimidation.

Schools and teachers support migrant families' integration. Parents' digital skills are tried to be supported and guidance in digital aid tools for communication between home and school is provided. School social workers also are key persons to share the worries of children forward for example to child protection social workers so that a child or family can get the support needed. If a migrant child has siblings, they also play a crucial role in helping the younger ones in their homework or in conveying various messages from school to parents.

In Finland, knowing English is often not enough – the Finnish language was seen as key to integration. School social workers mentioned that, as a service, school social work may be unknown in many countries, even in Europe. Thus, parents are often amazed to find someone is interested in their issues. In Finland, children's rights are protected and if the rights are violated, the issues are addressed. Social workers considered it important that parents are informed and educated about the rights of the child. It was also commonly agreed that in Finland, gender equality persists and there are no gender-related limitations.

Intersections of gender and culture

Social workers in the sample introduced several features related to gender, family roles, and culture which they perceive as shaping the social situation of migrant children. As they seldom mentioned any particular countries of origin, ethnicities, cultures, or religions, this report does not provide a detailed understanding of the topic and of the variability in relation to migrants from different geographical locations and with different cultural backgrounds and/or religious affiliations.

First, there seem to be differences in bringing up boys vis-à-vis girls. Social workers mentioned that an (unspecified) 'ethnic' background seems to grant boys more freedom of action whereas for girls, there are more limitations. It is common for migrant girls to remain under the supervision of their fathers; they also help their mothers in housekeeping and childcare while their brothers are free to go and enjoy their leisure time. In some (but not all) cultures, also boys' school success is more highly valued and supported than that of girls.

Continuing with gender roles, second, social workers said that, in some cultures, it seems to be the father's task to manage relations and attend meetings with officials, such as school. In a similar vein, migrant boys, even smaller ones, might sometimes have a demanding role in the family; a role not

meant for children. If, for example, the father is not present, it influences the well-being of boys and even shows in learning at school.

There were, third, some specific gender-related norms of behaving the social workers in the sample had observed. Among other things, not all migrant children attend sexual and gender education as part of health education at school as they are a taboo in some cultures. It is also the case that not all students with a migrant background can participate in physical education classes when swimming in mixed groups; or girls may need to wear long swimming suits. Girls' use of scarfs also typically stems from gender-specific cultural norms, in Muslim families in particular.

Addressing the intersections of gender, family and cultural norms is highly important for all young people:

If it's unequal treatment based on sex--here in the country is not supported and it is right to think that there must be equality. Gender is not a limit, or here it is not... and yes, they are empowered when they understand it. And on the other hand, regarding boys, they can also be under such pressures and expectations on what they should be like. It's not only girls who are empowered by that type of conversation. With the boys, such a contradiction arises between their family expectations and more diverse culture. It applies to both.
(FI_SW4_F)

While it may empower the young that gender is not supposed to limit people's lives in Finland, it is always not welcomed by all young people with a migrant background: not all migrating young people suddenly want to start living like Finnish people in general, and they may not have wanted to leave their 'home culture' or 'culture of origin' behind but have been forced to move. Retaining one's own cultural norms may then show, according to some social workers, in peer monitoring, where youth with a similar cultural and religious background-- Middle East Muslim youth in specific-- become authorities for desirable conduct. They also show disapproval if members call into question or act against the pervading socio-cultural norms or understanding.

Some girls with a migrant background, who have been in Finland for a long time, have started to think about the role of women in Finland and evaluating their own future; if they should get married and focus on family at an early age already, or focus more on their own, individual goals. In general, well-integrated youth with a migrant background tend wonder about these directions crossing between two different cultures. In a similar vein, cultural issues persist for second-generation immigrants, but in a different light:

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_FGI1_SW2_F)

Sources of vulnerability: language deficiency and societal prejudice

While migrant children may be motivated to study and even receive support from their parents, dreams of success are not always fulfilled. In visioning future studies, the academic skills of pupils with a migrant background might be veiled due to language difficulties as the development of language skills create a basis for future education.

Well at school you can see that many times young people have very ambitious goals for their own lives. They want to get a good profession and the goals are pretty tough and sometimes it feels like there are few unrealistic goals and when you go through them with their parents then there is always a little pain of restoring that realism to it. Those challenges are related to the fact that there are purely language problems or a history of being outside of school and that learning can be challenging. It does not always progress at the same pace, although the support that young children with an immigrant background receive is quite good. But it's a pretty big contradiction then for those dreams." (FI_SW5_M)

Among other causes of vulnerabilities, the social workers interviewed mentioned the asylum-seeking process itself as it causes insecurities for both minors and whole families, which can hinder the study motivation and future planning as well as cause depression, difficulties in sleeping, and many other mental issues. Absence from school is undesirable and might, sometimes, be a step towards the formation of youth gangs, a negative development among all youth:

And probably otherwise the absences now may be due to similar reasons with the native Finns. That we are being out of school and in those gangs. Not just to come to school. Even then, not due to immigration, but you may have drifted into such groups that you are in the city rather than at school. Yes, there are young people like this among both immigrants and native Finns who are out of school. (FI_SW4_F)

Indeed, young people face similar risks and undesired behaviour independent of their national background. One school social worker exemplified this in telling about a racist shouting between different migrant groups at school. Additionally, it also happens that there are children and youth who prefer socialising with other members of their cultural/ethnic group only. Social workers saw this type of segregation as strengthening undesired development and creating risks for problematic behaviour.

While some pupils with a migrant background may feel safe and satisfied in their own cultural networks, and although multiculturalism is deeply embedded in the school curriculum, social workers emphasise that migrant pupils generally long for Finnish friends. Even after spending his/her whole life in Finland, a young person with a migrant background may still face challenges in making friends with native Finns. The case is, the interviewees argue, even more difficult when arriving to Finland at the time of secondary school (ISCED2). Migrant children often face loneliness outside school. The language barrier might be one of the reasons behind difficulties in making friends. School social workers also mentioned that some children do not even want to learn Finnish and they want to survive using English (not an official language in Finland although widely spoken). Another school social worker raised a case where some children can speak Finnish but prefer not to use it at school. Some parents, on their behalf, speak English to their children although it is not their mother tongue and social workers saw this as posing challenges to the language development of the child.

Social workers generally agreed that there is today explicit racism and structural discrimination in Finnish society which hinders and blocks the inclusion and participation of (young) immigrants. They claimed many people have prejudice towards asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in general, which are built and emphasised through media representations. They see this as a shame as in their view: immigrants they work with are different from the existing stereotypes. Further, social workers think that children's integration into society is usually fast, and it often happens that individuals and whole families undergo changes during the integration process. Counsellors felt powerless at the face

of societal atmosphere as they felt incapable of influencing and changing society towards open-mindedness and respect for diversity.

Interpreters' views on migrant children's situation

In Finland, interpreters tend to work in educational settings only when a pupil's non-Finnish speaking parents are present (an issue addressed in section 4). This is something that troubles *Marjo*:

I've thought about these kick-off meetings between families and teachers before the migrant child enters the school. We go through the school rules, routines, and practices. The child may be present and hear the interpreted version addressed to the parents. But then the next day the child is on her own, and it must be really challenging not to understand what people around you are saying and not being able to express yourself. Well you can point at those pictures but are they enough to express what you think? It is pretty intimidating. (FI_I2_F)

The case shows that although entering school is well-planned and thoroughly discussed with migrant parents, the scene is different for the child. *Marjo* shows concern over migrant children 'losing their voice' in not being able to communicate their inner thoughts and feelings when they arrive and wonders why children are not provided with interpreting when they start school in the new country. She seems the same flaw in a slightly older age group: when minors turn 18, it is up to them, not their guardians, to answer for themselves in official contexts like job-seeking. However, an interpreter should be used because language skills do not develop overnight.

Although interpreters do not often work directly with pupils in schools, they do have a good overall understanding of the educational needs of children with a migrant background. *Siri* (FI_I3_F) proposes for teachers a stricter take on migrant pupils' absence from classes, as she says being absent from school makes the integration process slower. She also calls for immediate intervention in case of bullying as well as for a more regular use of learning methods that enhance group spirit and participants' sense of belonging.

The sample on interpreters also shows that school plays a central role in promoting gender equality:

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. ---It hinders women's integration when their success isn't supported at home. I've met many clients who have lived in Finland for a long time. The man is succeeding, studies for a profession or even has a job, but the woman is still where she started cause she has had to stay at home with children. When they have several children, it is the mother's task to stay at home. They are not supported for gaining success outside the home. ---I see young women who are illiterate and just keep on having children. ---I see that as a major reason why women don't become involved in society. Integration never happens for them. When they only stay at home, they never get involved. (FI_I3_F.)

In the extract, *Siri* argues that the school, as an institution, is in the position to affect gender and power relations and girls' and women's agency and active participation in society, and that it should do more to take advantage of this position and teach pupils the meaning of gender equality in order to enhance integration of children with a migrant background.

Migrant children's situation from the perspective of reception centres

Asylum-seeking families may stay in a reception centre environment for some five years, during which children are born and raised. In the reception centre, families have a room or two for themselves and share the kitchen and bathrooms with other residents. During the years of residence, counsellors encounter different emotions among the residents; adults' tiredness is constantly present also in children's life. Asylum seekers are frustrated and sometimes even angry over their situation; on the other hand, there are lighter days when they forget their status. Asylum-seeking children are open for contact with reception centre counsellors. Children have a hard time staying in their family rooms and they often use the corridor space for their plays, where they create their own culture of being. For children, a balancing factor to everyday life is attending the municipal school; under school-aged asylum-seeking children can attend day care or pre-school.

Staying at a reception centre for years as an asylum seeker becomes costly to society not only because of the facilities but also due to the professional support and other services surrounding it. The process also becomes costly financially, and mentally, for those asylum seekers who cannot practice their previous occupation fully. As asylum-seeking children receive day care placement free of charge, social workers stated that the adults do not always understand that it is a benefit provided by society and normally a payable service. Not paying for it has in some cases caused only loose commitment in using the service. After receiving resident permit, the asylum seeker has a legal right for social security benefits and services. The social workers interviewed pointed out that many people, in general, have misinformation about the financial support that asylum seekers and immigrants receive.

The views of reception centre personnel in the sample was generally in line with those of individual social workers (reported two sections earlier). For example, both see asylum-seeking children as mainly optimistic despite all the difficulties they have experienced. Social workers saw children's ability to adapt and find positive things even in difficult situations as a great resource: "Most of the youth are really, it's amazing how they can be so diligent about schooling in this life situation" (FI_SW6_F). Not always do asylum-seeking parents even have the resources to support their children in schoolwork due to their insufficient skills in Finnish, illiteracy, or overall stressfulness of the life conditions.

As for asylum-seeking teenagers, who can already understand the situation better, the asylum process was seen as unreasonable burdensome and difficult. Moreover, for them, encountering a new culture, a new system of rules and norms, seems especially challenging; for instance, some counsellors felt that they do not always find ways to motivate or persuade youth to leave for school. As the asylum-seeking process is prolonged, normal ways of supporting coping lose their effectiveness.

As to differences between perceptions of gender in different cultures, the NGO specialising in migrant youth work has made a deliberate effort on community-building on the basis of encountering individuals and giving and receiving peer support. Young people are welcome as they are, not as representatives of a certain nationality, culture, or gender, which shows in the positive atmosphere and in encounters between youth, volunteers, parents, and workers. As a result, the interviewees argue the young perceive it as their second home where they experience belonging. This approach enables participants to think and criticise learnt perceptions of gender and culture together.

In the eyes of social workers in the NGO, it is challenging for migrant youth to find work which corresponds to their education. They also criticised vocational counselling at schools, claiming too much attention is given in individuals' counselling to the fact that Finnish is not marked as their mother tongue and that, consequently, migrant youth are automatically referred to vocational education instead of high schools.

4. Working with children and their families

When asked about the practical aspects of working with children and their families, the interviewees generally showed close engagement in and high expertise in their field across professions. The section is organised into two: Relationship and communication with parents and Professionals' roles and tools in working with children and their families.

Relationship and communication with parents

Teachers and parents

When teachers were asked about how they perceive parents' or caregivers' role and engagement in their children's education, two types of answers reoccurred. First, the family backgrounds of migrant pupils are not uniform as parents are a heterogeneous group; yet, two, communication with migrant pupils' parents tends not to be straightforward.

As to the first point on migrant parents differing from each other in how involved they are in their children's education, teachers said that it is the same as with native parents: some are more involved and more interested than others. Similarly, if offered additional support for learning, some parents are suspicious as to what it means. While this is not uncommon among native parents, either, it may be a sign of a different type of understanding on learning difficulties than what currently exists in Finnish pedagogy, one that does not accuse the learner of not learning but tries to accommodate teaching to meet the learner's needs. Teachers do recognise some thought lines and attitudes among parents that they see as relating to differences in cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds; some parents, for example, underline the joy of having their children attending Finnish school. They give high value and full support for learning, and they also expect their children to do the same. On the other hand, a few teachers note there are parents with demands or unrealistic expectations on the teacher, or, at times, on the child; for instance optional language studies may seem attractive and useful for the parents' perspective but not for the learning and study load of the child still in the process of acquiring skills in the Finnish language.

Language is a central point of concern also in teachers' communication with migrant pupils' parents. The single factor that teachers recurrently mention as a challenge in their work is the lack of a shared language between them and migrant parents. By this they refer to parents' poor skills in Finnish and, often, English, and to the overall feeling that they cannot be sure whether the parents have understood them right. Often, it happens that class teachers ask for S2 teachers' help in communicating with parents: "Communication with parents is really challenging. It is not impossible, but I do also help other teachers a lot when they come to me and say that now the mother or father has misunderstood this and that." (FI_T3_M)

In addition, it is not merely the difficulties in a certain language but a difficulty in reaching the parents through any communication channels. Migrant parents do not regularly participate in parents'

meetings and, for reasons the teachers say they do not know, do not easily respond through digital media.

Social workers and parents

Some migrant parents understand Westerns ways of thinking about child protection well but for others, it is more difficult to comprehend. Some migrant families find it difficult to work with social workers who are women with power for decision-making. Immigrant families might further be generally cautious when talking with social workers, and social workers evaluated that gaining their trust was a challenge. Immigrant families might also lack knowledge about the Finnish service system and the work of different professionals which causes mistrust in co-operation. One school social worker evaluated that it is rare for immigrant parents to do the initiative for contacting the school social worker.

They very rarely actively raise issues themselves unless there is such a clear experience of racism in the past, so if they experience such an attitude, then they might get in touch, but very rarely do the parents themselves take initiatives to co-operate. It must be because of their caution or perhaps they feel the system is too complex with all its clicks and everything, and whether they know how to handle things that they might prefer to keep in the home sphere and not dare to bring issues to school. (FI_SW5_M)

On the other hand, there are also migrant parents who take initiative towards the school but to a direction that is not appreciated in the Finnish education context: trying to buy grades for their children and affect school regulations. This might happen if the families used to be clients of private schools abroad. Further, some parents who want their children to aim high show respect towards hard sciences only and acquire extra lessons for their children after school, for instance in maths. As one social worker argues, “parents boast over their own success at school, like they were so good in this and that, but they don't understand that here the level of requirements is different and that success is hard especially if there are problems with language.” (FI_SW1_F) Such parents may also be demanding in terms of their children's leisure time activities and goals.

School social workers in the sample report that they have sometimes had to make a child welfare notification, which has created a lack of trust and conflict between school social workers and parents.

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)

School social workers reflected on migrant parents' attitudes towards the new culture and its habits, which might also create a major challenge to their and their children's integration and participation. Also children and youth can have negative attitudes towards following the generally accepted roles at school.

Probably the biggest challenge I have encountered when families are involved in the work that there are such attitudes among parents that different culture should not be recognised. That they should be able to live here following similar laws than in their country of origin,

for example... Or if there is a young person with a migrant background who somehow experiences that s/he will not take these rules and this culture into account. In a way, maybe a little bit of the same that some parents have. Not to try or give a chance to try to adapt to the rules at school. That little bit of making your own rules, which somehow looks like is linked with the migrant background. (FI_SW4_F)

School social workers further raised a concern about migrant parents' digital skills which are crucial when keeping in contact with the school as the majority of daily and/or weekly communication with the school takes place through digital applications.

Despite the ever-emerging need for social workers, the human relationships and interaction involved are the very reason that makes it meaningful: “In my opinion, young students who come from different cultures, are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I go abroad many times a week when I sit on my couch and listen to their stories” (FI_SW1_F).

School social workers argued that, in building connection to children and their caregivers, it is important to take into consideration the family history of arriving to the country. Even when they have lived in Finland for several years, the journey they made as asylum seekers or as migrating for other reasons remains a significant experience.

Interpreters and parents

Interpreters in Finland tend to work with parents and families more often than with children only. Their work may cover various educational and health-related contexts, such as meetings between parents and the teacher, child health care, or psychiatric consultation. However, the interviewees gave no indication of interpreting ever occurring between pupil(s) and teacher in class without the parents' presence. The interviewees point out cultural differences in how straight-to-the-point negotiation may be; in Finland, professionals' communication can be very straightforward without much warming up, which may come as a surprise to those migrant parents who are used to certain politeness rules—saying nice things to one another, even in an excessive manner—before addressing the ‘real’ issue at stake. One interpreter also introduced the issue of ‘cultural bonding’: some migrants do not perceive the interpreter as a professional but, rather, a friend who speaks the same language and who they think can be addressed in an informal, straight, or even intrusive manner before, during, or after the interpreted session.

Reception centre staff and parents

In social work among migrant adults, families have an assigned worker (in accordance to Social Welfare Act 2014/1301, 42 §)¹² to whom they can turn to in any questions and receive guidance. Interpreters are used in client meetings. Social counsellors conduct home visits and sometimes also goes to different places with families, such as hobbies. Social counsellors working with migrant adults mainly work with parents, but they also take children into account and want to get to know them as well, as it is then easier also for children to contact the counsellor if needed.

Due to lack of resources, social counsellors feel they have not had enough time for teaching useful skills (e.g. digital skills, filling in applications, and paying bills) to their clients. Especially digital

¹² Social Welfare Act 2014/1301. Available: 710/1982 englantti - Säädoskäännösten tietokanta - FINLEX ®.

skills were mentioned among the needs of migrants as plenty of services, including home-school - communication, are now online.

The interviewees in reception centres point out asymmetry in the roles of parents and children. They note that migrant children might have a role of an adult at home for different reasons and they help their parent(s) in communicating with Finns and also take care of family's daily life and chores:

But then I think that it is seen that many children ... When they are a little older and they learn the Finnish language, they take care of a lot of things here for the whole family, act as interpreters and mothers and fathers rely on these children, it is worrying and we have tried that the children do not interpret and... (FI_FGI3_SW1_F)

Also, these children usually do not receive support from their parents in school homework due to language barriers and do not get any financial support for hobbies, either.

Many social workers also stated that integration of teenagers might cause specific challenges as they already face puberty in all its colours, and if integration of children is or has been faster than parents, the outcome may shake family dynamics:

For parents, it's easy when that child learns faster than an adult and can take care of those things, and for a long time it will probably go pretty well unless there aren't heavy things that bother that child, but then when a child comes to puberty there will be problems as it has somehow made the distorted the... power relations in that family, or such things. It is then difficult for parents to take authority in other matters as well when through that language the child has somehow gained a stronger authority in some way. (FI_FGI3_SW4_F)

The reception centres' counsellors were concerned about the lengthened situations of asylum seekers, and in these abnormal situations normal ways of coping were not seen as effective. Asylum-seeking children might have days of absence from school due to the family situation and mental overburden caused by the situation. Some children are born while their parents are living at the reception centre which then becomes the only environment the children know. In the words of one interviewee, the situation is unsustainable and the society needs "not to continue that type of marginalisation development, so it would be important that children could use their potential and parents' (poor) wellbeing would not paralyse children, that parents could get support for themselves" (FI_FGI3_SW4_F).

Professionals' roles and tools in working with children and their families

Teachers

Teachers mentioned several useful skills in teaching migrant pupils. For example, teachers are skilful to form confidential relationships with migrant pupils and their families. Their awareness concerns different cultures, languages, and individual backgrounds.

One school assistant illustrated what it can mean to balance at the intersections of cultural differences, family habits, and the law on child protection. According to her, some migrant parents can sometimes give "an automatic little slam" (FI_T2_F) on the child's face. The school assistant did not evaluate this as a harmful act that would cause insecurity and break the child's physical integrity. She did not see slams as an evidence of violence but as a thing that "belongs" to the other culture. The boundary between Finnish and other parents is here constructed as a natural cultural distinction.

Useful skills

Teachers have skills to adapt and teach in rapidly changing situations. Some of the interviewed teachers mentioned that they have an ability to recognise pupils' multidimensional backgrounds as well as empathy towards pupils' traumatic experiences. They also pointed out they need to learn more about trauma in so far as it may hinder pupils' learning.

Teachers mentioned the following useful skills when working with immigrant children and families:

- Language and cultural awareness as a pedagogical approach (linguistically responsive instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy as defined in the DivED¹³ project in Finland).
- Ability to response to different situations that may occur unforeseen.
- Transversal competence and ability to embrace a wide range of transversal knowledge.
- Ability to form confidential relationships with migrant pupils and their families.
- Openness and flexibility.
- Sense of humour and situational awareness.
- Collaboration and interactional skills.
- Pedagogical skills.
- Preparedness for a continuous change.
- Recognising themselves as meaningful persons for pupils' identity construction.
- Sensitive approach in pedagogy and interaction.
- Willingness towards continuous learning.
- Ability to recognise pupils' multidimensional backgrounds and empathy towards the traumatic experiences of the pupils.

Teachers also mentioned the following development needs at their work with immigrant families and children:

- The continuous need for further education about intercultural competences and encountering diverse backgrounds, such as traumas.
- The need of professional guidance of work.
- Strong concern about pupils' welfare and success at school and in life: they need more support than teachers can offer.
- Knowledge on how to teach pupils with traumatic experiences and how the experiences may prevent learning and motivation.

Social workers

Social workers presented school as a key institution in providing and referring children and youth to different support services needed. It was evaluated by school social workers that the support measurements and services at school are pretty good overall and that there has been a great improvement of support services across time.

School social workers said that they are daily in contact with teachers as well, as there are cooperation structures at schools such as weekly pedagogical support teams (including school head, special needs teacher, study counsellor, school psychologist, nurse) and student welfare meetings. Student welfare

¹³ See <https://dived.fi/en/>.

work means joint action including all members and participants of the school (e.g. cleaners, janitors, parents as representatives of parental associations). Special needs teachers often cooperate with teachers of Finnish as second language and with special needs assistants. At primary school, a class teacher has an important role for pupils and their families for several years, as one social worker exemplifies:

At elementary school, there is the classroom teacher and under his/her leadership the classroom functions, so it is an important thing for the pupils that it is the one and same adult who is usually present for several years. And it's such a safe person in general who has shared things and showed emotions, it's an important thing for children's development. And for parents, it is also an important thing that there is someone safe who is with the child for several hours a day. (FI_SW3_F)

All in all, social workers gave positive feedback to teachers for their work in following up students' welfare, taking action, and sharing worries with school social workers when those arise. As part of the student welfare work in some schools, there are social counsellors (Bachelor of Social Services), who guide different group activities and give individual counselling. Also, some schools have recruited special needs assistants with an ethnic background. They can, for example, better "understand certain issues that can worry the teacher, so they can also interpret these issues" (FI_SW3_F).

At schools, there are student union activities and different youth-led projects. Social participation is supported more at schools nowadays and it is seen as an important element for creating a healthy and supportive learning environment in addition to pedagogy.

Inclusion, in general, is a trend idea today, so to speak. It is, of course, to be supported... Yes, in general, it is not related to immigration but to the school culture in general, that there is more and more of these activities alongside traditional teaching and pedagogy. I don't know then how that change is seen in classes, but in everything that happens every day at school, after school and in the breaks and other contexts, so yes, I think that inclusion is supported quite well and resources are invested there. (FI_SW5_M)

There was a practice mentioned by a few school social workers that when new pupils join the class, the teacher assigns some other pupils to accompany the new ones for the first days so that the newcomers feel welcome. In some schools, there are special days for the creation of group spirit at the beginning of the school year for all pupils, where also youth work and parish representatives are present. School social workers also meet new pupils (and sometimes parents) with difficulties in integrating into the new school. School social workers also do individual student welfare work with children, their parents, and other members of the support network. This type of individual work might also include targeted group intervention in selected classes, for instance investigating cases of bullying, conducting welfare surveys, and so on.

Below, a social worker praises lessons on Finnish as a second language where pupils with a migrant background come together:

They kind of start to lead that class in a way that, sometimes the teachers laugh that they talked about something completely different from what they were supposed to, and that there was a good conversation and when the students have the same experiences in that migrant group--- they dare to bring up their cause and make whatever questions. They dare to better bring out their insecurities and not-knowing and that they are very curious and take a stand on things, and when we start thinking about issues from a student perspective,

in a way where students feel they need help, support, information, then they become better targeted when they better dare to bring out their own needs for information. This is one point of view that it is, of course, contradictory in the way that the same students are of course in those big mixed-groups, and that is an important part, but then they also need this group of their own where they dare to think about their special issues. (FI_SW5_M)

In the above extract, the social worker argues that, while mixed groups are central for integration, teacher-led moments with other pupils with a migrant background serve a great purpose in enabling learners of Finnish as a second language to open up on various, even sensitive topics.

School social workers also mentioned success stories as some pupils have completed studies on their mother tongue and on Finnish as a second language successfully and moved forward to high schools and universities. In general, social workers viewed migrant families as supporting their children in educating themselves. Some school social workers evaluated that the support services for migrant parents are accessible. School social workers preferred interpretation services for parents who cannot communicate well in Finnish or English. There was also a project mentioned which provides low-threshold, voluntary-based and peer to peer social service for immigrant families; they also provide information about the Finnish education system.

School social work is voluntary for pupils, and parents cannot prohibit their children from meeting the school social worker. If teachers refer pupils to the school social worker, the teacher has already mentioned this to parents earlier or will talk to them together with the school social worker. Discussion with children and school social worker is confidential and not shared with teachers. Also, parents can directly contact the school social worker with different questions and issues. One school social worker positioned herself working as a middle person in-between teachers and parents:

In general, I try consciously to go between [the teacher and parents] and take it all on me so that the teacher who has daily dealings with the parents ...to protect the teacher from hatred. That is, in a way, trying to protect the relationship between the teacher and the parents so school social workers are dealing with more uncomfortable cases. (FI_SW1_F)

Useful skills

Some of the interviewed social workers were active in updating their skills for example on trauma work and multicultural counselling, and they were involved in different multicultural and international networks. It was mentioned that updating one's professional skills is something one should actively aim for, because not all employers, in municipal social work especially, actively promote and provide opportunities for that. School social workers working under the education sector in bigger municipalities were pleased with their training opportunities which they saw as plenty. Social workers in some workplaces, like reception centres, receive regular work mentoring.

Social workers mentioned the following useful skills when working with immigrant children and families:

- client-centred development approach and growth mindset
- empowerment approach in counselling
- skills in listening to the needs and opinions of immigrants
- skills in understanding the different type of family dynamics
- the cultural and gender-sensitive approach in counselling
- skills in encountering people as individuals
- working with interpreter (live, phone or application)

- communicating in plain language
- staying patient
- admitting that not all situations can be solved with your help and support
- having an acceptive and permissive attitude (not a judgemental one)
- asking for collegial help and support when needed
- fighting against stereotypes
- knowledge on the social security system (services and benefits)
- respecting difference.

Social workers also mentioned the following development needs at their work with immigrant families and children:

- to have easily accessible information on service guidance for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors, and on banking issues especially for refugees
- to acquire knowledge on social insurance benefits, especially for own language counsellors
- to develop skills in scaling up cultural and gender-sensitive work methods
- to gain knowledge on trauma and psychology in more general
- to learn working methods and approaches with refugees
- to learn about different cultures and religions.

Interpreters

The role of interpreters in working with migrant families is diverse. Depending on their exact position and job title, they may offer more or, typically, less extra-linguistic support and guidance for example in matters related to taxation or job-seeking. In school contexts, they report working primarily with parents and not directly with children. The following chain of events would thus not have taken place without the guardian's contact with *Jade*, a mother tongue counsellor:

The child was falling over, and the teacher saw it and ran to drag the child by the arm. The child got hurt a little, but this prevented the pupil from falling over. The child thought that the teacher was trying to rip her arm. (FI_I1_F.)

Afterwards, the two family members came to Jade's office, the child crying and wanting to quit school. Jade asked about the mother's wishes on what to do, and the mother said she wanted Jade to make a phone call to the teacher with her present, because her own language skills were insufficient to carry out such a conversation. After the phone call, it turned out that the situation at school yard had been misunderstood by the child. In the end, the child was happy to go to school again.

As the example shows, language assistance which is more than interpreting can help participants to reach mutual understanding on challenging issues. Whereas an interpreter cannot escape the official role of producing a precise translation, a language assistant (close to the position of a mediator in some other European countries) may contribute more to the interaction by mediating between different persons, languages, and cultures, and thereby support migrants' agency. Additionally, ordering interpretation is a task of the officers, so in the example above, without Jade, the mother would have needed to take action herself and only hope the teacher calls out an interpreter.

Another example of the fine line between literal interpreting and culture-sensitive mediation relates to the use of humour in talk. In different cultures, people tend to read and appreciate humour in diverse ways. Whereas in culture A a certain utterance may be interpreted as humorous and not as literal, in culture B it may be taken as controversial and even threatening. Take a scene with a family, social

worker, and interpreter (produced originally in FI_I1_F). The child acts naughty, and the mother reproves by saying she will „cut the child’s finger”. The interpreter interprets the utterance literally. The Finnish officer calls out child protection. The parents are puzzled.

To solve the misunderstanding, the issue is three-fold: the migrant family needs information; to be told that in Finland, social workers and other officers care for the safety and well-being of children, and that threatening with violence is unacceptable. The social worker needs culture-sensitivity; to be told that it was not a threat to be taken literally but an idiomatic expression rather regularly heard in the family after unruly behaviour. The interpreter, finally, needs support; as the interpreter cannot step away from the strict role of literal interpretation, a mediator could help to reconcile different roles, norms, and cultures.

As we see, there are different shades needed in ‘interpreting’. When an interpreter was to give an opinion on the idea of introducing ‘mediators’ in Finnish school contexts in the research interview, the response was, however, that it is not desired. The fear was that mediators would steal interpreters’ jobs and that it would diminish the value given to professional and precise interpreting.

Reception centre staff

Social workers evaluated their work with migrant children and families as rewarding and as a living library as all the clients have their own story to share. Social workers have seen positive development in their clients with respect to learning new skills or language or becoming decent citizens, which has been rewarding for the staff to observe.

Especially social workers who can follow minor asylum seekers’ processes from arrival to the granting of resident permits saw their work as rewarding because these youth develop their skills a lot in a short time. Social workers working with asylum-seeking minors were amazed at the youth's resilience to cope with all the stress and their ability to proceed with their life path despite all the difficulties.

When asylum-seeking minors turn 18 years old, they stop receiving counselling in the same way they used to. Counsellors saw that this independence breaks off, for some minors, rather fast and there are many things to be learnt before this step.

In a reception centre, there are multidisciplinary team meetings and client and social work teams, where difficult cases are solved together. Asylum seekers can attend vocational school's language courses and many of them also work¹⁴. Asylum children attend day care or school. There are different activities at the reception centre organised by NGOs and the third sector. On the other hand, “we have tried not to build a lot of activities inside the reception centre as its bubble, but to get people to participate activities of the municipality.” (FI_FGI3_SW4_F) Such a specific outward support measure was one where a parish project where asylum seeker can receive a support person to accompany the asylum seeker in different hobbies.

¹⁴ There are some limitations for work if you are an asylum seeker, see more: <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/moving-to-finland/non-eu-citizens/coming-to-finland-as-an-asylum-seeker>.

When an asylum seeker receives a resident permit, counsellors in the reception centre help to fill in different official applications. After receiving a municipality placement, clients move to municipalities and are referred to immigration services of the municipality. A transfer negotiation is held between the reception centre and immigration services if the client needs acute support.

Municipal immigration service and the social counsellors working therein are usually contacted from day care directly, as at day care they know that counsellors often meet families. Social counsellors also attend different meetings with clients especially if clients cannot go alone to meetings or they are not able to take care of things by themselves.

Low-threshold NGO has invested in a safe and gender-sensitive atmosphere for youth and counsellors to get to know youth individually and listen carefully to their needs so that they can develop their activities based on those: “It is not only an open space where you come and go. We ask the young how they are and phone them if they haven’t been around for a while or we have not heard from them.” (FI_FGI2_SW2_F) While migrant youth participate in NGO activities, they learn new skills from each other. NGO also provides support for migrant parents.

Social counsellors working at NGOs saw it as rewarding that youth experience the NGO as their second home which means that their investments as counsellors have paid off. Some social workers mentioned that they have learned a lot while working with families and children from different cultures and backgrounds: “After all, they come with their own culture to our activities. And this enriches our activities.” (FI_FGI2_SW2_M)

5. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Teachers on integration policy

Teachers in the sample argued that the Finnish school is, by nature, inclusive, meaning that pupils with various skills and backgrounds are welcomed into one and the same classroom. They also pointed out that support for learning is, in its most simple and everyday forms (learning in small groups; remedial teaching), available for everyone independent of their background. Here, co-operation between teachers is a norm, as is co-teaching by a class/subject teacher and S2 teacher/special needs teacher, or S2 teacher and school/special needs assistant.

Teachers showed appreciation towards the integration measures applied in Finnish schools nationally. However, they were clear in saying more is needed at societal, municipal as well as school levels. Crucial factors enhancing the school conditions of pupils with a migrant background and in need of additional support for learning include structural and financial support: how work is organised and resourced has a direct effect on both teachers’ working conditions as well as children’s well-being. Specific attention should be paid to increase language awareness among subject teachers to ease the transition of pupils from preparatory to regular class: “I’d like to see that migrant pupils are taken into account better in class. And at times I’m really impressed about how [some teachers] can adapt their teaching and find all sorts of wonderful new things though.” (FI_T5_F.) Further, one school year in preparatory instruction is hardly enough for a smooth transition to regular class; support should continue in some form whenever needed.

Teachers in the sample also pointed out that some measures should be taken to reach out to work-based migrants. While their children are subjected to integration measures through the school system,

they themselves are often left with no one apart from the employer. Teachers do their best in also showing empathy towards these parents by helping them to understand and tackle various issues in the new society they are settling into.

Social workers on integration policy

Social workers in different organisations and with different titles collaborate with many other organisations and are members of different multi-professional teams. School social workers are part of school cooperation structures but also work closely with municipal child protection and, in some cases, adult social work. School social workers also co-organise events with NGOs.

Social workers described integration both as a process and a result. While it is a goal their profession aims at, it involves the personal experience of people with a migrant background becoming full members of society and finding each one's own place in society.

Social workers were generally concerned about the segregation of immigrants from native Finns; yet, they were optimistic about successful integration and inclusion happening at school level among children and the young. In their view, peer support is important for both adults' and children's integration. Most social workers stressed the view that people are more similar to each other than different from one another, and that this serves as the baseline for dialogue.

Social workers saw themselves as working towards fostering the participation of migrants and providing them with the resources needed for better integration. Some social workers highlighted that integration is a two-way learning process:

And then again, on the other hand, integration that not everyone ... Doesn't need to make themselves Finnish in every aspect, that they can let those beautiful things in their culture flourish so we can take something from their culture and then again, they can take what they want from our culture. (FI_SW1_F)

Well maybe it's just finding your place... that you have to be yourself and that you don't need to become Finnish to be and act and live here and influence... integration...that it's like a two-way process or that it's not that someone is integrating you and then you are a ready-made package afterwards... (FI_FGI2_SW3_F)

There was a joint conception among social workers that the long integration process is filled with different emotions at different stages of integration.

Many times that strong emotional reaction can come at either end but when they arrive there can be a few-months honeymoon, but then gradually the truth reveals that you didn't just bump into this and you have to go back to that normal routine, it's pretty heavy for many kids. (FI_SW1_F)

It was also jointly agreed that the progression of integration depends on the person's attitude and activity. Finnish language proficiency was mentioned as the key for integration as well as for fast transition to education and working life. Different perceptions of gender roles might be difficult for immigrants to adjust to with the need for open dialogue and idea exchange in an accepting atmosphere: "All of a sudden, when they come here to Finland and there is equality here, that's a big change." (FI_FGI1_SW1_F.) As Finnish society builds on gender equality, recognising and accepting gender equality is important for successful integration.

School social workers highlighted that all pupils are equal and there needs to be a school-level policy with a sensitive approach towards all students. School social workers saw youth as individuals and persons, but they also highlighted the importance of understanding different cultures and different ways of seeing things, for instance the expectations for children and special questions in each culture. School social workers also referred to the school's overall objective and its importance to set a joint goal for a tolerant atmosphere and environment for all: "I believe that at our school's general goal and atmosphere of tolerance is conveyed to the students. I think it has a positive effect on youth with migrant background also." (FI_SW4_F)

Interpreters on integration policy

In Finnish society, interpreters work in an operational level and are not officially key figures in shaping integration policy¹⁵. This is unfortunate as interpreters gain a multifaceted perspective on migrants' reality of settling into the new society, a phase where policies and programmes intertwine with lived, everyday practices. Moreover, as *Marjo* points out, a number of interpreters have a migrant or multicultural background themselves, which already grants them unique experience and expertise on the process (FI_I2_F). Such is the case with *Jade*, who argues, on the basis of her own experiences, that every newcomer from another country should have a tutor, a personalised figure to welcome and guide the newcomer in everyday issues and especially in bureaucratic ones (FI_I1_F).

The possibility to use interpretation services in the early stages of the integration process is crucial in *Marjo's* (FI_I2_F) opinion. When language skills are still poor, interpreting is the key to support people's agency, active participation, and equity. Moreover, the initial phase is critical in a broader sense, as *Siri* points out:

I want to emphasise that the early stages of integration are the most important. If those don't work out, neither will the rest of the stages. After that it will be really difficult for anyone to be part of society if it didn't start off well. (FI_I3_F)

Siri also poses severe critique towards Finnish society and Finns' attitudes towards migrants. This relates to what she claims is a prolonged practice of attaching the label 'migrant' or 'migrant background' to people who differ from a more homogeneous mass of white native-born Finns in terms of their name, appearance or place of birth despite acquiring Finnish education and work experience:

It does make integration more difficult when you see that you are not welcome. It'd be really nice if one day migrant people were on the same level with the rest of Finns. Although the law gives you the same status and rights and all, I've seen it myself that employers favour native Finns over me even if I am more experienced. (FI_I3_F)

While relating more to society at large and the labour market especially, *Siri's* point simultaneously feeds straight into the educational system and shows that developing agency and active participation is central to the construction of fair and equal societal structures and practices. *Marjo*, too, has

¹⁵ An exception to this is the state-of-the-art review of interpreting in Finland commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2020).

identified some challenges in Finnish integration policy in general and in educational contexts in specific:

In Finland, integration measures and services are fragmented at least in cities. One reason for this is the tight information policy, which does have its benefits, but it is hard to tackle and understand if you come from elsewhere and don't speak the language. (FI_I2_F)

The fragmentation of services also affects children. For example, when school officials do not receive information from other sectors (such as labour service or social and health care) about changes in migrant parents' circumstances (e.g. starting a Finnish course, going to work, or falling ill), they do not manage to see the whole context around the pupil and are prevented from suggesting measures the school could take to enhance the pupil's learning and well-being.

A further point found in both interpreters' and teachers' sample is that integration policy should reach out to all migrants in Finland. At present, there is no national programme nor established common municipal practices to enhance work-based migrants' integration, while individual municipalities, enterprises and projects do work to develop these.

Integration policy from the perspective of reception centres

Integration programs are part of the general work of social workers working with immigrants at different settings and services; integration policies are merged with the work approach. The work involves close collaboration between different institutions, networks, and actors. Social workers mentioned some specific projects usually run by NGOs and parishes where they refer immigrant families and youth to as supplementary services. Otherwise, asylum-seeking children and youth attend normal day care and school as well as adult asylum seekers attend Finnish language courses outside the reception centre. There are also compulsory courses on Finnish society for asylum seekers, organised by immigration services.

Low-threshold NGO cooperates with the municipality, other NGOs, health and social services, academia, schools, and politicians. Social counsellors bring quota refugee youth to visit the NGO. NGO recruits volunteers from higher education institutions to work with youth. Also, the NGO organises different educational activities with experts for their network.

The integrational work conducted in reception centre was considered pre-integration as the target group for these services are asylum seekers, and for them the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010¹⁶) is not yet effective. Integration work was also seen as challenging by these social workers working with asylum seekers as society's structures and the system does not support the full integration of asylum seekers. Social workers working at the reception centre experienced a further flaw in current policy:

As a measure, society is focusing on improving access to information on the voluntary return, which, from the point of view of reception centre counsellors, is not an option for asylum seekers, as the return of asylum seekers is not due to lack of information on voluntary return but there are other reasons. (FI_FGI4_SW4_F)

¹⁶ Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 1386/2010. Available in English: <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2010/en20101386>.

Family group home's social counsellors raised their concerns relating to negative attitudes of Finnish people which are hindering or blocking immigrants' integration. They saw that policy-level talks and goals are not visible in action. Social counsellors emphasised that, despite their difficult situation, asylum-seeking minors usually have a high motivation for integration as well as education and hobbies. There is pressure for minor asylum seekers to grow independent rapidly, before turning 18 years old.

And then the fact that the young person sees that what his part in that matter and how he can influence certain things, that what he should take responsibility for, maybe these are issues where the young people have to practice quite a bit. But of course not everyone.
(FI_FGI1_SW2_F)

In reception centres, asylum-seeking families prepare their meals and do groceries by themselves, which was seen as activating the residents for independence and agency in the new environment, and as thereby fostering integration.

Social counsellors among adult migrants work closely with day care and usually social counsellors attend meetings with day care teachers. Social counsellors also work closely with schools and especially with preparatory class teachers. There is an assigned, own nurse for immigrants at the health clinic who is a close partner when conducting a three-step health check-up for quota refugees. Social counsellors help in booking different health appointments and attend those as well if needed. Immigration services also work closely with child protection and their service providers (e.g. family workers). Counsellors also refer clients to different NGO services for immigrants. Social workers at immigration services co-operate more with employment office, responsible for organising Finnish language courses.

The reception centre nurse works closely with maternity clinics. The reception centre social counsellor co-operates closely with day care and schools, for example on children's absence. Teachers also directly communicate with asylum-seeking parents. Children in the reception centre might also receive family work services from child welfare/protection, and they can visit the school nurse and social worker. The reception centre's counsellors often use interpretation services. There is also co-operation with NGOs, higher education institutions, and different sports clubs for organising activities for children and families and coordinating volunteer work. The reception centre social workers have organised network meetings at the reception centre and, at the same time, introduced the facilities to other professionals, which helps them understand the situations of asylum seeker families and children better:

When there was a meeting on the child's issues the teacher has come to our reception centre to have that meeting and at the same time, we have introduced the reception centre and the environment from where the child attends the school world. Quite practical issues arise if the family lives in one and the same room and the child should do homework in the same room where everyone else in the family lives in and that rhythm... All such challenges become much clearer when they can see it for themselves what the starting point is and all that affects the child's concentration at school, for example. (FI_FGI4_SW4_F)

6. School during the pandemic

Teachers

The teachers in the sample described that the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent changes in teaching modes (remote or hybrid, combining live and remote activities) affected pupils, especially their learning possibilities and peer networking. In Finland also more generally, COVID-19 has affected everyone's (pupils', teachers', whole families') lives in multidimensional ways. When it comes to the needs of pupils with a migrant background especially, it has been found that their needs should have been recognised in more effective ways in all educational levels (Goman et al. 2021).

One consequence of the pandemic was that after-school activities were closed. For pupils with a migrant background, these afternoon hours are important for learning Finnish in interaction with peers in a casual, yet professionally organised and monitored educational environment. This club lockdown was a major factor decreasing contact with peers in general and with Finnish-speaking peers specifically. Further, pupils lost the support for homework they had received thus far during the afternoons.

While COVID-19 affected pupils and forms of teaching, it also affected teachers. The pandemic was reported to be the single biggest factor affecting teachers' professional careers ever. Many studied new technology and worked long hours, some caring for their children at home simultaneously (some, but not all, day care centres also experienced lockdown). On a further note, a teacher with 20 years' experience in teaching in vocational school, pointed out that the number of students with a migrant background has gradually grown.

As a reflection, the remote teaching practices discovered and utilised during COVID-19 are valuable for a country like Finland with long distances and decreasing population. They have opened up new possibilities also for teaching pupils with a migrant background who need preparatory instruction or language teaching in their (possibly rare) mother tongue. Remote teaching is an option if teaching cannot be organised face-to-face which, however, is what teachers view as the best way of teaching and learning.

Social workers

Social workers in the sample reflected on the state of emergency caused by COVID-19 in the following ways. School social workers have met families via Teams instead of face-to-face meetings. In these video meetings, emotional language is missing, and usually migrant parents want to survive with their broken Finnish in the meetings; meetings are focused on the agenda and many issues may stay unsolved due to barriers in communication. During the distant teaching period, school social workers noticed that pupils forgot how to interact with peers and their friendship skills had decreased from what they were like in face-to-face settings. One social worker noticed that even when all other classes transitioned to distant learning due to the pandemic, the preparatory class for migrant children retained its normal activities and schedule, thereby highlighting their specificity as different, as a separate group from the majority of pupils.

Interpreters

In times of COVID-19, interpretation has mainly taken place through telephone. As interpreters say, this may pose more challenges in some situations for the interpreter (and possibly for the client) as

the interpreter gains no para-linguistic hints, like facial expressions, on whether the message and the contents become understood or not.

Reception centres

In reception centres, the personnel interviewed had observed families to have more problems during the pandemic as daily routines have changed in the new circumstances. Children in the reception centre play with mobile phones more often as there is a lack of other activities, for example. Some social workers had started remote working and experienced that more stressful than being physically present at the workplace, as there were now no spontaneous discussion opportunities with colleagues, and they suggested creating such opportunities more intentionally now when working away from colleagues.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations by teachers

The teachers in the sample were explicit in demanding support for their work in the form of training provided by the employer. Training on multiculturalism, culturally sensitive pedagogy, teaching traumatised children, among other themes, is needed both during one's study years as well as continuously in working life. At present, there is not enough further training available for all teachers; moreover, as there still are municipalities which encounter migrant pupils for the first time who start from a scratch although there is already a lot of expertise and good practices in the country.

Establishing more consistent training for S2 teachers in particular would also serve to recognise and appreciate them as professional experts in this special educational area, which should show in their wages, which, on its behalf, could help to solve the growing need for working hands on this field.

Educational structures should be affected by increased cultural awareness, and both school and administrative personnel should represent the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of people living in Finland.

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 in some teachers' everyday work, not to mention the child's learning and overall well-being.

A practical recommendation by teachers is that more teaching material is prepared for the various needs of preparatory instruction. The need is shared across the country, taking a lot of teachers' time. 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.

Recommendations by social workers

Programmes and policies

There were different policy enhancements mentioned among social workers relating to integration programmes. To begin with, minor asylum seekers were seen as a group that is not well known— or seen— in society. To continue with, parents' unawareness of Finnish society and the Finnish school system was seen as possibly even hindering children's development and building of agency:

In other words, it starts with educating parents about the whole project and in a way the school can't target them, but if other services are dealing with immigrants, just like informing parents about the Finnish school system and the situation in the municipality and, for example, school actors, i.e. ... For example, some don't go to special education, so it can be that ... When here the special education belongs to anyone and it doesn't mean anything yet for future schooling, or that the child goes to a psychologist or meets even ... Get a psychiatric care or else, then it ... seen in a completely different way in our culture if a psychologist examines, for example, a child's learning or something else. People have so different perceptions of things, so somehow trying to tell immigrants more accurately and comprehensibly about our system, how could it help them to somehow figure out where they have come to. (FI_SW1_F)

Further, social workers' interviews included recommendations for improving language courses' content to also include service guidance and counselling elements since also the international clients of employment services (not immigration services) need guidance for better integration and understanding of the Finnish social security system. Some social workers argued this type of client-centred case management and counselling approach should be applied by different professionals in different settings.

Another issue social workers wish to enhance is increasing social activities outside official meetings. A successful experience on this was told by a social worker who had organised a peer support group for migrant women after their language course. The group held thematic meetings over a joint dinner. These meetings were experienced as meaningful by the participants who did not have any other social activities after the language lectures. Thus, also migrant adults need different hobbies and activities in groups. Different types of volunteer work could be utilised more in integration work:

It would be great if this kind of voluntary agency could be found like we're now going and doing this for this group. It always just needs someone who starts it ... And then it's not just one trick and how to do it, but it takes a long time (commitment) that ... you go in the middle of Finnish forest and light a campfire and fry the sausage, then it's probably an earth-shaking experience for some who hasn't done it. (FI_SW2_M)

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.

Financial resources and the lack of them worries social workers in general. This also shows in their concern about the great numbers of children both social workers and school psychologists have as their clients. They constantly wish for more staff to ensure proper encounters with pupils of different ages as well as providing them with sufficient amount and forms of help.

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.

Finally, a handbook on asylum seekers (cf. Child Protection Handbook¹⁷) would be helpful in guidance and counselling work, including responses to different practical issues.

Collaboration

Social workers saw integration as a two-way process, and they highlighted the richness of joint learning which many of them explained that they have experienced in their work.

What I would like to see developed is that somehow I would bring it even more in a certain way, I would not differentiate immigrant children in any way, but somehow I would bring their cultural richness here to our Finnish families. Somehow, that kind of family connection, which is seen stronger in their families, that is missing here. (FI_SW3_F)

People and families learning from one another should be complemented by institutional collaboration. In addition to teaching at school, an increase in different social programmes was recommended so that immigrant children would be more acquainted with Finnish schooling and peers; social workers highlighted the importance of enhancing participatory *everyday* activities at schools instead of thematic days celebrating diversity.

It was also recommended that special youth work could be more integrated into school and NGOs capacities utilised at schools. More resources for teachers and social workers (including counsellors) were seen as important so that they could encounter children more individually. There were also wishes raised for closer cooperation with schools and child protection services. One school social worker raised her opinion about ongoing social and health care reform in Finland and wished that school social workers could stay under the education sector for maintaining similar freedom to plan their work as they now have.

There were many recommendations for school study counsellors considering a need for a resource-based counselling approach taking into account individual dreams and school performance without paying so much attention to what is marked as the person's mother tongue. There is also a gap in the transition from secondary school to university where more support could be given to immigrant youth.

Social workers hoped that there were more persons with a migrant background or knowledge of different cultures working with immigrant families and children. It would be important to bring experts from different cultures to school regularly to aid learning in different mother tongues but also to normalise diversity. Besides, at schools, teachers could utilise immigrant pupils' cultural knowledge when addressing different cultures and religions while respecting respective pupils' opinions on whether they wish to take such a role.

Communication

Social workers advocate the recruitment of different language assistants to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (*Kela*) and say this would help them to focus on the actual contents of their work. Now, they feel, a lot of their work is burdened with Kela benefit issues and giving financial advice instead of social counselling.

¹⁷ Lastensuojelun käsikirja - Lastensuojelun käsikirja - THL

Social workers also pointed out that the study material in preparatory instruction should be more practical and closer to the needs of current life. Social workers also reminded that teachers need to show understanding towards migrant children's overall conditions when they do not necessarily have proper gear for physical education lesson or do not managing everything in Finnish.

For migrant parents to better understand communication from school, the messages should be interpreted for parents for example 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 needs to be set aside as the conversation will last longer. When it comes to parents' meetings at school, it would be good to use paper information sheets for sharing information about them or call parents on the phone because the use of digital information applications is not regular among migrant parents.

Recommendations by interpreters

Interviews with interpreters included some insightful comments on how to enhance integration in schools and elsewhere. As to school, some interpreters suggest providing children with interpreting when they start school in the new country to guarantee a good start with self-expression and experience of agency and involvement. However, one interpreter was hesitant towards the idea of introducing language or culture mediators into Finnish school contexts in a European vein. The fear was that mediators would steal interpreters' jobs and that it would further diminish the value given to educated professionals' competence and to precise interpreting.

Other school-related points raised by interpreters included (1) that preparatory instruction could be extended as one school year is hardly enough to gain a holistic picture of the pupil's overall situation, (2) that there should be a stricter take on migrant pupils' absence from classes, as being absent slows down the integration process, (3) that immediate intervention should take place in case of bullying, (4) more regular use should be made of learning methods that enhance group spirit and participants' sense of belonging every day, and (5) schools should take a more explicit stance on stressing gender equality to support children in making full use of their potential.

Interpreters also raised high concern over the centrality of cost-efficiency in the public sector today which they read as a general and unfortunate misunderstanding that 'anyone can act as an interpreter'. Instead, they argue for more support for educated interpreters and a real appreciation towards interpreters' competence as a guarantee for best results in interpreting situations and the official processes of which they are a part.

Recommendations by reception centres

Some social workers working with asylum seekers argued that the process for waiting for asylum is inhuman and should be shortened, considering minor asylum seekers especially and the protection of their rights as children. They raised a voice to setting a national time limit for asylum-seekers receiving asylum (e.g. two years maximum), and to permitting resident permits automatically for those who stay in the country for at least five years, or who have acquired a certain level of Finnish in a given time and lived a decent life without committing crime.

It was also reflected that some immigrants experience the language requirements for employment too high and that these limits should be reconsidered as there are jobs that can be managed even with less developed skills in Finnish.

There were also recommendations mentioned for supporting families better in their integration which would also directly affect children's integration and wellbeing, for example taking parents' wellbeing into account better at reception centres and supporting parents' language learning as now the pressure is on children.

It was also stated that if youth work was integrated better into reception centre activities, it would bring the needed extra resources for the centre. Especially asylum-seeking children living in reception centres would need help after school for home assignments in Finnish when parents are not capable of supporting them. Increasing teachers' knowledge of life in reception centres is important in helping them build an understanding of what the conditions for learning are.

Family group home's counsellors were not aware of how asylum-seeking minors were paid attention in schools and they wished they would receive attention as other pupils most likely do have questions they would like to openly ask. This would help to in finding friends, diminishing prejudice, and strengthening the feeling of belonging.

Social counsellors working with asylum-seeking minors also wanted to have more close partnership with different cultural groups and they also saw that they could play a bigger role in contacting representatives of these groups. It was also recommended by one social worker that when developing something for asylum-seeking youth, it would be worth interviewing immigrants with an asylum background who are already well integrated, because asylum-seeking youth usually feel difficult to share their wishes and thoughts. Social workers stated that there should be more various activities for asylum-seeking youth for their different needs and that the activities should be organised closer to geographically.

8. Conclusions

Summary

The main task of the report on professionals' perspectives about migrant children's and youth's conditions and experiences in schools and reception centres is to increase understanding of the multidimensionality of the phenomenon. Overall, a unifying description for promoting inclusion is that, in this context, there is a strong need for multiprofessional co-operation between institutions with a high degree of resources (time, finances, and human resources) as well for a need to keep professionals' intercultural competence up-to-date through continuous education. Even though abundant measures have been taken in school and social care especially since 2015 when an unprecedented number of migrant minors arrived in Finland, the interviews show that the prevailing system does not offer the best solutions. In addition, professionals describe they feel powerless in the face of societal atmosphere, structural racism, and individual citizens' stances towards migrants. Four key findings should be underlined:

1. The professionals in this research revealed a substantial concern about the welfare of migrant children: they need to be valued as holistic persons with their experiences and identities of their past, present and future – migration is not the one and only essential element in defining them. Integration measures and preparatory instruction is based on, mostly, learning Finnish or Swedish. However, focusing on developing skills in target language hinders the personal ways of being children with their needs for constructing an understanding of themselves as persons and dealing with what is meaningful for them in their living, education and learning contexts. Children need to be seen in a more holistic way in

building their hybrid experiences between identities of where they come from and where they now are; and binding them together as a life story concept of who I am. The professionals kept repeating that language does not grant a thorough experience of involvement in society but essentially offers possibilities for action.

2. Professionals, teachers of newly arrived pupils in specific, lack adequate education that is defined on a national level and offers recognition for as experts specialising in the field. Currently, their profession lacks recognition, decent payment, and education on meeting the needs of traumatised children; linguistic and cultural awareness; and theoretical plus pedagogical understanding of how children's past affects their positioning and motivation as learners.
3. The perspective of children raises questions on accessibility. Since, firstly, preparatory instruction is merely a suggestion in the Basic Education Act, all migrant children do not have access to it or access to it on the same level. Two, municipalities' resources, know-how, and agenda vary a lot. Third, the teachers working with migrant children do not receive nationally coordinated education, which renders both teachers and children in an unequal position in terms of accessibility.
4. School-aged children with a migrant background lack Finnish-speaking friends. Professionals were unanimous in voicing their deep worry about this and did not know how to make the situation better in general.

Situation of migrant children in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic

As to the situation of migrant children nationwide during COVID-19, it has been found that their needs should have been recognised in more effective ways on all educational levels in Finland (Goman et al. 2021). Their needs and situations were described in a similar way also in the interviews; however, some positive impacts were also discussed. For some migrant pupils, the accessibility for individual support or accessibility of mother tongue language learning has increased to some degree. However, accessibility was somewhat linked to the technical equipment in times of lockdown or quarantine. Despite this, in all situations the support needed for learning, or other special needs, were guaranteed to pupils by individual measures.

Professionals developed effective remote pedagogies and the best solutions have stayed in use even after schools' reopening. Especially communication and interaction with caregivers was possible through different software; by contrast, before pandemic, migrant families did not make much use of the digital communication application used in schools.

The repeated worry of migrant children not having peer relationships (with Finnish-speaking children) was maintained during the pandemic. Children could not meet each other at school, and they also lacked after-school activities for informal networking. In addition, the after-school activities and many hobbies have been closed for a year, which has further decreased the possibilities of meeting Finnish peers.

Continuous changes on a week-to-week basis has complicated the planning and implementation of permanent educational and social work, which has confused both professionals and children. Dissemination of information in all respective minority languages has challenged professionals and the families, as well.

Discussion

The central concept in this report and the overall project, integration, is used in Finland to refer to the policies and practices related to helping new arrivals in Finnish society settle in. Drawn together, the

results of the data analysis show that the prevailing integration measures do not guarantee the experience of participation in the sense of *active agency* and *involvement* of individuals. In the Finnish conceptual framework, there are two concepts on ‘participation’. The first one is *osallistuminen* ‘participation’, which refers to taking part and being present in measures, actions, and activities that are planned in advance. The second term, on its behalf, is *osallisuus* ‘inclusion and involvement’, which is used for measuring the experience of wellbeing and ability to affect or change one’s own social contexts. The interviewees’ descriptions are in line with the latter one: professionals call for agency where migrants’ wellbeing is observed from ‘the inside’ – what their own sense of their involvement in Finnish society is, even with or without the target language.

This leads us to reconsider the concepts of hybrid identity and intersectionality. There is a need for more recognition and understanding of identity construction as *multidimensional*. Despite such categories as ‘migrant’, ‘migrant mother’, ‘migrant boy’, and the like, people need to be encountered as individuals in everyday situations as well as at all levels of integration policy – not as representatives of gender, nationality, or culture. This consciously gender-sensitive and multicultural appreciation is also rooted in the Finnish National Core Curriculum of Education

The interviewed professionals described cultural constructions, such as how pupils negotiate their hybrid agency in relation to language, family, school and cultural values and habits; and how socio-cultural attitudes, such as prejudice and outright racism show in the pupils’ lives (Kinossalo et.al, 2022). The interviewees’ message is clear on this: children need to be seen as they are – similar to their peers with their hopes for the future, making meaning on the basis of their past, and in search of identity in the present. They have stories about themselves and want to be heard; however, they must be approached in sensitive and respectful ways. Further research must aim at increasing the understanding of best practices both theoretically and pedagogically.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: GERMANY

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the ‘Children hybrid integration in the education system’ CHILD-UP project (Horizon 2020). A total of seven countries are participating in the study. This report refers to the surveys in Germany. The contents of the report refer to the results of the qualitative survey of professionals in the occupational groups of teachers (in schools and daycare centers), social workers and mediators. The period in which the interviews were conducted was from May 2020 to October 2020. The participants work in different contexts and cities with children and families with a migration background; for example in pre-school, school, as an additional teacher in the Teach First programme, as school social workers, in fields of open social work and as translators and mediators. Building on the previous quantitative work packages (WP4), the surveys took place mainly in Saxony and Hamburg. In addition, two teachers working in schools in Berlin were included. A total of 36 professionals took part in the interviews. The interviews took place as both focus group interviews (5 focus group interviews / FGI) and individual interviews (20 individual interviews / I).

2. Methods of the study

Sample

Place of research

The research took place in schools, day care centers (pre-school) and related institutions in Saxony, Hamburg and Berlin. In Saxony, teachers from three different day care centers participated. All three day care centers are located in cities with approximately 500,000 inhabitants. Two of the day care centers focus on intercultural education, and one on promoting children's participation. In Saxony, teachers, social workers and mediators from different regions were interviewed. Most of the participants work in urban areas. The people interviewed from Hamburg also work in an urban area (more than 1.8 million inhabitants). Berlin is the capital of Germany with more than 3.6 million inhabitants. The proportion of people with a migration background is very high in Berlin. For this reason, two teachers who work at Berlin schools with a high proportion of migrants also took part in the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not always possible to conduct research in the same schools/day care centers as in WP4. Furthermore, no surveys could be conducted in reception

centers because access was limited due to pandemic protection regulations and was not possible within the scope of the survey. The interviews in reception centers were replaced by further individual interviews with social workers.

A total of 25 interviews were conducted, of which 20 were individual interviews and five were group interviews with two to four participants. Eleven interviews took place face-to-face, twelve as telephone interviews and two as video calls (for further details, see Table 1).

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

Type of interview	I	FGI	In total
Face-to-face	7	4	11
Phone	11	1	12
Video call	2	/	2
Total	20	5	25

Sampling

The qualitative study (WP5) is linked to the quantitative study as part of a mixed method. The aim was to deepen the understanding of some aspects that we discovered in earlier steps. Therefore, we focused on the same target groups, but not necessarily the same people. The sample comprised the following professionals (see table) and was selected using the principles explained below.

TABLE 3: SAMPLING

Professional group	Number	From that in FGI	Own migration background
Teacher/educator	22	14	8
Social worker	9	/	1
Mediator	5	3	4

Principles of selection were undertaking regular work with children with a migration background, having a good knowledge of integration policies at the work place, and an openness to the CHILD-UP study.

The focus group interviews of the teachers comprised teachers who worked in the same institution but with different groups of children. The mediators who participated in the focus group interview also worked for the same organization but are employed in different institutions (day care centers and schools).

Relation to WP4 and WP6

We conduct all work packages independently but try to reach the same preschools and schools in all phases. Regarding WP4, we conducted interviews in two day care centers that already participated in the previous phase. We were unable to conduct interviews in the schools that have also participated in the questionnaire study. Regarding WP6, thus far we only could receive consent for both WPs from day care centers, where we will conduct FGIs with children. However, we are in contact with three schools that signaled openness to the project but pointed to the role of the pandemic and the uncertainty of schools being re-opened to external persons.

Potential risk, possible difficulties

- As in WP4, the responsivity of schools – especially in the times of the pandemic – is quite low. Although stating their interest and the importance of the project's scope, the schools often refer to the lack of resources and capacities in supporting this extracurricular project work. At the same time, in order to enter schools we need approval from the Saxonian Ministry of Education. As in WP4, the procedure was quite extensive. The extent of the informant and consent forms addressing all the data protection information is quite large, making it difficult to reach parents and gain their consent, especially for children with a migrant background and families with lower socioeconomic and educational status.

Course of the study

The survey process was designed holistically regarding the achievement of objectives. The questioning of both children and professionals was about exploring the current integration conditions for children with a migration background, recognizing difficulties, discovering potentials, identifying development needs and opportunities for improvement. This overarching objective was implemented in practice in such a way that the respective groups of actors (i.e. children, teachers, social workers, mediators) were addressed with specific key questions. The aim was to include the respective perspectives to ultimately enable a comprehensive perspective.

Recruitment phase

The recruitment phase was already started during WP4, in which the contacts were checked for continuation and – if possible – addressed. These contacts were activated at the beginning of WP5. Unfortunately, not all contacts could be refreshed due to coronavirus – among other factors – and thus new interview partners were selected, sought and approached.

A total of 43 institutions (eleven day care centers, seventeen primary schools and fifteen secondary schools) in Saxony and Hamburg were approached for the teacher interviews. Three day care centers, four primary schools and four secondary schools agreed to participate. A total of sixteen social workers and social work organizations were approached in Hamburg, Saxony and Berlin. As the capital of Germany, Berlin was added because two social workers agreed to participate who had experience in the field of working with children and families with a migration background. Nine social workers took part in the interviews, as can be seen in Table 4. In order to recruit mediators, a total of three organizations were approached, two of which agreed to participate, as can be seen in Table 5.

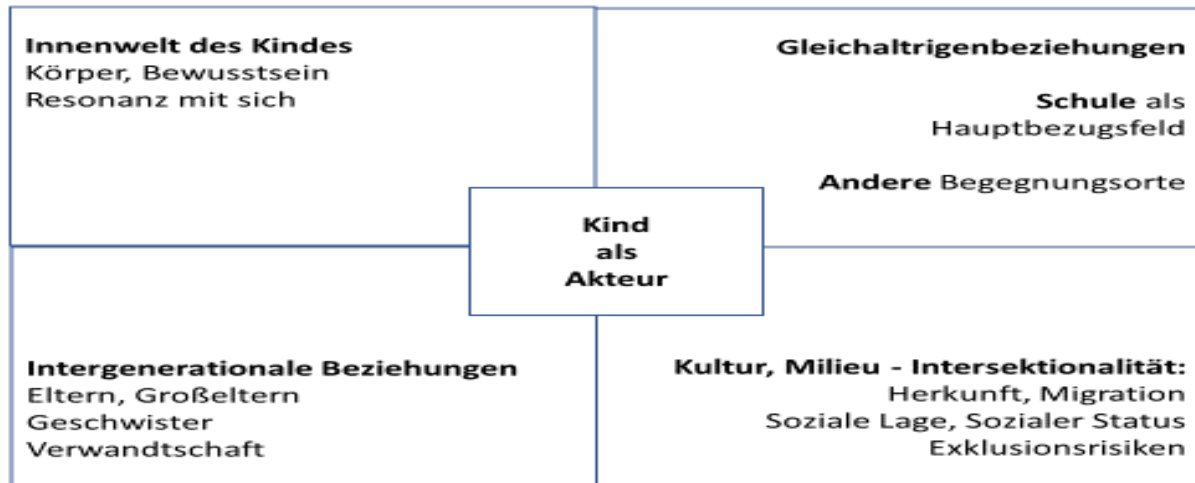
Interview format

The focus of qualitative research is on understanding and improving children's agency, whereby all interviews were guided by this focus. However, the perspective of the respective group was precisely

oriented towards this. In the case of professionals, this was the perspective of the teacher, the social worker and the mediator.

Basic model

We have presented the central model for the children’s agency in a four-field scheme, which has the following basic structure:



Legend:

The focus is on the “child as an actor”.

In the upper-left quadrant (Innenwelt des Kindes / inner world of the child) is the child with his/her needs, experiences and feelings.

In the lower-left quadrant (Intergenerationale Beziehungen / intergenerational relationships) is the child in the family, their system of values and norms.

In the upper-right quadrant (Gleichaltrigenbeziehungen, Schule, Andere/ peer relationships; school, other encounters) is the child in his/her social reference field outside the family.

In the lower-right quadrant (Kultur, Milieu, Intersektionalität / culture, milieu, intersectionality) is the child’s field of social possibilities, descriptions and restrictions.

Process

In the interviews, the perspectives of the respective professionals on this field of activity of the child were explored. Each profession has a relevant perspective (such as teachers on the field of "school") and distant perspectives (such as teachers on internal family processes). Since these actors are all important for the holistic integration success, their perspectives on all fields are interesting. The interviews were designed as on-the-fly narratives. The process was based on so-called vignettes, which enabled addressing professionals on all important points, and there was individual freedom in terms of explaining the individual points. The interviews were carried out partly as individuals and partly as group interviews (focus group interviews). In both cases, the question impulses followed the vignettes, whereby in the focus group interviews there was also a careful moderation of the individual contributions.

Here, the vignettes are named with their heading. Under each heading, there were opening questions and in-depth questions. The application and sequence of the vignettes were implemented by the interviewer according to the situation. This was particularly helpful with the focus group interviews:

Vignette 1: Professional development, training, further education, fields of work

Vignette 2: Children with a migration background and parents / families / legal guardians

Vignette 3: Schools and other key institutions (social policy)

Vignette 4: Integration guidelines, integration support, possible improvement

Exit vignette: Final questions, hints

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed and thus prepared for the subsequent interpretation.

Interpretation

1. For the interpretation, we used the MAXQDA 2020 software. We developed the code tree based on the WP5 leader's suggested grids. The code trees of the three professional groups are quite similar (as an example, see the following code tree for teachers).

The process of interpretation was realized in a kind of a matrix, whereby we horizontally analyzed one interview along the code tree and the interpretation categories. After we had analyzed all interviews in a horizontal way, we analyzed in a vertical way. Accordingly, in one category each, we interpreted the results of the horizontal analysis of all interviews into one result. These results are presented in this report under points 2 to 8.

Quotations from the empirical material are always italicized and marked by the position of the phrase in the MAXQDA analysis, e.g. G_T3_F, pos. 25 means: country/ profession/ interview number/ position. The translations of the participants' quotes are based on what was said. This authentic translation can lead to individual sentences being difficult to read due to sentence structure or language barriers. The quotes reflect the language use of the participants.

Methodological reflections

All interviews – phone and face-to-face interviews alike – were conducted in a comfortable situation, mainly without time restrictions. Depending on the participants' wishes, the face-to-face interviews took place at either their facilities or a neutral location, such as the research center. This allowed an atmosphere in which the interviewees could feel safe and comfortable. The atmosphere was open and research participants were interested and positive to open their perceptions and experiences about the topics of the CHILD-UP project. Interviews with professionals were conducted in German, and all participants had the language competencies to do so. After each interview, the interviewer prepared a memory protocol in which the atmosphere and important impressions were noted and own thoughts reflected. These first impressions and notes were included in the analysis.

TABLE 4: CODE TREE

Codebaum / <i>Code tree</i>	Häufigkeit / <i>Frequency</i>
Codesystem / <i>code system</i>	1065
Corona Herausforderungen / <i>Challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic</i>	33
Gender / <i>Gender</i>	34
Agency / <i>Agency</i>	47
Partizipation / <i>Participation</i>	108
Inklusion / <i>Inclusion</i>	72
Andere Themen / <i>Other topics</i>	7
für Auswertung unwichtige / <i>Not important for evaluation</i>	11
Verbesserung von Maßnahmen, Policies / <i>Improving measures, policies</i>	3
Verbesserung der Integrationsprogramme / <i>Improving integration programmes</i>	14
Verbesserung in der Zusammenarbeit mit Institutionen / <i>Improving cooperation with institutions</i>	8
Verbesserung der Kommunikation / <i>Improving communication</i>	29
Empfehlungen von Programmen / <i>Recommendation of programmes</i>	10
Einfluss der Integrationsprogramme auf die Kinder / <i>Influence of integration programmes on children</i>	10
Bewertung/Evaluation von Integrationsprogrammen / <i>Evaluation of integration programmes</i>	27
Integrationsprogramme in der Arbeit / <i>Integration programmes at work</i>	86
Definition von Integration / <i>Definition of integration</i>	33
Zusammenarbeit mit Institutionen und Personen / <i>Cooperation with institutions and individuals</i>	59
Hilfreiche Fähigkeiten / <i>Helpful skills</i>	47
positive Erfahrungen / <i>Positive experiences</i>	9
beeinflussende Schlüsselfaktoren / <i>Key factors</i>	47
Arbeitsbedingungen und Strukturen / <i>Working conditions and structures</i>	73

Bedarfe und Gründe für Vulnerabilität bzw. Sicherheit / <i>Needs and reasons for vulnerability and security</i>	41
Zusammenarbeit mit Familien und Kindern mit MGH / <i>Cooperation with families and children with a migratin background</i>	122
Tätigkeitsbereiche: Schule; Träger / <i>Field of work: school; organization</i>	82
Berufliche Erfahrung / <i>Professional experience</i>	53

3. Professional experience an overview

The experiences of the three groups are very specific and thus we divide the results in each topic into three points concerning teachers, social workers and mediators.

Professional experiences and professional experiences of working with migrant families and children

Teachers

The following table provides an overview of the key data of the interviewed teachers. This group includes teachers who work in schools as well as educators from day care centers. Focus group interviews are marked with FGI:

TABLE 5: TEACHERS

Profession	Years working as a teacher	Working with children/families with a migration background	Country of origin	languages
Individual Interviews				
T 1: History, Geography, Social Studies (Secondary school)	36 years	It depends from year to year; no data on current situation	Germany	German, English
T 2: Teacher for German as a second language (Primary school)	5 years	daily	Germany	German, English, Portuguese
T 3: Teacher for German as a second language	16 years	daily	Italy	German, English, Italian

(Primary school)				
T 4: Teacher for German as a second language (special school)	3 years	daily	Soviet Union	German, English, Russian
T 5: Teacher for German as a second language (Secondary school)	9 years	daily	Poland	German, English, Polish
T 6: History and social studies (Secondary school)	5 years	daily	Germany	German, English
T 8: Educator in a bilingual day care center	14 years	daily	France	German, English, French
T 9: Head of a bilingual day care center	9 years	daily	Germany	German, French, Swedish, English
Focus group interview				
T 7a: Teacher in an international preparatory class (for newly arrived pupils); Teacher for German as a second language (Primary school)	17 years	daily	not specified	not specified
T 7b: Teacher for German as a second language; Coordination of educational sponsorships at the	20 years	daily	not specified	not specified

Education Foundation (Primary school)				
T 10 (FGI):				
T 10a: Educator	13 years	daily	Germany	German
T 10b: Educator	7 years	daily	Germany	German, English, French
T 10c: Educator	42 years	daily	Germany	German, English, Russian
T 10d: Speech therapist in day care	3 years	daily	Germany	German, English
T 11 (FGI):				
T 11a: Educator	1 year	daily	Germany	German, English, French
T 11b: Educator	6 years	daily	Germany	German, English, French
T 11c: Educator	Not specified	daily	Not specified	Not specified
T 12 (FGI):				
T 12a: curative educator	24 years	daily	Germany	German, Russian
T 12b: Educator	1 year	daily	Uzbekistan	German, Russian
T 12c: deputizing management	9 year	daily	Germany	German, English, Russian,
T 12d: Head of an intercultural day care center	10 years	daily	Russia	German, Russian
T 12 e: Educator	7 years	daily	Peru	German, Spanish

A total of 22 teachers from the work areas of schools and day care centers were interviewed. Among them were five men and seventeen women. Both individual and group interviews were conducted.

The professionals work in different areas and functions. Some of them are teachers and teach in regular classes and others work explicitly with pupils with a migration background as so-called teachers for German as a second language (i.e. L2 teachers). Others work in different day care centers with children aged three to six years, in the functions of manager, deputy manager, curative educator and speech therapist. Overall, three of the 22 interviewees work as teachers in secondary education, four in primary education, one in a special school and fourteen in day care centers. Most of the interviewees stated that they have daily contact with pupils and families with a migrant background. In one case, it was described that the percentage of pupils with a migration background changes from year to year.

There are institutions where the percentage of pupils with a migration background is very high and schools where the percentage is rather low. For example, the percentage of migrants at one school is stated by a teacher to be at least 85%, while at another the specialist emphasizes that there are hardly any children at the school who were born in another country.

The working conditions are also different. The teachers interviewed state that they teach either only one, four or up to nine classes at a time in a school year. The size of the class and thus the number of pupils also strongly varies. Class sizes are given as nine, 21, 23, 26 and 30 pupils on average.

The sample group of teachers is characterized by diversity in their own cultural background. Their countries of birth are Germany, Italy, Soviet Union, Poland, France, Uzbekistan and Peru. Accordingly, they speak different languages.

Five of the 22 interviewees have a teaching degree with a master's degree, one has a master's degree, and in the day care center the professionals have different degrees, such as an education degree, a speech therapist degree, a home educator degree with a teaching qualification, a special education degree, a bachelor's degree in childhood education and a master's degree in education.

Nine of the 22 professionals state that they have gathered knowledge and experience on the topic of discrimination-sensitive teaching in their training or in the form of further and advanced training. A total of twelve of the interviewees state that they have learned something about the topic of gender-sensitive teaching in training or further education formats.

According to the interviewees' statements, there are opportunities for in-service and further training at their workplace. However, it is remarkable that the attendance of further training in the school context seems to be primarily based on the teachers' own initiative and motivation. Supervision and professional exchange are mainly used in the area of teaching German as a second language and in the area of child day care.

Social workers

The following table provides an overview of the key data of the social workers interviewed:

TABLE 6: SOCIAL WORKERS

Profession	Years working as social worker	Working with children/families with migration background	Country of origin	Languages
SW 1: social worker; Counseling	20 years	Daily	German	German, Russian, Dutch, English, Czech
SW 2: educator, social worker	2 years	Daily	German	German, English
SW 3: social worker (within the field of social work at schools)	18 years	Daily	German	German, English, French
SW 4: additional trained staff at a school to support pupils (2-year programme)	< 1 year (11 month)	Daily	German	German, English, French
SW 5: additional trained staff at a school to support pupils (2-year programme)	1 year	Daily	German	German, English
SW 6: additional trained staff at a school to support pupils (2-year programme)	< 1 year (9 month)	Daily	German	German, English
SW 7: additional trained staff at a	1 year	Daily	German	German, English, French

school to support pupils (2-year programme)				
SW 8: Counselor for families with a migration background	5 years	Daily	Arabs	Arabic, German, English
SW 9: educator, social worker, Counselor for people with a migration background	25 years	Daily	German	German, English, Russian

A total of nine social workers were interviewed. Of these, seven state that they are female, one person states that he is male and one person does not wish to make a gender-specific statement. Even though only one person has a migration background himself, the interviewees also indicate other language skills besides German, namely English, French, Russian, Arabic, Dutch and Czech. According to their own statements, they all speak English well to very well. The ability to speak English is not highlighted by the professionals as a particularly important resource; rather, it is described as a helpful skill enabling to converse with families with a migration background in their mother tongue. In particular, Arabic plays a major role here. Professionals who do not speak Arabic themselves integrate people of Arabic origin into their team or use interpreters.

The main group of respondents works in the field of school social work, more specifically as additional professionals in a nationwide two-year integration programme called 'Teach First'. They are trained to support pupils at schools with a high proportion of pupils from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds. The tasks that Teach First staff take on vary and are adapted to the needs of the students and the school. For example, they are trained to have some kind of oversight of the organization. They network with other organizations outside the school and they take on small groups of students to help them learn and support them. Some Teach First staff work as a second teacher in the classroom, while others offer their own courses or tutoring sessions. They are accompanied during their working hours by the Teach First organization, through which they receive further training, supervision and support. Other fields of work mentioned are open child and youth work and counseling for families with a migration background or refugee experience. In all of these areas of work, the interviewed social workers state that they have daily contact with families and children with migration background. All of them work in both group and individual settings.

Of all the respondents, four do not have a degree in the field of social work but are career changers. Some of them have a pedagogical background such as a teaching degree, while others come from

non-specialist fields and are continuing their education through further training. All nine participants have an academic degree (one bachelor's degree, seven master's degrees and one doctorate).

The offer for institutionally-anchored supervision, professional exchange or further and advanced training strongly varies in the individual fields of work. Only the professionals who work in counseling for people with a migration background and refugee experience (SW 1, SW 8 & SW 9) and the social worker who works in the field of school social work have the opportunity to regularly participate in professional exchange meetings, supervision and further and advanced training programmes. By contrast, the four Teach First professionals report that they are able to take advantage of a variety of further training, exchange and supervision opportunities within their programme, but that there are no structurally-anchored and professional opportunities for the entire staff at the schools where they are employed, despite such a need. The social worker from the open children and youth center (SW 2) also reports a strong need but a lack of opportunities.

It can be seen as a common focus of their daily work that all interviewees speak of being a trustworthy contact person and networking. Networking among each other – for example, among the pupils or families with a migration background – plays a major role here, but also networking with locals and externally; for example, to other fields of social work and to authorities, such as the youth welfare office or the employment office.

Mediators/Interpreters

An overview of the mediators interviewed is outlined below:

TABLE 7: MEDIATORS/INTERPRETERS

profession	Years working as mediators	Working with children with migration background	Country of origin	Languages
Trainee	1 year	daily	Morocco	Arabic, French
Trainee	2 years	daily	Syria	Arabic
Trainee	1 year	daily	Romania	Romanian, English
Trainee	5 years	daily	Lebanon	Arabic
Social worker	15 years	No	Germany	German

The mediators of our sample are all female, and all but one has a migration background, including Lebanese, Moroccan, Romanian, and Syrian. Accordingly, the languages they speak are Arabic, French, Romanian, English and German. The mediators with a migration background are participants in a project for integration supporters and culture navigators. The German mediator is the coordinator of this project. All of the mediators with a migration background work in schools and day care centers as integration supporters and have regular supervision. The mediators' major resource is their cultural

background and similar life circumstances as children with Arabic or Central Asian roots. It is easy for them to build trust in the first encounter and understand the challenges for a migrated child in the German society. Together with the German coordinator, they have an overview of the whole process of integration with the relevant dimensions and facets. We will present the key findings of this group within the main categories in the report. However, three aspects should be mentioned in advance.

(1) All work is based on reflecting their personal situation and experience.

In the case of the migrated mediators, it is their own experience of the challenges of the integration process:

So in the beginning it was a bit difficult for me because I'm a foreigner. I don't know the system exactly, like the parents here, like the new parents who come to Germany here, it was a bit difficult to understand the system, what is allowed to do what we are allowed to do, what is not allowed to do, but now it's a little easier for me I still need ... experience. It is not at all easy to work in kindergarten or with children (G_M2_F)

The German mediator – the coordinator of the project – has a long experience in developing democratic behavior and democratic institutions. She is extraordinarily involved in the process of integration of the participants, the parents and the children. She is also working closely with other institutions in this field.

I come from a different society in which there was no social work, because everything was laid down in a directive from above, in the GDR ... to this day ... I have noticed time and time again that the truth is getting thinner and thinner in a world that is getting wider and wider and more global ... and the moment I take the time and interest for consensus, then I start the other first to listen and maybe better understand your needs, ask questions and in the end you will probably come out completely different ... I wanted to understand better from those affected, what is about and what is the interest, what are the possibilities, what is the dream and for a future and how can I uh participate in how to implement it together. (G_M1_F)

(2) Creating and learning a special profession: integration supporter and culture navigator:

Integration assistant ... is the job of these women, they didn't really know at the beginning what their integration aid was. That not to say that to the mother, that means here um day care card and day care card means this and that, but that, that dealing with OUR OWN culture that doesn't exist here, the other one, I don't know yet. What am I doing now with my own? Can, how can I live here? She became aware of it, painfully aware, because that was no longer there, what she used to have around her normally. Now there is something different and but no religiosity on the other side. There are vi: I have dealt with a lot of religious women ... who REALLY experienced these adaptation processes painfully the first time and then very much only related to their family and CLEAR couldn't imagine anything else and the intercultural ones Activities could not come because it was too alien to them. (G_M3_F)

I would really like to start the apprenticeship, uh, then first I want to improve my language and learn the theory. Now I am learning the practice, yes, but I also want to learn the theory. (G_M2_F)

(3) Trusting relationship with the children as a person with an own migration background:

It's not that difficult for me, I've already worked in school in Syria. ... sometimes the children of neighbors come to us, then I have the feeling uh not so difficult for and I am very motivated when I was in school and the children got to know me and so and then in the end uh all the children came to me come ... I am very happy when the children really find love and it is important for the children to learn to love too. (G_M3_FFF)

4. The experience of migrant children from professionals' perspectives

Perception and interpretation of the situation of migrant children

Teachers

Regarding the situation of migrant children, educators and teachers express some ambiguity. On the one hand, they highlight that it is not the migrant background per se, but rather the fact that all children are different and have to be seen in their individuality. They highlight that age with accordant developmental tasks and challenges are more important in their pedagogical work than the migrant background. Hence, educators and teachers endorse similarity and equality between children with and without a migrant background, and they want to treat all children alike, even if they know about their experiences and potential traumata. This, on the one hand, underlines an important precondition of hybrid integration, on the other inter alia experiences of migrant children may challenge the promotion of hybrid integration, but may possibly support hybrid integration by promoting dialogues between children to share these experiences. According to first, teachers aim at addressing their individuality and creating an optimal school experience not only for children but also for teachers and parents.

Sometimes you just forget that you have children with a migration background who have information in their heads that you just forget, because for us as teachers it's not so important whether the child is a foreign child or not, because it's just a child at a certain age with certain behaviours and they don't really differ. (G_T2_F)

But then I also try to (...) treat the child like a (.) normal child. For God's sake, traumatized children are also normal children. But I don't want to give uh (.) um the family or the children the impression, oh yes, you had it so hard, then do I treat you a little differently now." That/ I don't think that's okay either. (G_T3_F)

This understanding and endorsement of equality is also ascribed to the children, as a day care educator notes in the following statement:

When a new child with another skin colour or something that simply looks different comes into the group, then of course they have to know what's going on, where does it come from and why is it like that and why doesn't it speak German and so on. (...) And that's one day and then it's done. (...) And then the background that the child has, doesn't matter. (G_T9_F)

Thus, equality has a huge meaning for teachers. However, on the other hand, educators and teachers are aware of and acknowledge the peculiar experiences that migrant children have made, their needs and the challenges that they are facing. At this point, language has a central impact on the situation of migrant children and their parents. More concretely, the lack of language competencies and communication skills is perceived as a crucial challenge for integration and participation.

The children really come with zero knowledge of German. But of course, they should be integrated as quickly as possible and the parents, logically, usually also have zero or very little knowledge of German, so communication works with hands and feet. (GT_9_F)

For this matter, two levels of language competencies can be differentiated. On the one hand, teachers refer to language skills that are necessary for daily communication and interacting with teachers and peers, while on the other hand there is the relevance of subject-related and technical language. Competencies in the two types of language can be quite different.

So they want to play, boys especially want to play soccer. And I notice that there is hardly any communication, so there is negotiation about the game, but the communication that they need for the lessons, for mastering the lessons, for the technical language, that is not given. So it's um, yes it's nice when they play soccer and when they talk about it and also learn to deal with frustration. But that's not what's really so important for elementary school or for arriving in Germany, for the language they need (G_T2_F)

These two types of language use lead to another issue. On a fundamental level, teachers observe a lack of understanding regarding school tasks such as written math tasks or cloze, which in turn limits their competence to work individually and independently, and in the long run for the school success of migrant children.

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)

Finally, all teachers refer to migrant children's experiences, which can be quite different. They frequently mention experiences such as the flight and its circumstances (e.g. voluntariness of leaving the country, violence), a (temporary) separation from parents, or prior living conditions. Often they feel overwhelmed and wish to have more knowledge and further training in subjects such as traumata. Another problem is the lack of information on such experiences that eventually shape children's learning and participation.

And it's usually, in this case it's always been the fathers who have told a little bit, because they simply knew German better. And then you also get that out a little bit. And you can bring that into the teaching staff and say, here with them everything with caution, so and so is the background, you simply have to start very carefully with a parent interview or so. (G_T9_F)

Social Workers

Social workers usually experience the children in an inclusive way, i.e. their migration background is not used as a differentiating factor. It is only relevant in the case of detailed questions such as language or social behavior (e.g. co-determination), but even there it is not the case that a migration background explains everything.

I cannot answer the question whether there are migration-related differences or differences due to origin, I have the feeling that it is actually whether it is German, whether Syrian, whether from anywhere else, participation in the parental home is generally not that strong. And that is brought into the school and I wouldn't say now that I see significant differences. (G_SW6_M)

However, perception changes when there is a migrant background of one's own and this is visible in external features. From this perspective, discrimination in Germany is always present. This is a strong feeling especially among social workers who have a migration background themselves:

We have discussed this [racism] about four times, the topic and these hostilities. But yes. (.) Exactly. That's always a topic and it can stay that way. I've been in Germany since 2004 and yes, I experience that [racism and xenophobia] every day. (...) Exactly.. (G_SW8_F)

Children with a migration background 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. Unfortunately, Germans fall into this mishmash language, and thus neither the mother tongue nor German is mastered well.

I felt with the students [...] who had also been in 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 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)

Mediators

The mediators (except the coordinator) work as integration supporters with individual children or small groups of children. They have direct contact with the child, and they witness the process of belonging to the group. The mediators experience the development of the children and their commitment to finding a new role.

With each new child, the mediators learn again. One of the key convictions is that every child is unique and it is important to approach children in this way.

It is not at all easy to work [...] with children because the children have different characters. Can't be used like a method for all children. That it is different and then you also learn with the child. That means, when a new child comes, it definitely means that you gain new experiences. (G_M2_F)

Every child has the ability to cope with most everyday requirements. They often do not need as much support as parents.

For the parents this mediation is very important, for the children I can say they can do it on their own. Well, they don't always need my support, because they can do it. (G_M2_F)

Social, cultural or political factors that are considered crucial regarding the situation of migrant children

Teachers

Educators and teachers utter the importance of accompanying children with a migrant background in the educational system, preparing them and equipping them with skills and competencies. They perceive a huge responsibility laying on their shoulders. Overall, educators and teacher extract different social, cultural, and political factors that influence the school experience of children with a migrant background. For instance, educators and teachers point to differences in the educational systems of the countries of origin and Germany.

But they also have to learn to work independently relatively quickly, that's a big handicap, that works very badly (...) the children also come from a frontal instruction and bring these previous knowledge and if they come from systems with suppression, then that is naturally still much more difficult to lead the children to such a free system, as we would prefer it actually. (G_T2_F)

Due to these differences, they see a lack of knowledge concerning the German system, and point to the risk of negative attitudes that stem from previous contacts with administration and authorities.

Often parents have already experienced that the language of origin is seen only as a barrier, themselves as supplicants and less as persons who can contribute something. Often parents have also experienced that they were not seen in their individuality with their experiences and needs, which they now bring into the exchange with the educational institutions. Due to the lack of language, communication about what day care centers and school mean and what expectations and responsibilities parents and teachers have is hardly addressed but needs to be included in the pedagogical work.

(...) for the families it is so difficult with their other culture or with their other language that it is always seen only as an obstacle (...) that they perhaps dare less to participate (...) for example, what do authorities mean for the families here, what does school mean for the families, what kind of experiences have they had since the birth of their children, the women or the families, how long have they been in Germany, then also / or, or over how many generations, how educated are the families, what is also perceived and recognized as education, so to speak. (G_T7_FF)

Furthermore, the parental home has a central impact, especially if parents did not have access to schools or are – for instance – illiterate. As the following quotation demonstrates, educators and teachers perceive parents as important drivers of motivation, including to create a common understanding of day care centers and schools.

One can do it from the country or why does this child from the other region react differently or why can, does the [one child] have no problems learning, but the other child does, that can sometimes also be related to the educational policy of the country. Turkey, or children who come from Turkey, have simply brought other learning strategies, for example [...], and the children who come from other countries, from Iraq for example, they bring partly NOTHING [...] that are so many facets actually, also the question, are the parents illiterate or not. What motivation do they bring with them, why do they want this, do they even want the children to learn at school, is it important to them, the education system in Germany, or is it simply a safe country in which to live, so that is very comprehensive, so that cannot be reproduced in a few words (G_T2_F)

While social, cultural and political factors seem important for the performance and working relationship in school, they seem less crucial for togetherness in the class.

I: If we now go back to the togetherness in the classroom [...] How would you say impact [...] not only reasons of origin, but also [...] financial backgrounds, educational backgrounds? T3: Uh, that doesn't influence the togetherness [...] So the children are not uh/ envious of each other or um [...] pff, uh make fun of another child. That not at all. (G_T3_F)

Educators and teachers also point to another understanding of participation, authority, and obedience.

My experience is uh that the students who come from the Asian language area are rather dependent. They are used to a different school culture, so where the teacher really uh says, "this is the topic now and this is what you're learning and this is/ these are the tasks." The independent working out of topics is now there in their school practice from the home country not really very anchored. And we have to teach that to the children. (G_T3_F)

Similarly, a day care educator utters:

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)

There is also the perspective expressed that participation and autonomy has to be learnt independent of children's migrant background. On the one hand, this learning process is seen as a task of teachers and in the duty of day care and elementary schools, while on the other hand the role of the parental home in providing children with experiences of participating in decisions is another crucial influence factor.

Then I have to look, where could I now have uh resources that the children learn to really work together. [...] other techniques or social forms in school, these must also be learned. [...] And that is really independent of origin. With the DaZ children perhaps somewhat more pronounced [...] In my eyes, it is also a task of the elementary schools to educate children to be independent. [...] I usually always start with traditional [...] frontal teaching // where the children work individually. And then the next stage is partner work. And the next [...] stage is group or // small group work. (G_T3_F)

The transfer is not necessarily so easy with us, that is also from the linguistic side or also from the family background a bit difficult, because they are just NOT included in decisions there, for example, because they KNOW it differently and YES, there just notices yes socially weaker families somewhere, where that just also not so promoted. the thinking along, the co-deciding or as said, families with migration background quite often, but just NOT ALL, there are also other families, which promote this very strongly, but it is just nevertheless in a smaller number I say so (G_T2_F)

Finally, educators and teachers emphasize various structural and organizational barriers such as the lack of resources, fluctuation and a lack of competent staff, which hinders continuous work on topics such as autonomy and participation. It is criticized that the classes are too large, and that the coordination between schools and authorities is poor. Most of these problems are particularly relevant in so-called hotspot schools, which have a high ratio of students with a migrant background and low socioeconomic status. Moreover, particularly since the pandemic, there are pleas for a better digital equipment of schools, as well as migrant households. This is seen as a major challenge that is not mastered very well. Overall, there is strong variability between schools regarding these factors, but also concerning collaboration among the staff, the opportunities for supervision and further training, the degree of freedom in teaching, or the shaping of parental work.

Schools are simply overburdened, overworked. You probably can't blame the teachers either. This is a BIG problem, because later we will reap these fruits. The children, the educational losers, we will reap these fruits later. What's going to happen to them? Well. I don't know either. (G_T4_F)

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)

Social Workers

Language deficits are mentioned first, even if they do not occur in everyone, but they mean that there is a need to catch up. At the same time, the identity issue arises that "I am not German":

You notice, there are children there who have only been in Germany for a few years, you just notice that they have backlogs that have to be made up, where it's your turn, but of course that, affects the whole class. Then it's like this, that the children [...] come from different countries and [...] that the children HAVE to deal with the question, or what they deal with, the point is, I am not German. (G_SW7_F)

The cultural differences of how a family is defined are decisive for siblings. In the case of protection and reunification, they do not belong to the family:

In general, all siblings are dropped, if a sibling is here in Germany, there is a legal right if there is refugee recognition only for the parents. This is the same for subsidiary protection, i.e. only the parents can apply for family reunification, the siblings do not belong to the core families and cannot travel with them. (G_SW1_F)

Unfortunately, there is also discrimination against one another, as well as racism in the sense that people with darker skin are discriminated against more strongly, including with respect to the mediators.

We always talk about discrimination against foreigners. They are not fine with each other either. (.) So, in terms of belief, the color of the skin. [...] So the darker your skin color, the more you will be discriminated. [...] so we have experienced it here that a Syrian or an Afghan did not want to be advised by our cultural mediator because he had black skin color. (G_SW9_F)

Mediators

The mediators perceive all children in the day care center/school as unique individuals. They very rarely describe them as children with a migration background. Therefore, as educators and teachers, they try to work with each child individually. On the other hand, they also see that attitudes and values are so different that mutual understanding is impossible and working together is difficult.

I: And when you talk about the children that is often the topic, the children with a migration background and those without, or is there not that much differentiation? -

Mediator: No, there is no differentiation at all, only if integration is the topic, ok you are talking about children with a migration background, otherwise, no. (G_M2_F)

Educational opportunities, aspirations and difficulties of migrant children

Teachers

Language plays a major role regarding educational opportunities and difficulties. However, there is a debate among educators and teachers on how to deal with this challenge, which is illustrated in the discussion about the usage of the language of origin during the school lessons. Here, the opinions vary from an endorsement of German as a common language that enhances the integration and participation of all students to the approval of a stronger reliance on the language of origin in classes. Teachers who adopt the latter position argue that the language of origin is often seen very negatively instead of recognizing it as a resource for migrant children and their parents.

But sometimes I have to stop it 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)

There are also city 1 [A] wide in different languages, the Turkish lessons in the language of origin, because there are many studies that say that the better one speaks one's first language, one's mother tongue, the better one can read and write [...] in German. [...] that

it is nice, that they speak another language at home. And our system and everything that we offer to the families has to be good enough that they still manage. But two, three, when they're in kindergarten, or then just in preschool, good enough, or to acquire the German uh that's good enough to graduate from high school (G_T7_FF)

They [parents with migrant background] make more of an effort to actually push their [children's] German. [...] This is also quite often the case, especially in refugee families, that they think their language of origin is worthless. So you have to tell them again and again, please don't speak funny German, but proper Arabic or whatever. (G_T9_F)

Implicitly, this balancing of German and the language of origin is also understood as an indicator of the “arrival” in school (and in Germany).

So I also try, when I do grammar or so, to include the language of origin if possible. IF children are able to write in the language of origin, then you can also very nicely. Sometimes explain phenomena on the blackboard, according to the motto, the connection is just the same with you as with us or with you it is done like this, with us like this, but with you something changes. [...] I've noticed, well, once they've arrived in a language, then they don't want to have the language of origin in class anymore and they can't even get involved in it anymore, [...] because they really already think in the language of instruction [...]. (G_T2_F, pos. 181-187)

In a more dramatic way, a DaZ-teacher mentions:

But now here is the problem, actually probably a very broad one. I don't know how many children there are who fall through this school system, how many children there are who have language problems, who simply don't keep up at all in school. Children with a migration background. (G_T4_F)

To ensure integration, pre-school (i.e. the last year of day care) is seen as a good preparation for migrant children, particularly language-wise, but also regarding the demands of schools, such as understanding instructions and working on tasks, or in establishing the prerequisites for participation. Similarly, teachers also emphasize the importance of pre-school to parents to shape their understanding of education and the German educational system. However, migrant children have a lower likelihood of attending the day care institutions, making it necessary to establish a common base at the beginning of school. Given that children come with a wide range of prepositions and competencies, an individual consideration of the children is necessary.

There are many children who have a migration background, but who were born here in Germany. And you can't tell that they // have a migration background. [...] I'm thinking, for example, of Russians or also Europeans. [...] that is a challenge for us to find out which child needs DaZ lessons now. (G_T3_F)

Finally, from the perspective of teachers, grades and performance seem very crucial to migrant children. In their view, most of them are very motivated to achieve good grades and take it as a measure of success. This is contrasted by the fact that DaZ classes in Germany (are forced to) rely on verbal evaluations instead of grades.

I can't even say that, whether it [strong concentration on grades] really comes from the parents. I think it definitely comes very strongly from the children, that they have taken in somewhere that the grades are very important and the verbal assessment is NOT so important. Because we mostly do a verbal assessment and I see that the parents don't even look at it [...] They're as proud as horns, oh, we're writing a test tomorrow, then they're very excited about what's going to be in it. And the next day they see that I've only marked

the points, but I haven't written what grade it is, I can't give a grade. I'm not allowed to, so, then they are disappointed again, because they don't have a grade. (G_T2_F)

However, this motivation to perform is coincided by concerns and ambiguities about the future, and in the worst case a lack of future aspirations, as a teacher highlights. She criticizes that the children experience the future as abstract and vague, mainly focusing on the present.

And in, the view into the future, that's for some still just totally difficult, so that's already sometimes difficult with German children, but mostly the experience is that these children have no ideas about the future whatsoever. And also, the topic of wishes is mostly limited to I want a tablet or I want a cell phone, so that, so, that's it then actually already. (G_T2_F)

Social Workers

The school system is too focused on performance/grades, which blocks both students and teachers. In addition, there is little room for understanding because it is clear that graduation is the most important thing.

So I think, on the one hand, 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)

It is an integration advantage if older siblings have already successfully mastered German school.

And there is also a really important role that the older siblings play. That is noticeable. The fact that those who have older siblings who have already made it halfway through school, maybe study or have some kind of training, is extremely helpful for the younger ones. But the one who is the first or the first in the family has a pioneering role and probably, I think, in many cases less support. (G_SW4_F)

Integration is made more difficult by unreflected racism in parts of the teaching staff. In part, there is a refusal to integrate on the part of the parents. However, awareness has increased and the situation for children has improved.

Even if something is happening very slowly, something is happening in the education system. So I would say spontaneously that the support for children with a migration background was much worse twenty years ago than it is today. You can't expect it to turn right away, but such a bit of improvement is already there and I'm also relatively optimistic that it will - get better, because people network more, because there is more know-how because at some point a younger generation of teachers might just move up and see some things a little differently. (G_SW4_F, pos. 370-383)

Mediators

The mediators in our sample have no experiences regarding this issue.

Gender (and other) differences in relation to migrant children, and the situation of migrant children compared to children without a migrant background

Teachers

Generally, treating children alike independent of their gender is an essential value to educators and teachers. However, they also perceive gender as an impact factor regarding learning processes; for instance, it seems to play a role when migrant children settle in and are asked to collaborate in gender-heterogeneous groups.

No, for God's sake, nothing is separated. Well, we also have the boys who parade through the kindergarten every day dressed up as princesses and the girls who are waiting to see

when soccer is finally going to be played. That is of course catered for. So there is no distinction made. And that is, here our boys princesses are the most beautiful, that is/ No, so there/ it is also not the toys somehow so distributed, that is for a boy, that is for a girl. Nah, of course not. (G_T9_F)

So the thing is, it comes in from the kids. And we try to resolve it. And we say, now listen, even if you're a boy, it's still necessary or it's good if you work with a girl. [...] But sometimes you notice when you decide that a child should now repeat or a child should now: has difficulties or you now need another class for the child, then of course you also consider on the basis of the gender of the teacher. Is it now better off there or is it now better off there, what does it need now? (G_T2_F)

The parental home is recognized as an important key to the perception and endorsement of gender differences, especially if the school and home context differ in their perceptions and opinions.

I'll talk about it, but does it really have to be like that? Why does it have to be like that? What do you think is good about it? So that the children can simply reflect on it again, [...] and there I just have to look and I just sometimes can't take them out of their circle. I mean I don't have a normal class, but a DaZ class and I just always have to make sure that they don't come home with ideas where they then get terrible problems at home? Then with their parents, too. Yes, it is sometimes a culture shock for the children and you have to be a bit sensitive about it. (G_T2_F, pos. 795-803)

There are often reflections about the impact of one's own gender; for instance, as children are looking for support and prefer contacts of the same gender, or as potential role models, especially when a father is missing at home. Here, it is a resource if one works in a gender-heterogeneous team, where the children can choose whether they want to interact with a male or female educator/teacher.

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, pos. 759-777)

Educators and teachers alike acknowledge accordant difficulties in dealing with different attitudes towards gender. They acknowledge that these differences might result in tensions, making attitudes towards gender a sensitive topic in the work with parents and their children. Two female educators utter:

We then had (...) [a boy], who simply did not accept women, that is, he never accepted us as [female] educators, because (...) at home (...) women (...) simply have nothing to say, but the dad has something to say there (...) he knew, from women, so we had the feeling, I [the boy] do not have to be told anything. (G_T11_MFF).

There are actually, differences. I feel that sometimes parents are more interested in promoting a boy than a girl. As if they would already uh their role uh as later as a housewife or yes that there is actually. I have also experienced that. [...] That is then crap is that. If such conditions prevail, because the girls I don't know, in this culture whether one culture at all nor whether one may say that culture. [...] but I say that where the children HAVE come from (-). I say it this way, it is probably usual to marry the girls very early and the boys must then, so to speak, are the progenitors and must then. Girls do not go to work, they are only housewives who are then prepared for the activity as a housewife and that is not possible here. That the children must also learn something here, the girls must also

learn something. We are with us there are no differences, in the sexes. Now you even talk about which gender you feel you belong to, yes. Therefore, we are developed quite differently than (-) I say as a leading industrialized country. (G_T4_F, pos. 247 – 255)

At the same time, they realize that gender stereotypes are deeply rooted within themselves and society, and thus they also tend to reproduce gender differences. Indeed, this results in an ambiguity between their striving to implement equality, and everyday routines and practices.

I think so, but sometimes you're so stuck in your basic attitude. I see that from the outside, too, that I say, well, now you've done something so typical of girls again. That's how it really has to be now. I mean one can promote girls just as boys also ne. And if a girl enjoys math, then that's great and if she can explain it to a boy, then even better. (G_T2_F)

And I'm also glad that I have four male colleagues. Because they have a different way of dealing with the children. And that's good. Therefore, that's a good/ it has to be a mixture. Only women for boys is not good. There/ logically you can't get out of your skin as a woman either. So if that/ uh if the boy somehow whistles up the tree and stands free-handed on top and says, look, and so, then all my female educators go, ah, come down there and so. While the male educator says, try to see if you can get a little higher, ne, so. Or climbs behind (G_T9_F)

Social Workers

The first noticeable feature is that girls use open offers more often than boys. Girls seem to be more flexible and open here.

With the help of the documentation, you could now see what a very large excess of girls we have. Especially with the older ones so that we have almost no boys over ten more than visitors. Yes, where the question was, what is the reason, or are there just no bigger boys out and about in the neighborhood? Which actually can't be, but yes, the older guys are missing a bit. But things can have changed again in a quarter of a year. (G_W2_F, pos. 617-622)

Differences in behavior show that boys are allowed to do more or bring themselves to the fore more aggressively, while girls tend to be cautious in mixed groups.

A lot of girls are really very, very shy and just... feel more comfortable in groups of girls. (G_SW4_F)

Mediators

Mediators referred to the role of brothers and sisters. It is very helpful that siblings can support each other in the day care center. The mediators emphasize that it is very favorable in Germany that the siblings stay independent in their own development despite this helping relation.

Siblings so they give support. Um, but here in Germany or in the day care I think it's really nice that the child remains independent of his brother or sister. For example, we have a couple, i.e. siblings, the girl is five or six years old, the brother is three years old and he always gets support from the sister [...] the girl always stays in your group and she watches how it works with her brother. (G_M2_F)

Furthermore, they report gender differences according to the behavior of boys and girls and with that they quite critically refer to traditional gender roles and appropriate educational practices of parents.

The boys do a lot of nonsense, they just want the attention [...] And mostly the girls stay quiet and the boys who [...] are really extremely active. So they scream or well they want the attention. (G_M2_F)

5. Working with children and their families

Working with children

Teachers

As outlined above, educators and teachers point to the heterogeneity among and the individuality of children and the need to assess individual needs.

[They] are mostly children who also have learning difficulties, not only deficits in the German language, but directly problems in attention or problems in learning or problems in concentration too. And there I have to just say that my group so in contrast to a special school is very heterogeneous. [...] here I have this heterogeneity in terms of abilities, skills and knowledge and in terms of age. (G_T4_F, pos. 13)

Accordingly, one DaZ-teacher mentions as a strategy:

I actually try to interview every family that comes to our school for the first time in a detailed conversation, which I also do with a language mediator. In order to find out what is really so important for me to know, what do I have to take into consideration, what do I have to be able to respond to or can the child be triggered when I deal with certain topics, for example. (G_T2_F, pos. 27 - 33)

As one impact factor, the work in small groups is reported as helpful. In their work, educators and teachers try to address and use the strengths of the children to motivate them, as well as using their strengths as a starting point for learning and development. Additionally, they try to initiate self-reflection about the competencies, strengths and weaknesses.

So in a small group I can definitely respond more individually to the children and also build up a different relationship with the children and say, here listen, your parents may not be able to read and write, but I think it's very important to them that you learn that and, that the motivation comes from the child and that the parents also support that, so you have to be in constant contact (G_T2_F)

If there is then such a complex performance, there are always points on a reflection. So just, we worked together. Or: Why did I work alone? How did I succeed? Where did it work, where not? Where do I still have to help? (G_T6_F / 20_C_I_T_18.08.2020)

Another approach is the disclosure of relevance, either to subjects and regular class contents, or to children's daily life, their experiences, or their future aspirations and dreams. More concretely, it is helpful for teachers to draw on children's lives, asking about their experiences of certain things. On the one hand, this can refer to the school routine itself; for example, to the subject lessons and tasks that have already been worked on in them. On the other hand, it can also relate to wishes and needs that are not directly linked to school, but rather to the family, leisure activities or dreams for the future. Subjective relevance is a bridge that makes it possible to find a common language with the children.

Exactly, when teaching learning strategies, exactly, I try to refer to the material of the class. So that they see, ah, that is also done in the class, thereby the effort to participate and to understand that is greater than if I now, so to speak, bring in my own material, my own pictures [...], then they are more motivated and then they usually also say, I know that from the class too, we've already done that (G_T2_F).

Sometimes you can ask a question in the morning circle or however, and with just these children this question causes something. [...] that was in religion class. And it was about miracles.[...] And a girl from Afghanistan spoke up, because my question was: Has anyone already experienced a miracle? And then, of course, the children told me all sorts of things,

yes. Suddenly the light went on in my room, even though I didn't turn it on, or things like that. And then this girl comes forward and just tells that they were on a boat and that then / I don't know, and that it already looked like they were, uh, the boat was sort of tipping over. And that was very dangerous. And they were all praying, and, uh, and then the boat still, uh, still / So that didn't happen after all. So, and then you realize: Oh, no? So, that is already such a confidence that she tells that, because that is also in front of the class, and the class, that the relationship to the classmates is good, that she dares to do that. Uh, but as a teacher you are not necessarily prepared for something like that. (G_T5_F)

We often have conversations [...] about professions, about goals, about wishes and if you have goals and wishes and dreams then you can also align your behaviour and yes that is our goal. Because the children enable themselves that they can go into life and to that. And I praise them small step by step [...] for example one I look what where do the children have interests for example and then how do they go how do they work or which and then we talk about what do you think what do you want to be and you can do it so super well. Maybe this job would be something for you, this work, this training. Have you ever thought about that? We sometimes get so crazy, we have such daydreams in the break we sometimes think about it, when I'm in the room we talk a lot about such things. Actually, I don't have the problem that the children can't express their wishes (G_T4_F)

Educators and teachers emphasize that they want to include children and create opportunities for children's participation; for instance, when setting up rules in the class. For example, if the children get into an argument, they want to discuss with the children how to resolve it, and what rules to follow in case of conflict.

All the children are involved, for example, when it comes to setting rules for the garden, for the room, and so on. But also to realize their ideas. So there is no difference between the German, the non-disabled and the migration children. (G_T9_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)

Finally, teachers try to foster integration among the children and establish a community. One measure to do so is through tandem projects, in which older children – who are familiar with the school – are partnered with younger school beginners, explain to them school routines, are open for questions and offer support to enhance arrival and integration in the school. Older tandem partners share their knowledge and thus are able to experience agency.

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)

Social Workers

It is important to provide individual care, i.e. to offer the children space in which they can develop optimally. It is more important to recognize and promote individual resources than to focus on supposed burdens or deficits, which are potentially linked to the migrant background. Empathy and acceptance of culturally different perceptions help in this respect.

That children have the space and also the time and contacts to develop according to their strengths. Or that you also somehow use or recognize strengths in a more targeted manner

or first find out. It also depends on the teacher, to what extent one responds to the individuals or also recognizes them. (G_SW3_not specified)

This underlines the necessity to be reflexive against some kind of stereotyping, e.g. regarding needs for the support and integration of children and their families or school's expectations towards this supportive work, etc. All creative forms of integration are very helpful, which are not solely focused on language, but address migrant children in a more comprehensive way.

In the all-day offer we had a project for spraying graffiti. [...] with the aim of beautifying the school grounds. ... And that's just one thing where students can participate. They were also very enthusiastic. (G_SW3_not specified)

Such creative measures provide migrant children different opportunities to express themselves and get in touch with other children without being limited by language proficiency. Such opportunities for self-expression, giving voice, sharing experiences, entering dialogues and intercultural negotiation are extremely important to support hybrid integration and give migrant and non-migrant children the chance of building hybrid identity due to mutual experiences. Social work contexts obviously provide necessary or useful scopes to support this in creative and open ways more than it is possible in school. Hence, creative measures of integration might enable dialogue and communication between all participants regardless of their origin and regarding migrant students they might help to promote their self-efficacy and sense of belonging when avoiding potentially disavowing contexts. The integration of individual children works better if this is included in group processes or involves other students to actively guide, support and some extent guard migrant students.

So I've always tried either that students who really come to us now and actually want to discuss problems, that they also bring someone with them. That you might also be looking for someone to be by your side, that you don't have the feeling you are not alone and when children are integrated into a class, regardless of whether they speak a different language or whatever. That you are already building a network or that a class representative is there. (G_SW3_not specified)

Social workers do not explicitly deal with traumatic experiences of the children (e.g. flight). Loose forms have proven their worth, including in cooperation with other institutions (e.g. foreigner's council). Some children do not want this open and cognitive engagement. Considering their preferences and to provide substantial support if necessary, social workers should first create a secure social context – e.g. within open youth work – where these children can be as they wish and to some extent they should be available as reliable persons if needed. This may include negotiating cooperation with network partners. It is essential is to respect the individual interests and preferences of migrant children instead of focusing on any kind of supposed problems, diagnostics to be expected, etc.

It's different. Some children don't want that, they quickly switch back. Sometimes they break out in tears [...] Sometimes that's just a brief flare-up [...] Many are already looking for help themselves or through their families, which then actually somehow go to therapy or somehow make their own rounds or advice centers. And with the students, we once had a foreign council as a partner, which is also highly recommended. [...] It was always actually very positive, also for the teachers, to experience them differently and of course for the students to just be outside and play. (G_SW3_not specified)

Mediators

First, there are some attitudes for working with migrant children, e.g. to build trust. This is often a difficult but necessary step:

But I believe with strangers, it takes a little time. Not easy with raising children. Really difficult with children. [...] Yes. It's also about building trust at all." (G_M3_FFF 3)

Working with children always involves working with parents. The main problem is different values and norms between school/day care centre and the family. The child is seen as the battlefield and needs support. One supporting and indispensable tool is the education of the parents and another is the education of the pedagogues/teachers:

The parents get the rule wrong here in Germany. Really get it wrong. [...] the children learn at school - you can decide what you want by yourself. The child learns this way at school, comes home, has to do what the parents prefer. (G_M3_FFF)

Working with families

Teachers

With few exceptions, teachers highlight the meaning of working with families with (and without) a migrant background. However, they also mention that they lack resources and time, which makes work with families challenging.

And uh so it's very very different ... some need great support from parents, of course you notice how the parents' house as a whole stands to the school. Always more positive to the school or always critical to the school or do not care at all [...] the parental homes play a very important role. (G_T1_M)

Again, the importance of language and the need to overcome language barriers are endorsed as critical points. Most of the educators and teachers perceive parents and family as a valuable resource, which they try to incorporate in teaching.

So, there is only one family, where really the parents do not know any / no German at all. With / With Persian, for example. Those who speak Arabic, they can speak a little German. So that one, if one speaks relatively slowly, uh, that it works. And if you then give them things again in writing, um, you can already communicate. I have actually explained a computer program to someone on the phone. And that took a long time, but it worked. It works, yes. But now and then there is really a family where the parents don't speak German. And that is difficult. (G_T5_F)

We try to get the children to bring it with them, to ignite the children into a flame, so that they are also interested in the matter, in the project ... Then they tell it of their own accord. If I'm not interested, I don't tell them. And we try to make it very transparent through notices, through pictures, so that the children tell their parents about what we did there. (G_T10_FFF)

Here, it is helpful if the team of educators and teachers is diverse themselves.

But I think it's important to have a team, a diverse team. Especially if you also / so that is already important to be able to address the target group of parents and children, of course, in the sense that you want it. (G_T12_FFFMM)

There is a width in ways of incorporating parents reaching from doorway conversations to a parents' café (e.g. presentations on certain topics) and parents' school (e.g., offering information on school and formulation of expectations). Rather distant communication channels such as notices, emails, and social media chats are also seen as a ways to interact with parents. These offers aim at providing

information – for example – on the educational system and the meaning of education, but are also seen as a way to build a relationship, a working alliance. However, it is highlighted that offers such as the parents' café do not always work – for instance, in DaZ classes – and that it is more about establishing an individual contact or accepting that you cannot get in touch. Overall, the functionality is strongly dependent on the attitude and engagement of educators and teachers, as well as the interest and the motivation of the parents. It is therefore highly variable and to some extent individualized. For example, while some teachers hand their phone numbers to the parents and are involved in the chat, others reject the possibility of a private channel and mainly look for contact with the parents if problems in the school occur.

Our goal is simply to build a bridge between the education we want to impart, i.e. primary school education, on the one hand, and adult and parental education, on the other hand, by trying to build a partnership with the parents, to get them on board (...), to take away their fears of institutions and schools, and that they can ultimately learn a lot from us and experience it through active participation, so that they are also a bit more capable of building up a written culture at home and promoting language, focusing on language in all respects, not just German as a language of education, but also everyday language and the languages of origin. (G_T7_FF)

Other ways of participating with parents include projects in which parents talk about their life, reading aloud, planning, organizing and joining festivities, theatre plays, music and sport events, or other joint activities. At an institutional level, schools and day care centres also have a parent-teacher association, which is used as a channel of exchange. Independent of specific measures, language mediation is given strong importance in the exchange and the communication between teachers and parents.

Another building block is our language and cultural mediators. (...) They are // a bit our interface with the/ with the families who (.) still speak very, very little German and who also (.) sometimes have inhibitions/ (G_T3_F)

I have a translation app on my phone. I can talk with each parent and what I want to bring across, that comes with the parents, I am very sure. I am able to put it in short sentences, in simple language, so that the device translates what I want to have, but whether what the parents want to say to me is received by ME, that's another question. I can say whether I can lead a dialogue, but I am able to create the child a translation possibility and thereby it can also continue to learn. But the strategies, I can not then convey to him. (G_T2_F)

Some of them also mention that part of teaching is educating the parents and that it is necessary to reach parents, make them changing in order to reach their children.

And also // for the families, because if you work um (..) with uh families with migration background, you also have to take (.) the parents (.) by the hand and accompany or, in quotation marks now, educate them. Because they don't know how school works, how life works in Germany. Of course, you have to teach that to the parents as well (.) um (.) (G_T3_F)

This teacher also illustrates this point with the example of participating migrant children in committees:

That will never be one-to-one. [...] And that's why it's not bad if these children's committees mostly consist only of German children. At some point, the children with a migration background will also be brought there. We are working on it, that they will be led there. But it won't happen overnight. [...] And especially in Arabic-speaking countries, such democratic bodies do not exist in schools. There the parents even have difficulties to accept something like a parents' representative. There are / the teacher. The teacher says.

Uh and uh here in the Central European area, the teacher says, but there is also the parents/ who maybe have a different opinion or have a suggestion about it. So it's just a democratic voting and a democratic um speaking. And that just doesn't exist in these Arabic-speaking countries. That's what // we have to teach the parents now. So that they also (.) little by little uh in these committees. So find courage to join these committees. And if that happens with the parents, then of course it will happen with the children. (G_T3_F)

Two exemplary examples of this kind of co-educating are a pre-school for parents (complementary to the children's pre-school) as well as parents' representatives for parents with a migrant background.

And there the children have a more intensive preschool. In the same time parallel a kind of parent school takes place, where we explain to the parents how to keep a homework book, what do you also expect as a school from the parents, for example feedback, constantly // in homework book well check it. We have the platform LernSax, you also have to explain to the parents how that works. Um, because communication takes place via the homework book AND via [...] LernSax. That is such a (./) building block. Uh another building block are uh the parent representatives for the DaZ students. These parent representatives are (.) classes, so goes across the grades. So usually one parent representative [...] one [class]. These (.) parent representatives are simply responsible for the DaZ families. (G_T3_F)

Finally, working with parents might also imply balancing differing expectations of DaZ teachers, teachers in the regular school, and parents, which in turn affects children's promotion:

Mum [...] now thinks that he (her son) has already made progress through these remedial lessons with me, because the teacher has graded him at school very well. Well, then I also thought: Okay, if they see progress [...] [but] what I see is that he struggles with himself [...] We have talked to his mother many times, but she is of the opinion that no, he has already progressed, he is now going into third grade, whereas his twin sister is still in grade two and yes. What can I say then, when the mother sees it that way and the teacher says: No, he's already progressed. (G_T4_F)

Social Workers

Working with families is inseparable from working with children. So take the fear out of school for parents to have a positive impact on the integration of students and families. Parents should be more involved in all subjects and able to contact all teachers:

Is more and more that this is totally super, super important, no matter what subject, no matter what you want to organize, if you somehow have a reasonably good relationship with your parents. . [...].. I think it is good not only to contact your parents if there are problems, but also to call and say, well, she is really good (G_SW4_F)

Additional offers for parents are seen as helpful; for instance, a family get-together once a week, which is supported by many migrants. In this way, the popularity among the respective community (e.g. Arabic, Russian) can be improved.

Then the family get-together is also there and you notice that in district 1 [A] that is unbelievable: we have an Arabic-speaking colleague who also fled from Syria and she was a teacher there. And yes, without them, the Arab community wouldn't be at the start for a long time. (G_SW2_F)

Further on, these spaces for getting to know a culture/society should open up for personal stories and encounters to enable understanding.

In the direction of adult work [...] spaces are needed where one can live out one's identity. Where you don't have to try to be German. [...] We have country evenings once a month at the family get-together and they are always very well attended. [...] we have now sat

down together and thought that perhaps from this space for a society there must also be space for individual stories, where you can then easily get recognition for what has been personally experienced. [...] this recognition of life's work. [...] when it comes to getting to know people or breaking down prejudices, the personal story is still somehow what works best. And to make friendships or to think: Hey crazy what they, so easy to see (-) yes that's not just the woman with the headscarf, but much more. (G_SW2_F)

Parent work in the women's meeting place can strongly promote integration, because it helps to see one another with others through personal exchange:

So we have now also started a women's meeting where you or wherever it gets very personal [...] and where we just talk openly about the résumé and this: I'm not alone, others feel the same way. Is also incredibly invigorating. And that's where super nice dynamics arise. Talking about things you normally don't want to talk about because you think you'll make a drama out of it. But somehow five others are doing the same and they are just as bad with it. So it can't actually be a drama, the situation just isn't one. And this recognition, yes, not to be alone. (G_SW2_F)

A challenge is the restricted communication with parents with a migration background due to language barriers.

Working with parents is difficult because many parents do not understand us either. [...] you can't reach them and so on. (G_SW5_F)

Support is possible through the opportunity to hold development discussions with parents and pupils and work together (as a team) on goals, whereby this context enables building a relationship to talk to parents.

In other words, the school conducts target and balance sheet discussions, so to speak, one-on-one discussions with students and parents [...] They look at [...] performance development and social behavior and set goals for the near future. That happens together with the parents, in that context I got to know many [parents]. (G_SW5_F)

Mediators

The mediators develop a basic relation with the parents, and in particular they talk about the day in the day care/school and explain some ordinary things. Mediators accompany parents to the doctor and other institutions.

Mostly my work is with parents. [...] well, every day when they pick up the child, I describe how it was in day care, what made the child special. [...] Sometimes I also go to the doctor with the parents, but only when that has to do with the kita, that is, when an examination takes place, when the kita needs an examination [...] Then there is the topic of early intervention. A lot of parents don't understand what this is about. Is something wrong or the child is not doing something well? The parents don't understand - it's not about that, it's just about the child's development. (G_M2_F)

Working with children is always interwoven with working with families and the pedagogues (as mentioned above). This constellation needs special response. In first place, we have to challenge this constellation, address it in programs and look for partners in supporting institutions.

Well, it just bothers me that a lot of parents don't know anything about daycare and certainly about school and I would like the organizations to take up the topic, which I find really interesting [...] Yes there are organizations all over the city [...] or children's clubs. [...] There are many organizations and I think they work, they do a good job and they have a good relationship with the parents. [...] we can also work together, for example, staff from the day care center and we do a little program, maybe a presentation; maybe work

together [...]. Yes, I hope the educators, the teachers have more patience with the immigrant children. I understand them. They are under pressure, sometimes me too; sometimes I also lack the patience. We are all human, but um, how we do it for the children for the child well in the end, they are children, some have experienced bad things in your country, some unfortunately have strict parents and some do not get enough attention. (G_M2_F)

6. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Integration: definition and personal and institutional involvement

Teachers

Teachers' definitions of integration recognize different dimensions and aspects and at least practical implications for daily life. First, integration does not mean a unidirectional business of adaption or assimilation, but rather a bidirectional process that affects newcomers as well as residents of the receiving society.

Integration is not that kind that people, who come to Germany, have to integrate in the German society. We, who we are here already, have to stick our hands too. (13_G_I_F)

Integration in the meaning of “sticking our hands” requires some prerequisites like acceptance and respect, the willingness to appreciate different cultures and see their potential to contribute and enrich the receiving society.

For us [it] is important that we not only accept the families with their backgrounds and their languages of origin, but to see these backgrounds and their mother tongues as a potential that needs to be unfold. To make them clear that they are a part of the society. This is very important to us. (G_T7_FF)

Thus, integration relates to communication, and the ability, openness and will to understand each other: “You have to understand each other, have to be open-minded. Communicate, communicate, and communicate” (G_T9_F). Integration in the meaning of communication and understanding requires not only open-mindedness but also patience and perseverance. Integration – mentioned as a bidirectional process – requires the ability and willingness to reflect individual values and normative orientations and with that an open-minded and honest reflection of the necessities, requirements, and consequences of integration beyond the commonly-appreciated concept.

I think, integration during the last years was seen and discussed a bit too optimistic. We are all good. We all love each other. It will work. We will make it. Of course, we will make it. However, integration also means to reflect one's own values and perhaps reorganize it. It might mean to be confronted with something, which I do not really like but have to accept it in the meaning of tolerance and integration. (13_G_I_F)

In this way, integration represents a consciously-tackled task of conflict regulation, discussing and adjusting values, learning and practicing tolerance and in a way changing attitudes and expectations regarding anyone, especially adults, professionals and parents.

There have been three parent couples, namely Christians, who have vehemently opposed to it at the beginning. However, we insisted referring to cosmopolitanism and to the fact that those attitudes are not of interest for children and did it. At the end, all have been very happy with it. We asked an Algerian mother, who told about Ramadan and about the traditional practices. (G_T9_F)

Some of the parents try really hard that their children are quite integrated, speak German very well. However, there are other parents, who almost never speak, send their children, who translate. (G_T10_FF)

Regarding children and promoting children's integration, teachers and educators describe different needs and strategies. Addressing migrant children, it might be the case that some of them – including as adults – have to learn about social life and societal rules in Germany from teachers' perspective.

Some children come from countries with dictatorship and here in Germany we have a different form of society. Children have to learn about this, which for me means integration. Parents may experience some problems, but they can solve these problems intellectually. Children grow up here and there has to be the opportunity to grow into the society. [...] This is an important point in preparing children for their future life. Living in a democracy means communicating opinions and respecting the opinions of others. This is quite important. (G_T4_F)

Unlike adults, children's integration in this meaning can be described as casual but at least conscious education. However, regardless of particular experiences or perceptions of political, religious or cultural representations – which are probably related to manifest or imputed educational needs – the idea of participation is inherited in children's integration.

For what concerns I am a little bit sad is that, but this is in process, not finished yet: Most of the children are children with migrant background. However, there are only German children in these committees (students committees, the authors). This is not really bad. Nevertheless, I would prefer that these committees represent the demographic structure of the school. This is where we start and why we started with the parent's speakers. They all have been German as well. (G_T3_F)

Integrating migrant children and their parents in this example means enforcing children's and parent's engagement in institutionalized forms of participation in school, which most of them did not know so far. Accordingly, this strategy is related to learning about rules and rights of participation as well as strengthening children's and parents' participation in a somewhat practical way. This sometimes needs time, patience, some kind of a plan and communication, in this case to open the parents' council consciously to migrant parents. Therefore, these strategies do not address deficits or needs but provide experiences of being respected and accepted as a member of a certain social context, which implies that migrant children will contribute to social life. Concerning – to some extent – the assimilative side of integration, which addresses language learning and social knowledge, respect, acceptance and openness reflect the contributive, enriching side of integration and thus the hybrid character of integration processes, which are considered as bidirectional.

Actually, I will start a course in Italian language for the children. This is not about learning Italian at all. Important to me is to demonstrate that children's mother tongue, mine is Italian, is another than German and that it is worth to be brought into school. That is, what I want, to be some kind of model. We here have the possibility to teach in children's language of origin. However, this is something from outside. I would be happy, when children or parents say: 'I want to provide something, maybe a project, cooking with Misses X or something like that' (laughing). (G_T3_F)

Regarding children themselves, an educator from a day care center said the following.

When a child wants to tell something about his country, then we will take it as a topic like that everybody can tell something about his or her country, what animals there live etc. You can make a project about it. However, it might be possible as well that the Spanish child likes firefighter Sam. In this case, the topic is firefighter Sam. This has nothing to do

with migrant background; it is just the interest of the child. This interest is essential for any activity. (G_T9_F)

Among others, a migration background is one characteristic of an individual child that possibly requests some attention, depending on the context and – above all – the current interests and needs of the child. The child is in focus, not necessarily the migrant child, which can be seen as an integration of a casual educational business considering diversity.

To sum up, teachers' and educators' definition of integration underlines its character as a multifaceted, bidirectional process that affects all participants and thus must be shaped actively by them. According to origin, age and social contexts differences that could be observed, they concern certain educational needs of migrant children and their parents referring to social rules and values in Germany. This might address some kind adaption, which is mentioned as necessary. On the other hand, it endorses the opportunity to actively contribute to social life and be a part of the society. Accordingly, the mention of a migrant background concerning integration is considered ambivalent. On the one hand, mentioning helps in improving sensitivity and providing adequate support.

It should be the aim not need to mention migrant background. This would indicate successful integration. However, we need this term to communicate and to be able to act supportively. (13_C_I_F_02.07.202)

On the other hand, a migrant background should not be necessarily in focus, even when supporting the integration of children and their families. As reported above, being a migrant children might indicate a certain need for help, support and understanding. Nevertheless, the core element and aim of integration should be to focus on children as children, appreciating their interests, contributions and personality.

It means to be a part of the society, without losing themselves in it. I know, who I am, what I can provide to the society. Possibly this way. A little bit weird, but yes. That I don't have to wear a mask to ensure that people accept me or like me. I can stay and I can contribute to social life. That is, I think, my understanding. However, this is a process, which takes years. (G_T5_F)

Summarily and taking the consideration of integration as bi-directional and actively to be shaped process into account, relevant facets of the provided understandings of integration address dialogue and interaction, interchange and togetherness as relevant aspects, which are essential for the promotion of hybrid integration and thus to overcome unidirectional, assimilating understandings of integration.

Social Workers

For the social workers, integration strongly relates to language, language sensitivity and communication. Very different areas play a role here. In general, it can be said that it is important for them to recognize and name migration, with the overarching goal of identifying individual needs and being able to apply for funding. However, it is also important for social workers not to stigmatize people:

For me, there are actually a lot of people out there, but I think you actually have to name them in order to be able to better point out disadvantages [...]. Then there is also the question of funding [...]. There is always the question of how much migrant background there is [...] and then there is more [money]. (G_SW2_not specified)

With the suspicion of stigmatization and the term "migration background", the desire for language sensitivity and the need for the practice for a more meaningful and non-discriminatory but appreciative term arises:

I haven't found the right term yet, the others all sound so awkward. [...] I have [...] sometimes said pupils from other countries. Sometimes you say [...] whose language of origin is not German [...]. I don't really find migration background a nice word. But it has probably [...] become so ingrained. (G_SW3_F)

However, naming a migrant background concerning potentially disadvantageous life situations does not automatically mean stigmatizing, but rather it might help in requesting sufficient resources for supporting migrant families.

Linguistic understanding and communication are also seen as making a very important contribution to successful interaction in the process of integration, which represents a challenge that resonates the opportunity of dialogue and hybrid integration. Communication problems are named as obstacles to integration, especially in the context of school. Teaching basic language skills is seen as the first step towards integration:

I would like to see [...] pupils who have language problems [...] integrated into the class group as soon as basic communication is possible and to try to help each other and learn from each other. [...] For this, there would have to be basic language support at school [...] Differentiation, yes, is certainly somehow necessary in order to impart such a basic knowledge of the language, if it is not present, but then try to resolve these differences as quickly as possible. (G_SW6_M)

In the open social work and counselling of people with a migration background, the beginning of integration is not the teaching of language basics, but rather understanding the other person and perceiving their needs:

We have looked for people from the communities who can mediate, who can establish mutual communication, who can tell us what people need. (G_SW9_F)

Mediators

Integration is a process of coming together with respect and openness for others. This process is difficult due to misunderstandings in communication. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge this and be careful with each other.

It is also difficult sometimes, especially with foreigners, because with us the mothers do almost everything for the child and they think that they will take care of the child. They think that they always do something nice for the child, but here in Germany, no [...] How do you do that? Sometimes we ask the parents or, as we say, we start with the children step by step. [...] So we try to motivate the child. But it is really difficult for the children who are not at home by themselves. ... Then uh, the help from the parents is very, very important. (G_M2_F)

One of the most challenging thing is the joint meal in day care centre and school. All participants mentioned it and they have explained it lengthy and detailed. It was surprising.

There are several misunderstandings, either on the side of the parents or on the side of the educators. And several times I explain how it is with us and that one is not rude. It's just that we think so, we talk differently [...] that's why we talk a lot about the difference between cultures. [...] well, that helps. [...] for example when eating, like the Germans eat with a knife and fork. The educators have many problems showing foreigners how to eat

with a knife and fork. Some educators say that's bad, it doesn't work, then I'll explain. We eat most of the time with a spoon. [...] sometimes there are children who don't eat meat and they tell their parents that there was meat and they ate meat. What is wrong, the child simply tells how there are specialties here that really look like meat, but are only vegetables [...] and then the parents come and say, we said the child shouldn't eat meat. And there you have to explain that. [...] Yes, I find it difficult to eat because some parents do not want their children to eat meat, but they do not explain to their children that they are not allowed to eat meat in daycare. Some children cry, they protest. [...] Well, the parents have to work with their children on the subject of food. Because it's difficult when everything is on the table and one child is not allowed to take or one child is allowed to take all the children and then we say: No, you don't. (G_M2_F)

Policy instruments and experiences

Teachers

In terms of policy instruments and experiences, teachers recognize different programs and structural conditions. In this context, the institutional framework of second language learning reflects a main topic. It becomes clear when mentioned that second language learning or preparation classes are the most important instruments in promoting the integration of migrant children into school and within the German school system. However, experiences and perceptions of this program are differentiated and quite ambivalent to some extent. Essentially, second language classes are considered as important arenas providing diverse opportunities of learning and development according to language learning and beyond.

We have children, who attend L2-classes only, because they do not speak German at all. They have to learn several things. Here they have the opportunity not only to learn German, but to learn how school works as well. They have the possibility to enter regular classes step by step, for one or two hours or in the afternoon in after school care. However, in this way L2-classes are some kind of shelter at the very beginning. (G_T3_F)

L2 or preparation classes in this perception not only provide 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 and communication, and thus they provide opportunities to experience social integration.

Perhaps this will transfer to the L2-classes. Because, things are done in regular classes (students' participation measures, the authors), are installed in L2-classes as well, right. Therefore, they will be included and as more responsibility is given to them, as more they will learn to take this responsibility and perhaps come into dialogue with other children. This, for sure, is my hope, that they will communicate and participate. Things sometimes missed out. (G_T2_F)

However, teachers stress the crucial character of language proficiency concerning the educational success and accordingly the importance of second language learning in preparation classes. Teachers describe meeting this as a challenging task concerning the different levels of children's language competencies.

A challenge for instance are beginners, as I told. Many children with migrant background come to us. However, migrant background does not automatically mean that children need L2-classes. There are many children, who have migrant background, but are 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 support of a L2-class.
(G_T3_F)

Children with different levels of language proficiency as well as experiences with school in general and German school system in particular as well as different grades might learn together in one L2 class, which requires individual diagnostic and support but is usually limited by time and personal capacities. Additionally, the fact that there are children of different grades within one course challenges L2 teachers regarding the different requirements concerning subject language and lesson contents.

Another challenge specific to second language teaching is that it should prepare for lessons in regular classes. This requires negotiation and coordination according to content and time. This might be difficult, when considered that there are students of different grades in one L2-class. (G_T3_F)

Accordingly, cooperation with subject teachers becomes essential, where teachers reported quite different experiences reaching from good cooperation to almost complete disinterest on the part of the subject teachers. This is critically considered as a substantial issue, because a closer cooperation between L2 and subject teachers from teachers' perspective might promote language learning as well as individual success in school and finally the social integration of migrant children when considering and supporting their individual interests and capabilities.

Here we have a dedicated system of gradual integration, which means I have children without language proficiency, who come to me on the very basic L2-level. And then I have them for around 15 lessons and after this lessons they will be integrated into regular classes step by step. This means that I develop individual timetables and in this context, I try to integrate them quickly into Math classes, because they usually are very interested in Mathematics and this helps them to learn German faster. They get into the classes and learn German in a casual way. This works well in physical education or art. Concerning more language intensive subjects as German or Science teaching they come to me and thus I have small groups during the lessons, so I can children support more individually.
(G_T2_F)

Although L2 classes are considered as very important elements of individual support and integration of migrant children concerning language learning, social experiences and participation, teachers addressed some critical aspects like the segregating and potentially stigmatizing character of those classes. A teacher illustrates that children can experience themselves as stigmatized and have the wish to be part of the regular classes to lose this stigma.

At the beginning, it is quite easy to work with the children. However, when they are in regular class, it becomes more and more difficult. Maybe it is a bit different from school to school. We have more than 60% migrant children and they all want to leave L2-classes. They want to be ordinary persons, gain good ratings and that's it. I don't know, why L2-classes are considered this way, but it is the aim of the children, ok. (G_T2_F)

Migrant children to some extent experience their status as L2 students and their belonging to dedicated classes or courses as problematic in terms of highlighting their migrant background and their exclusion from ordinary school life, regardless of the purpose of this exclusion. This potentially segregating impact of L2 classes is illustrated by the following statement, which highlights another aspect.

We have the house of cultures here, they provide many things that children are not left alone, but experience social activity. That they do not watch television or play PlayStation

the whole day, but make an excursion, to be more integrated. You know? I am not sure how to explain that children should be provided a better access to the society and not stay on their own and have only contacts with Arabic children, that is Arabic children with Arabic children, but have contact with German children as well, that it is more multicultural. This is sometimes difficult. [...] Actually, I have only Arabic children and one from Afghanistan and one from Venezuela. Almost Arabic children, but it would be nice there would be more contact with German children, for language reasons too. They spend much time in L2-classes, later they possibly attend regular classes. But then they got older, and I am not sure, because of their perception, if they get along with the other children. How do they find access? They are almost among themselves. (G_T4_F)

One side of dedicated integration programs like L2 classes might be the risk of segregation and thus promoting separation of groups of children, when those classes represent a separated and separating space or are perceived as such. In a more general sense, some teachers critically mention structural problems according to scholarship and related risks of unintentionally promoting cultural separation.

Together with the ministry we try to control the number of Arabic children. This is not because we do not want them here. The reason is to provide contact, more contact with the German language, because this is a prerequisite for their social success later here in Germany. (G_T3_F)

These critical considerations might underline the importance of close cooperation between L2 classes and regular classes, as well as their practical shaping as a space of comprehensive social experience beside language learning with connections to different aspects of social life in school and beyond. Furthermore, they address questions concerning structural challenges like considering cultural diversity of children and families across schools regarding their quota in a general sense.

If I had a wish for free, then I would prefer smaller classes, with less migrant children respectively children with other mother tongues. Whereas I would not talk of migrant background, but prefer to talk of children few German language proficiency. However, those children should not be more than 50% of all children in class. And, what would be an advantage is more staff, a second teacher in class. (G_T3_F, pos.926-945)

In terms of what concerns schools besides the mentioned necessity of internal cooperation amount and qualification of staff, the number of children in classes and finally the quota of migrant children and sensitivity to their origin represent crucial aspects of integration programs. Regarding promoting the social integration of migrant children in general, programs and activities in school represent an important element. However, there are other important factors like opportunities for social contact and their promotion outside school or family background.

From the teachers' perspective, cooperation between schools and parents is considered as important as it is challenging, especially regarding parents' language competencies in particular. In this context, mediators play an important role not only regarding translation.

We have the mediators' project here. We can order a mediator for a particular language. For meetings with parents for instance and this is a big support in our work. If this person is competent. [...] Concerning mediators, I expect that they have the knowledge and can tell me about particular aspects. When I cannot figure out why this child does not look me in the eyes, while other from the same country do, why react this child from this region in a particular way, why has this child no problems with learning, another has. (G_T2_F)

Because mediators play an important role as language- and culture-related agents, problems according to capacities, availability and budget limit the appropriate support opportunities, which teachers

regularly criticize. Bureaucracy in the application process makes it difficult to reach and use mediators when needed.

Uhm, there is a pool of mediators and interpreters, I can apply for. However, this takes time and money and, of course, there is no dedicated budget. (G_T9_F)

From a general perspective, regarding the socioeconomic situation of migrant children and their families teachers mention the so-called education and participation package, a social political program that provides disadvantaged families with children attending day care or school additional money.

There is this education and participation package, from which many things can be paid, e.g. all excursions with children. [...] Accordingly, they do not need money for paying transfer to swimming lessons for instance. (G_T7_FF)

And there is this wonderful education and participation package, which provides every child in need financial resources. For school supplies, tutoring, excursions and so on. This means, no child at a German school has to miss something due to financial reasons. Those things will be provided, which is rather correct. (G_T3_F)

However, looking at the big picture, programs to ensure social security on a material basis are important because they guarantee children's participation in school. Nevertheless, promoting the integration of children from teachers' perspective requires a broad and differentiated spectrum of approaches, programs and activities, of which schools are one part. Accordingly, schools and teachers essentially play an important role in migrant children's integration. To play this role properly, dedicated programs are necessary, useful and important, but it also needs adequate structural conditions and substantial relationships to families and institutions outside school.

Social Workers

The political regulations on family reunification in Germany are demanding and can be an obstacle to integration:

When underage refugees are here, they usually only have a legal right to have their parents join them. But if there are still siblings in the family, then by law they are not allowed to come with them, which is of course extremely complicated for the integration, for the history of the people, the young people who are here, because they were usually sent ahead by the families to then catch up with the entire family. And now that is not possible by law, so that there are quite a few catastrophes, yes, holes, which of course also has an effect on integration. (G_SW1_F)

The difficulty is that while the policy instruments seem workable, implementation is difficult and often severely hampered, e.g. by deadlines, funding or for reasons that are not transparently communicated to the respective institutions.

Well, there is a project that is just coming to an end, which is a shame because it worked really well [...]. The program is still there, but the Senate has unfortunately cancelled it. No one really knows why. (G_SW4_F)

The social workers who work in schools are particularly critical of the strongly prescribed framework for action. They would like to have more possibilities to deal with topics that arise situationally in the individual classes, such as the following example with a focus on diversity and racism in the class.

And at the moment they don't really understand what they are saying, but of course it is totally racist. Um, to pick up on that at that moment and to create the framework for it [...].

There are so many topics for which one would like to create space that is not there. Because racism is, of course, one topic and in a class with so much diversity, it is definitely a good idea to talk about this topic because, of course, statements have to be classified and talked about, but the question is always, how much time and space do you get for this in the narrow learning plan? (G_SW7_F)

Promoting integration that enables diversity, agency and participation among the children, families and the team of the respective institution is rated as positive, what coincides substantially with the concept of hybrid integration. For example, projects are mentioned to accompany the transition from school to work:

This is a person who, I think, usually starts in the tenth grade with kids where it's already clear that it won't go so smoothly after school and then accompanies them even after the tenth grade. And having someone who can handle this transition is {of course} super good. Because it is often the case that after the tenth grade, all the support measures that existed in the context of school completely break down again. And to have a person there who continuously accompanies them into training or second-chance education or whatever else they do. (G_SW4_F)

Mediators

Main instrument is the project „culture guide” or integration assistants:

Integration assistant [...] is the job of these women who didn't really know at the beginning what their integration aid was. I still know that it is not about telling the mother that means here after-school care card and after-school care card mean this and that, but that it involves dealing with your OWN culture, which does not exist here, the other not. What am I doing now with my own culture? (2_A_I_T_18.05.2020)

One effective way is music. Music builds bridges and invites children and parents to join the group without fear:

Music is really like a language. [...]. I noticed when there is music, all the children play together, sing together, or sit together ... yes, I think it's really nice, for integration for all children. (G_M1_F)

Inter-institutional cooperation (good practices)

Teachers

Teachers describe inter-institutional cooperation regarding work with migrant children, diversity and integration along different reasons and aims. In a very general sense, inter-institutional cooperation provides experiences, educational occasions and appropriate places for learning and education outside school.

We cooperate with the police, starting from traffic education until drug abuse. Of course, we collaborate with other institutions. We do excursions within several subjects, visit several learning locations. We did an excursion even in mathematics this year. (G_T1_M)

We have the French institute in the city. And I try to visit the institute once or twice per month together with the children. There we can visit the library or watch cartoons.” (G_T8_M)

Concerning integration and education, the reasons for such cooperation differ, they cover aspects related to contents of certain courses within school, and should provide enhanced experiences and knowledge or access to new or alternative social and cultural resources. Furthermore, inter-

institutional cooperation of this kind provides insights, enables contact and thus promotes integration and participation.

We asked two colleagues for cooperating with the municipality, which know much about the city. Both are members of the community representation. However, of course, in my teaching we visit many learning places outside school. We met the major during the ninth grade within social studies course. I did many projects, where we visited enterprises etc. We use many learning places outside school. (G_T1_M)

Other reasons for inter-institutional cooperation concern certain requirements, needs or difficulties that might be related to the migrant background of children and their families. First mentioned in this regard are mediators and interpreters, who in Germany do not work at dedicated schools.

Interpreters are an important resource to us indeed. Because, like a refugee family has no experience and knowledge about social life and school system in Germany, so we do not have any knowledge or experience concerning school in Syria or Vietnam. What means school there and what means school here, what is the position of a teacher? This is something we have to learn and to know. (G_T3_F)

Interpreters and mediators – as mentioned above – are important not only to enable communication between school, children and families. Moreover, considering teachers' experiences as well as expectations, their role also includes cultural mediation, providing information about different aspects of social life, school system, traditions etc. in the different countries of origin as well as supporting sensitivity and understanding according to the possible experiences or families and children during their escape to Europe.

And this is, from which we can benefit, when they have information about the countries of origin or possibly for themselves are educators or teachers, who escaped. This all can be useful, in exchange with each other. (G_T2_F)

However, the fact that interpreters as well as mediators in Germany usually do not work at dedicated schools often leads to problems such as their availability, the continuity of collaboration – which might impair the trustworthiness of the relation between school and families – or with respect to budget.

Another important resource in terms of cooperation is social workers, who represent a professional resource for different reasons. Because social workers also work in schools, cooperation between schools and social work not only occurs in the case of individual problems and the need for help and assistance.

We closely cooperate with the youth welfare office. Though it happens that we talk about with the office, but first we always speak with the parents. We try to find a good solution and possibly the youth welfare office provides proper support, a family worker. This opportunity exists. Support of a family worker, when a mother is a single parent and has to go to shift work. [...] Then she possibly needs a family worker, when she has two children and has to work in night shifts and there is no father, no husband or partner. (G_T4_F)

Regardless of such cooperation, which addresses more or less specific problems and needs, social workers – especially those working in schools – are considered as professional resource with different competencies and opportunities to work with children and families.

Yes, social workers are of a different nature. From time to time, I collaborated with the social worker of our school club, because I had massive problems with a particular class. Not according human level. They just could not calm down during lessons. Therefore, we

collaborated, went outside and beat each other with foam or something like that. This way we worked on our relationship. (G_T6_F)

Nevertheless, there are critical statements concerning the collaboration with social workers, especially within school. Teachers – and here quite often L2 teachers – criticize a lack of interest among teachers towards social workers and the opportunities of cooperation. Such experiences and perceptions prevent opportunities for children and families and sometimes affect L2 teachers.

We more or less closely collaborate with the social workers of the school, this works quite well. There is less contact to the teachers. This affects children, who go to a regular school and this is quite difficult for me. I have to know, what is important for the teacher, what I have to focus during my lessons, what are the current topics. According to this, the cooperation is not so good. (G_T4_F)

On the one hand, such experiences perhaps outline the old problem of the school as a rather closed institution that follows its own rules and practices and keeps other professions at a distance, if not outside. On the other hand, teachers described the importance of cooperation and collaboration with other professions and professionals in school. According to primary schools, after-school care – which in Germany usually is located within schools – plays an important role concerning migrant children's integration from the teachers' perspective.

However, of course, we need after school care. Not even as a place, but the educators, who continue during the afternoon what we started in the morning. Accordingly, we are interested in a close cooperation with our day care. On the other hand, colleagues at day care always were open to welcome children immediately. Of course, there are registration times, which are to be respected. But otherwise they also think that a child has the best chances to be integrated, to enhance language competencies, when it attends day care quickly. (G_T3_F)

A kind of best practice represents the opportunity to provide individual support and promotion at one place.

We have multifaceted, in quotes, tutoring offers, which means trainings such as language training, learning training. In some cases we invite experts like occupational therapists, speech therapists and so on to school, so that parents do not have to go somewhere with their children, rather they can be supported in many ways here in school. (G_T7_FF)

To sum up, cooperation of teachers regarding work with migrant children and their families has to face some problems like the availability of experts, budget or seemingly old-fashioned professional and institutional borders. If cooperation and collaboration works, it is multifaceted, includes professions and partners outside and inside school, and addresses different aims and needs, reaching from the idea of opening access to new experiences to support in case of individual challenges or problems.

Social Workers

Since the focus of the social workers is above all on networking and they do not understand integration as total assimilation but rather as linkage and needs orientation, they work together with many different inter-institutional cooperation partners. In particular, enabling people to help themselves and empowerment are also in the foreground when working with people with a migration background:

We then approached a youth club here [...] and had a brief exchange about the possibilities and then agreed with them that we would [...] come by with pupils from the DAZ class and

[...] visit the youth club. We simply showed them the place, played table tennis and table football, spent an afternoon and showed them that this place exists, that you can come here, that there is a holiday programme here and, um, yes, what you do with it is your decision, but we showed them that there is a place that is open and welcomes them, where there are also other people who they can get to know and with whom they can exchange ideas. (G_SW6_M)

In addition, contacts are established with state social aid and support programmes. The focus here is primarily on the exchange of information, cultural mediation and getting to know the institutions and their working methods, so that low-threshold access can be possible for the families, if required:

We also invited the Youth Welfare Office once, because when we talk about the Youth Welfare Office, our clients are immediately afraid of the Youth Welfare Office, our children and, and we then tried to correct that, why does the Youth Welfare Office come into play at all? And that's why we invited the Youth Welfare Office. They explained exactly how it works and so on, and these are topics that are not [dealt with] at all in our countries, for example. Yes? And that is important, to know about it. (G_SW8_F)

Cooperation with the Addiction Officer, who noticed that we have enormous access to the users, a culturally sensitive addiction prevention project. This will continue until the end of the YEAR. (G_SW9_F)

In addition to cooperation with state institutions, informal networks are also being expanded and evaluated as positive and supportive, because these networks might work preventively, provide support below an official intervention, and they can mediate to official agencies in case of more intensive need of assistance; for instance, to youth welfare offices, which regardless of their work sometimes are mentioned as strictly intervening.

What is often mentioned in our team discussions are support structures that are not state-run. Not the Youth Welfare Office, but external people who just drop by, who can be contacted, which is not immediately connected with fear ... The Youth Welfare Office is ... actually a good thing, they are actually there to support you, but the view there is: Ok, if the Youth Welfare Office is in, it can happen very quickly that the children are gone. ... and to have such an independent authority ... that only sees the parents as deficient, but says: Ok, we can somehow manage it together. (G_SW2_F)

Independent of these networks and cooperative relationships, social workers also report difficulties in cooperating with other institutions due to a lack of professional acceptance towards social work. Especially in schools, social work sometimes finds itself in a subordinate position, at best responsible for supporting individual difficulties and relieving everyday school life of such cases. In this context, the school sometimes refuses to share responsibility for the comprehensive support of migrant children, which can affect access to and the effectiveness of integration measures or programmes.

SW6: As I said, there is the youth migration service, there is a socio-educational counselling centre, there is a vocational counsellor, so these services exist.

I: And how do these programmes affect the children or are they well received?

SW6: Very little. But that also has to do with the staff at school, that [...] social work is very, very poorly accepted, very, very poorly communicated, and is often viewed rather pejoratively by the staff, because there is (-) yes, one can only speculate, a lack of competence or the question of why we need such social workers here at the school at all. (G_SW6_M)

Mediators

The starting point of the culture guide project was a network around the university. Later there was a good cooperation with the day care centre (municipal day care management). Developing good cooperation with other institutions was possible but needed staying power.

First tried to find something in their area and then found out that it wasn't that easy and then they had to find something quickly and during that time I found a counterpart at the daycare management level. (G_M1_F)

Impact of inclusive programmes on children/communities

Teachers

Teachers consider the impact of inclusive programs and activities regarding the school context in quite different ways, whereas explicit programs are perceived in a kind of framework for activities and experiences.

We are very active in exchange with other countries, participate actively in ERASMUS-program since many years. We had exchange with the United States and other countries. Beside ERASMUS we had further exchange with Finland and other countries. Our students where in almost all European countries, from Estonia to Romania, from Spain to France quite a lot. [...] We worked on a topic concerning refugees, integration and what is done within different countries in Europe. Values, traditions, morals etc. in these countries also where of interest. The diversity of Europe. (G_T1_M)

Participation in such programs might have an influence on the social climate in school and thus promote open-mindedness and initiatives of students and teachers regarding integration when the same teacher reported different examples of engagement and participation.

We worked together with a reception center, where students of ours gave tuition to children there and other things. We did many other initiatives. (G_T1_M)

However, if educators and teachers mention impact in a quite direct way regarding migrant integration, they refer to resident children as well as those with a migrant background.

We had once; the initiative came from this girl. She was Muslim, I do not know from which country. Moreover, here was a stage presented play last year. I actually cannot remember in detail, but I have seen this play by myself. Oh yes, its title was 'I am Muslim'. Muslim women did it. It was played in Theatre. And this girl initiated that these women came to us and made a performance for our students, for the older ones. Afterwards we had a discussion. (G_T5_F)

They joined with other students to initiate a student coffee shop in town. [...] They want to build a meeting place open for all students in the city. Cross-school, a meeting place for students. [...] For leisure time. It is currently discussed. The municipality provides rooms our students do not prefer. So, there is some struggle. However, most of the members of the city council basically agree. It is a question of costs. They already found a sponsor organization. (4_C_I_T)

In these examples, impact materializes as concrete actions and initiatives undertaken by pupils regarding migrant children, dialogue and integration. In a more general meaning, as these examples also demonstrate, participation, engagement, empowerment and self-confidence might be effects of integration programs or simply activities. Teachers' reports suggest that school – regardless of particular programs – should be shaped as a social context that enables social experiences, provides opportunities to encounter for building bridges into communities, develop and grow individually. It

is interesting that a migrant background in these contexts was mentioned differently, but overall seemed to have an important but somewhat subordinated impact.

And I think, this has a little more impact. I am a foreigner, yes? Children know me and trust me, yes? They come to me with their concerns, when there happened something bad at home, when they have a secret. I am the educator, and I am there for the children. But I am the foreigner. [...] Possibly I am the only foreigner the children actually know. I believe that when they go to school, when they are in foreign countries, they remember: I know a foreigner. Anyway, from where he comes, a foreigner is a foreigner. For me this is interesting and exiting that children have contact with a foreigner at this early stage of life. (G_T8_M)

But it is not important that somebody cares for the children. Of course, it is important. However, the thing is that children should stay in school as long as possible to have contact with the German language and to develop their social competencies. (G_T3_F)

Although these examples refer to a migrant background from different perspective, they focus on the individual development of children, the experience of diversity and thus the promotion of tolerance, respect, and open-mindedness.

And it is usual in our groups that new children are accompanied by a tutor. This works very nice. This is an older child or a child of the same age, it depends, who is responsible to show the newcomer, here is the place for your shoes, now we must go to brush our teeth etc. And this works fine with foreign children, who do not speak German, as well. Because our children know what is going on and they are proud as hell. They try to teach the other child. And children learn a language so quickly. So, it works. (G_T9_F)

Regarding this, school and other educational institutions might provide the institutional and social context that addresses children with or without a migrant background to convey experiences of mutual recognition, respect and tolerance.

Concerning children with a migrant background, besides dedicated educational efforts and impacts – e.g. second language learning – teachers and educators reflect on the impacts regarding building a social context, which might and should provide security, trust, and a sense of belonging to migrant children.

I believe that we took care of the children, who came to us, in a way, that they, I do not want to say repressed or forgot, surely not. But they are feeling well here, they are safe, found a new home and that was the plan. (G_T9_F)

And this girl told us when she was on a boat and then, I do not know, the boat seemed to overturn. It was very dangerous. All prayed and finally nothing happened. Then you recognize: Really? There must be a lot of trust that she tells us about, facing the whole class. This indicates a good relationship to her peers in class when she dares to do so. As a teacher, you are not prepared that something like this happens, right. It is quite moving sometimes. (G_T5_F)

However, teachers also reported quite critical perspectives upon school regarding the integration of migrant children and thus reflecting not only problematic aspects of school, but also certain given limitations that are difficult to overcome.

We are part of a greater context. Of course, we should prepare the child for the next step as good as possible. But it must be clear that we cannot prepare a child, who came to Germany at the age of ten, for the middle school or high school as we can do with a child, who was born in Germany. (G_T3_F)

Social Workers

Projects such as the Together Café – which takes place once a month – create a safe and trusting framework for transcultural exchange. People from different nationalities (e.g. from Germany, Eritrea, Syria and Afghanistan) meet and talk about previously-announced topics such as faith. The discussion is divided into workshops and accompanied by social work professionals. In order to facilitate a transcultural understanding, commonalities between the diverse cultures – in this case faiths – are first sought. This enables the participants to get to know diversity, recognize commonalities, get closer to each other, adopt different perspectives, and see common goals. This has a strong impact on living together and awakens the participants' need to engage further with the respective topic. Furthermore, this form of exchange contributes to feeling welcome and understood:

For many years now [...] we have been holding so-called Together-Cafés, where we meet very regularly, at least once a [year] [...] but this sometimes extends into the open area, where we simply discuss the topics further. [...] So I'll give you an example, last Saturday there were 18 people from Germany, Eritrea, [...] Syria, um Afghanistan. Men, women, children [...] and dedicated themselves to the topic: And what do you think? With the aim, so to speak, of getting close to each other, uh, in the question of whether there are not COMMON values? Whether faith is more disturbing or more helpful? So to talk very openly with each other. [...] So we had a very rigid Coptic Christian there, an Orthodox Christian from Eritrea, [...] uh, REALLY STRONG in his views and at the beginning with a great lack of understanding, why here in Germany/ [...] no one believes in God [...] And so what he then presented here as an insight, so in this conversation was enormous. So, that he realised that he believes in God [...] But the INTERESTING thing was that he said: "I have met SO many people. It didn't matter what they believed, [...] they were GOOD people. And he had NOT thought that was possible in 2015. (G_SW9_F)

Furthermore, the influence of social work support can empower migrant people and families to become self-reliant and empowered:

And there are some who, the parents have become a bit more independent. Only if there is a problem or something, I am a contact person. For example, the school can call me and say: Yes, it hasn't been clarified yet. We have talked to the family and so on. But not, um, (.) intensive support like at the beginning. With some families it's still like that because the parents themselves, it's also difficult for the parents themselves, what do you call it, to have everything in their hands and so on. But there are (clever?) parents, very strong parents, who in the end have almost all the work in their hands. (G_SW8_F)

Nonetheless, some opportunities for support or scope for action are not used and accepted as expected by the social workers. For example, it can be observed that in some cases the students do not take the opportunity to contribute and shape their own lives within the framework of participation, or that structures and network partners for people with a migration background are not taken seriously by locals – for example, by peers or superiors – but are rather devalued. This influences the uptake by pupils with a migration background.

But I also have the feeling that they don't really want to get involved because then somehow, for many, the identification with the school doesn't exist, the lack of a class network [...] and then of course the commitment doesn't grow out of that, so I know that there used to be a student council [...], but then it was partly a teacher-controlled or teacher-presented event, which is not the point of the thing, and when the responsibility was supposed to be handed over to the pupils, it fell asleep and nothing more happened, so, yes, pupils actually have possibilities, rights and things they can do, but they are not used

because they are not aware of it and because they are not really interested in putting a lot of time into it.. (G_SW6_M)

SW6: As I said, there is the youth migration service, there is a socio-educational counselling centre, there is a vocational counsellor, so these services exist.

I: And how do these programmes affect the children or are they well received?

SW6: Very little. But that also has to do with the staff at school, that [...] social work is very, very poorly accepted, very, very poorly communicated, and is often viewed rather pejoratively by the staff, because there is (-) yes, one can only speculate, a lack of competence or the question of why we need such social workers here at the school at all. (G_SW6_M)

Mediators

The “Kulturlotsen-programm” (culture guides program) project brought integration into the community, foreign (partly unqualified, but also masters and doctorates in other areas) accompanying women of academics at the university (often with temporary contracts).

The project was started as a part of the Dual Career Service in cooperation with the day care center Dresden), initially through German courses and a women's café, and later training as an educator and at the same time working as a cultural guide in day care centers, schools (forms and frequency vary depending on the provider/place of work).

In addition to the benefits for the women (and their husbands, the university and the city), the project aims to improve the school and pre-school situation of children with a migration background (sometimes over 50% migration background; very heterogeneous requirements), i.e. children support them in becoming independent together with their parents; Culturally (especially linguistically) familiar people welcome the children and accompany them and their parents:

And then we made a leap into vocational training with them.[...] Then they got a permanent employment contract in training [...] then they studied part-time, so they learned to be an educator ... with an international background (G_M1_F)

7. School during the pandemic

Situation of pupils during the pandemic

Teachers

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant a severe disruption in the social lives of most children (and adults). In 2020, day care centers and schools were temporarily closed for several months and only open for emergency care for children whose parents work in so-called system-relevant occupational groups. For pupils, this means that classes were cancelled, contacts with other children and teachers were restricted, and school material was reduced to a minimum (e.g. reduced to so-called main subjects such as math and German). Since education is a matter for the federal states, there are sometimes very different regulations from state to state, but also between different regions (e.g. depending on the incidence value). Overall, the reduction or the lack of contact with other children is perceived as one of the greatest stresses.

It's so difficult at the moment, because the children need this social contact. Because otherwise they become dull. But they also have to be able to touch each other or put their hand on their shoulder or fight a bit. (G_T5_F)

Regarding learning and accordant support, educators and teachers point to the variability, often also tied to factors such as migrant background and socioeconomic status. On the one hand, this addresses the digital equipment at home, on the other it is tied to the (non-)availability of parental support. Here, teachers see the danger that the gap further widens.

Well, that's what Corona has shown now. Therefore, it already started with the fact that there were children who had no devices at home. [...] So these are just so two girls. So one from Syria, the other from Vietnam, exactly. So they just didn't have computers at home. And then the lessons were online. Yes, we then organized tablets for these children from the school, but you only find that out when you call there and talk to the people. Uh, so it's noticeable: The child doesn't send any assignments. But, uh, this coming behind and not generalizing and saying: These are somehow lazy children who do nothing, but try to find out: Why doesn't the child do anything? Maybe because it can't / doesn't do anything. [...] But even / more dramatic is, I think, the situation then, so at least now been, uh, children who had a support at home, the parents, and children who were really on their own completely. And then, when such a child sits in front of such a computer, and there is some program, which it doesn't know yet, which it can implement, then it is very, very difficult. But I think we've had a really, really big lesson now, where we see what works, but also what doesn't work. (G_T5_F)

During the pandemic, different ways of communicating were established, mainly dependent on aspects such as teachers' capacities or attitudes towards communication technology.

But if the now to Corona, there I had now set up an e-mail address myself for the children, if they wanted, they could ask questions. Where I was approachable. [...] They then also had a high need to communicate, how things were going. And (.) that I then said, okay, watch out, I can also send something of/ from me every week. And then I always had a student in the class who was a contact person for me, so to speak, for the class WhatsApp group. (G_T6_F)

Educators and teacher reported that they seek contact by phone, expressing the peculiar circumstances of the pandemic.

So you also accompany the families, of course. That's clear, because, um, now just in the time, um, where we had online lessons, I have also phoned here, there, with the parents, also partly translate then the children. Not all parents speak German. So, um, it's / it's also, uh, about: What does the family itself need? So not only the child. (G_T5_F)

So I personally email. And, as I said, during the Corona period, I actually spoke to every child on the phone. And sometimes also with the parents, yes. But otherwise I wouldn't have done that. My privacy is also important to me. And I don't have to be available everywhere and, uh, for everyone all the time. (G_T5_F)

However, educators and teachers also observe positive side effects. For instance, due to the contact restrictions, one solution in day care centers and schools was to create smaller groups and classes. Sometimes, this resulted in an increase of cooperation and integration in these newly-formed groups. Accordingly, one DaZ teacher mentions:

At the moment we have, a compulsory community in a DAZ class. Because I HAVE to look after ten children, so that the group sizes are as small as possible, (...) and now of course constellations have formed that were unthinkable before, (...) [they] cooperate with each other, that really only works now (...). And yes, the children have to concentrate on each other, so they know that if they behave badly now, then of course it's also in the class, everyone sees that then (...). And they have to communicate with each other in a completely different ways. Our wish would be almost that it stays like that, but of course

that's utopian, because they can't just have math, German, and science, they also have to get other subjects again (G_T2_F)

They simply have more FREE space in the class, more room for maneuver, so to speak, and that definitely has an advantage, well, you notice that now also under Corona, because a few children are out, in the DAZ classes in that the class sizes are smaller (G_T2_F)

Not only the children benefit from the smaller groups, but the teachers also notice positive aspects of this new situation. For instance, the smaller classes and groups are easier to manage.

Well, as a teacher, it's quicker. Because they don't mix with lots of other classes in the schoolyard, and they can't spread out around the building so that you can't see them. (G_T2_F)

They are also acknowledged and reflected positively about their work with the children, as the following statement reveals.

If the DaZ lessons have to be cancelled more often, as is the case now, for example, due to corona, then a child often stands in front of me and asks, "When is DaZ?" and the experience is that the children enjoy the DaZ lessons because there they are picked up where they really are. (G_T3_F)

Another gain is that children are forced to become independent, as a day care educator details.

And that, I have to say, really works: And if you take the Corona time into account, our children have developed into independent beings, where the parents are flapping their ears. Therefore, they are left at the door and then they have to go to their groups on their own, so to speak. That's what they do, they don't even turn around to their parents. (G_T9_F)

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, in 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)

Social Workers

Socially-disadvantaged pupils often live and learn under difficult conditions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this has an even further negative effect. Social workers consider it important to offer children spaces to develop:

So now, through Corona, it's once again, as far as the education system is concerned, that it's simply that those who are already left behind are left even further behind. There would be a need, but I don't know how, but you would just have to change the education system, I don't know how, because we give tutoring once a week. A child is helped a little bit and I think it's incredibly important that there are spaces where they can be and be loud and be themselves and where they are simply accepted. I think that's very important, but you also have to be careful that you don't take yourself too seriously in your role. (G_SW2)

During the pandemic, it was also difficult for socially-disadvantaged children to network with each other in peer groups, exchange ideas and receive social support:

Emotionally and socially that is for sure, academically, for some yes, but that are actually those who already have relatively good grades and relatively few problems in the school system. For them. [...] [who don't get along well with the school system] there is, I think, little support among themselves. (G_SW4_F)

For this reason, it could be that pupils with a migration background have become increasingly withdrawn and distanced from locals and other pupils. Daily life mainly took place within their own

families. There was a lack of social interaction and the challenge of learning and practicing a new culture and language:

Of course, they stay in their own families and their language skills suffer, their ability to integrate suffers and perhaps this distance is built up that should not actually be there. (G_SW6_M)

Language deficits, in the national language of children with a migration background, are the result:

Children, especially after the Corona period, when school started again, it was very frightening [...] that they really forgot their German words, which they actually already knew WELL or better before. (G_SW7_F)

From the social workers' perspective, a positive aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting hygiene regulations and spacing rules is that educational settings comprise smaller groups. Accordingly, a professional can focus on the needs and resources of fewer children and has time to respond to them. This has a positive effect on strengthening the relationship between the teacher and pupil:

And [I] started giving online lessons [...], i.e. one-to-one lessons, [...] I [tried] to reach everyone. And a few [...] wanted to work with me. And then I started [...] to work on the tasks that [...] were set by our school with them and to somehow convey the feeling that there is someone there who directly supports them even in times of Corona. And I have also achieved quite good results with this, especially with regard to the bond between the pupils and me. (G_SW6_M)

Measures taken

Teachers

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a restriction period during which teaching and work has been paused or even stopped. Furthermore, additional activities such as excursions and field trips were cancelled, and possibilities of interaction and exchange with pupils, colleagues and parents such as class councils, joint meetings, or parents' cafes were stopped. One challenge – especially at the beginning of the pandemic – was to find ways to stay in touch. This issue shows great differences between schools and teachers. While some report that the contact with their students has increased, other admit to having little or even no contact. Some educators and teachers tried new ways of making contact, such as emails or letters to parents. They either organized these different types of communication themselves or used school-based ways such as digital platforms or parents' representatives as a mouthpiece.

At the beginning I didn't know anything about the digital learning platform ... and that's when I made the first exchange via letters to parents. ... all the parents have my email addresses, they also have my telephone number, but very few of them have contacted me. I asked my parents' representative for an assessment and she wrote to me about what works with the tasks and what doesn't. Otherwise, I have no further contact there. (G_T1_M)

Educators and teachers claim that the responsiveness differs, ranging from parents who are very interested to a majority who are difficult to reach.

We then only exchanged via email, but there were only two parents who were also interested, who also wrote regularly. (G_T2_F).

This also affects their children, for instance, when the parental consent is needed to establish alternative communication channels.

It would have been good, I would say, to have a fixed time and to say, okay, now you can get in touch with each other. And not just me WITH YOU, but me with the students, but: and that's what I did, that I then suggested to connect certain children with each other, by saying, I ask the parents if I can give the phone number and that the children can exchange via WhatsApp. Or even then again meet in the park in pairs so they just have to practice talking. That actually also worked in a constellation, but again only with two children. So they actually communicated via WhatsApp, they then met. That was again such a small success, but of course that only works if the parents say, we also want that, we also support that (G_T2_F)

Digital learning is viewed skeptically by educators and teachers, whereby most do not want this to permanently replace tried and tested methods and approaches and they have fears about the future of teaching. A majority of teachers also admit that they were not prepared for the digital learning.

So I suspect that knowledge will continue to decline. That is, what we used to call general knowledge. Because at the moment the prevailing opinion is that they only need to know (...) how they can acquire the knowledge. But the knowledge itself they don't need anymore. ... These are two fears that I have. The overemphasis on digitalization and the fact that the lessons are so unsystematic that the students become even more disoriented. (G_T1_M)

This challenges are also ascribed to the parents, especially those with migrant background

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)

Migrant parents as well as children were not only not prepared for online learning but also faced difficulties regarding language proficiency in German according to online content management systems, etc. They criticize the fact that many households are not sufficiently equipped.

Then there has to be the possibility that every child in the family has such a thing, and if six children go to school, then six children have to have such a tablet. However, as I said, at the moment I don't see the Internet. Um, some of them are fighting over the devices at home. (...) The transmission speeds we have here in Germany are far behind what I experienced in Mozambique in the village or at sea, I would say. So I was really amazed at the standard we have here and we are, as an Internet-tuned nation. (G_T2_F)

However, educators and teacher also perceive positive side effects of the pandemic. For instance, they have time for further education and administration matters, which often otherwise always fell away to the rear.

We have of course now had other opportunities, when we were at home in the time off from school, to tackle certain things (...) we are now taking care of certain other things that have otherwise been left undone (...) And now we simply had a bit of time for research and could simply look again perhaps in old teaching documents (G_T2_F)

Moreover, the pandemic also provided insights into their work; for instance, on the importance of parental work, as the following statement of a day care educator demonstrates:

We had in the Corona time where the parents come in here, I always wrote a weekly review for the parents, emailed it, and I have one Indian child, where the parents only English and then I actually translated that again for them. You don't have to do that, but it was like that for me, I had taken over the child, after two and a half years it was in, with another kindergarten teacher and she said to me, this is now the first time that I'm getting anything at all from the kindergarten everyday life. So really. Because we had translated it into English and in the parent interview there was also an interpreter. And then I thought, "Oh, that's actually really crass. They come here and know / hand over their child and des / don't get anything at all. That was such an eye-opener, where I thought there has to be a lot more parental work. (G_T10_FFFF)

Social Workers

To limit the further spread of the pandemic, various hygiene regulations and distance rules are observed. Work, school and life are increasingly taking place online. For this reason, social work tries to digitally empower people with a migration or refugee background to enable them to participate, including with a view to the future:

So now one of the focal points is also digital EMPOWERMENT, because we have noticed how little this is developed and how much it is necessary, i.e. pandemic-related and so on. [...] contacts that one has to CONNECT in a different way or to develop skills that are still necessary there. (G_SW9_F)

Mediators

Due to their different structural link to schools, mediators' opportunities and strategies to work with migrant children during pandemic situations have differed. At least one interviewed mediator reported to work with children in smaller groups or one to one, supporting them in doing homework by phone or by organizing some kinds of social events like a painting contest.

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

Not at the moment, because there has been no contact with parents since Corona and then I started supporting children one-on-one in math. (G_M3_FFF)

Organize events, but now, with Corona, it's a bit different and uh, [...] we organized a painting competition. (G_M3_FFF)

8. Recommendations

The following remarks in this chapter summarize the recommendations of the professionals from the previous chapters, and the deficits or difficulties mentioned, which we formulate as relevant challenges in the ductus of the professionals. We first name the challenges and then present the recommendations (sometimes several recommendation for one challenge). Since all references follow directly from the previous chapters, we have only added a few quotations here again.

Teachers

(a) Challenge: Tension between recognizing the individuality of all students and teachers and the necessary, specific support for children with a migration background due to negative effects of migration (trauma, language problems). Language problems are particularly important here. For teachers, they do not show up so much in everyday life, but rather in understanding scientific texts. The use of the mother tongue in class is controversial.

Recommendation: Teachers want specific further training to meet the challenges caused by migration, which also includes methods of multilingual schooling.

Recommendation: Regarding work with children, the individuality of each child can be addressed by referring the subject matter or teaching methods to the children's world.

Learning the German language is a prerequisite for successful hybrid integration. Special classes (L2 or preparation classes) have proven themselves. These classes provide not only the opportunity of language learning, but also 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 they provide opportunities to experience social integration. However, it is sometimes also stated that there is a risk of segregation and stigmatization and thus, when being the substantial platform of supporting migrant children's integration, an obstacle for dialogue and hybrid integration. Promoting processes of hybrid integration and opportunities of intercultural learning as well as building hybrid identities, L 2 class contexts might be opened for all children regardless to their migrant background.

(b) Challenge: Teachers and educators see it as their responsibility to enable children with a migrant background by providing an optimal education. In doing so, they feel a great burden, in particular due to different school systems, learning attitudes and knowledge of the requirements in Germany. This includes ideas about children's independence and participation.

Recommendation: Looking at the big picture programs to ensure social security on a material basis is important, because they guarantee children's participation in school. Promoting the integration of children requires a broad and differentiated spectrum of approaches, programmes and activities, of which schools are one part. Accordingly, schools and teachers essentially play an important role in migrant children's integration. To play this role properly, dedicated programs are necessary, useful and important, but it also needs adequate structural conditions and eventually substantial relationships to families and institutions outside school.

Recommendation: Participation, independence (e.g. regarding family) and independence should be approached as an independent task of the training.

In my eyes, it is also a task of the elementary schools to educate children to be independent.(...) I usually always start with traditional ... frontal teaching // where the children work individually. And then the next stage is partner work. And the next but one stage is then group or // small group work. (G_T3_F)

Recommendation: The willingness to participate should always be supported in practice, e.g. in representative bodies, in far-reaching decision-making processes to which as many children as possible are invited. Promoting children's participation with regard to migrant children means, considering them as agent, able to actively contribute to social life in school, which at least means enhancing opportunities of dialogue and hybrid integration.

Recommendation: School and teachers should have sufficient resources available for this integration work (smaller classes, pre-school for day care; specific further education or training for teachers).

(c) Challenge: Success at school is often at risk given that parents neither capture the organization and requirements of the German school system nor the specifics of the social challenges.

Recommendation: There should also be a pre-school for parents or corresponding forms of contact and trust-building. There is a width in ways of incorporating parents ranging from doorway conversations to a parents' café (e.g. presentations on certain topics) and parents' school (e.g. offering information on school and the formulation of expectations).

(d) Challenge: Gender-specific problems are not mentioned as a general distinguishing feature at school, whereas the family influence of gender tends to be.

I just always have to make sure that they don't come home with ideas where they then get terrible problems at home? Then with their parents, too. Yes, it is sometimes a culture shock for the children and you have to be a bit sensitive about it. (G_T2_F)

Recommendation: There should be offers to work sensitively with parents about this, but at the same time it must be seen that gender stereotypes are often deeply rooted in society and have to be solved there.

Social Workers

(a) Challenge: Language deficits or gaps in language acquisition and practice. The greatest challenge for the children's integration and agency is language deficits. They make communication, learning and working together more difficult.

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

(b) Challenge: Prejudice and discrimination. Migration is seen as a deficit, and migration is used as the main differentiator for people.

Recommendation: Demonstrate empathy, individual perception and respect for individuals and what they have already achieved. Professionals should be enabled to apply this in a targeted manner, whereby it is urgent to offer supervision and reflection in the team.

(c) Challenge: Finding one's own identity, whereby the major danger in the integration process is to reduce other people to supposed cultural or gender characteristics.

Recommendation: Show openness in all interactions with children as well as parents. It is important to enable encounters between cultures/individuals and gently moderate these encounters if necessary. This also applies to gender differences and gender roles. The professionals often see boys as dominant in group situations, but girls are often much more open to new projects and exchange opportunities. This is to be seen individually and accordant activities to be strengthened.

Recommendation: Understand integration as a two-way process. Therefore, name misunderstandings and irritations without stigmatizing. Personal perspectives are important and should be allowed. Mutual perspective and needs should be made visible. Solutions can only be found together.

(d) Challenge: The school puts performance requirements before social integration.

Recommendation: Expand social work in schools. The school should revise its strict performance orientation in favor of participation, agency and recognition. There should be an acceptance of projects that are holistically promoting integration (e.g. transition from school to professional life).

Recommendation: Provide rooms and use the social environment. Small groups and one-to-one support are beneficial for integration and personal development, as well as learning success. Moreover, if necessary, enable gender-homogeneous groups, in personal issues can be discussed. Use of the social environment (e.g. classmates) to reduce fear is necessary.

(e) Recommendation: Make use of cooperation with other institutions.

Cooperation facilitates the integration of children, but also facilitates and improves the work of one's own institution; It is important to involve migrant self-initiatives and the civic communities. It is recommended to expand networks, including to enable better project funding. There is strong potential here for the integration of families. Networks and cooperation with migrant self-organizations also offer the potential to encounter and overcome prejudice and discrimination.

(f) Learning from the coronavirus period

The restrictions of the coronavirus period show the already problematic situation of integration in classes that are too large, under a poorly-organized exchange culture and under spatial limitations.

Recommendation: It was recognized that direct encounters and smaller groups significantly improve learning and integration success.

Mediators

Challenge: Misunderstanding in the communication is not only a language problem but also a cultural problem. Sometimes misunderstanding reaches deep into social relationships and appreciation. In everyday life at school and day care centers, different cultural interpretations and values often make integration difficult, which is particularly evident when it comes to eating together, belonging to the family, and religion.

Recommendation: Find common solutions through participation (e.g. for meals or religious festivals). Finding a solution helps optimally to understand! Note: Eating seems to be marginal for integration, but this is not the case at all, because the sense of taste is also otherwise the decisive sense in social distancing, since it starts directly with our self-image (Barlösius 2000).

Recommendation: 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.

Recommendation: The most important and urgent requirement is an elaborated kind of understanding (Wilcke 2009). Understanding has to be seen as a multidimensional, multifaceted and mutual process.

The dimensions are as follows:

- Child – day care centers /school (the children understand the education system; school understands the children's situation and their behavior)
- Child – other children (Children can play and learn with each other, regardless of their origin)
- Parents – day care centers/school (the parents understand the education system, especially the tasks of the educators and the methods of education / upbringing)
- Parents – own child (the parents learn that their child is facing new tasks; the child is supported in this)
- Teacher/pedagogues – child, parents (the teachers recognize their task of integrating children and parents and have the opportunity and support to acquire the necessary skills)

The facets are as follows:

- Behavior (especially greeting, eating, learning)
- Expectations (support, activities, responsibilities, participation, agency)
- Role models (child, parents, pedagogues, kita/school, teacher; gender roles)

It is not only understanding on the side of those who have come, it is also LEARNING to understand, also on the side of those who were here, [...] because they make room for the

other, make compromises of their own or renounce their own or realize that is not important to me at all. I mean all of this as understanding (G_M1_F)

The mediators pled for a continuous process with the following steps:

Step 1: Children feel welcomed and can create trust (language, familiar habitus and trustworthy person).

Step 2: Parents are involved in the integration process of their children and at the same time they too are integrated.

Step 3: The educators recognize that they too have to think about their identity and thus promote integration.

Step 4: In common practice, role models are developed that enable the optimal integration of all children.

9. Conclusions

Key findings

What is needed first is a practice and atmosphere of mutual understanding. This is never seen as a one-way street, but rather everyone involved should be included. The groups of professionals see this as a common task, and combine different emphases depending on the profession.

Teachers think first of school success, which can only be achieved if teachers as well as pupils and parents how learning should or could be achieved.

Social workers focus on forms of co-existence in terms of recognition and respect. The aim is here is the identity of the children.

Based on their own experience, mediators strongly advocate a cultural understanding. The aim is mutual support and peaceful living together. Mediators and teachers with an own migration background complain daily about subtle racism in any direction (child – child; child – teacher/mediator; pedagogies - parents – pedagogies).

The insights and results make it clear that when considering challenges in the educational work with children with a migration background, considerations are necessary that go beyond, as it were, classic narratives of integration promotion and the conditions and prerequisites necessary for this. This also concerns the perception of children with a migration background and pedagogical accompaniment and support. The results indicate that professionals on the one hand – consciously – focus on migrant children equal to non-migrant children to support their hybrid integration. On the other hand, the migration related demands and issues do not lose their educational relevance. However, the insights show that professionals do not necessarily differentiate between children with and without a migration background with regard to agency and participation. This means, on the one hand, that opportunities of promoting hybrid integration come into focus here, regarding dialogue and promoting (migrant) children's participation. On the other hand, ways of thematizing migration and corresponding needs of support and thus to secure preconditions of participation and integration become important, which can be described theoretically and practically with the concept of hybrid integration and thus can provide a reference concept dealing with the tensions within the practice of diversity. Because finally, the participatory attitude of promoting participation and hybrid integration children with a migrant background is best achieved through diverse practice:

- in class through step-by-step participatory methods and through participation in finding topics for special offers
- in school / daycare through students' council committees
- in the municipality and region through internships, visits to politicians / managers and through regional explorations (small research projects).

All three areas require the design, supervision and moderation of the pedagogies or teachers!

Learning the German language remains the declared basic goal of integration. However, different language skills should in no way become an obstacle to integration. This is why all forms of non-linguistic integration (music, art, sport / movement) are to be used. Moreover the children's own mother language should be used as a source of strength for learning German.

The integration of the children only works with the integration of the parents, which requires time, resources and opportunities for exchange in school and day care. Furthermore, parent integration only runs through mutual understanding processes (not through messages, information, rule references).

Finally, the integration of the children only takes place through 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.

Situation of migrant children in the era of Covid-19

Due to the impact and safety regulations of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools and day care centers were often closed or only opened for emergency care. Contact with family members outside the household and with friends had to be suspended, and classes were held at a distance. This means that the subjects were partly taught online and partly with the help of worksheets. A strong variability between day care centers and school existed; for instance, regarding methods applied and contact with students and parents. This was particularly challenging for children from socially-disadvantaged families, but also for children who did not yet have a good command of the language of instruction (German).

In the interviews, pupils with migration background and refugee experience were reported as not having the necessary materials and infrastructure (e.g. internet access, computer, printer or similar) to work on tasks or participate in online seminars. Some children and families with a migration background found it difficult to contact the school themselves. The reasons for this could be language barriers, shame, no hope of support, or uncertainty in the unknown pandemic situation.

At the same time, it was also difficult for professionals to reach children and parents during the lockdown. Some professionals have tried to maintain contact with their students and their parents via chats, phone, emails and letters. Children often had to translate and mediate between their teachers and parents in these cases, ascribing them a huge responsibility.

For children with migration-related language difficulties, it is also difficult to understand and work on the tasks given by the school. Often, their parents are also still learning German and can give them little support. Teachers and classmates are more difficult to reach and cannot be asked for help spontaneously.

Social support, exchange and playing together in per groups was hardly possible during the pandemic. Children with migrant background became increasingly withdrawn and distanced from locals and other pupils. They spend most of their time with the part of the family that lives in the same household, which often are smaller, more crowded, and worse regarding equipment. The mother tongue is spoken there. This resulted in a lack of social interactions with locals and a lack of practice of the German language. However, both active exchange and regular listening and speaking of the national language can contribute to successful integration.

In the interviews, it was repeatedly emphasized that the smaller group sizes that have arisen due to the hygiene measures – both in school and leisure and counseling offers – are especially helpful for children with a migration background. Due to the smaller groups, the needs and abilities of the respective children can be more intensively addressed and promoted.

Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research

In the theoretical preparatory work, integration was seen as a two-sided process of those present and those who were added. It was defined as a common learning process and design process. The professionals have a fairly good overview of the integration process for children with a migration background and their parents. They concentrate on the respective area of their profession. Some also see that they are part of the integration process.

The goal of making children independent and responsible people is recognized by everyone. Every profession tries to explore and try out ways of participation, whereby there is often talk of step sequences and additional methods.

The success of integration is seen very strongly and directly dependent on the relationship with the parents and the family, while having a migration background or social disadvantage is rated much lower. Gender disadvantage is rarely mentioned and then it also relates to family involvement. On the other hand, racism is often reported, which is particularly attached to externalities (darkness of the skin; clothing, food). Racist behaviour is also reported by children with an own migration background and it is also directed against educators (including women here). This makes it clear that mutual understanding and tolerance must be vigorously promoted.

The child's perspective (cf. the four-pen diagram in Chapter 1.2, interview format) is hardly taken up by the professionals, most likely by the mediators. Thus, the focus is already on the interviews with the children.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: ITALY

1. Methodology

The research team invited the class teachers involved in the project, as well as some educators in charge of activities within the project, to participate in interviews. Almost all the teachers/educators contacted agreed to participate, meaning that participants were almost entirely the same as those that took part in the 2019 survey (WP4, Milestone 10). In only a few cases were the teachers interviewed working in the same school but not with the same class that participated in the first phase. Some additional teachers leading activities in the classroom in WP6 were interviewed in Genoa. Mediators, community educators, and social workers also participated in the survey. Almost all the interviews with teachers/educators, as well as some interviews with mediators, were conducted during the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown (Spring 2020). These individuals were working from home but were willing to be interviewed. Involving social workers, community educators and some mediators was more difficult however, since they were faced with a radical reorganization of both their work schedule and workload as a result of the pandemic. Some mediators and educators working in reception centres were therefore interviewed at the end of the school year. In order to meet their needs, individual interviews were carried out with educators working in reception centres, rather than in focus groups as was foreseen.

Professionals were contacted either via email or phone to check their availability and make the necessary arrangements. Interviews were carried out remotely, either over the phone or using digital platforms such as Google Meet and Skype. Many respondents appreciated the opportunity to take the time to stop and reflect on their own educational practices and on their students/clients. This part of research involved a total of 77 professionals divided as outlined in Table 1 below.

TABLE 8: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

	Tot al	Mal es	femal es	Migran ts	Moden a	Reggio Emilia	Genov a
Teachers/educato rs	43	1	42	-	19	11	13
Staff in reception centres	6	4	2	1	2	1	3
Social Workers	6	-	6	-	2	4	-
Mediators	22	3	19	21	9	9	4

2. Professional experiences – an overview

This section concerns the professional and educational background of teachers, educators, social workers and mediators, their experience in working with migrant children in terms of tasks and roles, as well as opportunities for the development and upgrading of skills.

Teachers

Of the teachers taking part in this survey, most had many years of experience, ranging from 10 to 41 years, except for two who had worked respectively for 2 and 5 years. The number of years of experience in their current school was more varied, ranging from 2 to 35 years. Excluding ISCED0 teachers, the majority teach the humanities, with a minority teaching scientific subjects, with a few single teachers teaching English, French, Religious Education, and Physical Education. One was a support teacher. Four teachers have changed subject since the start of their employment in their current school: three were, or have become, support teachers, and one had been a pedagogist and a facilitator for migrant children for 6 years.

Five educators have 9 to 13 years of experience working with facilitative methods with children of all school grades, and one had 20 years of experience as a teacher. A psychologist and two Italian L2 language teachers have 15 to 17 years of experience working on integration, mediation, facilitation and wellbeing of ISCED1 and ISCED2 children.

All teachers had significant experience with migrant children: there are migrant children in all their classes, and with one exception they have always had migrant children in their classes. The number of migrant children is quite high in all classes with quite a fair gender distribution. In almost all classes, the percentage ranges from 30% to 90%, with a prevalence of children from Sub-Saharan Africa, Maghreb and Eastern Europe. In some areas (in the province of Modena and in Reggio Emilia), Chinese, Pakistani and Indian children are also numerous, while in Genoa, the Romany component is high. The highest percentages and variety of origins (up to 18 countries) can be found in ISCED0 and ISCED1 schools, as well as the schools in city centres. The lowest percentages are seen in peripheral schools, ISCED2 and some ISCED3 schools, especially the later stage classes at which point schools provide midway certificates. According to the teachers, the composition of migrant children has changed over time: while ten to twenty years ago migrant children were mainly newcomers, they now belong to the second-generation or, at least, have attended school in Italy for many years, while there are few newcomers who have come to Italy through family reunification. Mixed couples also are well represented. Finally, there is a trend for sending Chinese children in Reggio Emilia to school back in China for the first school years in order to learn Chinese, returning to Italy when they are 10-12 years old. Most of the teachers highlighted variations in the composition of migrant students in their classes depending on the position of the school (more in cities than countryside), the type of school for ISCED3 (more in vocational schools than in high schools), and time.

Respondents declared their surprise at migrant children's will, capability, determination, adaptability and personal resources, once linguistic barriers are overcome. They talked especially about seeing their positive attitude and open mindedness, "As soon as the language problem is somehow solved, these children are very resourceful, willing to learn but, above all, highly skillful. Foreign children

are often the most meta-cognitive children” (IT_T13_F). Moreover, respondents stressed the satisfaction and gratitude expressed by both children and parents, including migrant parents’ interest, trust and respect for their job. However, the educator with a migrant background underlined her surprise and regret that some migrant children rejected their origins and language in order to conform and be accepted by others in the classroom. Some teachers emphasized that in their experiences with migrant children the personal aspect is predominant.

Of the young people who have emigrated abroad, "emigrated" is only one of the many things which characterize them, so, as well as that, there are many others [...] just the attitude to study, the motivational drive of the family, etc. so because the factors are many, let's say I had all kinds of experiences. (IT_T24_M)

Other teachers seemed more interested in performance and evaluation, showing surprise and satisfaction at migrant children’s approach to learning and achievement. The same view is even more evident in terms of the challenges that teachers face when teaching migrant children, in particular language barriers. These performance-centred teachers cite the challenges of low language ability, even for second-generation children (those born in Italy), and their slowness in learning.

In contrast, person-centred teachers stressed the challenge of language barriers only in relation to newly arrived migrants and to problems of creating dialogue and trusting relationships with them and their families. Some person-centred teachers, particularly in ISCED0 and ISCED2-3 schools, observed that, apart from newcomers, there are no problems with migrant students as they are either too young or to have language problems or too educated.

Some teachers explicitly stressed the importance of adopting a person-oriented approach, “Ensuring these children and young people are considered as all-rounders in the eyes of other teachers, as bearers of experience therefore, bearers of languages, bearers of something, or rather a lot, that the teachers do not know and do not see.” (IT_T21_F). This approach reflects a teaching strategy which is not based on content but on competencies and on personalized evaluations:

When very traditional teaching is used, based on content and not on competence, these children are lost, not least because the content we give them is often culturally distant from their experiences. (IT_T13_F).

They have to be assessed for what they can do, you cannot ask them what they cannot do. So not in a standardized way but in a more flexible way. (IT_T21_F)

Social workers

Three groups of social workers were interviewed. A first group included social workers supporting migrant families with economic and/or accommodation challenges, adoptions or custody cases, and training for guardians. A second group included educators working within reception centres. The third group included social workers working with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC; in the Italian system (Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati – MSNA). UASC includes two groups of children: those who have arrived as asylum seekers and those who have arrived via networks of migrants and have autonomously self-reported to the police, declaring themselves to be minors not in the care of any adults.

Six out of twelve interviewees have at least ten years of experience in the field, one has twenty two years of experience, three started working in 2019.

Both social workers who work with UASC and social workers working with families, usually work in teams, with educators and psychologists. The main task of the social workers working with families is a relational one, thus they frequently interview families and visit their houses. They write reports for legal authorities and coordinate with other services (schools, health services). They frequently attend network meetings with educators, mental health centres, schools, public bodies dealing with drug addicts, and courts. Their main task is to monitor and support situations of parenting fragility, supporting both parents and children. They support both parents who have spontaneously sought their help and families that have been reported by the juvenile courts, the police, schools or health services. They are usually in charge of cases for at least one year. The majority of families they work with have a migrant background and most of them come from Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Georgia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Social workers working with UASC also have relational tasks. They deal with stories of migration and help children to reconstruct their migration stories. Most of these children are from Albania, Maghreb and Pakistan, but this changes over time. Other relevant tasks relating to UASC are administrative and legal, e.g., providing documents required for residency permits as well as interrogation and reports for juvenile courts. Schooling and health are dealt with in the reception centres, with social workers only collecting signatures from children's tutors. Another task is organizing the coordination with reception centres.

The educator working in reception centres in Modena described her main task as being coordination: she observes the work of other educators and listens to their opinions and programme choices. One educator is usually always inside the centre managing routine processes while a second manages external tasks. These educators also keep track of the relationship with social workers to monitor children's inclusion within their educational projects, any challenges they face and more generally, administrative tasks. Other educators who manage the centres coordinate children's individual projects, including administrative work and relationships with schools, volunteering, work, police stations, social services, and health services. The team organizes and manages all children's daily activities.

Social workers dealing with UASC told us that they are offered opportunities to increase their professional knowledge albeit without any economic support, so they undertake training if they have a personal interest and the economic means. Some training can be funded, however. Only one social worker dealing with families specified that both institutional training and external opportunities exist. The opportunity to have more *ad hoc* training opportunities (also with a focus on cultural aspects) is considered important by many respondents. One educator working in a reception centre in Reggio Emilia is satisfied with training and claims that the city offers several options. Many social workers and educators said that engaging in systematic dialogue is important. Educators also claimed the importance of systematic supervision and coordination between centres. In Genoa, supervision is supported by psychotherapists and the opportunities for training seem more structured than in the two cities in Emilia Romagna, although in Genoa too, social workers sometimes have to pay for training since decisions as to whether or not to fund these opportunities is taken by their cooperatives.

Mediators

Mediators are usually engaged in three areas of intervention: schools, social services and health services. Their overall goal is the promotion of the integration of migrant communities and facilitating

communication between them and the host country. Four out of twelve respondents have more than 15 years of experience in the field, with three starting work in this area in the last two years.

The task of mediators is facilitating relationships between families, students and schools, “Facilitating the relationship between the pupil's family, the pupil and the school, promoting the pupil’s culture but also the culture of the host country [...] valuing languages, specifically their own language, is often an important point in the work, valuing multilingualism” (IT_F7_M_2_F). One mediator defined this as an important “cultural responsibility”: “it is a responsibility because you are this tool that the school can use [...] to show the positive side of a culture that is perhaps seen as inferior or in any case a culture not close to our own” (IT_F8_M_2_F).

Mediators are frequently asked to support newcomers, but also second-generation children manifesting difficulties relating to (1) prolonged language learning problems requiring evaluation to understand the underlying reasons, and (2) difficulties with relationships which require inclusion within the class to be facilitated. “They are assigned to us to see why they have not yet acquired the level of behaviour required by the school let's say, we observe and then we help them” (IT_F3_M_3_F).

In Genoa, mediators work with newcomers and in projects of intercultural and educational mediation with the whole class.

Basically, we work with so-called new arrived children on small projects of maximum ten hours, whereas intercultural educational mediation projects mainly involve workshop-type activities with larger projects in terms of hours because we may cover an entire school. (IT_F7_M_1_F)

Currently, specific and focused projects on intercultural and educational mediation are less frequent in Modena and Reggio Emilia where mediators are usually involved in specific situations. They support the inclusion of newcomers and recently, and more frequently, undertake annual meetings with parents or meetings to discuss behavioural issues concerning the child with parents; “We are called when needed, let's say, especially during report card time or for student orientation” (IT_F4_M_1_F).

According to some mediators, there has been a reduction of activities in which they are involved, mainly the result of lack of economic resources. Some claim that they are now only involved in severe cases and frequently at a late stage when problems have already developed significantly. Sometimes, some teachers ask for their help when they meet the families of newcomers, in order to understand their past educational experiences.

When the teacher wants to understand, she calls you in during the first interview with the family to understand the schools the child previously went to, why they came, why they left their country and came here, just some information so that the school can understand in order to move forward with the child. (IT_F4_M_2_F)

Moreover, mediators can be involved in conversations with teachers about aspects of the cultural context from which children come.

For example, I was called in for a discussion with the teaching staff to explain some things that they do not understand on a cultural level [...] All this is to avoid building prejudices that are in fact the result of misunderstanding or cultural divergence that can later turn into conflict. (IT_F5_M_3_FM)

Mediators meet teachers, discuss children with them and plan their attendance in order to support these children. They also meet parents and, for some mediators, organizing a meeting with parents at the beginning of the support process is extremely important.

So when I make plans in the diary with teachers, we put in at least one hour's meeting with the parent because, although it's true that we have a form which includes [...] the biography of that pupil, sometimes it is better to also hear certain things from the parents, (it's important also for) a parent to understand that there is also an additional individual who comes to school support his child. (IT_F2_M_2_F)

As a result of the pandemic, mediators have had to adapt their work to an online learning mode. For some, online learning has had some positive side effects such as greater communication with teachers and more indications about the work needed with children.

Now that schools are closed, we do video lessons on Whatsapp for two girls. I have already started with one and the teacher sends me the activities on Whatsapp, she says, "do this together" and I explain it first in Turkish, then in Italian. (IT_F1_M_3_F)

Some mediators said they might also be involved in observing the newcomers to evaluate whether their behaviours highlight any potential learning or cultural problems.

According to some mediators, the main goal of their support concerns enabling children's social inclusion which is important because teachers are much more concerned with the acquisition of language skills than with relational wellbeing, "The responsibility is to calm the child down [...] to help him accept others and also to help him to be accepted by others" (IT_F1_M_1_F).

For this reason, in Genoa, the mediators specified that their work focuses on the whole class and not just on the individual student. This work is supported by the observation of children, their classmates and teachers. This work with the whole class is necessary in order to construct a shared experience as a starting point to enhance relationships.

In the first few hours we observe everybody a little bit, both the school environment which the child has been placed into, as well as the child and the teacher [...] then we communicate the observations to the teacher, we talk to her and we plan how we will intervene both in terms of the child and the class, because we are not only focused on him, he has been placed within a class group, so doing one of the activities with the whole class helps more than only with the particular pupil. [...] We do bilingual readings so that the other pupils can hear the child's language right from his own mouth. Then, starting from a reading, you talk about something else, sometimes you talk about the language, about the differences [...], sometimes we talk about the country, about cultural aspects of the pupil's country of origin, he can even present it himself, together with me in Romanian and in Italian and so on, we show pictures, we play music. (IT_F7_M_2_F)

This resonates with one of the topics that recurred most frequently during the interviews: how, on a practical level, time is managed with the child, whether inside or outside the classroom, "When I see that they have already understood how the school works, I take them in to understand the rules of the classroom" (IT_F3_M_3_F). Depending on the school grade or general context, some mediators may feel it is important that the child remain within the class rather than being taken outside for mediation, especially with children in kindergarten or in their first years of primary school. Other mediators asserted that this decision should be negotiated with the teacher. In general, this is a relevant topic because, according to some mediators, these decisions have important consequences for the extent to which children are included in a class.

We should pretty much always be in the classroom. It's obvious that sometimes being away from the classroom helps everybody. So for, example, in the first hour with a particular child, I personally prefer to be alone with him, if there is a climate in the classroom whereby I can talk to him, in an empathic way, I can also be in the classroom, for example with kindergarten children you can't go out of the classroom, it doesn't make sense at all, with first grade children it doesn't make sense for me to take them out of the classroom either, but with older pupils chatting with them for that hour of initial acquaintance outside the classroom, it helps. And so, then you go back to the classroom and obviously having explained both to the class, and to everyone, before you leave the classroom why it is you're leaving. (IT_F7_M_2_F)

Some mediators started working within their family or group of friends, thus starting to practice the profession based on their personal experience and their own family's story. Few mediators started the profession purely by chance, simply looking for a job. Other mediators were influenced by their studies or professional experiences, for instance by their past as teachers: "In Romania I worked as a primary school teacher for seven years, so my work as a teacher certainly helped me in terms of my relationship with teachers and pupils and in my approach to school" (IT_F7_M_1_F)

Only one mediator attended interpretation courses within a translators' consortium in Rome. Other mediators mentioned degrees in social work, communication management, engineering, and economics. Some have a background in language studies or have attended academic courses. Only one mediator mentioned her degree in translation and interpreting studies, reflecting on how interpreting and mediation are quite different jobs, but also admitting that her studies were useful for her profession.

My studies were related to language, so I studied translation and interpreting, which, with mediation, let's say in a certain sense, are related purely from the linguistic point of view but they are clearly different jobs [...] but, yes, my studies were certainly useful but not exhaustive. Absolutely not. (IT_F7_M_2_F)

Only one mediator had a long professional experience of working with migrants. After a degree in educational studies, he worked as an educator in a CAS (extraordinary reception centres), in a community for children and, at the time of the interview, he was also working as an educator on a MNSA project (SPRAR/Sproimi, the Italian protection system for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors).

Only one mediator explicitly said that when she lost her previous job she started looking for another job that might connect her with her origins, finding this connection in the profession of mediator.

I used to work in a window and door import/export company [...] When I lost my job in 2011, I wanted to do something to help me get a bit closer to my culture, my roots and my origins, so I started testing the waters through associations and acquaintances (IT_F6_M_1_FM).

Other mediators said they started attending courses and undergoing training once they had already started working. Some of them, for instance, attended a 600-hour long course over the course of 6 months, after which they were qualified as a mediator. Shorter courses do also exist, however, although this type of training is often requested by many mediators, they rely on funding and are not frequently promoted. Associations and cooperatives inform them about short courses they can attend to obtain the necessary training if they want to, as well as possibilities for gaining further qualifications and sometimes provide them some financial help too. However, it can be hard to attend

certain courses because they are carried out during working hours. In one focus group, mediators highlighted the fact that they must look for vocational training individually and fund this themselves.

Overall the interviews highlighted three further main points about formation and training. First, that practice is very important in mediation. Second, shadowing is suggested by some mediators as a practice that helps when starting to approach the profession. Third, training is always needed, especially in respect of the legal field and the health service system and its rules. Attending a course after years of practice is also considered to be extremely important.

I qualified as a mediator after five years practicing as a mediator. When there was the possibility of doing the mediator course through the cooperative, as it is a course that has a cost, [...], I did it. I hadn't done it before, I worked for many years without having done it [...] But the fact that we started working beforehand allowed us to have an idea of the criticalities that could arise in this work [...] what we lacked was the ability to master our skills and to give a name to what we were already doing [...] It helped me to do this (IT_F6_M_1_FM).

Two interviewees also said that they needed greater psychological insight.

According to some mediators, the pandemic itself would require further training around how things have changed and how to approach the new needs that have arisen.

With COVID-19 everything has been reset for us mediators. When they tell you on the phone to explain how online communication works, 'what is a computer?' 'what is online?' 'what is an application?' We are also struggling, just imagine someone who has never studied, has never gone to school, has never had (contact) with these things, it's a really big and difficult challenge that has reset all our knowledge and the tools that we used (previously when we based) on the look, the verbal and non-verbal. [...] It's not an easy thing then training – [we'd need] a lot of individual training as well as individual training on the linguistic point of view of Italian, technology, the language you use when you talk to the doctor, the language of the teacher, each service has a different language and you have to update continually (IT_F5_M_2_FM).

The opportunity to share and discuss work with colleagues is also highly valued and considered to be extremely important by some mediators who said that periodical meetings with colleagues are helpful for them and their work.

3. The experience of migrant children from professionals' perspectives

Teachers

School achievement.

Almost all teachers claimed there are differences in terms of school achievement between migrant and non-migrant students. There were only two exceptions. A physical education teacher and a teacher at an ISCED3 vocational school both stated that their migrant students reach average or even above average educational goals due to their familiarity with physical activities or ability in practice. Some ISCED0 teachers claimed that, since personal competences are more relevant than having a migrant background or not, school performances only depend on individual differences.

It depends, there are two exceptional girls who are very good and have even learnt to master bilingualism completely, so they alternate Italian and Moroccan perfectly and use it in the appropriate contexts [...] it depends on the child and their personal specificity. (IT_T26_F)

Most teachers highlighted a difference between newcomers and second-generation or migrant students who had already spent several years in the Italian school system. They claimed that only newcomers show lower performances adding that, once any language problems are solved, many migrant students are brilliant and smart. On the contrary, a minority of teachers claimed that all migrant students have some problems, with only a few exceptions, in the form of language used to study, lower results, and delays in reaching school goals. Thus, migrant students require different ways of teaching and goals. Finally, one teacher stressed change in time, i.e., decreasing levels of failure at school among migrant students.

According to the teachers, there are different reasons for lower levels achievement by migrant students. The first reason is language barriers, for both newcomers and second-generation children who speak Italian only at school, while speaking their native language at home and during the holidays: “They are well looked after at school, but at home their parents don't speak a word of Italian and even if they have immense will power this compromises their results” (IT_T20_F).

The second reason concerns socio-economic problems, such as marginalization and poverty; migrant children are less well supported by their families and have fewer social opportunities.

The socio-economic condition intervenes because it is true that - there are some pupils of foreign origin who then go and work after the third year, I mean the school investment lasts up to a certain point for some because they cannot afford it. (IT_T36_F)

Moreover, migrant students and their families may not invest in education or consider it important in terms of social enhancement, for future careers and generally enhancing emancipation. For example, they may not invest in education because they plan to go back to their countries of origin or move to other countries.

The third reason is cultural background. Difficulties arise because the school system works in a way that is taken for granted by “us” but not by “them”: “They have to get to know a place that is completely unfamiliar to them and therefore have to adapt to a social and cultural context that is very different from their own, not only at school but also in general” (IT_T16_F).

The final reason is children’s engagement and willingness to get involved: “School results are actually in line with their level of commitment” (IT_T18_F).

Some teachers think that there is no gender difference in terms of commitment, but that there is a difference in terms of opportunities concerning both achievement and relationships.

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)

A psychologist stressed that whereas girls are more discreet and careful in terms of opening up with others, boys are more energetic and willing to actively participate. Having said this, both boys and girls actively participate if they feel they are allowed to, because they appreciate the opportunity to

be understood. One Italian L2 teacher said that it is more difficult to motivate boys to study, especially when they become able to communicate in Italian. The only way to motivate them is to build a relationship within a one-to-one setting or engaging with them in a small group where a more personal relationship can be established than in the classroom with a teacher: “because there is the emotional part, I mean you get the boy involved in a much more intimate way, much more closely, and so when this relationship is created the boy is often inclined to take part” (IT_T18_F).

Only two teachers said that they had experience with non-binary children, stressing both acceptance and non-acceptance from classmates and the community. One said that a particular student was accepted by their classmates, while another was not accepted because their difference was rejected by both their classmates and the community.

Children’s needs, aspirations and expectations.

According to teachers, migrant children’s needs are both different and interrelated. The first need is the ability to speak the language. Children need to learn Italian as a means of communication and to establish social relationships: “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).

The second need is emotional. Children need to reach an emotional and psychological balance, feeling well in themselves and at ease in the school context.

Their needs are not only related to teaching, which must often be put on the back burner, but of primary importance is a sense of well-being, so creating a situation that makes them feel at ease [...] the psychological aspect, plays an important role. (IT_T16_F)

The third need is relational. Many teachers stressed that migrant students need to feel accepted and included in the classroom and that they fear being excluded because they are different or defined as not being Italian: “they aspire to be accepted by others, they invest a lot, especially at the beginning, in learning from their peers rather than from us” (IT_T11_F).

Connected to this need is the need to spend a lot of time with their peers outside school: “to be able to do many activities, for instance, they would like school time to be longer, they would like to play sport with others, they would like to spend more time with their classmates outside school” (IT_T21_F).

The fourth need is preserving and valuing cultural traditions.

At school not to be different from the others, but at home and in everyday life, to bring their culture and to have it valued a little [...] some children told me 'my classmates don't know that on Saturdays I go to the Indian temple', this is a bit regrettable, but it seems impossible to them that their Italian classmates might be interested, for example, so they don't even envisage telling them about it. (IT_T21_F)

Finally, some ISCED0 teachers stressed that migrant children have the same needs as other children, i.e., to construct and handle relationships with peers.

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)

Teachers conveyed two different narratives of aspirations and expectations, both stressing the influence of family. The first narrative concerns children's commitment to learning; they are motivated and want to achieve and succeed in school.

Most of them care about it [about learning], they respect the school because for them it is a starting point and a way of making their parents, for example, who fled from places that were not very hospitable and where they were no longer able to continue living with their families, proud. (IT_T4_F)

Those positive expectations are related to a family valuing education highly, meaning that children want to make their families proud by attending many different extra-curricular activities, achieving social success, gaining the skills to be prepared to work professionally, living well, integrating into society and feeling Italian.

The second narrative concerns negative expectations where children do not care about learning, do not engage in studying, show no - or only superficial - goals, e.g. easy money, are passive and tend to be isolated: "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 goals, at least they don't show that they do" (IT_T5_F).

In this narrative children demonstrate very low levels of self-esteem, their families do not value education, perhaps because they consider migration to Italy to be a temporary phase of life.

Both positive and negative expectations are more visible in ISCED3 vocational schools.

Some teachers in Genoa claimed that expectations changed over time, changing from migrant children's initially positive expectations and commitment to a lazy approach, one shared with many Italian children. However, migrant children show lower expectations of education than Italian students.

In the past it was absolutely [to] find a job [...] because that's what they came to us for - it's a vocational institute [...] now we also have the five-year courses, they enroll [...] I don't find these big differences anymore, talking about children who have always been here, or were even born here, or have been here since they were children, they are on an equal footing with the others who in any case have a socio-economic background that is usually rather disadvantaged, and in any case at least until fifth grade [...] they have even slightly longer expectations of studying. (IT_T36_F)

Finally, the child's individual personality is considered more relevant than her/his gender in determining needs, aspirations and expectations:

There are no differences from this point of view, we have not seen males and females having different needs. (IT_T14_F)

Int: Are there differences between males and females in this respect?

T: No, it really depends on the child, on how the child is

Int: Also, in terms of their needs, aspirations, have you seen differences?

T: No. (IT_T9_F)

Challenges

Some challenges mentioned by teachers concern migrants student's needs and aspirations, particularly language and education as well as other difficulties they have when compared to Italian

students. The challenges are as follows: (1) difficulties learning Italian both for daily use and curricular studies; (2) gaps in curricular studies due to different school experiences and systems; (3) understanding and adapting to new norms, cultural and social context, in particular the school context; (4) problems for teachers and experts in diagnosing possible learning disorders in foreign speech; (5) economical, educational and emotional difficulties of families who are not supported and encouraged, or ignore local opportunities and services.

Other challenges are related to children's competences which they find hard to share and have valued at school. The first is their bilingualism.

One of the most important things we don't do is to value the fact that they are bilingual because it is very much a part of them, something that, when they enter school, they erase. Even those who, in some way, maintain a partial knowledge or relative use of their language of origin, perhaps through their grandparents, are ashamed, they don't talk about it, they don't bring it up. It is just as if the school says, "we will do our best to get your fill of English, but please get the other languages out of here" (IT_T13_F).

The second one is having a voice, being listened to and empowered as people and having the chance to make visible their competences to classmates. **This challenge resonates with the opportunity of enhancing hybrid integration.**

They need to be heard and to be listened to, so they need someone to give them the floor. This is the most important thing, they need someone to say now you speak, I won't speak, you tell me, and to be welcomed not only by me, but also by their classmates with whom there are certainly authentic relationships. But they lack this element, that is, being the bearer of a culture that the others don't know and that can make the difference in terms of their growth and that of the others. (IT_T35_F)

According to some teachers, migrant students often feel - and are perceived by classmates - as being inadequate because they cannot communicate and actively participate. For the same reason, they therefore also lack recognition from teachers and are often placed in classes below those of their age group.

Some of them say that they were not accepted at school, that sometimes, even if they are, how can I say it? 'good' kids, aren't they? [...] maybe they are placed in a lower class because they need to learn the language and everything, but for some of them it is a moment of non-recognition. (IT_T31_F)

Connected to empowerment, recognition and positive relationships is also the challenge of creating social spaces outside school to interact and integrate with peers: "The challenge of integration, which has never evolved, has never been considered from a political point of view, I mean it is not enough to say you must speak Italian if you don't build spaces for interaction" (IT_T24_M).

Finally, an important challenge concerns multiple cultural belonging and cultural identity. Even if some teachers claimed that multiple identities are a resource and must be supported to fight stereotypes, other teachers claimed that it is very difficult for children to handle different identities within different contexts such as at school, with family, amongst peers, etc.

The problem of belonging to different cultures is a big one, I mean coming to terms with a family with a certain approach and a school with another approach is a big problem [...] they have, like all children, this enormous need to recognize themselves as being equal to

others and recognizing themselves as equal to others means coming into conflict with the cultural diversity that they experience. (IT_T13_F)

Some teachers said that boys have more problems respecting rules because they tend to reproduce distinct, rigid and stereotypical male roles that they observe within their families. These teachers underlined the fact that family and cultural heritage influences boys to reproduce these roles at school, such as dominating classmates or not respecting female teachers.

Perhaps males have greater difficulty in respecting the rules, maybe it depends on the family culture or something, I don't want to stereotype, but in the end you see that the boys, as a woman, they recognize you as a teacher, but you are always a female figure, since at home you notice that maybe when they are with their mothers they have a different attitude compared to their fathers [...] they assert themselves and pose as males imitating the adult male of the house [...]. [...] they have this tendency almost to see the female as being a little bit inferior, but then when you speak and point it out to them, for that moment they believe it. Anyway, if in their culture they find it difficult to accept new things so suddenly, then perhaps as they grow up, hanging out with older boys and girls, they will adapt to that too. (IT_T4_F)

Many teachers highlighted that fact that girls often experiment more than boys do with the challenge of reconciling the culture of family and school because they are more closely linked to their family's cultures and symbols.

Maybe you see the girls who have the veil or who come from families with a certain type of tradition, in my opinion they experience a contrast between the reality of school, the experience of their companions, and the family's teaching. (IT_T2_F)

Moreover, girls have more problems integrating because they are not allowed to do the same things as boys are, they have more duties in the home and therefore have fewer opportunities than boys do. Dropping out of school is also more frequently seen amongst female migrant students.

It turned out that once they have reached the third or fourth grade in high school, they are often withdrawn from school because they have fulfilled their minimum academic obligations. The objective of families is sometimes not to let them take the diploma in order for them not to have the possibility of independence that would allow them to leave the family if the family forced them into marriages or engagements, and unfortunately this has often happened, especially in high school and the vocational school. (IT_T16_F)

Most respondents had not come across any non-binary migrants in their classes, both because it is an issue very rarely discussed in school, and because children, especially migrants, are reluctant to talk about this issue. Teachers who stated that they had encountered non-binary migrants tended to identify them as boys with feminine attitudes or who behave like girls. There are not always problems for these children, either at school or at home, but in some cases they experience frustration since they are not accepted by classmates and therefore don't have positive relationships with peers.

I always thought that the family - moreover the mother almost wore the burqa - so you can imagine, that for the family it would have been a problem if this thing had emerged [...] and in reality he has always had quite a normal life with us, he has always participated in all the activities, I have always seen him being quite free [...] so I think that probably, in spite of the appearance of the mother, I thought that it was quite a relaxed family, quite open and therefore I have never noticed from this boy any difficulties or particular issues. (IT_T16_F)

The girls chased him away and told him to go away and he felt terrible, he started crying and hid, and it was as if at that moment he was being told that they didn't recognize him,

the others didn't recognize him as a male, the females didn't want him with them as a female and he felt terrible. (IT_T13_F)

Factors influencing participation and achievement.

Teachers identified a variety of factors influencing participation and achievement at school. They considered participation as involving attendance of both school and extra-curricular activities. Few teachers considered participation as active involvement, i.e., children's personal expression of views and feelings. **This might have an impact on the enhancement of hybrid integration.**

The main factors highlighted by respondents as being significant were character, the family situation, socio-economic conditions, language skills, cultural and institutional aspects. For most teachers, personal character was considered important too. It is the child's personality, attitude and interest that either facilitates or hinders - as in the case of Italian students - his/her ability to interact with classmates and teachers and to achieve good results.

Depending on each child, that is, it also depends on how they are, on their personality [...] then it also depends on their character, not only on the linguistic or cultural difficulties, but also on the character, there are children who are shy, there are children who find it more difficult to relate to others outside the family. (IT_T23_F)

A family's educational background and difficult family circumstances are also important, since they can influence a family's attitude to education. Participation and good results are hindered when children are not supported or motivated by their families or are burdened with household duties and family caregiving responsibilities.

Some of them have families that don't consider school as a priority because they consider work a priority, or a lot of girls, for example, have a lot of tasks at home, including cleaning, housework, babysitting their brothers, sisters and cousins, so school often takes a back seat. (IT_T6_F)

The extent to which socio-economic conditions influence learning and achievement is quite a controversial topic. Some respondents said that socio-economic disadvantage can lead to students dropping out of school: "We have also had cases of children who, having completed their compulsory education, have withdrawn from school because they had to go to work to help their families" (IT_T6_F). These factors hinder participation and good performances, especially regarding expensive extra-curricular activities. Other respondents said that this is a false problem because when activities are in fact free, cultural factors prevent participation: "In our area, we sometimes have proposals at no or minimal cost to facilitate the integration of these children, but they are not always taken into consideration precisely because the cultural factor comes into play" (IT_T20_F).

According to many respondents, culture has an impact on participation and positive achievement, especially when the background culture is very different from the Italian one. First, a very different cultural background can influence how much a family values education, school participation, and extra-curricular activities.

The majority of those who don't participate are Pakistani and Chinese children [...] they don't let them go out easily, this is especially true for Pakistanis, they don't have the opportunity to go out in the afternoon to participate in extra-curricular activities. (IT_T18_F)

It's cultural, because their culture doesn't care a lot - I mean it's a very free culture, so if the kid wants to study, he studies, if he doesn't want to study, he can - if he wants to come to school, he comes, if he doesn't want to come to school, he doesn't. (IT_T30_F)

Second, it can be observed that children with different cultural backgrounds are affected in terms of expressing their opinions, 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 in Italy.

Judgment on the part of the class - I mean, if the whole class starts to take a certain kind of stance on certain things, you intuitively realize that that the child, who perhaps in reality has a completely different experience, a different way of managing relationships in the family, is just keeping quiet and doesn't go and say: no? (IT_T1_F)

Those who have been to school in Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana and Mauritania have a very different idea of a teacher and a school, of a school where there is no dialogue, no joking, the rules are strict, there are punishments, in short, it is different and they are surprised when they see that the teacher comes up to them and asks how you are, thus opening up a dialogue that goes beyond. (IT_T7_F)

According to some teachers, culturally defined gender roles hinder participation of female students. One reason is that parents prevent daughters attending extra-curricular activities.

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)

A second reason is that girls find it more difficult to express themselves in the classroom due to the presence of male classmates or to prevarication of male classmates: "Many girls, like Pakistani girls, however, even within the class, always try to stay only with the girls, even if we move them from one desk to another, they always try to return to the place where the girls are" (IT_T5_F).

Cultural norms endure and influences their way of thinking, it is quite difficult to take them out of the cultural or family context, it is difficult to take them out of it. Sometimes, one of them treats a little girl, in quotes, in a way that is not very correct. (IT_T4_F)

Language skills can both hinder and facilitate the active participation of migrant students in school activities. Children who are not yet competent in Italian tend to participate more passively and tend to have more problems expressing opinions and feelings. Language was also highlighted as a factor by teachers who considered individual differences as having primary importance.

Institutional influence is also important. It includes school organization, dialogue between school and its community, the type of education, and the teacher's approach. First, the enhancement of migrant students' participation requires additional hours of mediation, gradual inclusion in the classroom, second language learning before this inclusion, less frequent classes and design of educational extra-curricular activities that do not involve the extensive use of Italian.

The possibility of taking 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)

Second, the school should implement dialogue and relationships with the external context:

It must be clear to a school working in this field, that it needs to work on an integrated educational project that can also take advantage of the possibility of dialogue with the outside world [...] I mean a school that does not shut itself away, but rather, opens itself up to the outside world. (IT_T14_F)

Third, schools should enhance a form of education based on children's know-how, competences and expressions that make them feel more involved.

Certainly, the way in which the lesson is conducted, I see that the students, if there are tools in the classroom such as a computer, an IWB, [...] the lessons are more linked to doing practical activities, such as constructing a text, doing group work, working on images, and therefore something that brings together not only intellectual work but also know-how, they are much more involved. (IT_T7_F)

Finally, teachers must be welcoming, inclusive and curious, avoiding prejudice and constructing trusting relationships with children and families: "If there is a teacher who is an inclusive teacher you work on inclusivity, if the teacher is pedantic however, it is a bit more difficult" (IT_T30_F).

Some teachers claimed that migrant children socialize with peers, spending time together both inside the classroom, during breaktimes, and outside school, on birthdays, or hanging out in the afternoon. This happens mainly when these children spend a lot of time together at school and/or in local spaces and at activities, such as sports and in the parish, and when teachers avoid the separation of cultural groups.

The recreation centre is the long hand of the parish, that is (it is also mixed). There is this place where they have a football field, where they do an after-school activity, it is very inclusive and so Italian and foreign kids become friends, then there is the town square where they meet. (IT_T30_F)

My student Y. I mean in class she's clearly seen as the best in the class. The worst in the class is another Chinese pupil, so if you put yourself at the two extremes with another four or five Chinese in the middle, you understand that there is no "group of Chinese", they don't form a group. In some classes this does happen but this depends above all on the attitude of the teachers, that is, if the teacher always puts the Chinese among them and says you do this and the others do this, then it is the teacher who marks this difference. On the other hand, as a strategy, for example among peers, when I have to arrange the desks [...] I never, or rarely, put two people with the same language or nationality together, I almost never put them together, or even when we do second language groups, [...] I never put a group of Chinese children only together, because on the one hand this becomes a constraint for them to use an intermediate language, I mean if I put a Chinese and a Pakistani child together they have to speak Italian. (IT_T24_F)

Discrimination

Most teachers identified discrimination as being present within relationships amongst peers. First, discrimination depends on context: while migrant children socialize with everyone at school, outside the school context they largely spend time with their family of origin and its friendship, parental or religious networks. Second, discrimination depends on the amount of time spent in Italy and the time of arrival. Migrant children tend to have friends beyond their linguistic and cultural context if they have been in Italy for a long time or if they were born in Italy. In secondary high school children can come to have difficulties making friends outside their linguistic and cultural circle, especially if they are newcomers.

Those who come from secondary school upwards, as far as I've seen, find it very difficult to establish friendly relationships with children who don't speak their language, so after school it's much more difficult for them to see each other outside or at each other's homes, for birthdays and so on. (IT_T21_F)

Discrimination also depends on gender differences. Some teachers said that boys and girls, both migrants and non-migrants, talk and play together, divided only by different interests, but others said that boys and girls talk and play separately, especially from pre-adolescence onwards, whether they are migrants or non-migrants. Some argued that girls from some cultures have more trouble talking and playing with peers who do not share their language and culture.

I often see that the girls in the Chinese community have very few relationships with classmates outside school, very few. They are a very closed community, they don't participate in trips, parties, projects of various kinds. Instead, the other girls they also meet outside school (IT_T6_F).

Finally, some teachers maintained that usually migrant children have friends mainly among peers who share their language and culture and find difficulties integrating because of cultural background, character, and their family's lack of integration, resulting in marginalization in the classroom.

Usually they are always with the foreign kids then, again, it's the case that they are usually always on the sidelines, they struggle to integrate and to be with their peers, to collaborate and everything, also when we do group work they often don't participate, even if the group is formed by the teacher [...] above all the Pakistani and the Chinese children are the ones who don't succeed in being part of the class group. Instead, the kids from the eastern [European] countries integrate better, they have less difficulties, but also the character is different, they are more open, they are more spontaneous. (IT_T5_F)

In some classes [...] where there is not this interaction there can be some discrimination, I know some classes where there are perhaps some people who probably live at home with certain kind of parents who have some discriminatory attitudes or mistrust towards foreigners, and so you see that in some classes there is a difference, but it also depends on the social class not necessarily on the origin of the child, so there are the rich, the well-off, and those who are maybe considered- that maybe they dress in a poorer way, that don't have branded clothes, and this creates tensions (IT_T2_F).

Function of peer networks.

According to teachers, peer networks play a key function and have an important impact on children, both migrant and non-migrant. First, students are often promoters of peer participation, inclusion, and well-being. This function can be based on autonomous initiative or prompted by teachers.

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)

Second, peer networks can have an important impact on educational opportunities, for example, through peer mediation of the native language, and on the inclusion and well-being of migrants.

I've also noticed that in certain situations now, with children who are smarter or more empathetic, they even manage to simplify their language in order to relate to children who speak another language, they are fantastic. (IT_T12_F)

The Italian children, as you say in quotes, have helped the others to fit in because they have really encouraged them and made them feel at ease, they have helped them a lot. I'll tell you, however, among this little group that helped the others there were also two or three of these foreign children. (IT_T27_F)

Third, peer support may occur when skills are not shared. In these cases, support may also be offered by migrants to non-migrants or by migrants to newcomers

They manage to help each other, as I was saying before, because someone might translate for someone else, but they manage to help each other when they have a common origin, so they manage to help each other, but due to coming from a similar group of origin. (IT_T22_F)

Social Workers

Problems of unaccompanied children

According to the educators in reception centres, working with UASC is to work as if blind-folded because it is up to the users of this service to share their stories with the educator. The most important need for UASC is to have a system of regularization when migrants reach the age of 18. Before that age they need to have documents that show they are in Italy regularly. Their path of integration is extremely important in order to successfully obtain regularization, i.e., if they learned the second language, participated in several activities, learned a vocation. Another important need is finding a job in order to be able to stay in Italy. This is very hard to achieve before the age of 18 since many children have not completed their education, something that requires at least 10 years spent in the education and must be documented. Moreover, documentation must be translated and validated by the juvenile court. Compulsory schooling and education represent the main reason for difficulties in finding a job before the age of eighteen. It is possible to be involved in training only when promoted by a professional institution although they cannot have a proper employment contract.

So, in the end, what comes out is that we get to the age of eighteen and we discharge the boys and girls and for those who have done the course well we succeed, we try to extend the course beyond the age of adulthood for the necessary time, but we tend to discharge the boys and girls without a work contract and then out of there, without a job, and then automatically without a place to live, it becomes really complex. (IT_SW2_F)

While language is certainly a barrier, important vulnerabilities include health, cognitive troubles and falling into criminal networks. Criminal networks are linked to economical fragility, amplified by the travel debts accrued to enable the initial journey to Italy as well as the pressure of having to support a family back home and to gain social prestige, which often pushes them to show that “success in Western life” has been achieved. Therefore, their high expectations, having arrived in Italy, are also a source of vulnerability.

You put him on a school path, so what you offer him is, “ok now you go to school!” and he has the family on his back pressing him to send the money, the debt of the trip, the urgency to assert himself here in the country, the fear of the little time available until the age of eighteen has been reached. All that, the deviant networks present in this country, which place pressure and completely suck these boys in when they have the possibility of earning and instead the other party offers you school, unfortunately, what we see is that the boys tend to yield more to this (IT_SW2_F).

Resources

When children are minors, it is a resource since it implies protection. Other important resources are family or friends in Italy who can help them to find a job, as well as the existence of the family back home. On the other hand, lack of parents was described by some respondents as being a significant vulnerability, something which requires some intervention.

The fact of not having parents in the area is the first characteristic that in some way affects their developmental path, because although there is the presence of the educator who in some way tries not to replace, but to be the 'reference person' for the child, it is not always easy to think that the child recognizes you as a contact person. (IT_SW2_F)

A third type of important, albeit controversial, resource is building good relationships on a national level. For some social workers this type of network provides support when looking for a job at the age of 18. Other social workers describe themselves as having unclear roles in children's lives, since they are responsible for their migration journey and push children to declare themselves as UASC in order to take advantage of some of the opportunities offered by the reception system, even though some family members – and sometimes even parents themselves – in fact live in the same area as the child. One educator claimed that these national networks sometimes push such children towards dangerous lifestyles thereby damaging the individual projects established within the reception system. However, the systematic connection between children and people from their national communities is an important resource, even though it is also a source of separation based on national origins.

An ability to build relationships, to be resilient, and to face frustrations were also all considered to be an important resource for unaccompanied children.

Finally, while one educator claimed the importance of being aware of the choice to migrate as being a resource, a social worker expressed the fear that unaccompanied minors do not really have the possibility of choosing to leave.

I happened to have worked with young people who arrived when they were young, but basically what they said was that it was their choice, I mean, they had difficulty in accepting the idea of abandonment, maybe even a bit as a defense mechanism in the sense that it's easier to think that 'I chose to go' rather than that 'my parents put me on a boat and told me to go' [...] they are generally shared projects, and then it's difficult for a fourteen year old kid to really realize the choice he's going to take. (IT_SW1_F)

Some social workers also said that several children claim that they arrived in Italy in order to remain with their friends, thus reconstructing the same group they had in their country of origin in Italy.

Families

Social workers mainly highlight families' economic and accommodation difficulties or challenging circumstances for single mothers. They also stressed cultural differences related to different origins. The social and geographical isolation of families living outside cities, far from all services, is another problem. According to social workers, the most important need for children within these families is receiving support by being educated and supported in the cultural shift together with their families.

But I see that, for example, I don't know how to say, that Nigerian mothers are very anchored in certain ways of doing things rather than having a mentality and culture around education - I mean, they are very much about "letting them do", so few rules, so we also need very much work on these aspects, so I think that children, and especially parents, must

be supported in this respect, this does not mean to cancel - absolutely always respecting their cultures, but they need support from this point of view. (IT_SW4_F)

Most of the social workers talked of “double belonging”: cultural shift determines the risk of conflict with parents who represent the link to the original culture. It enhances different expectations: while parents sometimes have rigid plans for their children (e.g. to find a job soon), children have different desires, like continuing to study or nurturing other interests.

At a certain point, especially towards the middle of adolescence, it sometimes becomes a little bit more difficult because of the discrepancy between one's own culture of origin and perhaps with what the parents have considered correct in terms of their values up to that moment. At a certain point, young people start to become more integrated, to want to live in a different way and there are often very strong clashes with parents, who have remained somewhat stuck within a different value system. (IT_SW5_F)

Gender

Reception centres which participated in the research consisted only of boys. Only one social worker had worked with a gender fluid boy in the past, saying that the process of transition experienced by them, their lack of understanding, their difficulty in talking about it, and in being accepted within their family, generated their deep unease.

The experience of experiencing an identity undergoing transformation can be a very complex one, of not fully understanding various aspects of it and of the difficulty in that situation for both the family in accepting a support pathway for him psychologically and other support pathways and to be able to talk openly about it and to be able to confront and understand, resulted in very significant discomfort. (IT_SW5_F)

Two educators believed that migrant children might sometimes define themselves as having a non-binary gender, but that their context inhibited the expression of this condition. Given the short amount of time many migrant children stay, as well as the low level of confidence and trust established during this period, they fear being stigmatized and insulted by other children.

It is possible that some of them might have the need to do so, but our context does not allow it. Even if this information is handled confidentially, there is so much fear of stigma or even of verbal or non-verbal abuse, that a boy who may have an opposite-sex oriented sexual identity is not willing to discuss the matter. (IT_SW8_M)

The majority of the social workers surveyed, who work with both migrant boys and girls, did not refer to any expression of different needs. However, some respondents, in line with some teachers, suggested that girls need more freedom (i.e., to dress how they wish, to get out with friends, to do sport or other activities, to date Italian boys) and this depends on gender socialization within their families, which intersects cultural orientations.

They may be treated differently within their own family depending on where they come from, in the sense that, depending on the culture, the male may have more freedom or be able to count on greater benefits than his sisters. This yes, but no differences in terms of needs. At least I think so. (IT_SW3_F)

According to one social worker, gender difference negatively affects girls' feelings of acceptance and inclusion within their peer groups: “A lot of girls have told me ‘I always feel different because I can't do all these things, and because I can't do them I can never fit into a group, I can never experience what girls my age experience’” (IT_SW5_F).

Another social worker argued that migrant boys and girls have both different and similar needs. Different needs depend on expectations about gender held and expressed by parents; but at the same time, boys and girls can express common needs (to be loved, to be understood, etc.) in different ways.

Expectation is the investment you make, which is different from the cultural point of view. [...] I mean, especially with African families, where the expectation for the girl is always to find a man, a partner, whereas for the boy it is to study, to come back home and prove that he has become someone. In my opinion they are consistent with cultural (legends) [...].

Maybe their needs are different but also similar. Little boys and girls need to feel safe and secure and to feel welcomed and wanted [...] in my opinion their needs from the point of view of socialization are the same. The girls also stay together, they exchange their first lipsticks, their diaries. Whereas boys might gravitate much more towards misbehaving, in this generational clash with the parents, so he commits little thefts (?)¹⁸, he goes to a shopping centre and steals a T-shirt, instead girls are more on the (victimized) end of the scale, because perhaps they have suffered violence at home and might write a letter or tell the teacher "daddy beat me" rather than "mummy forced me to cook and do housework". In my opinion, they have different ways of expressing themselves often in ways that are coherent with the cultural role that exists in that culture, in that ethnic group. (IT_SW6_F)

Talking of the most significant challenges or vulnerabilities migrant children often experience, one social worker mentioned gender relations within the culture of origin, with another referring to such relations within the family. On the one hand, it is possible to see a stereotypical representation of marital relations in Albania and Italy. Thus, an essentialist representation of gender stereotypes produces an ethnocentric approach to cultural difference.

Being part of a second-generation migrant family already helps children in their developmental process and belonging to certain nationalities certainly has its influence. That is, the Albanian community has a strong connotation linked to the "kanun", the law followed in practice in Albania, which is not an official law, but rather a law of tradition, one which also regulates the relationship between men and women, between husband and wife. Therefore, these young people have to deal with living in a country that is strangely open to the situation of women and, at the same time, within a family where this does not happen and is not recognized. [...] The theme of double belonging is, in my opinion, still a very hot topic. (IT_SW3_F)

On the other hand, with reference to gender relations within a specific Tunisian family, the social worker apparently observes a more fluid representation of gender, observing the mother as living between two "cultures", while the father is "totally anchored to the culture of origin". However, in this case an essentialist and ethnocentric approach to cultural difference also seems to emerge when the social worker associates the Tunisian culture to forced weddings for children:

Once it happened to me, for example, to have two separated parents, where there is maybe the mother... I don't know, it comes to my mind a family of Tunisian origin where there is just the mother who is separated, so it is her who made the choice to separate, so also, how to say, she works, she is very Westernized, but she also retains some cultural aspects of her country of origin, a sense of belonging, with the father instead being totally anchored to the culture of origin. (IT_SW4_F)

¹⁸ This sign will be used when the audio is not clear enough to report the right words said by the interviewee

According to one educator most of the migrant children hosted within the service interpreted and spoke of gender roles in a traditional way, by representing and reproducing the power hierarchy between men (dominant) and women (subordinate). In this view, gendered expectations, especially about female obedience to men, come from migrant children's experience, knowledge, and habits. This probably depends on their family socialization, but it is independent from their culture.

The female has a very precise role consisting of subordination, of obedience, because they have no power. These terms came up in various circumstances, themes that we then also explored in depth [...] we did some group work where we talked about the roles between men and women in Italian society, even doing a bit of recent history with respect to voting rights, emancipation with respect to the theme of work, because working here, in this structure, the theme was very evident. When we did this we also asked the young people to tell us what their experience, knowledge or habits were, and they all said that women must obey men. (IT_SW8_M)

Mediators

The majority of mediators reported that migrant children's most important expectations is to be equal to their Italian classmates: "kids want to feel similar to Italian kids" (R1, IT_F6_M_3_FM). Expectations of support given by mediators' depends on this desire; they wish to get closer to their classmates: "I think they want to feel they are part of the group and they want you as a mediator to help reduce these distances [...] in my opinion they expect us to create this relationship between them and the rest of the class" (IT_F6_M_1_FM). Accordingly, mediators recognize and try to repair children's feelings of being different from their classmates, which is considered as an important vulnerability: "work in such a way that the pupil is able to understand why his task is different from others, I mean, this point is a very sensitive one and should be treated with caution" (IT_F6_M_2_FM). These mediators stress that children's most significant vulnerability is relationships with their classmates. Consequently, mediators perceive their role to be facilitators of children's social inclusion: "we are not teachers, we don't have a degree in that field, so we don't have the possibility of doing that. Mediation, in my opinion, helps the child morally and also helps him to fit into that school" (IT_F1_M_1_F).

Some other mediators claimed that migrant children aim to know what to expect from school: "children don't usually have expectations, the child says "but when do I learn Italian?", this is their main question "when do I learn Italian?" (IT_F3_M_1_F). Accordingly, mediators cited learning a second language as the most significant vulnerability for children, which lead them to look for a mediator's support: "when they see a fellow countrywoman, one who speaks their language, they see a mum, they see her- I don't know, a person they know like a saviour, I don't know, just talking they feel very good" (IT_F1_M_1_F).

Finally, in contrast to social workers, only one mediator cited different views between parents and children as presenting a vulnerability for children. According to this mediator, Chinese parents in particular give less relevance to Italian education than Chinese children because their aim is ultimately to go back to China.

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 of communication between the kids now and their parents. (IT_F4_M_1_F)

Some mediators claimed that children's needs are based on their personal story, especially whether they were born in Italy or abroad, when they started school and what their mother tongue was.

Almost all mediators claimed that needs are different for migrant boys and girls. According to two respondents, migrant boys' and girls' different needs depend on their different natures and characters. Displaying an essentialist perspective, these mediators expressed a stereotyped representation of gender differences in the school context and argued that girls are calmer, sweeter, more focussed, keen to learn and competitive, while boys are more rebellious, distracted and less willing to learn.

This is natural [...] it's normal, the whole world is a country, boys and girls are different. So, females have an extra gear, they have a desire and a charisma to learn that is out of the ordinary. Males are always the lazy ones (?) males can be a bit of a rebel sometimes, although I have come across some males who have this desire to learn more than women, more than girls. But yes, often it is more the girls than the boys. Because the male is the male, he feels strong, he feels... then it depends on the age, eh? In primary schools, in front of an adult they surrender (?) It depends, that's it. It depends on the situation, on the school level, but girls are often calmer, they have more desire to work [...] [boys] are proud and don't really want to share their experiences [...] And so boys are more restricted, less expansive, so, yes, you must work more with boys. (IT_F3_M_1_F)

In other cases, mediators underlined the influence of culture and family on different needs expressed by migrant boys and girls. One respondent talked of different attitudes: given that girls usually socialize at home with their mothers, they find it easier to be part of a group; boys are considered more instinctive and introverted, and this can problematize their relationships and inclusion in peer groups.

So, for us, since the mother has more contact with her daughter, she is at home, she does things at home with her, she is, in quotes, apart from sporadic cases, more... she tries to place herself more in this view. The boy, in my opinion, if he is well supported, that is, above all, at school, not only at home, because he lives at home, therefore he knows how to live in that house, he knows, more or less, how to live. When, however, he is at school [...] if his difference, if the difference in the contribution he makes is underlined in a bad way, he feels inferior and therefore this anger is carried inside him and he brings it home. Because he starts to point the finger in a way that says, "it's your fault that at school they tell me that... it's your fault if [...]" and, on the other hand, he needs to fit in and to feel part of something, to feel valid, to share something with the others. And so, this is surely different because boys tend more to act from the belly, from the chest. Because they aren't able, they don't externalize it, they don't say it. And so, they tend to be a bit more difficult to deal with. (IT_F4_M_3_F)

Two other respondents highlighted the role of culture: girls are expected to do a lot of work both at home and at school, but at the same time they are limited in their freedom and opportunities, an aspect mentioned by teachers and social workers too.

Sometimes difficulties have arisen when the school or after-school club asks us to convince the family to sign a consent form for a one-day trip. So, this is a very cultural issue because, even in Morocco, concessions are given to a males but not to females. (IT_F4_M_2_F)

4. Working with children and their families

Teachers

Parents' involvement

According to some teachers, collaboration, participation and respect are equally distributed between migrant and non-migrant parents. Moreover, migrant parents' respect for school, teachers and their

work, is often even greater than that of non-migrant parents: “the thing my colleagues say most often is, “if only they were all like that”, meaning that foreign parents often have an attitude of respect towards the school and teachers which is acknowledged” (IT_T13_F).

However, many respondents argued that collaboration and participation with migrant parents is not always ideal for several reasons. The first being the language barrier: parents feel embarrassed or inadequate during conversations with teachers. The second reason is a socio-economic one: parents tend to give more attention to economic or family difficulties than to their children’s schooling: If I’m struggling to feed my daughter, it’s clear that school will take a backseat, but if I come from a family where I have a certain social and economic standing, it’s easier to think about school issues (IT_T6_F).

The third reason is the way in which education is considered from a cultural point of view. In many cultures, trust and respect for the school system has led parents to rely on it completely, but without participating.

Sometimes it can be perceived as a lack of interest rather than a complete trust [in school] because often they don’t ask anything- once they feel included they participate though, but at the beginning this absence is just complete delegation of responsibility, I mean we have seen over the years that many come and say “this is my child and I trust you” and therefore many are afraid, especially at the beginning, to interfere thinking they are not allowed to do anything. (IT_T11_F)

The fourth reason why participation and collaboration with migrant parents can be challenging is related to gender and age. Although mothers are more likely to participate in school activities, they find the language more challenging, since they are often at home. Moreover, sometimes younger mothers participate less actively because they fear being judged, they are modest, and they find it difficult to interact with men. However, several teachers stressed that if the school is willing to establish a trusting relationship and to make even a small effort in the use of their language, parental involvement and participation increases and there are no problems: “as soon as you show your willingness, you show that you care about the relationship with them and you make a very small linguistic effort, they are always very willing” (IT_T21_F). Teachers said that communication channels that work better are informal one (phone, Whatsapp), which allows for more direct, simple, and interpersonal communication.

I thought “are these parents really disinterested or is it that parents don’t know how the school operates, they don’t understand it, maybe they don’t even know about it and nobody explained to them that there is an electronic register, that there are circulars?”, and so I called everybody one by one and I saw that by calling them they registered my number, and through Whatsapp they called me back, or they wrote to me, so I understood that it’s not true that there is a lack of interest, it’s that often they don’t [...] they don’t know the procedures in Italian school well. (IT_T7_F)

Teachers also meet parents outside official reception hours in order to accommodate their work schedules: it is the school that has to meet them in certain cases, for example I meet them at any time of the day, even outside of my office hours, I mean, I do everything I can to meet their needs and work schedule (IT_T6_F).

Mediation is frequently used, however mediators are not always available, or teachers aim to create a more direct relationship either using their own language skills or the mediation of a relative, a friend, or children.

I'm lucky enough to be able to say a few words in English as well as in French and also in Chinese, very few in Chinese, so I have the advantage of having some additional languages [...] as a school we do it a lot [using mediators], in primary school we do it a lot, there are a lot of interventions every month, they are frequent, but if I can do it myself I prefer to speak to them directly because although mediation is very good, it's a translation that might get the message misconstrued as well as translating and so in some way it's better if things are communicated directly. (IT_T24_M)

Parents' expectations.

Most of the teachers agree that parents consider school to be an important opportunity for the future of their children, to learn the language, to integrate into Italian society, and to access the roles to which their children aspire: "study is a key to success, a key to having a better future" (IT_T7_F).

According to many teachers, family support of children's learning and participation in school and extracurricular activities can be more difficult. This is especially related to parents' low level of competence in the Italian language and culture, to their economic and socio-cultural conditions and to cultural factors.

They are the same as the Italians, it depends on the work they do, because if they are busy all day they are exhausted by the time it is evening and they have to think about paying the bills, cooking and cleaning [...] then it also depends on the cultural context and it is the same with Italians [...] then there are some cultures that are in my opinion less interested in the educational aspect and more in the element of the obligation to go to school. (IT_T35_F)

Only one teacher claimed that migrant families can offer even greater opportunities than non-migrant families.

In most cases they don't have substantial resources to support their children, and in most cases not all. However there are families who do support them a lot and thereby extend the education of their children in a positive way to other agencies, also to agencies related to their place of origin. I had children that attended Moroccan schools out of school time but not only for religious reasons, but also to continue learning French because it was the language of origin. (IT_T29_F)

Finally, family support seems to vary in relation to both gender and age. Teachers working in the lower grades claimed that support is similar for boys and girls. On the contrary, those who teach in secondary schools claimed that some girls are more controlled and less encouraged to continue their studies due to the role that females traditionally play in their cultures of origin, as mothers and wives. This impacts girls negatively, increases low self-esteem and levels of dropping out of school as well as increasing the chance of them taking on unqualified jobs.

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)

The educator with migrant origins emphasized that females are expected to study more and longer, for them to be able to have jobs which would allow them to preserve traditional values such as wearing the veil, but also because study is used as a tool to control potential bad behaviour.

Social workers

Some social workers described the challenge for migrant children in retaining both cultures in their lives. This need is shared and understood by parents, although they are generally more closely linked to their original culture.

So, there is a cultural aspect, but there is also an objective aspect of difficulty, including the difficulty of keeping two cultures together, because clearly the parents are the bearers of a different culture that they want to pass on to their children, and sometimes this is very different from the cultural model of their peers or the way their peers have grown up in their own families. (IT_SW3_F)

One social worker mentioned the need to “reconcile our parental model with the family model” as a huge challenge (IT_SW3_F). Another social worker talked of the disparity between children who know Italian better than their parents, and parents who struggle to have a direct relationship with the school. In this situation, the child is often used as a mediator.

You see children at the age of six who speak Italian better than their mothers and therefore act as little mediators, who become smart about an assignment that has to be done in class, because they know their mothers can’t read, children who are smart about notes or notices or deliveries, depending on the age group, in short, when the child knows his mother can’t check because she can’t read. (IT_SW6_F)

Another challenge for children, shared with teachers, is that they do not have anyone who can help them with homework.

The feeling of being accepted by the host society (and by their classmates) is an important resource for these children because it gives them a sense of belonging to something. Sport and recreative activities are important for this reason. In general, however, economic and socio-cultural, as well as age and nationality, were mentioned as elements which may negatively impact children’s inclusion in these things. Only one educator underlined the risk of creating prejudices as the result of grounding the evaluation of children’s experiences on their nationality. Moreover, only one social worker mentioned children’s personal resources as motivations, strengths and resilience, as well as family support and ability to consider external support.

According to social workers, a positive strategy that can be used to help children is understanding their culture of belonging alongside the important support of mediators. One social worker mentioned trust, empathy and collaboration as the main elements involved in her work with families. Another social worker also mentioned the importance of empathy in building relationships and enhancing the participation of both families and children in the “personalized life projects”- projects coordinated by the protection service.

A little bit is in the construction of the relationship, I mean to try as much as possible to build a relationship of trust that inevitably comes only with time, and to try as much as possible to welcome without judging, to welcome and to try to understand what is brought up by the other side, and to understand that if he doesn’t have enough to eat in this moment “I can’t manage it, I am not available to meet any other needs”, that is to say that first this problem must be solved and then maybe we talk about the rest. And therefore, to try to

understand the priorities of the others and to understand that I can't read an entirely different life and a culture with my references [...] the activation of cultural mediators in some situations was very, very useful, I think, to be able to better understand the underlying reason and the reciprocal dynamics. (IT_SW5_F)

Social workers working with UASC stressed several challenges in their profession. One of them mentioned the creation of trusting relationships with children, convincing them that social workers can help and that they are not policemen or lawyers. Some social workers spoke of the difficulty of communicating with children only through a mediator's help, something which makes it harder to build a trusting relationship. On the other hand, mediators' support is extremely important both as a resource for children and as a means of facilitation for social workers. One educator stressed the challenge of being recognized as having a valid role by children. Children's ability to negotiate roles was also defined as being hard: "asking them to act as adults when they are actually teenagers" (IT_SW11_F), is described as a difficult aspect by one community educator.

Only one educator told of the challenge in supporting children's self-confidence and belief in autonomy. He explained that children already experience emotional disappointments with parents, therefore creating a new relationship may generate further frustration and harm.

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 facing other adults who tell them "look, believe us because we will tell you what is the right approach". And what guarantees do these adults give the children that they will not disappear from their lives afterwards as their parents did? Why should these children invest in a relationship, an emotional relationship, knowing that this relationship will be cut short anyway? (IT_SW8_M)

Another challenge mentioned by social workers working with UASC is that of bureaucracy: "you do something according to a certain procedure one day and the next day the procedure has changed so you have to figure out again which office, who to contact, how to do it, what document is needed" (IT_SW1_F). Another challenge is providing activities that are more attractive to children than the illegal networks, to keep them safe from illegal networks. Social workers also struggle to ensure mental health. The majority of the children arrive in Italy around the age of seventeen, meaning that there is not sufficient time to create a plan with them; when they are aged eighteen, they are expected to be entirely independent and to have found a job in order to stay in Italy on a permanent basis. One educator specified that the label of unaccompanied minor is relatively new to the Italian system (it was introduced in 2017), thus the recognition of this condition has challenges.

Such challenges are faced through coordinated teamwork, including schools, local police, and educators. Coordination is considered to be being extremely positive, because it allows systematic updates to be made. In Modena especially, educators stressed that several training opportunities, language courses, and sporting activities have been organized by the local councils to increase the opportunities available to children and to motivate them.

Useful strategies include listening to children and being curious, giving them the space to express themselves, as well as seeking support from external projects which enables economic sustainability.

Educators working with UASC also mentioned the importance of honesty and lack of judgment, patience, being systematic, clear and coherent in addressing the needs of children.

Mediators

Family expectations

Mediators are frequently involved in interactions with families, to deal with children's behavioural issues as well as having periodical meetings with teachers. The role of mediator is essential in facilitating communication between a school and family. Families, especially families of newcomers, often do not speak fluent Italian and they are given no help in learning it. These communication difficulties might affect the child's attitude toward the school in a negative way: "Sometimes it is a language problem and at other times it is the fact that the parents do not understand the school's requirements very well and therefore the child sometimes arrives at school without materials." (IT_F3_M_3_F). Some mediators said this fragility on the part of the parents can drive children to take advantage of the situation (see p. 26): "The child is clever and doesn't do his homework because his parents don't know the school rules so we help them understand how Italian schools work." (IT_F3_M_3_F)

According to some mediators, as well as many teachers, lack of parents' involvement in children's school activities depends on language barriers rather than on lack of motivation. One mediator said that she always tries to explain this to teachers. One mediator also highlighted that some parents do not participate because they trust the school as an institution entirely, and they do not think their participation can make any difference.

A parent takes a sort of backseat in terms of the participation he/she has in the child's school career, however the expectations he/she has about the child's school career are still very high because the tendency of most parents is to say "develop yourself, study, so that tomorrow you don't have to do the humble work I'm doing, so that tomorrow you can go on", therefore he/she realizes the gaps he/she has, also the linguistic one, and therefore he/she cannot participate actively, sometimes he/she is almost ashamed. (IT_F4_M_3_F)

According to some other mediators, however, parents' expectations vary in different communities. For example, high expectations about schools were mentioned in relation to the Moroccan community, but not for the Chinese one, although the mediators did recognize differences within the Chinese community.

For those parents who grew up in China, who have lived in Italy for only a short time, expectations for their children are different from those parents who were born and raised here and who are more involved in their child's school life [...] Their expectation is that their children learn Italian well, enough Italian to start a business, if you know what I mean. They don't care that much, seven times out of ten I would say eh- they don't care whether or not their children get a degree or a diploma in a particular field or whether they get high or low grades, as long as they learn Italian to be able go to an accountant or a lawyer or just that little bit of Italian that is enough to live on. (IT_F4_M_1_F)

Regarding the mediation services, several mediators highlighted how the highest expectations usually come from teachers, because parents are not very involved. Parents, however, do seek the help of mediators once a trustful relationship has been established. One mediator claimed that parents do not have high expectations. According to other mediators however, the issue of high expectations is linked to a widespread misunderstanding about the mediator's role as being there to support children's learning, which was frequently mentioned as a challenge in the relation to teachers and schools.

Teachers don't really know what our role as mediator is, each teacher asks us for different things, they really have no idea, this is because so many people still use us as an interpreter and not as a mediator. (IT_F4_M_1_F)

Parents may expect us to help their children learn Italian, but there is something else more important, that they need to feel – when a child feels good, he feels at ease, he learns more quickly. (IT_F1_M_1_F).

Challenges and strategies

As mentioned above, some mediators consider their role as being an important factor in children's wellbeing and inclusion, while others describe the challenge of gaining parents' trust. This is also explained as being due to their unclear role in terms of collaborating with teachers and schools: “So one problem is building trust with parents. Because the role of the mediator is not clarified. The issue is that the school does not clarify the role – what the mediator is.” (IT_F8_M_2_F).

Another aspect considered a challenge was the lack of hours assigned with children was also evaluated as a challenge: “sometimes yes the time is very limited to be able to achieve more concrete results” (IT_F3_M_2_F). Mediators also stressed difficulties in establishing trust when working with social workers, who tend to view mediators as gatekeepers of the social service. For this reason, mediators are sent to work in different areas so that those they are working with can be sure they do not belong to their social environment: “but people haven't understood yet, they are afraid that I will end up going around telling their story to other families” (IT_F1_M_3_F).

Several mediators talked of communication strategies to create empathetic relationships such as smiling or making small gestures that make children aware that they are not alone. Several mediators also described the use of narratives about their personal experience to motivate students who find it difficult to engage in the educational experience: “sometimes you find a child who doesn't want to work and so I often have to talk about my experience and make him/her understand the opportunity he/she has to improve” (IT_F3_M_3_F).

Empathy was described by mediators as reflecting on their own personal migration experience to understand the needs of children and parents.

I always try to put myself in other people's shoes – that's the best way to understand and find the right tools. (IT_F3_M_1_F)

My experience at school, my migratory journey here in Italy, are two fundamental elements in understanding the child and give him/her help to learn Italian, to say if you want to get there it is not difficult. (IT_F3_M_1_F).

Some mediators said that children need to understand that education can be the key for change in their life: “You're always trying to give them that dream of changing their life and having better opportunities, and that's all linked to better education, isn't it? If you do well at school, your opportunities change” (IT_F3_M_2_F).

One mediator cited another important communication strategy: creating moments of dialogue with migrant students beyond schoolwork. Once dialogue with children has been established, the second step is to initiate dialogue with teachers and classmates. This process is important in giving children the opportunity to provide narratives which help them value their diversity **and thus enhancing hybrid integration**.

Usually, when we meet with secondary school pupils, we don't only talk about what is happening at school or about subjects, [...] sometimes we also talk a bit about their difficulties, also, since coming to Italy, what they see, what they feel at school, their emotions, their experiences. I think that by doing this with them I can help them to understand how it works, how it can be done and sometimes I find some teachers who also [...] care about this [...] I had a boy who felt excluded in his class. The teacher had seen something, and she also said to me "can you talk to him to see what's going on?". The boy spoke about it and together with that teacher we did a small project in class to talk about problems, we didn't talk about him but the problem in general [...] We talked about my country, the good things about my country. The school system and this approach helped the boy very much because the class understood that he had something that the others didn't have. A small thing, in my country there is cocoa and many children in the school had never seen cocoa and did not even know that chocolate came from this fruit. In the end he teased them "but didn't you know that you always eat chocolate and that it comes from my country?" (IT_F2_M_2_F)

Other strategies include offering support to other children within the class, thereby trying to avoid the child being supported feeling too different or problematic. Listening to children and establishing equal roles and not making the child feel inferior to the adult is involved.

I adopt a symmetrical approach from the beginning, I mean, I do not put myself in the position of an adult because I am talking to a child, I try to have an equal relationship. This allows me to connect with the child (IT_F5_M_3_FM).

What works is listening a lot, I listen a lot and then, by listening carefully, you can understand them and do what is best in that situation. Each case is different, so you must listen and then choose the right strategy for that situation and that child. (IT_F3_M_2_F)

Mediators said they do not use specific materials in their work. They use books used in the school (in Italian) and provide support through the use of the child's native tongue. It is up to mediators to provide materials to help migrant children. This means that there is no uniformity in terms of the tools and materials used by mediators. Some mediators said they would prefer having more tools and materials specifically designed for migrant children.

Most mediators appreciated the fact that they are able help people. One mediator specified that he feels like a bridge between two cultures: "For me, every mediation is a challenge because I see myself as a bridge between two parties, between two cultures" (IT_F5_M_3_FM). Two mediators emphasized the opportunity of giving value to children's cultures and languages.

Because let's not forget that all foreigners (have a feeling) that their culture is the inferior culture, their language is the inferior language [...] It's up to the mediator to emphasize that, on the contrary, having a different culture and a different language is an advantage. (IT_F5_M_2_FM)

Finally, according to some mediators their strength is to be able to adapt to different contexts and situations: "a not insignificant characteristic to consider is that we are very adaptable, flexible and can adapt to many situations" (IT_F3_M_2_F).

5. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Teachers

Representations of integration.

Teachers provided five definitions of integration, **some of them, such as dialogue and interaction, resonates with the aspects that we proposed as relevant to the promotion of hybrid integration and thus to overcome a more traditional understanding of integration.** The first definition is being open to engaging in dialogue with others, empowering and manifesting diversity as an opportunity rather than a threat.

It means having the possibility of having a dialogue with the other and it means having the possibility of accepting the diversity of others and to express one's own diversity freely, i.e., integration is a dialogue and a recognition of the other, certainly not an obstacle nor an enemy, but a stimulus for social novelty and for a new dialogue. (IT_T7_F)

Dialogue should be free of fear and rigidity. It can lead to collaboration and growth and to sharing points of view: “my idea of integration is [...] to find commonalities” (IT_T19_F).

The second definition of integration is giving the same opportunities to all children: “all children feel and perceive that they are able to have the same opportunities as everyone else and enjoy them like everyone else, that they can make the same choices as others do” (IT_T29_F). This means welcoming all children in the same way, making them feel at ease and equal to the other children, giving them the tools to deal with social context and supporting those who have more difficulties.

Allowing children from foreign countries to be able to work, to be put in a position where they can learn like everyone else, and therefore to fill all the gaps, all the linguistic difficulties as well as other difficulties, starting from, as I said, personalized plans or workshops where they can improve their knowledge of Italian. (IT_T16_F)

The third definition of integration is enhancing children's ability to create a community, by offering them the opportunity to participate in mediated workshops and practicing teaching methods which give opportunities and the chance to be valued.

The fourth definition of integration is avoiding stressing the problem of integration.

We have moved beyond this concept of integration because, in my opinion, it is an multicultural school and it works very well from this point of view, the children don't ask themselves “where do you come from” or “what are your origins”, because a true multiculturalism exists, there are many origins. (IT_T6_F)

By taking for granted the presence of migrant students and multiple different backgrounds, children are considered not as problems, but as people, “I'm getting there because after many years, I no longer ask myself about the problems of either the migrant or non-migrant child, I mean, I simply have twenty-four children to work with.” (IT_T11_F).

Real integration is when you are aware of the fact that this is a child who, just like many other children, has his/her own specificities and he/she is him/her, he/she is a particular person more than they are a migrant. In my opinion, that is real integration, when a child is really him/her and when you can have relationships on that basis in the class, so it is not “the Moroccan child”, and “the immigrant child” is not “the African child” but it is him/her, Mohamed or whoever, then there is the real integration. (IT_T13_F)

This means acknowledging their differences and resources: “the fact that one feels that one’s diversity is fully appreciated until it is no longer even considered to be diversity, that is the diversity we all have because we are all different.” (IT_T1_F).

Thus, many respondents highlighted the necessity to overcome the concept of integration itself as it implies the idea of becoming similar or adapting to others: “The word integration is controversial because very often integration is seen as a one-way street, I mean the foreign kid has to integrate into our customs” (IT_T36_F). These respondents suggest that “integration” could be replaced by terms like “inclusion” and “positive contamination”, which emphasize cultural differences, values and talents positively.

I much prefer the word “inclusion” in the sense of the idea that differences are values for everyone [...] inclusion is to use the fact that I am different from you means it is true that I have difficulties that are different from yours but I also have advantages, I can do things that you cannot do [...] to include one’s own values, one’s own things that I can do, therefore to put them together in a puzzle. (IT_T3_F)

The term “interaction” is also suggested, as it conveys the importance of intercultural education against stereotypes and in favour of similarities in feelings and experiences.

Talking about interaction in the sense that I don’t believe that there is a reality of ours in which the others have to be inserted, let’s say, tout court, I believe that in our schools it is really important to adopt a teaching method that is widely intercultural [...] fighting against racism and so on, we always work in an indirect way, starting from activities to understand which are the prejudices that we all have, we also talk a lot about narratives, so we give concrete examples linked to life stories, [...] in order to make people understand what common values we share [...] I don’t believe in theoretical statements of principle, rather in creating the conditions that enable us to get to know each other and to be able to tell each other things, to share the emotions, dreams and needs that all people have in common, and perhaps find common challenges or goals. (IT_T2_F)

Finally, several respondents stressed the importance of hybridization and the need for change in the school system.

The prevailing approach of the teaching staff towards foreign pupils is that the pupil who is given all the help, and that it is the pupil who must get used to our system, which is certainly true in part because that is the system, isn’t it? But I would say that from the point of view of changes, for example in the programme, changes in the system, structures, timetables, for example of school programmes and so on, the school is stuck from that point of view [...] for me integration means integration of everybody towards everybody, of the pupil towards the teacher, of the teacher towards the pupil. (IT_T36_F)

Support of integration

Different actions are implemented to support migrant children, at a national, regional, local and school level.

At a national level, all schools have staff, protocols or work groups addressing the issue of inclusion, welcoming students and families through meetings and facilitating the sharing of information.

We have a reception protocol that envisages an initial phase in which the contact person talks to the families together with a cultural mediator. Then there is a transfer of information to the class teachers. We are quite strict about putting children in the same class as their age group and we try to do this as much as possible. (IT_T13_F)

Moreover, schools arrange specific personalized programmes and types of evaluation, and provide a counselling function when problems arise.

There are measures that all schools implement, such as, for example, a personalized teaching plan for people who have language difficulties, a personalized teaching plan for newly arrived foreigners, to enable them to attend and receive a grade in some subjects not all. This is a novelty that did not exist some years ago. (IT_T8_F)

We have people who are part of an inclusion group [...] who we can ask to come and make observations in the classroom, if necessary, they give you advice, so people who are a little bit more, let's say, trained. (IT_T27_F)

Actions aimed at migrant students and their parents, such as mediation and Italian L2 courses, are widespread and can be implemented on a national, local or school level. As described by mediators too, language mediation is used with newcomers to help collect information, to help them understand the new context and facilitate communication with parents. Schools can use national or local funds to employ mediators. L2 courses may be held by CPIA (Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti), by specialized teachers, but more often by internal teachers, using national funds. According to teachers, internal courses work better for bringing children into the school context and are also useful in creating more personal relationships between teachers and students. L2 courses can take place either during or outside school lessons. However, during the time interviews were being carried out (during the pandemic) no native language classes were taking place in any of the schools. One school was planning a workshop about Chinese culture, open to all students, funded by the CHILD-UP project.

Workshops intended for all students take place either during school time or outside of school. Schools often participate in national, regional or local projects. Moreover, schools collaborate with cooperatives, organizations, local networks, sports clubs and parents' groups. Finally, teachers themselves can organize workshops which are sometimes included in school networks.

We also started a training course, let's say that there were already trained people, I am doing training in the methodology of narration and reflection (MNR) [...] I must say that this methodology [...] is popular because they manage to bring out [...] what they have inside, their problems. (IT_T27_F)

Workshops can address specific intercultural issues, aiming to raise awareness of cultural differences, promoting dialogue and overcoming prejudice and stereotypes as well incorporating other activities such as going to the theatre, visiting places, taking part to events and festivals, doing cookery, sports, orienteering, promoting participation and socialization of migrant children and overcoming language barriers.

On a school level, teachers adapt their teaching methods to include everyone, for example using workshops, enhancing group work, highlighting competences and raising cultural awareness during normal classroom activities.

We try to incorporate a pedagogy that is also a kind of laboratory in order to help integrate everyone so we have, for example, [...] study work groups [...] both peer-to-peer activities, or groups in the morning. (IT_T7_F)

I know of many colleagues who use texts, or the work being done in the classroom, or take advantage of questions asked by pupils to talk about these issues. (IT_T18_F)

All activities that raise cultural awareness have a positive impact on children because migrant students see that they can participate on a personal level and are appreciated and valued for their participation, experiences, identity and story.

This is an opportunity to talk about, for example, the places they come from, or we do life stories in biographies and in biographies of course everyone can bring their experience to the table. (IT_T36_F)

It gives children the opportunity to express their own experiences, giving value to these experiences more so than during normal school time. It has a positive impact on all Italians and non-Italians, especially on non-Italians, because they see attention focused in the right way on characteristics that are perhaps more typically theirs. (IT_T29_F)

Italian students also appreciate these activities since they can experience a more person-centred educational approach. They are curious about classmates and this kind of approach can change their view about migrants: “sometimes Italians like them more than the foreigners do, they become more useful for Italians, but they also become useful to get out of this mentality of hatred and mistrust towards others” (IT_T30_F).

Many teachers also find activities and programmes of integration helpful and valuable. Teachers respond to them positively because children participate with enthusiasm, they help them to achieve good levels of integration, they enhance children’s education as well as new and more personal forms of interaction with teachers. From the point of view of classroom relationships, these activities enhance mutual knowledge between children and different personal aspects that are usually not evidenced in classroom interactions.

They learnt to get to know their classmates through a different activity and they learnt to look at their classmates through different eyes because they saw that they had characteristics that they had never noticed in class and so they were pleasantly surprised, so much so that I also saw them on the way out and then groups were created to go and eat ice cream, to go and eat pizza, to go and eat kebabs. (IT_T7_F)

Moreover, these activities help migrant students feel less alone and more part of the school. Finally, they improve relationships and collaboration between teachers and between teachers, children and their families, thus creating a virtuous circle.

There is also a better relationship between colleagues involved in literacy, those colleagues involved in the various intercultural projects, and colleagues in the class council, and therefore also the children and their families because, in my opinion, a very virtuous network has been created. (IT_T6_F)

However, teachers did highlight that these actions are insufficient, because funds are insufficient and bureaucracy too is an obstacle to realizing appropriate actions; migrant families are not sufficiently involved, hours of mediation are insufficient both with parents and in the classroom in order to observe and interact with children, helping them to express their needs. Time for L2 leaning should also be increased, above all for newcomers at the beginning of the school year especially concerning academic language, which is difficult even when children have obtained a good level Italian.

The aspect of language for study should be implemented and increased much more [...] because often both the pupil and we teachers take it for granted that if the pupil reaches a good level of communication, a good level of literacy, then he or she fully and thoroughly understands the vocabulary of the discipline, which is a specific vocabulary and, in my opinion, requires greater reinforcement. (IT_T6_F)

Finally, it would be useful to increase the number of workshops taking place on intercultural education, intercultural mediation and gender differences in order to create opportunities for children to socialize. A teacher also highlighted the importance of coordination among teachers and the application of new methodologies, exchanging materials, competences and good practices.

They are sufficient when the class council carries on this common thread, because if the project [that we have done], if these three interventions are left to themselves, and within the class council no teacher carries on the discussion, things don't change [...] I'm speaking about my own group, so for the teachers of literature there has been a lot of collaboration over the years, we have learned to share materials and to share good practices, so all this puts in place the conditions that enable even those [teachers] arriving for the first time to be able to draw not only on others' experiences but also on a lot of material. (IT_T16_F)

Collaboration.

During interviews teachers spoke of collaboration with different institutions and actors. Collaboration was assessed positively, but many teachers mentioned the need for more systematic and regular partnership for mediation.

What I think is missing [...] is a more structured and more structural discourse, that is to say, we often relate to each other more for matters of urgency, I don't know, when an unaccompanied child arrives, obviously we, as a school, and they get in touch, we try to talk to each other, but this doesn't always happen in a continuous and constant way. (IT_T6_F)

They also requested the presence of a long-term mediator being present in the school, which was also suggested by most mediators.

The most frequent collaboration is with local administrations, which implements several actions concerning education and psychological support. These actions involve all students, but they are particularly important for migrant students' access to services and opportunities, for example for their socialization in the classroom: "We brought together all the bilingual children at the Institute and did educational and play activities, but above all it was a space where the children were together, so it was very important for them to be able to meet each other" (IT_T13_F).

Other actions are specifically addressed to migrant students and their families: mediation, meetings with migrant parents and language courses with children and/or their families.

There are also Italian language school projects for mothers, I mean there is a great tendency to try and include mothers in projects involving meetings between mothers in order to deal with certain issues that undoubtedly concern children, but which can also concern women alone. Meetings with gynecologists have also been organized. (IT_T23_F)

An important institution is CPIA (Centro provinciale per l'istruzione degli adulti), where newcomers can attend L2 courses, as seen above. However, according to teachers this type of course sometimes prevents students from being included in schools early and successfully.

A third type of collaboration concerns local associations, cooperatives, parishes, neighbourhood associations and foreign community associations. These local organizations provide activities which are not only addressed to migrant students, but often also involve fragile and problematic students. These activities include workshops during or outside the school hours and after-school clubs for children who need help with homework.

We have an after-school club run by the parish and attended only by foreign pupils, practically run by the parish with funds from the parish itself and this is very important because they are really supported in their homework. (IT_T16_F)

There are activities that also involve the school and that are intercultural [...] there is an activity with the Latin American community. Two years ago, for example, there was an association for the recovery of young people who had taken wrong, dysfunctional paths, and it was a religious association. (IT_T34_F)

The fourth type of collaboration is with local services, such as neuropsychiatry and social services, which collaborate with schools when migrant children have difficulties, e.g., family problems or cognitive challenges.

Some teachers also mentioned collaboration within networks of schools, particularly in kindergartens, working on intercultural issues and child poverty. Others mentioned collaboration with national or international institutions, e.g., the Ministry of Education and the European Union, to work on intercultural issues within specific projects.

Social workers

Representations of integration.

One social worker working with UASC preferred to talk of “inclusion” rather than “integration”, although in her opinion Italy is not moving forward fast enough on this issue. According to one educator, integration concerns the opportunity to co-construct individual projects with children, giving them the feeling of being authors of their own lives and identities. For two educators, integration involves curiosity, the desire to know and understand children and their stories. For one social worker, integration means the opportunity to gain access to equal rights and services, but also of having duties towards society.

In general, it (integration) is the possibility of fully entering as a citizen within the new context. The ideal is that young people leave here knowing how the country and culture works and how to operate in freedom and in the freedom of others. (IT_SW9_M)

Other definitions of integration included the recognition of cultural issues and the need for the mixing of different cultural groups, “general wellbeing to all”, “dialogue”, “respect for and knowledge of each other”, “the need to create social networks” and thus the feeling of “being part of a community” which nurtures “the perception of oneself as being an active participant, and not feeling judged or isolated”. Finally, one definition was the recognition and protection of belonging.

I integrate when I know that my belonging is safeguarded and that it is recognized by others. (IT_SW6_F)

Matching different trajectories – and not having to choose between the origin culture and the new one – was another a description of integration: “you as a minor are the linking arm, you have this ability”. (IT_SW11_F)

Actions

According to social workers, integration programmes, professional courses, short-term training and internship opportunities work well. However, some respondents highlighted that these initiatives are insufficient for creating integration because they are not included within a system of contexts and needs.

Volunteering and afternoon, post-school education were also considered a good way of supporting the inclusion of migrant families. The “Welcome” project in Modena, which UASC allows to include families, was cited by one social worker as being important because not only does it provide children with a family, but also a network of social contacts and opportunities. Moreover, this project allows the reception system to take care of people until they are 21 years old. One educator in Genoa talked of several activities in which children are included: movies followed by debates, horse riding therapy, canoeing, cookery lessons, discussion groups about challenges and issues, summer holiday camps, and gardening. These activities were judged positively because they are personalized.

Interventions are effective when they are gauged in the most suitable way to a particular person, because an intervention that may be positive for one person might not be for another. In my opinion, the right relationship and the right level of trust, the ability to feel the other person can be relied on goes to the heart of the success of any project. (IT_SW10_M)

Some social workers mentioned L2 courses, cooking and sewing courses for mothers and basic L2 courses for newcomers as other actions positively enhancing integration. Courses for mothers also provide a baby-sitting service.

Collaboration

According to one social worker, collaboration with health services presents several weak points concerning language and models of intervention. For instance, neuropsychiatric interventions fail due to language barriers as well as time limitations since children aged 17 can receive help only until they are 18, after which they must access the adult mental health services which has a very high threshold enabling access resulting in treatment being interrupted for many of them. However, in work with UASC, collaboration with health services is deemed very important. Social workers also collaborate with schools, professional institutions and the local police, although concerning the latter, communication with central police stations is considered difficult.

Social workers and educators also collaborate with schools, associations/cooperatives involved in post-school activities or managing services for migrants, sport associations, and migrant communities’ religious institutions. Educators also collaborate with the courts and this is considered to work well by most of the interviewees. However, changes within institutions are frequent, meaning that every time further efforts are needed in order to initiate relationships; one possible strategy is to rely on interpersonal relationships within these institutions. Bureaucracy, such as health practices and documentation, were mentioned as a weak point.

It can be just one glitch, just one wrong name in a document from the Police Headquarters, and everything is blocked for months. It is not an issue that can be resolved in an instant because everything must be sent back to the Ministry, and so the smallest thing is enough to block a project for months. (IT_SW12_M)

Keep in mind that we work with unaccompanied minors, unlike Italian minors, it is not that – I mean they arrive and there is no family anamnesis, they arrive, and we work in the dark. Therefore, there is an observation phase that takes place in the community and if doubts emerge regarding cognitive problems or something else, a proposal is made to social services and a referral is suggested [to the social services]. (IT_SW7_F)

According to educators, some challenges concerning collaboration do exist, especially with the health services. Difficulties concern health providers’ understanding of UASC’s aims and, within

neuropsychiatry, generalizations based on national and cultural belonging and social conditions, reduce the possibility of reaching a proper and useful diagnosis. One educator recounted being asked about a child by the health provider without involving the child at all during that conversation. Collaboration with CPIA (Provincial Centres for Adult Education) and vocational schools was also positively valued.

Compared to schools with a specific subject, we work mainly with vocational training institutes, [...] and we work very well. Let's say that with the smart kids, vocational training tends to be [...] a really good experience, you work very well, you do projects, you have a very good relationship with the social services. (IT_SW7_F)

An educator described the Italian language courses (SPAC) provided by Caleidos – a cooperative in Modena – and CPIA language courses for those children who already have some Italian knowledge. In contrast to teachers, educators assessed these courses very positively because they involve people from different nationalities.

The SPAC, although it has a lot of merits, is not good for all students, in particular those who are very able, so our second option is the CPIA, which offers eighth grade courses, which for many students is a very high goal to reach. The CPIA Italian courses are better in other ways too because they are structured in a different way, because the classes are also composed of other people, even adults, I don't know, Filipinos, Italians, women who come from abroad to learn Italian, so this variety softens the nationality factor. (IT_SW8_M)

Another educator was critical about collaborations, for instance about the educational possibilities provided by UASC which are very limited for systemic restrictions.

From the point of view of the people we meet, it is an excellent collaboration and I have always found people who are available, prepared, and extremely competent, aware of the problems of the constraints and willing to solve them. From the point of view of the institutional machine, the problems are many and they are often beyond the capacity of individuals to solve. So there are difficulties in obtaining documents rather than in enrolling at school, but I repeat, regardless of the will of the individuals and of the individuals we meet [...] the system does not help because the system says in compulsory education – in compulsory education, excuse me, therefore sixteen-eighteen, which is the range we deal with – the kids must be enrolled in an institutionally recognized school, I mean middle school, high school, vocational training or do an apprenticeship. Unfortunately in Emilia Romagna unaccompanied foreign minors cannot do these things and this is a huge problem that we have noticed, that is the lack of access to the world of work that a sixteen year old kid has, Italian I mean. The secondary schools are out of their age range because even there, by law, they have to be enrolled in one school per year of age. Therefore there is still high school and vocational training, but they do not know the language needed to do high school, they would find it hard to sit and do law, English or geography for five hours. And vocational training has a limited number of students, and they cannot access it at any time of the year. (IT_SW9_M)

Most of the social workers mentioned L2, cooking, and sewing courses, sometimes with baby-sitting facilities provided too, as we have seen above. These initiatives usually target mothers in order to enhance their skills, relationships and inclusion. The few activities targeted at fathers seem to concern job searching more directly:

The courses we were talking about are obviously much more targeted at women, they tend to be very focused on women. Then for fathers there are different ways of finding a job, but they do not have that aspect of aggregation. That tends to be more linked to women

because the need is normally much higher. For fathers there is often the job and sometimes there is also a social aspect linked to the community they belong to that women do not have, but it depends on the cultures. (IT_SW5_F)

The differentiation of activities targeted at mothers and fathers risks reiterating and reproducing both stereotypes and bias associated with the traditional gender roles.

Mediators

Representations of integration.

Some mediators claim that a successful process of integration originates in the family. Parents are responsible for providing children with an adequate approach to their integration. In this view, a successful process of integration combines resources in the country of origin and in the country of migration. Thus, it is important the children do not forget their country of departure or their parents' origins. However, for some mediators, personality has also an important influence.

What the children have as a cultural model at home is very influential [...] they also have a character that they can easily adapt to, or they can bond a little bit with their colleagues, and then maybe living the school better. (IT_F3_M_2_F)

Only two mediators (in Genoa) openly express disagreement about the concept of integration:

I don't like to use the word integration, because I think integration is a very violent word as it has the sense of forcing someone- I like to use the interaction between [...] It's not that I have to integrate- to become like you. (IT_F8_M_1_F)

Actions

Mediators highlighted the lack of tools and materials they can use to support migrant children and the absence of national guidelines for the inclusion of migrant children, which also impacts on a newcomer is included in a specific class. Some mediators claimed that they were asked to suggest which class a child should be included in, but they complained that they are not trained to make this decision and that specific guidelines should be provided by the government. In this situation, mediators look at the educational history of children to evaluate what the best thing to do for them is.

Two mediators (in Genoa) described a more complex procedure in some schools: a reception committee includes mediators to discuss newcomers' level of education, which class they should go into and what educational programme should be designed for them. However, these committees are not implemented in all schools and sometimes mediators are asked to intervene when decisions concerning the child have already been made.

These commissions work very well in some schools, but in others they do not exist and most of the time we are allocated children where decisions have already been taken [...] The law is very ambiguous, [...] it is interpreted differently from school to school. (IT_F8_M_1_F)

Collaboration

Mediators mentioned collaborating with several other professionals: child neuropsychiatrists, educators in schools, psychologists, pedagogists, social workers. In general, collaboration with neuropsychiatrists was assessed positively even though some mediators said they had witnessed racist behaviour within the health services.

Mediators spoke of the absence of systematic and established support of migrant children's inclusion due to lack of funding and time. They reported that implementing a procedure is time consuming and teachers often do not have enough time to do it. This resonates with what teachers claimed about bureaucracy as presenting an obstacle for realizing appropriate actions. Absence of funds also affects mediators' effective action within schools and in collaborating with teachers to enhance better practices around the inclusion of children.

We also did training when there was money, when there were funds, [...] we did training for teachers. The role of the mediator – I do not say that it has become less important now – but it was more relevant then. Now, due to lack of funds, even the services consider us to be interpreters. (IT_F4_M_3_F)

Moreover, according to the interviewees, mediators are frequently considered to be language teachers and this is problematic for most of them as the number of hours assigned to them is not enough to help children to learn L2. One mediator claimed that sometimes mediators are given responsibilities which are too burdensome. During two focus groups, the mediators agreed that they are perceived by teachers – and in the host country generally – to be a tool and not as part of the system. They reported being involved in emergency situations but not for ongoing support or prevention.

The problem is that they call you only in times of need and instead, I believe, that you should make full use of the mediators [...] not only when they need to deliver report cards or maybe to communicate something, but also to participate in meetings to understand a bit how to operate [...] we are professionals but we are not seen as professionals. (IT_F5_M_1_FM)

All mediators reported a significant reduction of resources to be able to carry out their interventions in the last ten years. They observed a general criticality in terms of policies to help and sustain their work as they feel invisible in politics and public debate.

6. School during the pandemic

The pandemic has worsened the conditions of students due to online teaching and isolation from peers. During the first months of pandemic, badly equipped schools, especially lower grade schools, experienced practical problems that go with delivering online teaching. Teachers considered the 2019/20 school year to be half lost. During the first part of 2020/21 school year, schools were open for most of the time, with some variations depending on the regional restrictions, and with the exception of quarantined classes and ISCED3 schools, where teaching was carried out remotely at least 50% of the time. Now that schools are well-equipped and better organized, so online teaching functions, even where students are quarantined at home.

The primary concern of both teachers and headteachers during online learning has been to preserve the relationship with students without hindering learning and socialization. The interviewees assessed telephone relationships to be positive, especially in the first phase of online learning when several schools were not yet well-equipped. They also mentioned the importance of psychological support and mediation, which almost always continued remotely during the period when schools were closed.

Mediators have conducted online meetings with parents even when schools were back open. However, several problems regarding parents' access, due to lack of equipment and skills, were reported. 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:

“Literacy was suspended because who those needed it most were not easily reachable, you could not plan, he/she connected perhaps once or occasionally and that time it was more important to establish and maintain the relationships” (IT_T41_F).

Sometimes after plenary sessions multiple connections were made in the same classroom, each supervised by a teacher, to give more opportunities for children to participate, as happens in class when working in small groups.

Recreate online what you do in a class, I mean, create groups, each one supervised by a teacher a bit as if you were in the classroom when perhaps a teacher goes out with a group or another teacher approaches two children in the classroom and supports them here at a distance. This type of more personalized coaching is not possible because if we have only one connection and we are all in the same room, but if there are two or three teachers we create more links, so we welcome everyone in the meantime because we have to give the class a sense of unity, then after the greetings and so on we can separate, so a group follows a teacher into another room. (IT_T41_F)

Interviewees highlighted several different ways in which teaching was impacted. The first thing that was impacted, especially in the lower grades of school, was the need for non-verbal communication, physical and visual contact with teachers and classmates. Children have experienced struggled with the stints of online teaching: “As children in kindergarten they need physical contact [...] what was missing is precisely this contact. Children need this, not only a hug but also a look” (IT_T42_F).

On the other hand, more distanced relationships resulted in fewer arguments and disciplinary sanctions, especially in ISCED3 schools.

A second way teaching was impacted concerned a slower pace of learning, above all because initially a number of children did not follow lessons systematically due to problems with access and connection as well as due to families’ work or economic problems. For instance, sometimes there was only a cell phone in the house which was used by the father when he went to work.

If a child is young, he doesn’t have a mobile phone and if there is only one mobile phone in the family, it is taken by the father when he goes to work. So last year I remember some situations in which teachers told me about children doing their homework in the evening with their father’s mobile phone. (IT_T41_F)

A migration background played a particularly significant role on the impact of education during the pandemic. Some children went back to their country of origin and disappeared from the education system altogether, to then either come back during the following school year or not having yet reappeared at the time the interviews were conducted. Moreover, migrant children with language impairments had greater problems communicating remotely since non-verbal communication was reduced.

A third way teaching was impacted was an increased detachment between schools and families, especially families in conditions of social and cultural disadvantage, including migrant families. Even in cases where the school was equipped to provide the possibility of online learning, this distance undermined trusting relationships with parents. For example, some Chinese parents refused to send their children to school for many months, in some cases until now, because they have considered it too risky for their children’s health or because they were busy dealing with other more pressing family

issues. Only after lengthy negotiations, have schools often succeeded in bringing children back to school.

Online learning has also had an impact on the opportunities being offered to children, particularly migrant ones, e.g., regarding information about choosing a secondary school for those who do not know about the options and opportunities offered by different schools.

To sum up, these conditions have significantly affected students' self-confidence and the recognition of their talents.

There have been fewer opportunities to deal with knowledge, with the subjects being studied, to test, so in my opinion they have had fewer elements and then, in my opinion, a little bit less self-confidence in the ability to develop their talents, less recognition of the potential talents of pupils who have recently immigrated, all these steps, in my opinion, are more difficult or incomplete. (IT_T41_F)

7. Recommendations

Teachers

Many teachers mentioned five actions required to foster migrant children's integration. The first action being mediation which is important, not only between languages, but also between cultures. Mediation services should be expanded to include more time, more work with children (where only parents are involved), permanent mediators in classrooms, in schools or in the country.

Systemic actions, therefore. To think that these migratory phenomena have existed, will exist, in different forms, take on different forms perhaps, over the years, but there must be, first and foremost, territorial centres to help families, both Italian and with cultural mediators employed on a permanent basis in every area of the territory in order to provide this type of service. (IT_T36_F)

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, to act as bridge classes to provide tools for children to then successfully fit into the classroom but above all as language support for studying.

Spaces where recently arrived – and the older they are the more sense this makes – classes where we teach them to communicate and say the first important phrases in order not to feel completely lost, in my opinion those spaces are fundamental, they are not ghettos, they are bridge classes [...] we teach Italian to children, we help them to have more tools to hand before putting them in the classes. (IT_T21_F)

The third action is improving communication with parents, in particular through L2 workshops with mothers to bridge the gap between them and their children, supporting families from both an economic and social perspective, involving parents in school activities, including cultural workshops and activities that enhance cultural heritage to promote the idea of difference as a resource.

We need to start from women's literacy, that is, of mothers. In my opinion, this would be a fundamental starting point that would have repercussions on many other things, because a mother who does not speak the language, who does not know the culture at all, is a mother who is always more distant from her children, always more the bearer of something too distant in time [...] cultural workshops where mothers could bring their own food and do their own thing, this would become a resource. (IT_T22_F)

The fourth action is teacher training, which should be continuous, provided by experts or universities and aimed at teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts, reception and inclusion, and conflict management.

A training also of oneself, something that can educate us in a way that, how can I say, it becomes a part of us no? so maybe, yes, a training but in the long term [...] dedicated to this different vision, for example, the management of conflict in a peaceful way, facing diversity but in a way that does not tire, no? “who knows what I have to do now?” but that makes you happier at that point because you know different things. (IT_T31_F)

The fifth action includes activities with young people to enhance socialization, intercultural education, the management of emotions and conflict, dialogue as enrichment and the valorisation of diversity.

These young people must be listened to because it is good for them but, above all, for others, and I say above all because the difference they make to others is fundamental for them in the sense that when their experience is socialized, I think, through dialogic practices [...] this comparison is already useful, in my opinion these young people need to be listened to because they have a richness that others do not possess at that time. (IT_T35_F)

Other proposals include the reduction of pupil numbers in classes, more personalized evaluation adapted to the objectives formed by migrant children themselves, economic support for extracurricular planning, the implementation of policies that avoid marginalization of migrant children, and the improvement of stable communication between institutions thereby fighting stereotypes.

Social workers

Suggestions by social workers and mediators were rather fragmented. First, one social worker focussed on internal organization, suggesting an increase of the number of people working with migrant children to provide more time for each individual child.

A second suggestion concerned implementing plans for children. Building programmes of integration focused more on the external world and children’s needs, creating higher synergy regarding jobs was suggested. An important suggestion coming from an educator was grounding projects on personal need and stories, going beyond cultural belonging and nationality. According to two educators, children showing commitment in their individual projects should have the opportunity to continue these projects even after they turn 18.

A third type of suggestion concerns work with families. One social worker felt communication with migrant families could be enhanced in order to promote knowledge of migrant people; this would also help families to gain trust in Italian institutions. Another social worker suggested adjusting guidelines for the evaluation of certain aspects of migrants’ lives such as parenting practices or approaches to maternity, as she said that these are too grounded in a national (Italian) perspective. Another social worker suggested increasing the involvement of mothers in activities in order to empower them and give them L2 knowledge.

A fourth type of suggestion concerns improvement of institutional collaboration, particularly with law enforcement, central police station and court.

Sometimes you have the feeling that they don't read the reports or that institutions don't talk with one another, and this means that afterwards, not only can you not follow a positive trajectory, because you don't have time, but the negative trajectories become so complicated that they take up seventy per cent of your work. (IT_SW2_F)

One educator highlighted the need for stronger action from the police in dealing with criminal networks that try to involve unaccompanied minors.

Moreover, several social workers highlighted the importance of increasing levels of collaboration with mediators, to learn more about families' cultures. One educator also stressed the importance of mediators as positive role models for children. Although most interviewees based their evaluations and narratives on children's national and cultural belonging, one educator suggested going beyond these labels and focusing more on personal aspects and elaborating cultural aspects.

Finally, one educator highlighted the need to have a system of evaluation of the impact of actions to understand whether children's integration was succeeding, with another educator highlighting the fact that changes in integration procedures rely solely on changes in Italian and European policies.

Mediators

Mediators provided several suggestions, also shared by teachers, to improve their own work and thus its effect on children's education. First, they suggested a more structured and long-term collaboration to support children: "increase the number of hours we do with the children, because the hours are minimal and we are rarely able to complete our work" (IT_F3_M_1_F). Second, they suggested more involvement to transform children's diversity into a source of richness from which everyone could learn something new. Third, they suggested shared training with teachers to create more cohesion and better organize their way of collaborating. Some also suggested the need for more tools and materials specifically addressed to migrant children and as well as systematic exchanges between mediators in order to understand each other's work practices.

Second, mediators suggested changes in approaches by schools'. They suggested that teachers should attend more training and courses to learn about the situations of migrant children and migration in general. One mediator claimed that schools need to understand that its users are different now, and that knowledge should conform to this change. Mediators also suggested a change in teachers' approach to communication with families, in particular suggesting meetings to get to know the family and to allow the family to understand the school system.

Some mediators highlighted the importance of children to be included in kindergarten or sport activities.

Another suggestion, also shared with teachers, was to support mothers' attendance of Italian school, so that they could support their children's learning.

8. Conclusions

Some teachers, social workers and mediators stressed that a focus on children's personal stories can help their work with migrant children. **This resonates with our concept of hybrid integration, which gives value to personal stories as resources for dialogue and mutual engagement in the relationship.** However, especially among teachers, some interviewees seem more oriented towards stressing achievements and evaluation, showing surprise and satisfaction when migrant children learn

successfully. The difference between teachers' and mediators' priorities concerns children's needs: while for most of the teachers the main need is learning L2, many mediators claim that children's relational wellbeing comes first.

Lack of time and funding represent a significant problem for all respondents. Both teachers and mediators emphasize that structured programmes for newcomers are rare, especially within schools, and that mediators are only called in emergency situations or to interact with parents (Genoa is an exception to this). Both teachers and mediators, as well as social workers working in this area, highlight the need for the systematic presence of mediators to provide important support in communication with migrant children and their families. **Time and more communication opportunities would also increase chances to enhance hybrid integration.**

All respondents argue that strategies to create trusting relationships with parents are required. Some teachers and mediators in particular highlight the relevance of creating communication channels which facilitate parent's participation both in terms of time and language support.

An important difference between the respondents concerns the theme of multiple or double belonging, which is considered a challenge by most of the teachers and social workers, but a richness by mediators. Bilingualism is mainly considered to be a challenge rather than a resource except for some mediators who explicitly stress it as being a resource.

Children are generally represented passively in terms of dealing with cultural influences and this shows that children's agency is generally ignored by all respondents, except for some teachers who recognize children's ability to manage different languages and social environments. Children's participation is mainly conceived of as alignment with educational requests by most of the teachers, while among social workers and mediators children's agency is only considered when the child is described as looking for strategies to deceive parents and skipping school duties.

Concerning gender issues, overall non-binary children are only identified as males who have feminine attitudes or behave like females. Most respondents frequently refer to cultural factors to explain gender inequalities between males and females. Cultural factors also seem to impact the evaluation of children's behaviours, participation, school performances, parents' expectations and life experience in general, especially when the culture of origin is very different from the Italian one, or where it implies religious differences. This highlights a tendency towards an essentialist understanding of cultural differences.

Nevertheless, systemic aspects are also mentioned several times as elements that affect children's lives: lack of national guidelines, tools, funding and training for professionals; scarce and inadequate activities and programmes, tortuous and excessive bureaucracy. The recommendations proposed by the interviewees mainly concern these aspects, especially the provision of more, and ad hoc, training opportunities. Mediators also stress the importance of learning the profession in practice, for example through job shadowing.

Finally, all respondents mentioned how the pandemic has increased pre-existing problems. However, one positive aspect was also highlighted: that more opportunities for communication between mediators and teachers regarding tasks for migrant children was possible.

CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: POLAND

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1. Introduction

In this report we present the results of WP5 of the CHILD-UP project. It encompasses the qualitative data gathered during interviews (both individual and FGI) with professionals: teachers, social workers and intercultural assistants.¹⁹ We discuss their educational background, the scope of their duties and experience of working with migrant children and their families.

The topic of our research is of great importance due to the increased visibility of immigrant children in the Polish school. Their integration in the educational system as well as their competence and intercultural capital depend to a great degree on the practices adopted by professionals: teachers, intercultural assistants and social workers working in research centers, universities, NGOs. (Błeszyńska 2006,2008, 2011; Białek, 2015; Bulandra et al. 2019; Herudzińska 2019; Januszewska 2015, 2017; Januszewska, Markowska-Manista 2017; Kościółek 2020; Kubin et al. 2010; Nikitorowicz, 2018 Pawlak 2013). The existing research distinguish two phases illuminating different approach to migrant children. The first waves of migration (about 15 years ago) can be seen as a reaction to new experiences and educational challenges, characterised by the lack of support instruments, adopted curricula, textbooks and cultural assistant. During this phase, the schools were unprepared to respond to migrant children's needs and integrate them into school life. Over the time, with the increasing number and diversity (i.e. refugee children, children of labour migrants or those returning from emigration) of migrant children in educational system, the development of new tools and approaches to integrate them has become a burning issue. While the existing studies point to the considerable challenges, they also identify measures allowing to better respond to the needs of migrant children as well as transformation in professionals' approach, in particular their openness to multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue (Błeszyńska, Herudzinska).

Our study contributed to the existing knowledge by looking at the migrant children's experiences through the lens of variety of professionals involved in their integration. Secondly, recognising the importance of migration's histories on children integration, we included in our studies both the children of labour migrants and refugee children. For the first time different voices and experiences of different professionals are shown together, and for the first time, thanks to the research, we can make some conclusions and recommendations to build a comprehensive picture of the situation in Poland. Finally, the research uncovers the weaknesses and strengths of the educational system and the positioning within it of both professionals and migrant children themselves. **Three locations were chosen to gather the data for WP5 (as for WP6) and were mostly the continuation of the cooperation established in WP4. We conducted**

¹⁹ In this report we use the term "intercultural assistant" for professionals supporting the integration of migrant children in schools. In the literature this position is also referred as a "cultural assistant" or "(cultural) mediator".

fieldwork in a large city (1 million inhabitants), with the majority of economic migrants from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. In this case, migrant children compose a minority of pupils at schools, constituting 2% of students in primary schools. The other two locations are small towns in the eastern part of Poland, located near centres for foreigners, where refugee families are accommodated. Migrant children in the schools constitute a majority of pupils in one of these two towns and a significant number in schools in the other. Migrant children in those schools originate mainly from Chechnya and neighbouring post-Soviet republics. These two distinct fieldsites allowed us to investigate various communities within which migrant children live and the way persons engaged in direct work with migrant children respond to this challenge.

2. Methods of the study

In line with the methodological approach foreseen in the project, the research was conducted in the same locations as Work Package 4: in an urban area in the southern part of Poland (large city) and in small communities / towns located close to the centre for foreigners. We invited professionals from the institutions and organizations already involved in the project, but also new institutions were approached. While teachers were recruited through the schools they work in, social workers were approached through the stakeholders: either CSWC in the large city or the NGO “Stowarzyszenie dla Ziemi” in the case of small communities / towns. In both cases, the contact was initiated with the head of the institution who assisted us in contacting professionals who have had experience with working with migrant children and/or families. To reach intercultural assistants, we used the support of the “Fundacja Wspierania Kultury I Języka Polskiego” Foundation which provides training for intercultural assistants in one of the research sites. This foundation sent out invitation to our project and helped to recruit intercultural assistants for focus group interviews.

The research coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a huge impact on the recruitment of interviewees and the research process. Although all of the approached institutions were interested in the CHILD-UP project and we met with a positive response to our invitation to participate in the research, the recruitment process was long, and it was difficult to get in contact and recruit interview persons. During that time, all three groups of professionals: teacher, social workers and cultural assistants were dealing with a greater workload and the reorganization of their work due to the closure of schools and the requirements of social distancing, which made engaging in the project difficult. This was especially challenging in case of professionals working in the Centre for Foreigners which led us to pursue an alternative strategy, replacing focus group interviews in the Centre for Foreigners with two individual interviews. To provide a broader picture of the situation of migrant children in the education system, we conducted a focus group interview with a new actor - not foreseen in the project – namely professionals working in a Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre for Children. Finally, as COVID-19 also influenced the daily work of professionals, a new section in the research guidelines as added to discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers were recruited from three schools in the urban area (9 interviews) and two schools in small communities/towns (8 interviews). In addition, a focus group interview with 5 professionals working in a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre for children was carried out in the large city. They are formally hired as teachers, but they represent a whole spectrum of specialists who work with children with learning disabilities and developmental disorders, including pedagogues, speech therapists, neurological speech therapists, and psychologists. They deal with psychological-

educational and speech therapy diagnosis and are independent of the school, often playing an advisory, supportive role for children, parents and teachers. They issue opinions that include recommendations on the need for assistance at school, adaptation of requirements, as well as special education certificates. This group of professionals recognize the challenges children face at different levels: educational and linguistic functioning and socio-emotional functioning. Altogether, we interviewed 22 teachers, among these there were 17 individual interviews carried out remotely via phone or online communication platforms with teachers working in primary schools. In the case of social workers, we conducted 9 interviews: 8 respondents work in different branches of the CSWC in the large city, 1 person is a social worker in the Centre for Foreigners. A focus group interview was conducted with intercultural assistants working in various schools. An overview of the number of interviews divided by professional category is available in Table 1 and the detailed description of interviewees and their professional experience is presented in the chapter entitled “Participant backgrounds”. The research included also innovative elements that included on-site observation of intercultural assistants work with children in schools as local neighbourhoods that allowed for a better understanding of their work and children’s situation (for example visiting the room where assistants organize activities and consultations with migrant children).

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS/ FOCUS GROUPS WITH PROFESSIONALS

Teachers Interviews/ focus group interviews	Social workers Individual interviews	Reception Centres Individual interviews	Intercultural assistants focus group interviews
17 individual interviews; 1 FGI in psychological and pedagogical counselling centre for children (5 participants)	8	2	1 FGI (7 participants)

The interviews with teachers, social workers and intercultural assistants were carried out between October and December 2020 and the focus group interview in the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre for children took place in March 2021. Due to restrictions related to the pandemic, most interviews were conducted remotely - either via telephone or online communication platforms. We experienced no problems in obtaining consent for this form of research, but it does have limitations: we could not see the interviewee and recognise non-verbal signals. We might have interrupted our interlocutor or too quickly ask another question. While talking to our interlocutors, we could hear that some of them were working remotely from home and struggling to find a quiet space to give an interview. All of the interviewed professionals received information letter about the project and consent forms. The researchers made sure that the interview did not cause additional stress for the interviewees and that their comfort and privacy were important. The time and type of contact were adjusted to interviewees’ needs and possibilities. The interviews typically lasted from 30 to 60

minutes, with only few exceeding this time up to 90 minutes or 2 hours. All interviews were recorded, and grids were prepared based on the interviews. MAXQDA 2020 software was used for the analysis of data.

3. Professional experiences – an overview

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff

Most teachers working in schools have extensive working experience. The average length of service is 19 years. However, many of the interviewed teachers have been working for 30 years or longer, and only 2 teachers for 5 or fewer years. The vocational experience of professionals working in the counselling centre varies from very experienced to persons entering professional work.

The sample is characterised by a high level of education. All the teachers completed higher education, mostly holding an MA in at least one field: apart from the main field of study e.g. mathematics or history, they graduated from other studies like early teaching, philosophy, teaching Polish as a foreign language. Many teachers completed postgraduate courses, including geography, philosophy, education management, or teaching Polish as a foreign language. Teachers from the counselling centre mostly hold pedagogical and psychological degrees, and had completed additional training in multicultural mediation, teaching Polish as a foreign language or therapeutic courses.

There is almost no anti-discrimination or intercultural training included in the pedagogical studies. However, our interviewees took part in several courses on working with foreign children either organized by the city council, NGOs, by school principals or at the Pedagogical University in Krakow. In this context, teachers underlined the rarity of such trainings which would improve their qualifications in working with migrant children. In 3 cases, teachers had completed postgraduate courses on working with migrant children. These are Polish language teachers who completed postgraduate courses in teaching Polish as a foreign language. It is usually on their own initiative that they chose to improve their skills after a few years of working with migrant children: “We started teaching with no former training, because no one instructed us at schools, no one trained teachers. I voluntarily took the initiative of teaching Polish as a foreign language because it is a challenge” (PL_T4_F).

The teachers work in public schools which vary in terms of location, their total number of pupils as well as the presence of migrant children. One can distinguish two types of schools. Eight teachers work in rather small schools in two small towns, near the centres for foreigners, with a high percentage of migrant children (more than half of the pupils in one of them). The refugee centres were established in the early 2000s, so the schools have about 20 years of experience in working with migrant children. Most of the migrant children come originally from post-Soviet countries in Central Asia and usually communicate in Russian. In these schools, classes are small (6-10 children) and some consist only of migrant children. Teachers underlined the usefulness of the knowledge of Russian, which is common among older teachers (learning Russian was obligatory in all stages of education during state socialism), which allows them to communicate with pupils and their parents. The other type of school, where 8 teachers work, is public primary school in a large city. These are bigger schools (about 500 pupils). In these schools there are few migrant pupils per school (ranging from 5 to 20). Pupils mostly come from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Teachers rarely mentioned the presence of children from Africa, Turkey or other countries and regions. Migrant pupils were seldom

present until about 2015 in these schools. Only recently has the number of migrant children started to grow.

There are also two teachers who work outside of the formal education system, either additionally to their main workplace or as their main occupational activity, teaching Polish as a foreign language children and adults. One of them used to work as Polish language teacher in primary school, however later moved into the field of adult education, organising courses for foreigners in Polish. Only two years ago the school principal invited her to teach Polish language to migrant children at her school for a couple of hours a week. The other teacher cooperates with governmental agencies like the Office for Foreigners and mostly teaches Polish to refugees coming to Poland. She also works in the refugee centre.

Five professionals from the counselling centre have also extensive experience of working with migrant children whose present a significant number of children under the supervision of the centre because of the difficulties at the school are connected to a language barrier or psychological stress connected to adaptation problems. The professionals in the centre work with children of different ages, from kindergarten to 18 years old.

Most of the teachers we interviewed work in primary schools, which encompasses ICSED 1 and ICSED 2 levels (children ages 7-15), one of them also teaches in secondary school (ISCED 3), two have experience as kindergarten teachers. Teachers working in early childhood education (classes 1-3, age 7-10) work with one class only, and they are both subject teachers and head of class. They conduct most of the classes for a single class in subjects like Polish language, math, nature, science, society, music, art. In those cases, teachers have intensive contact with children, including migrant children if they are in the class. Their role is crucial in child's integration and education. On the other hand, teachers working with older classes (4-8, age 10-15) teach a specific subject. They might have contact with pupils from a class every day (in the case of maths or Polish language, for example) or once to twice a week (in the case of other subjects like history, geography, physics, biology, sport etc). Some teachers are the form tutor of a class. The form tutor plays an important role in integrating migrant children since she/he is a tutor, who mediates between the pupil and other teachers, helping to solve any problems that arise at school. Also, parents mostly contact the head of class in any matters connected to school. In this case they also meet with children once a week during a "social class", serving as a kind of community meeting where current issues are discussed.

Two of the interviewed teachers have experience of working as school principals. One used to be the school principal in a small town near a refugee centre for several years. The other has been the school principal in the large city for 4 years. They were both very engaged in educating teachers working in their schools on the needs of migrant children. They organised special seminars for teachers to educate them about the context of migration and the special needs of migrant pupils. The principal from the urban school educates herself on how to support migrant children and regularly takes part in conferences organised by the city council on intercultural education. She also engaged an intercultural assistant for migrant children at her school.

TABLE 2 CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS

	Subject of teaching/professional experience	Years of working as a teacher	Working with children/families with a migration background	languages	Location	ISCED /grades
1.	Polish as a foreign language	4	Conducting courses for adults and children of different ages and implementing courses in cooperation with the Office for Foreigners, as well as with other organisations which organised Polish language classes for children and adults in the Centre for Foreigners	Polish	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 1-2/4-8 grades non-formal education
2.	Early childhood education	14	Head of class with two children from Ukraine daily	Polish	Large city	ISCED 1/1-3 grades
3.	Early childhood education with music	25	Head of class with a migrant child from Turkey, used to have children from Ukraine in class	Polish	Large city	1-3 grades
4.	English language	15	Works on a daily basis with migrant children from Chechnya, Ukraine, Polish children coming back from migration. Mostly Chechen children from the refugee centre. Head of class teacher with two pupils from Chechnya.	Polish, English,	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
5.	Polish language, history, music, knowledge about society	35	Has been working with migrant children mostly from post-soviet countries since 2008.	Polish, English, Russian	Small town, near refugee	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades

	(WOS), English MA in philosophy Postgraduate course in education management Polish as a foreign language postgraduate course Worked as a school principal		Mostly Chechen children from the refugee centre. Head of class teacher in Poland who has only Chechen children.		centr e	
6.	Polish language, Polish language as a foreign language	2001- 2011 primary school – Polish language 2019 – Polish as a foreign language in primary school	Used to be head of class with children from Ukraine (early education. School principal with 10 migrant children.	Polish, Englis h,	Larg e city	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
7.	Physical education	27	Works with migrant children from Ukraine or Belarus daily.	Polish	Larg e city	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
8.	Early childhood education Postgraduate course in	30	Work daily with migrant children from Ukraine, Nigeria, Russia, Belarus.	Polish	Larg e city	ISCED 1/1-3 grades

	education management School principal					
9.	History, German language	14	Works with children from Ukraine, Russia and Turkey daily. Classroom teacher with one migrant boy.	Polish, German	Large city	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
10.	English language, Art, Technology, Kindergarten education	5	Work daily with migrant children from Ukraine, Nigeria, Russia, Belarus. Mostly Chechen children from the refugee centre.	Polish, English, Russian	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 0-2/ Kindergarten, 1-8 grades
11.	Polish as a foreign language, philosophy and ethics	17	Works daily with children from Ukraine, Belarus and Turkey.	Polish	Large city	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
12.	early childhood education, geography	15	Works with migrant children since 10 years. Mostly Chechen children from the refugee centre	Polish, English,	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
13.	Polish language, after school education	31	Works with many migrant children daily. Mostly Chechen children from the refugee centre. Classroom teacher with three pupils from Chechnya. Also children from Kurdistan, Ukraine,	Polish, Russian	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 2

			Polish children returning from abroad.			
14.	English Language	10	Classroom teacher with four pupils from Chechnya. Work with migrant children daily, Belarus, Chechnya.	Polish, Russian	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 1-2/4-8 grades
15.	Math, early childhood education	30	Works with migrant children daily. Classroom teacher with one pupil from Chechnya.	Polish, Russian	Small town, near refugee centre	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
16.	English Language	n/a	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish, English	Large city	ISCED 1-2/1-8 grades
17.	Early childhood education	37 years	Classroom teacher with migrant kids. Works with migrant pupils daily .	Polish	Large city	ISCED 1/1-3 grades
18.	Pedagogue, Polish language as a foreign language	n/a	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish	Large city	Counselling centre, all grades
19.	speech therapist, neurologist	18	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish	Large city	Counselling centre, all grades
20.	psychologist	2	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish	Large city	Counselling centre,

						all grades
21.	psychologist	3	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish	Large city	Counseling centre, all grades
22.	Pedagogue, multiculturalism specialist	25	Works with migrant children daily.	Polish	Large city	Counseling centre, all grades

Social Workers

The social workers we spoke with are mostly women (there was one man in the sample) and are Polish. The duration of their experience varies from 4 to 30 years. They work in the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in one of the largest cities in Poland, apart for one person who works in the CSWC in a small town near the centre for foreigners.

All of the interviewed social workers have higher education which results from the legal regulations of the profession in Poland. Most of them hold an MA in social work, and one person holds MA in psychology. Only one professional took part in several training courses: intercultural communication, training on working with victims of sexual violence among migrants, and sexual violence against children.

Usually, the social workers we spoke to are fluent in a foreign language, either English or Russian, and their knowledge of a foreign language was usually the rationale as to why migrants were assigned to them. However, without special language training, they usually communicate on a basic level and this can cause difficulties in communication. Especially challenging in this regard is working with migrants who do not speak Russian or English and with whom communication is significantly hindered. Unfortunately, the CSWC does not hire interpreters which puts a burden on social workers who usually have to manage communication in a foreign language by themselves.

There are two types of positions that our interviewees hold: social workers and family assistants. Social workers work with all kinds of persons and their duties range from administrative work connected with applications for social benefits, through dealing with domestic violence, working with those misusing substances, directing persons to social welfare facilities. However, the proportions between office work and field work differ. The duties of a family assistant are much more precisely defined: they work with families and focus their attention on the well-being of the child. Their work includes assisting in the education of children and contact with schools, support in the upbringing of children, dealing with violence or other offences. Most of the social workers share field work with office work. They often work in special task teams, comprising a social worker, family assistant, and sometimes a psychologist or police officer, and who discuss particular cases of families together.

Social workers from the large city highlighted the limitations of their experience with migrant families. They stressed that there had not been much contact to date (most of them have only worked with 1-3 families) but they also underlined that the number of migrant families has been growing in recent years and they are encountering such cases more frequently as a result. Moreover, they stressed the unique aspects of their professional experience: they only work with families which are in difficult socio-economic situations and which need to apply for financial benefits, or require help in settling their legal situation. Social workers also deal with families which have experienced court or police interventions (e.g., due to domestic violence) and are subject to the so called "blue card" procedure, i.e., observation, supervision and help in changing domestic violence situations. Importantly, the cooperation with the social welfare centre is limited in time. Similarly, collaboration between social workers and other institutions (such as schools, healthcare, courts) also only occurs in problematic situations. Only the social worker in towns close to the centre for foreigners had wide experience and knowledge about the situation of migrant families, but in this case, they concern refugees.

The areas of intervention by social workers with migrant persons or families include:

- obtaining social benefits
- help during quarantine
- children's psychological problems
- individual integration programs
- help with legalising stays in Poland and getting documents
- psychological support for families with trauma
- adaptation of children at school
- crisis intervention (homelessness, violence)
- cultural conflicts within families where parents originate from different countries
- difficult situations with children – peer violence
- redirecting migrants to other institutions
- help in obtaining a job
- negligence of children
- assistance for victims of trafficking
- counselling families.

Intercultural assistants

The professional background of intercultural assistants is very diverse and corresponds to the different life trajectories of the mediators and often their personal history of migration. Among the participants of the FGI, 5 work professionally as intercultural assistants, 2 are volunteers, one works as a librarian in a primary school and serves as a supporting person at this school, the other is engaged with the Vietnamese Association in Krakow. The 5 professionals in the sample who migrated to Poland knew Polish prior to coming to Poland.

All of the intercultural assistants have a higher education, most of them are constantly working on developing professional skills by taking part in various training and postgraduate courses. Four of our interlocutors earned their degrees in Ukraine, but in various fields. Two have a major in a subject relevant to the role of intercultural assistants, namely linguistics and pedagogy, and pedagogy in history (this person studies also teaching Polish language as foreign at a Polish university). Among the other two educated in Ukraine, one has a major in engineering studies, and the other one in agriculture, and is also engaged in completing the course on teaching Polish as foreign language at a

Polish university. Professionals who completed their vocational training in Poland had graduated from various fields: Polish philology, technical studies, research information.

Intercultural assistants who had not taken a special course in teaching and/or intercultural education voiced their willingness to complete such a training. The fee for such a course, however, exceeds their financial capacities and the schools where they are employed are not willing to cover such costs. The intercultural assistants interviewed underlined the importance of studying language teaching and underlined their desire for professional development. All respondents have participated in the numerous courses for mediators conducted by non-governmental organizations and the City Council program scheme. Participation in training sessions and seminars shows the importance they attach to improving their qualifications in the field of intercultural work. They also refer to their own experience and their own sensitivity when working with migrant children.

The position of intercultural assistants is not well established and the awareness of existing such a position is not widespread. The organization of intercultural assistants' work (including financing) rests with local governments. In the large city, the city council has developed a scheme for employing cultural assistants in the frame of the city council's program. In this scheme, cultural assistants can be hired full time or part time on administrative position. School principals can apply to the city council to finance such a position if they recognize such a need in their school. Many school principals, however, are unaware of the possibility to hire a cultural assistant or are unwilling to do so. Being hired as administrative staff is less favourable as working as a teacher who have fewer working hours (18 a week compared to 40 by non-teachers), longer holidays, higher salary and better working conditions. Intercultural assistants are frequently hired part-time and only employed for the duration of the school year, which makes their employment very precarious.

Intercultural assistants are hired by schools in administrative positions although they perform pedagogical work. They are engaged in a whole array of tasks which not only encompasses contact with the child but also the school system, its organization, family system, support policies provided by specialists –the school principal, educators, psychologists, and other teachers.

Their activities include:

- assistance in mastering the Polish language, helping children becoming independent in school,
- help in understanding the differences between the educational system in Poland and the country of origin,
- organizing children's education at school,
- accompanying pupils during classes (if children do not speak Polish), recognition of education needs of the child,
- assistance with homework, assistance in communication with teachers and between teachers and parents,
- contact with specialists at school - pedagogue, psychologist, head of class,
- psychological support for children,
- explaining the specificity of the behaviour of migrant children to Polish teachers,
- solving conflicts and interventions in case of discrimination at school,
- bringing other cultures closer.

The intercultural assistants play crucial role in the education and adaptation of migrant children at school. They have a dual role as an insider (being a migrant, speaking the mother tongue, for example

Russian) and also a professional working at school and speaking Polish which allows them to be successful mediators between pupils, parents and the school and better understand the perspectives of all parties involved.

TABLE 3 EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF INTERCULTURAL ASSISTANTS

	Education	Professional experience	Nationality	ISCED
1	MA in agriculture (Ukraine); postgraduate studies in teaching Polish as a foreign language (Poland)	30 years; 8 years of voluntary work as a cultural assistant, librarian	Polish	ISCED 1-2
2	BA in research information (Poland)	3 years	Polish	ISCED 1-2 with integration departments
3	MA in linguistics and pedagogy (Ukraine)	2 years	Ukrainian	ISCED 1-2
4	MA in history (Ukraine) in Ukraine; teaching Polish as a foreign language (in progress), (Poland);	3 months-remote teaching in Covid-19	Ukrainian	ISCED 3
5	MA in Polish philology with history (Poland)	4 months, remote teaching	Ukrainian	ISCED 1-2 ISCED 3
6	mechanical engineering (Ukraine)	1 year	Ukrainian	ISCED 1-2
7	Higher technical education (Poland)	Not specified, many years	Vietnamese and Polish	Vietnamese Association in Krakow

4. The experience of migrant children from the perspective of professionals

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff

Teachers recognized several challenges in working with refugee children (who attend schools near centres for foreigners, most of whom come from Chechnya) and migrant children who attend schools in large cities, most of whom are economic migrants (in our group there were teachers working especially with children coming from Ukraine, Belarus, and to a lesser extent Turkey, Nigeria). Their experiences vary depending on their professional competences, time working with migrant and refugee children, and whether they work in a school located in a large city or small town. We divided the challenges which migrant children face into two types. The first concerns education and includes children's achievements, aspirations, and agency, and factors that are related to these aspects such as language, cultural differences, and their family situation. The second is related to the social and emotional functioning of these children, where peer relationships, discrimination and sense of belonging are important.

Educational functioning: achievement, aspirations, and agency

There are many circumstances that challenge the fulfilment of the aspirations and attainment of the educational goals of children with migration experience. The most important of these are related to language barriers, family situation, and cultural differences.

Educational and linguistic functioning

Teachers shared many observations regarding children's language skills with us. The language barrier is not only due to a lack of skills in spoken and written language, but also to specialized vocabulary related to education. Their opinion was further confirmed by the professionals working in the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre who noted that even for children staying in Poland for a long time, the use of Polish as the language of instruction is a barrier.

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's very little amount of hours of Polish as a foreign language and apart from the fact that they don't have the basic communicative skills, there are also problems in the educational sphere, because in Polish they don't understand many subjects, 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)

The language barrier is a challenge for all migrant children; however, teachers recognize important differences in overcoming this barrier. According to them, children who speak languages from the Slavic language family (Russian, Ukrainian) learn Polish faster than students who speak English, for example.

As for the boys and girls from Ukraine and the east of us, it's actually easy because these children learn Polish very quickly. (PL_T7_F)

However, I happened to have a pupil, 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)

This is a risky statement as not all children have an aptitude for language, and some may need more time to acquire it. Children may give the impression that they understand, e.g. by nodding that they understand everything because of the power distance which is large in Polish culture but might be even larger in the cultures from which children come from (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2007), but in fact they may not understand the instructions and they do not want to undermine the authority of the teachers. This may be particularly true during the adaptation phase, when children are experiencing stress. The same happens with children from returning families who, although they often speak Polish as an everyday language, they do not know the language of education and have difficulty understanding instructions in various subjects e.g. mathematics. Learning Polish is also hindered if migrant or refugee children live in a homogenous ethnic and national environment, rarely having contact with Polish peers. As was noted by teachers, having a high number of Polish children in the classroom, where peer relations are more differentiated, facilitates the acquisition of a good command of Polish, in both reading and writing. On the other hand, there are also many statements indicating that children who also speak other languages, such as Turkish, are able with proper support and motivation to acquire Polish to such an extent that they realize their educational aspirations. Similar opinions were expressed by teachers from large urban schools and those close to centres for foreigners:

The sister of the girl from Turkey has already left school, she went to high school. She learned Polish very quickly. The brother overcame barriers very quickly, they participated in math, English competitions. (PL_T3_F)

We often have to deal with a situation [that the child doesn't speak Polish or Russian]. For example, we had a girl in the 3rd grade, from Mongolia. She grew up to be a wonderful girl, but she could not speak Polish [or Russian]. The teachers who taught her used to run to me or to the English teacher [for help]. Now she speaks excellent Polish, writes excellent Polish, passed the exam very well, so it's possible. (PL_T5_M)

In large urban schools, teachers emphasize that many parents from Ukraine or Belarus come to Poland for a "better" life and these families mostly belong to the group of economic migrants. However, the reason for their arrival is not known in every case, as some parents, although they do not seek refugee status, also come to Poland out of fear of war (e.g. from the Crimea region and recently also from Belarus). In many cases, children are motivated to learn by parents and therefore they try to overcome the difficulties they encounter on their own. This is what a teacher from a school in the large city says:

We have foreign children at school, they are ambitious children, and I have noticed that they are able to achieve some success, and we don't have big problems with these children at school, this boy is an exception. These children are always looked after, they have their homework done. (...) He also had emotional problems, he wanted to succeed and get good grades, I suppose it was like that in Ukraine, he felt demotivated, got angry, reacted impulsively when he got worse grades. He has better academic results but not in all subjects, some concepts are too difficult for him, he does not react as impulsively as before. (PL_T8_F)

This statement indicates that the language barrier and acculturation stress can make it difficult for children to achieve goals that are consistent with their aspirations. Children's reactions during lessons may be misunderstood. They may stem from a sense of powerlessness and an inability to overcome barriers without adequate support. On the other hand, it is also challenging for the teacher to work

with a child who has difficulties with comprehension and language acquisition because teachers lack child-specific work tools (see section “Working with children and their families”).

Teachers working in schools close to the centres for foreigners sometimes find it difficult to estimate children's aspirations, because children attend particular school for a very short period as the family treats Poland as a transitory country. Such situations negatively influence a children's motivation to learn.

The unfortunate thing is that as teachers, we have no way to verify children's aspirations because these kids are quickly gone. We rarely have the opportunity to see what has happened to these kids. (...) These kids are vanishing, it's impossible to verify. (PL_T5_M)

Teachers are aware that there are other health circumstances and individual differences in addition to migration that also affect the children's performance at school. They try to recognize the children's strengths, the child's efforts despite the lack of adequate results. The psychological and pedagogical counselling centre's staff, just as the teachers pointed out, admitted that children who migrate, apart from the experience of migration, also experience developmental difficulties, such as developmental language disorders or dyslexia. It often turns out that a diagnosis made at an earlier stage in the country of origin is incorrect and needs to be verified.

The diagnosis of learning difficulties is made even more difficult due to the language barrier. The counsellors admitted that they do not have access to translators, psychological and pedagogical tools in different languages. They use their own language resources, such as English and Spanish, but there are few people who speak Ukrainian or Russian. This creates a feeling of helplessness when children and parents who do not speak Polish come to the counselling centre and seek help.

There is often a need to support parents in their upbringing, it would also be a great support for the child, to talk a bit about how to react, these are often parents who are under stress, in crisis, in the process of adaptation, so they themselves need to sort out certain things. And this would often have a very positive effect on the functioning of the child. And how it works in practice depends on the language level, how well the parent operates in Polish, because if it's basic, we can talk about some things, really exchange some information, give some hints. But if the level is low, then I often face a great helplessness, because there is a problem with access to translators, we don't have them, and sometimes we don't have the possibility to support these parents, either educationally or psychologically, even temporarily, until they find some other support. (PL_F1_T_4_F)

It is difficult to verify or make an adequate diagnosis. The diagnosis of these children, as opposed to children of Polish descent, differs in duration and sometimes there are many meetings with schools and parents to determine the optimum forms of support for the child. Not all schools employ a cultural assistant and therefore such a person cannot always support the child at a meeting with a psychologist.

Cultural differences in educational contexts

Cultural differences area challenge that also need to be overcome so that children can achieve their own educational and social aspirations. Understanding cultural texts like fairy tales allows them to find common ground with their peers. Teachers emphasize that children with appropriate intellectual potential are able to cope with cultural differences in terms of educational context or curriculum differences. A teacher from a school in the large city commented on this in the following manner:

The teaching of history and Polish language is complicated. There is such a thing as cultural context. These children came to us with a different cultural context, no one read

“Locomotive” or watched Reksio or Bolek and Lolek²⁰ in their childhood. This is a colossal difference. But those children who want to and have the intellectual potential [can achieve well]. (PL_T5_M)

Some classes – such as the “Upbringing to a family life” subject– are also difficult to accept for the parents of Muslim children, who question the need for such knowledge. In the case of any conflict between the curriculum content and the precepts of Islam, those children would simply not attend the lesson.

They are only children. You have to teach at school, but you have to look at their situation differently. They asked me: Upbringing to a family life. What is this subject about? I explained to them: It is a subject about family, similar to biology. They participated in a few classes. Probably told their parents at home what topics were discussed during the lesson. Their parents did not let them go again. At that time, they had biology about a woman's body (...). A naked woman!? They closed the books in anger. The teacher said: This is a woman's body. That's what you look like. But you're not ashamed that you show us such things, that you watch such things? - they asked. She said that: It's a shame if you don't have knowledge. If you do not study and learn. The parents were outraged. They did not want their children to participate in biology classes. We explained to them that those topics are obligatory in the curriculum. (PL_T13_F)

Cultural differences between the culture of the parents and the country of immigration

Parental attitude to education is another factor influencing the situation of migrant children at school. It is particularly visible in the statements of teachers working at schools near the centres for foreigners, where refugee families who are from very different life situations and are often after traumatic experiences, are staying. In the case of Muslim families (to which most Chechens belong) the division of social roles according to gender is different. According to the teachers, in many of them, though not all, the dominant cultural pattern is that girls finish their education quite early in order to get married.

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)

In the case of the Chechen families, cultural differences in the understanding of social roles and the role of education in the family play a crucial role in the functioning of the child. If the value to the family is the marriage of the daughter, then the parents will not encourage the child to spend time studying. The poorer grades of girls could be the result of the lack of time for learning, since girls must help their mothers in bringing up their younger siblings, and also serve their brothers.

Girls, especially those who are in the primary school, would help their mothers a lot in bringing up their younger siblings, and girls seem to be more resourceful, more caring, what I noticed earlier in my work. Boys again are more attached to their fathers and need such support, and they need to provide such support to their sisters, because they are brought up to do so, for being prowess, for self-protection. Often (girls) are seen by

²⁰ “Locomotive” - a well known children’s poem by Julian Tuwim, Reksio, BolekiLolek – Polish animated series for children.

teachers as persons, who don't want to learn, but seek to get married. Because someone who knows that culture is aware that girls get married earlier. A problem can appear at this point with mutual communication. If you don't want to learn, there is no place for you here. (PL_T1_F)

High personal academic expectations and the persistence of parents show that migrant girls also want to educate themselves.

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)

Therefore, the teachers observe that there are different patterns of behaviour among Muslim girls. While some girls fulfil traditional roles, others try to negotiate their available opportunities and follow more emancipated paths.

Girls are very modest, although there is no single pattern. There are girls who scrupulously observe the rules of Islam, we have pupils who walk in long dresses with their hair covered. We have girls who feel comfortable in this European cultural pattern, or they dress in a European way. Sometimes they are reluctant to participate in sports lessons, because it is necessary to change into sportswear. (PL_T13_F)

Some families know that education is important, children have better results when parents motivate them, when they treat education as a value and opportunity for child. This is particularly important for the children in our study, since those between 7(1st ISCED 1) and 15 (8th ISCED 2) are still very dependent on their parents. Parents play a key role in the development of educational aspirations, regardless of the type of migration or country of origin. Teachers from schools close to the centres for foreigners commented on this in the following manner:

If a man grew up under the care of a father who worked occasional jobs all his life and they lived very well, they would have survived somehow if it hadn't been for the war, it is difficult to develop in such a parent the conviction that it is necessary to study in order to have a profession. Often students answer the question of what do you want to become or what will you work as with a shrug of the shoulders (PL_T5_M)

There is small number of families in the centres 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)

On the other hand, this understanding of cultural differences as barriers to school achievement may be unfair since, when viewed from the perspective of the family's culture of origin, perhaps fulfilling the roles assigned at home can be a choice and an expression of children's agency. Children living in Poland begin to perceive differences between cultural patterns in their family of origin and outside it. However, this kind of empowerment could be discussed if the child consciously made decisions about his/her future by considering different solutions rather than following imposed roles. This can lead to a conflict of values in the child, as well as an increase in generational conflict between children and their parents. In the following statement we can see that the orientation to collective values related to the care of the family can be a manifestation of the child's important role in the family.

The boy says he didn't do the task because he made breakfast for everyone in the morning. Mom goes to work, so he takes care for the rest of the family. They have their father in prison. He is mentally ill because of what happened in Chechnya. They live only with Mom. (PL_T13_F)

In this case, the boy assumed the role of the father. By pursuing collective values (caring for the family) rather than individualistic ones (acquiring education), his role in a family is likely to increase. Children who still have difficulty speaking Polish and integrating into a peer group may rely on the values and behaviour patterns that are promoted at home. Additionally, random life circumstances (the lack of a father figure) cause the delegation of the role of caregiver to the son.

Cultural differences, but also the experience of acculturation stress, can manifest themselves in children in the form of different, not always compliant behaviours. Rude behaviour may be misinterpreted by teachers and even be a sign of depression or post-traumatic disorders. Teachers from schools close to the centres also notice differences in the behaviour of girls and boys. In the case of refugee Chechen families, there is also the problem of cultural differences in the way female teachers are treated by boys. When the teacher is a woman, boys sometimes do not follow rules, do not follow instructions, which can be difficult for female teachers, but can also be a barrier to the children's acquisition of new content: "Sometimes they are rebellious. Especially boys when they are rebuked by female teacher. In their culture, women are seen differently so they don't like being rebuked by woman, they are reluctant to obey orders" (PL_T14_F).

Moreover, religion shapes the everyday life of migrant pupils and their families. It used to be a major challenge for children and their parents to be in a space where Catholicism is present in such an evident way (crosses in classes, celebration of religious holidays).

No, in our school there are not [special religion lessons for refugee children]. Refugee children don't attend religion classes. Religion is often first or last in the plan. If it is in the middle of classes children can go to common room. (PL_T4_F)

Even though children do not have to participate in religion class, they participate in religious celebrations. However according to the interlocutor migrant children and their parents got used to the domination of Catholicism over time. Teachers who work in schools near the centres talk about this:

We have never pressed anything on foreign students, but we have beautiful experiences. For example, two years ago and last year Muslim children performed at a nativity play. The priest speaks to our children, the gospel is read. And migrant children like Christmas carols, my student plays "Bóg się rodzi" on a dulcimer. (...) We don't push anyone to do something. We are a Catholic school, although it is not written in the name, but we are a village school, by force of tradition, parents' demands, parents' expectations, teachers' expectations. We simply celebrate holiday. (PL_T5_M)

Our Chechen children performed in the Christmas speech. Our priest says that they will become Christians soon (...). (Pl_T13_F)

The above statements indicate expectations of adaptation, adoption of assimilation strategies in the context of religion. In the statements of some teachers, it is possible to see a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences and the adoption of an ethnocentric attitude. On the one hand, according to them, participation in religious events can be a form of integration, on the other hand, although teachers do not pressure students in the context of participation in these events, these students may feel obliged towards teachers who have more power. The following statement by a female teacher shows such a situation:

We had preparation for the teacher's day and we performed a Belgian dance. One girl refused to shake the boy's hand. I started talking to her, I showed her videos that in other dances you can touch, and nobody gets hurt. I showed her some of these dances. I told her:

"Here, the boys won't hurt either. Just put your hand closer to his hand. "And she tried. The dance turned out very well. (PL_T9_F)

Sometimes teachers do not know how to behave when they observe cultural differences. There are some situations at school where teachers convince children to break some of cultural rules which feature in conservative Islam, like boys touching girls. Teachers may have good intentions but in such power relations children often cannot refuse to follow the teachers' recommendations and they (or their parents) might feel bad about the results of those actions. Thus, it is likely that beyond cultural differences, family circumstances, or language barriers, the cultural sensitivity of teachers is also a factor related to the functioning of children with migration experiences in the school environment.

Social-emotional functioning: peer relationships, discrimination, and sense of belonging

Socio-emotional functioning

An important area perceived by those working in the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre is the lack of adequate psychological support at school. This was mentioned earlier by teachers, especially those working in schools near centres for foreigners.

And the counselling centre, and we are counselling centre workers, well it deals with a certain extreme, it may not be nice to be there, but our activities are directed to the margin of these children, not to all children, and all children need care. I am sure that many children do not go to counselling centres because they do not necessarily know about their existence, these counselling centres, or for various other reasons parents do not decide to get such help, because they did not get the hint at school. Well, I would like to believe that they don't end up there because they have that care at school, but that's not the case. (PL_F1_T_5_F)

Children with migration experience often face adaptation stress, which can significantly affect their educational and social functioning. The language barrier can result in an inability to reach one's potential and exacerbate emotional difficulties, sometimes resulting in withdrawal from the peer group. Language barriers, educational difficulties and emotional difficulties related to the change of residence limit the child's ability to function if they do not receive appropriate support. These may be extreme cases, but such children are first placed in Polish schools and then in the care of counselling centres. Such children require special care and the implementation of certain measures in schools in order to build a sense of security, to enable their further development in accordance with psychophysical possibilities.

Peer relationships

Teachers perceive differences between the relationships of children in ISCED 1 and ISCED 2. According to their observations, children in the younger grades are integrated into the classroom more quickly, largely because learning in Grades 1-3 is largely conducted through play: "With 1st graders, they spend a lot of time in the common room, they integrate then, they play together" (PL_T7_F). In addition, children in 1st grade are just beginning to learn to read and write and therefore children complete some tasks together.

The problem arises in higher classes, when the language gap is bigger due to specialized vocabulary connected with education and youth slang. Teachers try to choose the composition of the group in such a way that children have the emotional support of other foreign children. However, they recognize that this can have a negative impact on language learning.

On the one hand we give them to one class so that they have some support in each other, but on the other hand the problem arises in higher classes, when the language gap is bigger due to specialized vocabulary connected with education and youth slang. Teachers try to choose the composition of the group in such a way that children have the emotional support of other foreign children. However, they recognize that this can have a negative impact on language learning.

On the one hand we give them to one class I don't know if it's good, because then these children inevitably have to integrate with Polish children, and then they have to struggle, they're not together. (PL_T7_F)

Initially, however, being in an environment where children speak a similar language can support children's psychological adjustment, build a sense of security, and can positively influence cognitive opportunities for learning. Teachers recognize the importance of supporting children and their social-emotional functioning. In the case of a Nigerian student, the teacher's intervention and support was crucial because the student, due to language difficulties and her different skin colour, felt different and her anxiety levels were elevated, making it difficult for her to relate to her peers.

I wanted her to start communicating socially. It was the basic thing, that she was not ashamed of her language. Because at the very beginning when she went down the street she was hiding her head in her arms and she was afraid to walk down the street. (PL_T6_F)

The beginning was very euphoric, everyone wanted to size her up. I let them use the communicators to talk to her. Then it cooled down, the kids were just tired, so much so that the English teacher assigned her guardians, and there were two girls who stayed with her for a very long time. (PL_T7_F)

Children's sense of belonging and security is related to feeling accepted by other peers. As seen in the example above, it also involves making an effort on the part of the rest of the students who also try to communicate in foreign language (e.g. to use a translator) to make new student feel comfortable.

Building peer relations is also illustrated by the example of a boy's experiences which, although difficult, allowed him to find his place in the group and to present his knowledge.

There were no problems [with integration]. I have a boy in the fifth grade, and I will tell you that I forget about him, sometimes when I prepare various summaries. I forget that he is in the class, he integrated with the children so well. He immediately won the sympathy of the boys, because he talked a lot about war. Everything was shooting, all the drawings were about war, because it was the time of aggression in the Crimea. He also has such tendencies, and this influenced the sympathy of the boys, who accepted him with all his military ideas. (PL_T7_F)

Additionally, perhaps speaking openly about the situation in the country of origin can have a therapeutic effect for some children. In this case, working through difficult experiences in the form of drawing or play and having these behaviours accepted by peers may help the child cope with traumatic experiences. What also supports a sense of belonging is the opportunity to present the child's language and traditions related to the celebration of holidays.

When I was a teacher, we spent a lot of time discussing this. At that time there was a lot of talk about Ukraine, the pupil was talking about the war, what was happening. We even learned the Cyrillic alphabet, how they celebrate holidays, birthdays. (PL_T7_F)

Despite the language barrier, teachers manage to awaken in children a sense of responsibility for others and introduce a support system for the child with migration experience. Below is a description of the situation of a boy who came from Ukraine to one of the schools in the large city.

Ivan is accepted in the class, but it was not like that from the very beginning. Because of the language barrier, it backfired in social interactions. The boy was isolated, on the sidelines. Then he got in touch with 2-3 people, and now he talks to half of the class, which is a big success. Nobody teases him in the class. (...) The kids in the class don't visit [Ivan], but they help at school, send homework to each other, information about the topic of the homework, a note from the lesson. (PL_T8_F)

The child has received adequate support from peers at school; however, teachers observe that what happens at school does not correspond with free time after school. Children do not meet with each other in parks or visit each other's places of living. This is observed by teachers from schools in the urban area as well as from the schools close to the centres for foreigners: "Most children accept her at school but outside they do not want to keep in touch with her" (PL_T6_F). Refugee children sometimes have fewer resources to be able to establish and maintain social relationships due to their traumatic experiences and the emotional consequences.

I think that they move here [from their countries] with many difficult experiences, that is why I think that here it was hard for them to accept our reality. There were fights, conflicts. They weren't necessarily into social relations in general. (PL_T13_F)

These children in particular need adequate support from professionals in building relationships as well as acceptance by the host community in order to feel safe in their new school.

Sense of belonging

There was little information in the teachers' statements about their interpretation of migrant children's sense of belonging. Nevertheless, some teachers perceive that the children do not feel a sense of belonging to Poland, which may be related to the formation of a hybrid or global identity, but mainly also lack of attachment to one place: "She does not link her plans with Poland, she would like to live maybe in England, maybe Berlin, she talks about Europe but not Poland"(PL_T6_F). Teachers, on the one hand, accept those broader plans of children, but on the other hand, they have expectations of the assimilation and adoption of Polish traditions by children.

As a teacher I do not have to assume any goal, because those kids have Ukraine in them and we will not get rid of it and nobody even wants to do that. Because it is their country where they grew up until they were 5-6 years old. But I do not have much to do here as far as integration is concerned because these kids will feel Polish in a while. If they stay here, Poland will be their country, more important than Ukraine. They will attend high school here, they will find a job here. Ukraine will be living inside their parents, but not so much inside those children. (...) even Celina, who did not give a sound at the beginning, she starts already to argue in Polish. (PL_T6_F)

The changes concerning the sense of belonging to a place, observed by teachers, concern various spheres of children's lives. The more public ones, such as school and work in the future, require the children to adapt to Polish conditions to a larger extent. Nevertheless, the family is still a sphere where the culture of the parents may be dominant. Teachers see language as a marker of acculturation or a sense of belonging, but it is not the only factor. It may be more dominant in the case of some children, but for others it may be equally important to maintain traditions, values prevailing in the culture of

origin and nobody actually asks them if they feel Polish or Ukrainian, what kind of traditions they perceive at home.

Our goal as far as integration is concerned is to show her that she is fully accepted (...) and at the same time show her what is nice, what she might like. But we cannot impose anything on her, because she will not accept that, only as a gift (...) But she will not be fascinated by our culture, (...) because she is Nigerian, and she has that in her soul and in her body. She came here as an 11-year old girl and she has many friends there. I came to her with my heart in my hands, for me there is no problem that she came from such a distant place. (PL_T6_F)

Selective cultural adaptation and thus the process of identity formation in adolescents is associated with ambivalence, a lack of a sense of belonging, especially during adolescence. Children at home are "foreign", while at school they should be Polish. Teachers are often somewhat lost in this respect, even though most do not raise this issue, which may indicate a lack of awareness of the conflict of values that many children from migrant families face. It is therefore important to provide the experience of both learning the language of instruction and the opportunity for expression in the language of origin. That does not invalidate acculturation efforts and does not mean staying exclusively with national/ethnic culture. However, selective acculturation or bi- or even multiculturalism are also in the field of possibilities. Moreover, negotiating one's identity in the light of the concept of hybrid identity implies a certain fluidity, the possibility of change over time, the acceptance of a deeper entry into the host society or a turn towards the national/ethnic culture.

Teachers note that children's identities are in the process of being constructed, and as far as refugee children are concerned, this process is strongly influenced by the culture of the country of origin, and one may speak of a one-way identity or ambivalence due to the limited livelihood strategies of their parents. The children of economic migrants quickly take root in Poland, they speak Polish quite well and negotiate their identity, and this change is thanks to their sense of agency. Identity negotiations between Poland and the country of origin may create hybrid identities, which allows them to emphasize cultural manifestations appropriate to life and school situations.

Discrimination

The results of the analysis indicate the presence of discrimination in schools on several levels. The first is discrimination resulting from functioning stereotypes about the behaviour and temperament of Chechens, which is particularly experienced by Chechen refugees according to teachers working in schools close to the centres for foreigners.

Some older children went to high school. We helped them, because they did not want to accept them because they come from Chechnya, because there will be fights. (...) The Chechen family wanted to stay here. They got a work permit, a temporary stay and had to move out of the reception centre. They had a problem because whoever heard that they were from Chechnya didn't want to rent them an apartment. (PI_T13_F)

The second one is the isolation of migrant children and behavioural acts of discrimination. Teachers from schools close to the centres for foreigners admit that in the past there were many behavioural problems with refugee children, which resulted in their isolation. Aggressive behaviours can have other causes as well, such as those related to the importance of honour in the family. For example, Chechen boys feel responsibility to protect the girls from their community and defend them from

other boys: “We had a situation when a girl was teased by other children. Then a brother or a cousin would bring justice to the Polish boys” (PL_T5_M). Nevertheless, over time the amount of difficult behaviours decreased, and the children began to mix with each other and enter into intergroup relations: “Sometimes there are fights, which can be very aggressive. However, we have not had any cases for years”. (PL_T5_M)

Teachers in schools close to the centres for foreigners sometimes have different opinions about discrimination. Perhaps this is due to their different lengths of service in the schools. A man who worked in a school when refugees first arrived claims that the attitude of the host community was hostile, whereas a teacher who joined the teaching staff later claims that it was the refugee children who behaved aggressively towards Polish children and thus conflicts arose. This may indicate a significant change in intergroup relations over time. Teachers emphasized that there were fewer and fewer Polish children in schools over time due to conflicts:

Our children [Polish] always treated them with respect. It never happened that a Polish child beat up a Chechen child. Once a Chechen boy hid his shoes from a Polish boy. (PL_T13_F)

The children arrived in 2008. Initially, the attitude to the fact that there would be foreign children, and we knew they were Muslim. The attitude towards them was unfavourable, not to say hostile. (PL_T5_M)

The changes may have been due to the integration activities undertaken by the teachers. These changes can also be explained by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). There are a large number of migrants in the schools at the centres, so contact is intense and due to the integration activities undertaken by the teachers there may have been a reduction in prejudice and acts of discrimination.

At the beginning the girl from Turkey reacted in different ways, she showed some people something, and others she pushed away, kicked them. So there was this aggression. Now it is definitely better. Although she is such a girl quite difficult to raise. That was the problem, that she didn't want to, even with this assistant, say anything. She never wanted to talk, even when she did something wrong. Her mom had a hard time with her at home. We couldn't get to the bottom of things. (PL_T3_F)

The last example involves a student from a school in a large city. As it can be seen, she developed similar aggressive behaviours that may be a response to the adaptive stress that children may experience during relocation. Additionally, children may have developmental difficulties or have previously experienced emotional difficulties that are exacerbated by the stress of relocation and should be provided with psychological support.

Teachers mostly agree that Ukrainian children do not experience discrimination because of their origin. Teachers at schools in the large city speak of nicknames used towards migrant children using the name of the country from which they come, but they play down the significance of this form of discrimination. This may not indicate that the children do not experience this form of discrimination so much, but that the teachers do not treat slurs and nicknames as a form of discrimination.

It is at an age that teasing happens because it is fun. It is not related to their ethnicity, although there are situations where someone says in anger "you Russian". Immediately the teachers react and we this situation is reported to me and we talk. But such teasing is also among children from Poland. (PL_T7_F)

No, I think that kids welcomed them very well, right away, I would say, they integrated with the whole group. There is no division into those from Ukraine. They are treated equally just like other children. (PL_T2_F)

Nonetheless, a few teachers in the large city did make statements about discrimination and how to deal with it.

There was a girl from Ukraine in the 4th grade. They teased her for no reason, beat her, kicked her. Last year a girl from Nigeria came and she also caused a shock because she is in a different colour. Racist behaviour appeared. There have been several such situations. We reacted very quickly to them. Including the fact that we threatened to report it somewhere and it calmed down. She knew how to defend herself but she has different problem. She doesn't speak Polish. At one point I heard - stop kicking her. And I ran out quickly and this poor Sonia (from Ukraine) was standing in the corner, someone was kicking her. I took this boy who reacted and praised him so much. The director printed the diploma and we just publicized that he defended that girl because there were a lot of people in the corridor. Everyone would like to get such a diploma, so they just saw how cool it is. His dad was so happy too. And this was fourth grade, and they also wanted someone to praise them. The perpetrator was one person, from a difficult family, so I think that these are patterns transferred from home, because what child can be a racist in the fourth grade? (PL_T15_F)

Teachers emphasized the role of parents in the formation of prejudice in children. According to the teacher, reacting and rewarding the person who helped the discriminated girl made the level of discrimination decrease in the school. Thus, it is also possible to observe the teacher's agency in this area and the real changes that occur when teachers react to discrimination.

Social workers

Social workers also recognize the difficulties of migrant children which, as in the previous subsections, are divided into adaptation problems and their consequences and social-emotional functioning. However, they focus on the perspective of the whole families rather than the children themselves. Therefore, the child's needs and any educational issues are placed in the context of the specific problems of a family.

Adaptation problems and their consequences

According to social workers, children's educational functioning is greatly affected by adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences. Additionally, these children do not feel safe as they see the helplessness of their parents who do not speak Polish and experience their own adaptation problems.

As far as this first family is concerned, there were certainly such adaptation problems. Maybe it was also a matter of culture. They were very alienated children. Apart from the fact that they didn't speak the language, in that case, their mum didn't speak the language either, and it was such a barrier that we were very distrustful, as you explained. The children were generally so withdrawn. I don't know how much at school, but how I came into contact with them. In the case of the other family, well, I wasn't supposed to be in the environment, but I saw the children, because they were with me in the centre, well, in one case it was a small sick child, and in the other case it's hard for me to say, but it was problems of adaptation and contact. (PL_SW1_M)

Parents are not only confused about school rules or administrative procedures, but also about typical situations such as going to the doctor. The parent's behaviour may be interpreted as a lack of interest in the child or neglect. According to the pattern present in the culture of origin, the parent may treat the doctor as an authority and only listen to what the doctor has to say, without any comments or

questions. In situations of cultural differences in the rules regulating social relations, many misunderstandings may occur such as those described below.

The boy was in [the name of an association whose activities concern running day-care centre for children and youth], in the association, and he reacted aggressively towards his friend. He was throwing scissors, and they intervened and called the ambulance because they were afraid that something might happen, and they called the police, too, I think. The ambulance took the child to [name of s street] to the psychiatric ward. And then this lady, the mother, came there. And the important thing was that they [doctors - DB] were open to talking. When she came to see her son, she didn't ask the doctors "what happened", she listened to what they were saying to her. She wasn't asking about the situation, she was just waiting to hear what they were going to tell her. And they perceived it as, I suspect, as little interest in such reprehensible behaviour by her son. The hospital sent a letter to the court to have the court review the case. And the court decided, according to its competence, what they thought was wrong with the family. And it could also be a matter of culture. In Poland, everyone is taught that when you go to the doctor, you have to ask. I was not there at the hospital. (PL_SW3_F)

Social workers emphasize that associations that organize activities for children play a helpful role in the adaptation and educational problems of children. The role of these institutions is described in the section dedicated to the topic of integration.

Socio-emotional functioning of migrant children

Cultural differences and sense of belonging

Just like teachers, social workers observe the challenges children face during the period of their adolescence. These children function somewhere between the values and cultural patterns of their country of living as well as the culture of origin of their parents. The greater the cultural differences (e.g. in the case of children from conservative Muslim families) the greater the conflict of values children may experience while they fulfil developmental tasks such as exploring their own gender identity.

Anyway, there was a problem of cultural conflict there too. They were Muslims, and the girls at school, well, it was a different culture, different freedom. There was no talk at all about any kind of sexual contact, and here peers in Poland were much freer, more liberated on this subject. The difference was comparable to the times when we had socialism and someone from behind the Iron Curtain came to visit. So this girl had such two faces, at home she was calm adapted to what the family, what the sisters wanted. They talked about boys, but there were no sexual themes. No kissing, etc. Outside the home, at school, she began to have these even lesbian-tinged friendships, I don't know if that sounds right, and that didn't sit well with her mother. They didn't talk about it at their place, and she had brought up 8 or even more girls, because one stayed in Russia, 3 were grown up. (PL_SW5_F)

Cultural differences and domestic violence

A major challenge and factor shaping the situation of migrant children is domestic violence. In many countries domestic violence is understood differently than it is in Poland. Assistants make parents aware of the consequences of domestic violence, but they also stress that working with the issue of violence in migrant families is very complex also because of the language barrier, but also because of the cultural differences between legal regulations.

The issue of violence is also a difficult one. Because, for example, what is not violence in Marrakech is a whole catalogue in the blue card procedure in our country. (PL_SW6_F)

There was violence, but this violence was also because cultural norms are different. What is violence in our country is not violence there. Holding a child, hitting her. She held her by the neck, she even had a mark there. In turn, the girl scratched her mother. What is violence in our country is not violence in Ukraine. She was not aware of it either. As a result of the blue card the situation improved, in the meantime the girl turned 18. (PL_SW5_F)

Some parents are unaware of these differences and use violence as a parenting method. Therefore, it is not only the task of social workers to provide psychoeducation in this field, but also to monitor the changes made in the parenting systems by parents of children from migrant families. Problems of violence also arise in mixed marriages.

Cultural differences and discrimination

Social workers do not perceive discrimination towards migrant families. Perhaps the observations of the workers are not fully reliable, because they do not stay with the children in the institutions such as schools and rely on their parent's declarations. They also do not perceive differences between boys and girls when it comes to their school achievements as they can both cope well at school.

I have not encountered such problems. Rather, these children are functioning normally, entering into these peer relationships. (PL_SW6_F)

There was no such attitude that something can be a psychological predisposition, only that they are from Ukraine. (PL_SW3_F)

I had only girls, I didn't meet, nor did I hear from my friends about differences in the needs of girls and boys. I didn't encounter such situations, maybe because they were rather smaller children. But these children were rather treated like Polish ones. (PL_SW5_F)

The above statement can be interpreted as discrimination or ascribing stereotypical characteristics to a culture, which are probably due to other factors such as psychological conditions or individual differences.

Intercultural assistants

Intercultural assistants, like the previously described groups, recognise the range of needs of children with migration experience. Due to the nature of their work, in which they accompany children in lessons or have one-to-one sessions with children, they can establish a close relationship with them and their families. Their observations deepen the teachers' perspective. The aim of the assistant's work is to support the child and family enough to enable the child to function in school and achieve his or her full potential without the assistant's support. They usually support several children at the same time, but this number varies and depends on the overall number of migrant pupils at school:

My name is X, I work as an intercultural assistant in a primary school with integration classes. As of February 2019 and when I came, there were about forty-five foreign students at school, four of them from families returning to Poland. They were mainly from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Georgia, and there were two students from Chechnya. At this point, right now, we've got thirty-nine, and I'm mostly working with eight. These are actually children who arrived two weeks before the pandemic or something like that for a year or two, and have a hard time adapting, due to their difficulties a bit. I do all the work that an intercultural assistant does. Today, during the pandemic, we do all of this, perhaps a little more. (PL_F1_M_2_F)

Educational challenges: Language barrier, exams

Intercultural assistants observe the difficulties that the language barrier presents not only in communication, but also in situations of understanding cultural texts or knowing specific vocabulary.

Helping children in learning, what I've mentioned, so that teachers were able to adjust requirements, texts, while teaching children and that a kid should not have to write tests, I saw it with my own eyes, a Polish language test, an almost empty sheet was handed in by a girl and the test was taken by a girl from Ukraine, she was a seventh grader at that time: Madam, I really don't understand it. And your heart simply breaks. How could such a kid write things about *Balladyna* [a Polish drama written by Juliusz Słowacki]. So I would, I would do that. (PL_F1_M1_F)

Intercultural assistants, because of their own experience of migration, are more sensitive to the difficulties of children than teachers who may not have experienced such a change themselves and are not well prepared to work with such children. The above quote not only indicates the fact that the test had not been adapted to the child's linguistic abilities, but also a lack of understanding of the child's situation, a lack of sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences. Such behaviour on the part of the teacher may be treated as a sign of discrimination. Intercultural assistants also emphasize the importance of the language barrier as a factor that may prevent an adequate diagnosis of the causes of children's school difficulties. The impossibility of diagnosing developmental difficulties with a language barrier can exacerbate those difficulties. With appropriate training, intercultural assistants can provide a basic diagnosis because they do not experience a language barrier in their communication with children, but there is also no cultural barrier as they are able to recognize elements of culturally related behaviour patterns that may be mistaken for symptoms of disorder.

Actually, it's something like my own observation, so to speak, to work with the school pedagogue, perhaps with the class tutor, where the help is most needed. Because we have thirty nine such persons and rather each child feels it well and such assistant may rather understand if it is a language barrier or some Asperger syndrome, or if there are any other problems, which, actually, a Polish teacher is not able to immediately diagnose, because the child says nothing. (PL_F1_M_2_F)

Another challenge limiting the possibility of children to fulfil their aspirations is the organization of the 8th grade exams. From the assistant's perspective, despite the available adaptations, the examination sheet is too difficult as mentioned earlier by the teachers.

They just have half an hour more, at least my daughter had it. But when you can't write it, well that half an hour means... it means nothing. Half an hour more to write a language exam. I mean, the time added to the prescribed time limit. (PL_F1_M_3_F)

Intercultural assistants also present the difficulties in assigning children to particular classes (school year). Sometimes children are assigned according to their age in Poland despite the fact that they started their education in Ukraine a year earlier. In the case of many children this system works well, as the children have time to compensate for differences in curriculum and overcome the language barrier.

But sometimes a girl pupil in the seventh grade, she somewhat qualifies..., qualifies to be in the seventh grade, though she is supposed to have been in the ninth grade already, so that she should not take that exam, so she moved back a little. She was a good pupil and all that they do here, she did back at home, she just has a language barrier problem. She catches up on it quickly, diligently does all the homework, behaves properly, has abilities and, in such atmosphere, she begins to make progress. (PL_F1_M_2_F)

With proper support, the children are able to catch up, achieve educational successes adequate to their abilities, similar to the time before their arrival in Poland. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that working with these children and explaining cultural differences requires a lot of time and commitment.

I mean the vocabulary, it's just those words that seemed to us, well, such most important ones, when a child comes to school: what a lesson means, what a break is, a lunch break, a school common room, what else was there? (PL_F1_M_1_F)

Most intercultural assistants indicated that they hardly noticed any difference between the adaptation process for boys and girls, however bringing up particular cases showed examples of such variations. One of the intercultural assistants pointed out to the stereotypical features of girls that they were more diligent than boys, attach more importance to learning and learn a lot. On the other hand, boys were perceived as easier establishing peer relationships via sports activities that play an integrating role.

... it seems to me that boys have slightly..., I mean, because girls have that inclination to buckle down to learning more and they are... well, in general, they are more diligent pupils. However, as regards relationships as such, establishing them and relations and integration with the group, well, it seems to me that boys are better off. I mean they also catch up faster with such relations than girls. So it seems to me, but I don't know, if that's the case. (PL_F1_M_2_M)

Socio-emotional functioning of migrant children

Intercultural assistants emphasize the role of peers, teachers, and parents in the social-emotional functioning of migrant children. A consequence of a lack of support in those relations can be mood disorders which require specialist help.

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 thing, 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 depressions, and so on. (PL_F1_M_1_M)

In addition to difficulties in the integration process with peers, intercultural assistants also observe difficulties in the family relationships of these children. Often, in addition to working with the child and the teacher, assistants also work with parents to provide psycho-educational support, showing them the child's perspective and talking about the difficulties experienced by the child.

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. I'm sorry, for cutting in... (PL_F1_M_4_F)

In this statement, a different perspective on the role of the parent in the child's school achievement can be observed. In the case of children in schools attached to refugee centres, teachers emphasized the importance of parental attitude and motivation valorising it positively. Here it can be seen that the

excessive ambition of the parent can lead to a lack of understanding of the difficulties experienced by the child, of them not appreciating the child's achievements.

The intercultural assistants also emphasised the importance of peer relations. They pointed to the unique role of sports as a gender differentiator. They note that “from sports and physical education help boys very much. They go in for football, or some other, other sports” (PL_F1_M_2_F) and “well, in general, such team games, [help] very much so. And if a boy arrives, who is so-so, who can play, and then a physical education teacher... helps” (PL_F1_M_3_F). The intercultural assistant from Vietnam emphasised that girls from Asian countries do not establish relationships easily:

as far as Asia is concerned, it is actually girls who have a very discrete approach, they would be open to new relations and contacts and so on, so I think that it has, it does have an impact, it's just like with an illness. It's also one of the factors, what I've observed, it's visible in the case of Vietnamese children. (PL_F1_M_2_M)

5. Working with children and their families

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff

Polish language and remedial classes

Foreign children (until they acquire the requisite language fluency) and children from returning families (for a period of 12 months) have the right to participate in additional Polish language classes (from 2 to 5 hours per week, c.f. Educational Act). “There are additional Polish language classes for foreigners - I run them – and have a separate textbook for this purpose”. (PL_T5_M)

Yet all teachers stated that the regulations brought in by the Educational Act were insufficient and did not solve the problems of teaching more specialized subjects. For example, teachers mentioned a lack of proper textbooks or textbooks were not adjusted to the age of children. As a result, teachers' agency is manifested in employing their own, more engaging, teaching methods.

I started to teach her how to speak Polish. I started in my own way, teaching her sounds, teaching her the speech. (...) After a month this girl started to communicate (...) I work using such a system as I do not have a textbook for small kids, since I noticed that a lot of textbooks for the Polish language for foreigners are quite complicated, (...) they are designed for older kids, 9 years and older. I have a primer from which I copy some things and I copy for them lots of materials in general. The language should be taught in the way you teach children. So most of all sounds, we start talking, we have to hear the language and only later we introduce the grammar part. I have such a system and it works. (PL_T6_F)

They had Polish lessons all the time with a teacher of Polish for foreigners, extra classes. In third grade I had 5 more hours with them. And I must say it was great. We used those hours to the fullest. (PL_T16_F)

These classes are support for achieving children's educational aspirations. They lead to building a sense of empowerment by developing language competences, which later translates into e.g. opportunities to participate and understand the content of other subjects such as math, geography.

Methods of teaching

In order to make the teaching process easier for the children, the teachers employ various methods. The choice of a particular method depends on the subject and topic of the lesson.

If they don't understand Polish, how can I get them interested in another language? What methods should I use? I needed more materials, experience, cultural knowledge, and help. We tried to learn to respond to the needs of all groups: so that our [Polish] children would not lose, and the new children would learn, too. Now, it's good that there is the Internet, you can look for things. (PL_T13_F)

One of teachers referred to her work with the youngest children and pointed out the importance of visual methods: "I treated them [migrant children] as kindergarten children at the beginning. They like kindergarten children do not understand, sometimes they do not speak. Perhaps that's why it was easier for me to work with those children, to use visual methods" (PL_T9_F). Other uses the method of contract to enhance their fulfilment of school tasks and stimulating their activity during the lesson: "We've prepared a class contract. There were 15-16 children at the time and the children signed it with their painted thumbs. (...) Now we start the year with an upbringing hour about what multiculturalism, tolerance is about" (PL_T13_F). Other teachers use, among others, group work, expository methods, discussion, problem-solving or teaching games.

One of the teachers stressed that in order to encourage students to learn, attention should be paid to pupils' interests, which will motivate them to learn the language and become diligent. That is why individual activating methods are employed to enhance language competences of children.

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. In my opinion, it is important to find out who likes what, and who has passions. Then the child will be interested in acquiring these language skills, because this is the problem, the language. (PL_T11_F)

Also working in a mixed groups is used as a method of improving their Polish language skills and sharing knowledge between migrant and non-migrant children.

I also had a class with 5 migrant pupils for a short time. These were children from Chechnya, one girl from Crimea, two children from Ukraine. It is very hard to work then. For what methods do we use? In group work, we try to make sure that there is a foreign child in each group, so that they learn something from a Polish child. But if there are many children, it is difficult. (PL_T12_F)

Teachers often help children by offering them additional materials, frequently in a language other than Polish:

I prepared summary notes for the children, because you have to prepare lessons differently for them, different materials. They knew English very well, so the teachers who knew this language could communicate with them. But I don't know if this is a good direction, because this is a Polish school, and if they want to stay here, they have to learn Polish. (PL_T6_K)

Teachers - especially in schools located close to the centres for foreigners - adapt worksheets. They simplify them by introducing exercises which are based on completing sentences by connecting terms with definitions, more graphics or pictures. They also use formative teaching, which seems to be an effective form of support. Yet, some children who may have good cognitive resources and adequate support at home may not need as much adjustment.

But to customize everything for them, text or something, I didn't do it. If I saw there was a problem I would do it. But they did well. In my opinion they didn't need it. Apart from

that they could feel worse somehow if everything was customized for them every time. Against the backdrop of the group, they didn't fall behind, they were in the middle. The boy and the girl were even higher because they took part in math competitions, in school competitions. (PL_T16_F)

What seems to be important for the teachers is that all children should be treated as individuals. For example, for children whose Polish is not advanced, they assign smaller parts of materials to be learnt:

For him it is difficult because he does not know the historical context, I give him a smaller volume of material. At the beginning, he was even learning by heart, now I can see that he understands more, we use mind maps, work with source texts, there vocabulary is difficult even for children from Poland. (PL_T5_M)

Teachers also apply a grading system which is adjusted to the learning abilities of children and recognise the progress they make. As they admitted, the appreciation of their efforts, building on their strengths, is also valuable for enhancing children's self-esteem.

We have adopted this principle that we appreciate the efforts. We don't look at the language, but when put effort in learning, we appreciate it. We help as much as we can. Little boy from Tajikistan was motivated by this. He had bad notes at the beginning but later had a final annual certificate with honours. When I read it on stage, I cried and he did! I was so proud of him!

To a younger class a girl, the fifth, and she is also very active, wants to respond to the lesson is not closed in itself, when I ask someone to read she comes forward, I think you need to ask these children, because the child dares to learn to read, because these children should read aloud (PL_T8_F)

A systematic solution for all foreign children has been applied in the exam ending the 8th grade²¹ which determines the further educational path of the child after elementary school. The teachers admitted that this exam reflects the linguistic and curricular problems experienced by migrant children and to minimize their impact on the exam's results, an adapted examination sheet with, among other things, shorter, simpler instructions were introduced. In addition, the children have more time and can use a bilingual dictionary. Nevertheless, the instructions on the worksheet are presented in Polish. When the level of Polish language development is still low, it is difficult for children to get a satisfactory exam result, which in turn implies a difficulty in recruitment to their dream schools. This is what a teacher from a school in the large city says:

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 for 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)

Undoubtedly, taking active steps to include children in the school environment strengthens their sense of agency, but also helps to achieve educational success and increase their motivation to learn. Similarly, the effort teachers put into supporting a child can translate into success on exams. Teachers

²¹Children take exams in Polish, mathematics and English.

in the big city observe the opposite trend. Children do not want special treatment, do not want to be given different materials to complete than the rest of the children. Perhaps the children do not want to stand out. This may be related to the smaller number of children in the classrooms and the fear of feeling different.

Openness and flexibility of teachers, building a safe atmosphere

It is helpful if teachers are flexible, open to supporting the child with their own resources, such as foreign language skills.

For example, mathematics, if a sentence is translated into English, she does very well. There was a nice example in chemistry, because the chemistry teacher taught it in English, bilingual, and she was doing great, but unfortunately the teacher resigned. (PL_T16_F)

Moreover, an important factor which helps children adapt and function in the school environment is the flexibility of a teacher. I use active methods, communicate with them in Russian as well. (PL_T13_F)

Teachers emphasized that it is easier to support younger children because they can learn through play. On the other hand, when working with older children, the teacher directly asked the children what they liked and disliked about the activities. This is an attitude that supports children's agency, allowing them to know their needs and follow them.

I learned how to work with them by experience. The children from Ukraine told me that they make a lot of plasticine at school. With small children we made letters and fruits from plasticine. We made an exhibition and signed these fruits. (...) I said that children can talk to me in Russian or draw if they cannot express themselves. (...) I ask the older ones to write what they like and what they don't like during the class, what needs to be changed. (...) They would like to have more multimedia presentations, speak more English. Active methods are obligatory! With younger ones it is more fun, more ideas. It is different with the older ones, because they have to write and it is more difficult. (PL_T13_F)

Intercultural assistants

Intercultural assistants play an important role in both the schools in the large city and close to the centres for foreigners. They provide comprehensive educational support for children, but also for parents and teachers themselves. One of the teachers noted: ">>Chechnya<<[children from Chechnya] loves to sing and they got along with her" (Pl_T13_F). The cultural assistant helps children to feel safe on school premises and allows communication in the children's language of origin which can be a great relief to them in terms of the cognitive load associated with foreign language immersion.

From the perspective of professionals working in the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, intercultural assistants employed at schools play an important role in educational and emotional functioning. The incoming children are entitled to the support of such an assistant for one year. This is not obligatory; the school itself must apply for this kind of support to the leading authority.

I have a 7th grade boy, under my therapeutic care. A child who came with his parents from Georgia, a child with enormous speech development difficulties, where in Georgia he was treated as an intellectually disabled child, here he was diagnosed with aphasia (DLD), he receives support, and we managed to provide him with therapy in the counselling centre. He receives quite a lot of support at school, but I also know that without the intercultural assistant support this boy would not manage, he talks about it, he says how much he needs

it, how much he counts on the assistant, it was clear that at some point it would end, and it was a difficult moment for the boy. (PL_F1_T_3_F)

According to the professionals working in the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, intercultural assistants are a great support for teachers, children and parents, and sometimes also for the staff in the counselling centre. Their assistance has also been invaluable during distance learning. If there is an intercultural assistant at the school from which the child is enrolled, sometimes they help the parents throughout the procedure at the counselling centre, provide linguistic support during the psychological interview, or discuss the results of the meetings with a child.

Specific work challenges for teachers

Teachers face many challenges when working with children with migration experience, but what needs to be emphasized is that those who work in schools close to the centres for foreigners are at risk of experiencing secondary traumatization (Coles, Mudaly, 2010). Many of the children and families who come to the centres are families who have gone through difficult experiences in their place of origin. Sometimes teachers become familiar with this information and learn the stories of these children, their parents, and entire families. What is challenging is the lack of psychological support in the form of supervision for these teachers, which can influence the onset of professional burnout, as well as the lack of adequate psychological support for the children themselves and their families.

Working with the parents

When it comes to the parents of refugee children, teachers more frequently point to negative aspects of such collaboration. Nonetheless, some teachers would often also mention positive changes, which are linked to their decisions to settle in Poland and thus their better understanding of Polish culture.

I have to say that in the past it was harder to reach the parents of refugee children. Now parents very often participate in parental meetings, they respond when we ask for a telephone contact. This contact is provided through the electronic grade book, so the cooperation is better, I think. It has begun to be visible over the years. I think that there is better cooperation with those who live outside the refugee centre because these are people who plan a longer stay here. They often have jobs so their contact with the language is different. They care more about their children's better functioning in community. (PL_T4_F)

Another factor shaping an educational situation of migrant children is general difficulties with adaptation of migrant children's families to their staying in Poland. The first migrant families who came to this centre faced a challenge in adapting to their living and functioning in Poland since they did not know the cultural context. Today, the situation has changed. Migrant families who come to Poland have greater knowledge and also can gain knowledge from migrant families who are already here. (PL_T5_M)

Low interests of parents in their children's learning performance, school attendance, or, more broadly, educational aspirations are still the issues that are most frequently stressed.

Parental awareness of the need for education is low. Educating parents is difficult, and it seems to me that parental awareness would need to be refined. Parents don't always recognise the needs of children well, they don't always appreciate the need for education. If you ask children who their parents were in the home country, so when it comes to mothers you hear 'mom', which is because of the cultural role of women in society, which I envy. These are unfashionable words, but it is so wonderful how these women are appreciated by their husbands, their children, how happy, fulfilled they are. (PL_T5_M)

They stress, however, that when they are summoned to school, it is mothers who would most often appear.

On the other hand, teachers very positively assess the involvement of a majority of parents from Ukraine or Belarus in their children's education. They frequently support the ambitions of their children, sending them to various additional classes, inquiring about their children's progress, arriving to the appointments. They are supported in such activities by culture assistants, who work with their children: "mom... is very demanding. She... it is something like, she wants to catch up vicariously with him. She looks for thousands of different activities for him... also at school. She looks for opportunities to offer him as many activities as possible. (PL_T2_F)

There are also difficult situations and children do not receive proper support from their parents. This is because the parents are overworked and their knowledge of Polish is poor. It must be stressed that while mentioning parents' involvement in the school life of their children it means mothers, their cultural roles – as they are always present and committed. Fathers, in principle, are absent from their children's education, which, as they explain, is related to their role of the sole breadwinner in the family, being overworked, pursuing a mission of accomplishing their migration goal, which is to improve the family's financial condition.

Language barriers are a factor that makes parents' relations with the teacher difficult. Economic and refugee migrants do not always know Polish or Polish patterns and cultural values, either. This produces certain conflicts. However, in the case of parents from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia factors relating to cultural affinity and geographical proximity act as facilitators. Socio-cultural and cognitive distances are evidently smaller than in the case of Muslim culture or religion.

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)

Parents don't necessarily know the Polish language. So perhaps they, I would put it blatantly, they can't deal with it. A pupil from the 7th or 8th grade or even the 6th grade can say to their parent 'this is like that', but the parent doesn't know if this lesson was sent in a link, or if it is online for groups (...). This parent is kind of limited because as they can't cope with it. (PL_T14_F)

The language is rarely a barrier in contacting parents. Generally, teachers speak Russian more or less. Google translator also works. (PL_T5_M)

Teachers working with refugee children and families stress that their traumatic experiences impact the course of such cooperation. In their opinion, both parents and children need support and assistance of psychologists. Such tasks are performed by numerous non-governmental organisations and this marks the first step towards their participation in social and cultural life.

One of the teachers (PL_T1_F) stressed that:

Parents are often affected by apathy, depression, learned helplessness, I'd call it like rather going in circles, out of their helplessness, sensing no influence on the reality and this is very much shared by their children, too... Children are handed over to the teacher's care, as the parents don't always have the time to look after their own kids. You simply, cannot, in inverted commas – jump over those problems that exist in their families. We are dealing here with multi-child families. We, too, differently perceive this social phenomenon and

they see it differently, as well, we are culturally different. You need a lot of understanding here and it seems to me that it'd require, I don't know, well, more talks. (PL_T1_F)

Parents' psychophysical state sometimes does not allow them to become involved in their children's school life, and their knowledge is insufficient to help their children in subjects they are taught at school.

Social Workers

Areas of work

The information on the frequency of working with migrant families shows that mass economic immigrants in Poland (most often from Ukraine and Belarus) show high efficiency in coping with integration on the labour market, in the self-organisation of their families and educational life of their children and in achieving economic and housing independence. As one of the social workers noticed, "they come and are left on their own" (PL_SW9_F), they do not look for help in Social Welfare Centres or Family Support Centres operating also at the local level. However, social workers admitted that mostly those who has just arrived in Poland need their support.

Most the work is done with people who are newcomers, who have no understanding of the Polish reality yet, they need to be introduced slowly into the situation of their host country, translate the regulations, principles of functioning, and carry out such a socio-cultural orientation as far as possible within such a limited environment as is a Centre for Foreigners. (PL_SW10_F)

Social workers provide psychological and economic assistance as well as help dealing with numerous adaptation barriers – both in the case of parents and children. The intersecting difficulties related to the course of adaptation, language barriers, obtaining residence status, encounters with administrative institutions, looking for a flat, helping to strengthen the subjectivity of children and parents, as well as the challenges faced by working with a social worker are some of the problems social workers need to deal with. They are illustrated in the following narrative of one of the social workers:

There, it was more a question of the kids getting adapted at school, of learning Polish, because the kids had a big problem with adapting. And placing them in some peaceful place. After leaving the camp, these people are basically left in the lurch, there is nothing much for them, some cities offer some social housing, but there is none in [name of a city] (...) So we helped them in finding some relatively cheap accommodation, so that the kids could have some extra lessons at school, some tutoring. Because they were enrolled in a Polish school and actually we didn't know what would happen to them, they didn't understand anything at school, they didn't know what was going on. As far as she was concerned, first of all we were looking for a psychologist who would be able to communicate with her, because she spoke Polish, but with different accents, so sometimes it was difficult, because she didn't really understand what was said to her. (...). It was much more difficult to talk to the man, because he was withdrawn to anything. (PL_SW6_F)

Overcoming language barriers in contacts with different institutions, including social assistance centres is another area of support. They are caused either by insufficient knowledge of Polish language (e.g. difficulties to communicate, difficulties in writing a letter to the office for foreigners) or ignorance of administrative system in Poland. Social workers also provide assistance in going through the legalisation procedures and obtaining social benefits migrant families are entitled to (such as Family 500+). They help with lengthy procedures to legalise the stay, dealing with a sense of loneliness, low efficiency of actions. However, their permanent support may hinder migrants' independence:

Migrants are often ignorant of the procedures that apply to them and of benefits they are entitled to, despite having no residence card extended. On the one hand, it is an institutional practice that allows families to survive, but on the other hand it leads to permanent dependence on institutions. (PL_SW10_F)

Social workers also support women who experience violence. This problem has become especially visible during the pandemic and social workers noted that they are working with more families with a Blue Card.

I used to work with a mother, she had a blue card, the mother was Ukrainian, and the father of those children was Polish. They had a Blue Card. This situation had developed so much that she moved out of there. I assigned a family assistant service there, because the children had school and emotional problems. During the Blue Card procedure, many things turned out. Unfortunately, there was physical and psychological violence, she separated from her partner. She moved in with her children. She worked all the time. There was therapeutic, psychological support. The story ended positively. (PL_SW4_F)

Social needs and the sources of vulnerability/security of migrant children

As regards migrant children, social workers point out to a strong link between their sources of vulnerabilities and the economic situation of their family, the legal status of their residence, or their situation related to being refugees and waiting for permanent residence. The main sources of vulnerability include: parents' adaptation difficulties, language problems, legal right to reside in Poland, parental agency of children, problems with education and adjustment at Polish schools, parents' interest in their children's education and the impact of the pandemic on remote education.

When it comes to working with migrant children, there are specific challenges related to overcoming language barriers and organising additional Polish language classes, expanding knowledge about cultural and gender aspects, especially when it comes to matters related to domestic violence and patriarchal behaviour, providing information about the support offered by community centres as well as offering assistance by intercultural assistants.

Tools and measures

Social workers have noted an increasing number of migrants in Poland and thus migrant families under the care of social workers. From their perspective, there are a number of institutional constraints that make it difficult to provide adequate support to families with migration experience. These include insufficient measures and programmes which are unadjusted to migrants' needs:

There are more and more migrant families in Poland, and we are not quite there; it is a bit like wandering around in a fog. There are more and more people with whom we must work. In my opinion, we have absolutely no tools. I mean, we do have some tools, but they are faulty and there is no institution, no person who can help to guide a family through this system of administration from the beginning, to go all the way through in the offices. (PL_SW9_F)

They indicate a need to change the standards of work with such families and to be given the requisite tools to work with them. At the moment, they are unprepared for an influx of migrants to Poland. One of the respondents states that “standards of work for social workers limit the possibilities of action” (PL_SW7_F). This is especially visible in the case of migrants with an undocumented stay or lack of extension of the residence card who are outside the system. This can be seen as systemic discrimination:

We have legal difficulties in providing assistance to migrant families who do not have a residence card. You know, the Act on Social Assistance provides that those who are legally residing in Poland can benefit from such assistance. And not all Ukrainians have it. Besides, please tell me, how is it, how are they to cooperate with us and then wait for another residence card? It also depends on reasons for getting the card, but there may be times when they don't get the card right away and legally, we shouldn't deal with them. Then we work illegally (laughs). (PL_M_F)

Social worker support is significantly affected by the language barrier. To be able to develop a trusting relationship, a good command of the migrants' language is required. To overcome this barrier, social workers insisted either on relying on an interpreter when working with migrant families or taking a language course. On the other hand, they perceive that it could affect the quality of contact with families.

Yes, I think that would be very cool. Here it was a good thing that you understood something. (...) In our MOPS nobody sends us to language courses or sponsors them, so it's hard for us to speak every language fluently. A translator would certainly make communication easier. On the other hand, it is another person disturbing the family. (PL_SW3_F)

Another problem concerns insufficient cooperation with other institutions to provide a complete support. Although there are some cases of such cooperation, in general social workers noted that there is room for improvement in this area:

In my opinion, there is a lack of cooperation between institutions, which should have more fluid contact with each other. From such structures on the territory of [name of a city]. City Hall to some schools, to broader institutions. There is a lack of a total network of cooperation. Many people point this out. (PL_SW1_M)

Bureaucracy

Another challenge that probably also accompanies teachers and counsellors is the excessive bureaucracy that results in a lack of time to intervene.

I think that the bureaucratic system in Poland is very complex, and this means that we cannot concentrate on solving a particular situation. It takes a very long time to get help, sometimes a month, a month and a half, when you need help now. (PL_SW1_M)

Social workers' competences

Additionally, social workers highlighted a subjective feeling of a lack of competence to work with migrant families, both in terms of better understanding of cultural differences, psychological aspects of migration and language skills. They also complained about a lack of intercultural training for social workers, who need to broaden their knowledge and practical skills in order to enable them to better address the migrants' needs.

I'm afraid to go beyond some of my competences. We are very limited in our actions. We can grant strictly material or psychological help. (PL_SW9_F)

I do not feel that I have any substantive supervision over my work with foreigners. I feel that I have to develop myself in order to be able to work with such families. (PL_SW5_F)

There is further such a thing that divisions are created. There was no such attitude that something can be a psychological predisposition, only that they are from Ukraine and that's how it is there. Once a year there should be such workshops devoted to, let's say, the issue of other nations, other countries, but from the point of view that what happens to those

people in our country is not a result of the fact that we have to explain their behaviour, not to educate how it should look like in our country, because it is a result of their culture, but to what extent we allow them to do what is negatively perceived. (PL_SW3_F)

Professional challenges

Just like with teachers at schools close to the centres for foreigners, the topic of burnout also comes up in the case of social workers. The situation of migrant families is complex and also requires a lot of time, attention, additional work in free time and additional competences, it can lead to burnout. This occurs especially in situations when the worker feels that his/her field work with the family is not providing results and when families are granted funding, even if they do not fulfil the requirements, e.g. changes in parenting style, getting a job.

It seems to me that over time people just don't want it anymore. I have been working here for only 3 years, but they get families used to it, so that nothing is required, and then the management says "Why bother, you won't get anything out of it anyway". Getting used to what it is. And I as a young worker would like to change that. But also with time, after these three years, I will come up with something, and even if the lady doesn't agree, I will hear that I should still grant help. Because how could I not. She is a migrant, a refugee. And the truth is that her children will grow up soon, like the lady from Iraq, and then she will get almost nothing from us. (PL_SW4_F)

It should be noted that several social workers highlighted the positive aspects of the job. These featured when they were actually able to help families, e.g. in dealing with the procedures to legalise their stay, assist them in adaptation.

For me these are very different experiences. On one hand, this work is very developing. Because you often have to deal with different barriers, like language barriers. I have never been good at languages. (...) The second thing which perhaps is not problematic, but developing for me as an employee, are the cultural differences. (...) I have to learn about these cultural differences, because I cannot impose our culture, our social standards, because I have to understand their culture and where their behaviour comes from. On one hand, it's developing, but on the other, it's quite difficult for me. (PL_SW5_F)

They perform work that requires continuous improvement and learning about different cultures, their rules, and patterns that are helpful in approaching migrant families.

Intercultural assistants

Daily work: tasks, roles, and tools to work with children

Intercultural assistants are aware of the importance of their work and its multi-tasking nature. They define themselves as teachers, helpers, translators, organisers, service providers, who carry out the work with great commitment. Assistants refer to multi-faceted roles that involve offering support not only in learning specific subjects, but also in enhancing students' agency in relationships with teachers, educators, students in the classroom, and the wider community.

As already noted, there are differences in the number of children that cultural mediators work with, which ranges from 15 to 4. Most often they look after several children in different classes at one school. During regular teaching, intercultural assistants sit next to a child during classes and provide direct support in the learning process. They serve as interpreters during classes so migrant children can understand the topic, prompt words, check tasks, and respond directly to the child's needs. In order to properly support a migrant child, they adopted a holistic view of working with them. It not only involves the child, but also the school system, its organisation, the family

system, support policies provided by specialists: the school principal, educator, psychologist, and other teachers. For example, they work with a child and his/her parents from the beginning, by preparing a glossary of words which are useful when a child arrives at a new school and a calendar with important school events. Such an approach often means that they do “invisible work” which exceeds their contacted working time.

I don't spend that much [time] at school, say, four hours a day. I prepare for lessons, because before I go to a classroom, I have to... I have textbooks, first I have to prepare my vocabulary. Because even now, during on-line [lessons], I am texting and simply sending translated text messages, translations, and translations. This way it works very well. However, it takes a while. Nobody counts that, and talking to parents, right? (PL_F1_M_3_F)

Because here, this work has many sides and it's different work, various things are important. Well, one of the main ones is just help, helping the child to adjust. And... how to say that – it's most important and to help in becoming familiar, familiar with the language. And the third thing is also helping parents to learn how to get along in relations, so that it helped the child, and not to be an obstacle, in learning and adjusting. Because, if you leave parents out, then they will not, or cannot help and then they may be in the way, or they want to help very much and also are in the way, because they try to help their way, or are indifferent and so that, too... (PL_F1_M_2_M)

The way in which they work facilitates the adaptation of children, overcoming language barriers and strengthening the agency of the whole family, in particular children.

We do it in a way so that the child could be independent without an assistant. That is: make the parents become involved at school by any means so that they participated. Just like Polish parents do, so that the child could learn how to learn. (...) And when such a connection is made – between a child, a teacher, and parents, then you can stay away. (PL_F1_M_2_F)

In general, intercultural assistants work independently, and the process of working with each student is essentially formulated by them. They work on particular cases and develop a workplan for each child individually. Intercultural assistants use their own migration experiences and those of their children to work in the best possible way. For some intercultural assistants, it is important to work with the family, because the success of a migrant child at school and their further integration in society depends on the results of this work.

I'd actually look at it from another point of view, because my function here is first to introduce a family into a new environment. (...) I first work with parents. I have a daily contact with them and have had it for all those (...) This is a role of the assistant rather than a teacher, let's say that, a teacher assistant, who is a link between culture A and culture B. And that's why we must engage parents in that work, because, let's be frank, it's not some occasional job, it's rather work... I look at everybody here as a hero, because actually those ladies contribute so much to work, and that friend with that booklet ... How much, how much love she puts into... (laughter) in those tasks that she proposed to those poor foreigners. (PL_F1_M_3_F)

Language and communication with children and parents

All intercultural assistants raised the issue of language barriers, which are the key to enhancing children's agency and achieving educational success. To provide support to children, they use their own linguistic competences, using both Polish language and children's mother tongue. The latter shortens distances between children and cultural assistants, making children feel at ease and creating

trust, while the former due to completed courses in teaching Polish as a foreign language which gives them a solid basis for enhancing children's knowledge.

Some intercultural assistants highlighted the insufficient involvement of parents and problems with communication with them due to lack of their response to the messages sent by school. To engage parents in the education of their children, the intercultural assistants applied various strategies such as asking them to come to school and working out the rules of cooperation or being in contact on the phone.

We have such conditions [when we work] on-line, like unread messages sent via Librus [an electronic grade book], I don't call them every day asking to respond to the message, only sometimes, if there are any questions, how they go along, what help they need and often parents do not report any educational needs, as concerns older children at school. But if issues accumulate, there are lots of backlogs, then it's worth communicating that to parents and tell them about things, what help they need in such, such kind of situations. (...) And as concerns meetings, when parents used to come to meetings, I was also available there, I attended those meetings and so that they could sign things during my office hours, a declaration of adaptation, then... Because now, these declarations are available during office hours, so parents come and sign them. So I, too, sometimes come to school and explain them what they actually are, where to sign them, so as not to come twice. This is how things with parents look like. (PL_F1_M_4_F)

The insufficient involvement of parents, especially overworked parents who came to Poland to improve their economic situation, should be seen in a wider socio-economic context. These parents are often alone, separated from their families, and all the burden of responsibility is on their shoulders. Pursuing economic activity does not always allow them to take care of all the children's affairs, and very often due to language barriers they are unable to provide substantive help.

The intercultural assistants discussed how difficult it was to inform parents about the inappropriate behaviour of their child and explain the reasons for such behaviour. Many misunderstandings arise in such situations. Therefore, some children's behaviour at school needs to be clarified and parents should be prepared for appropriate reactions, especially when the child's arguments are untrue. Sometimes a child's behaviour requires the attention and interest of others, parents included. It also requires working with an educator in the case of school violence. It is worth citing the following examples provided by the interviewees:

Depending on what problem there is. If there is a problem at school, so we go, and give information from the teacher to parents. When a parent has [a problem] ... if a child has some problem with school, with peers, then a parent can report it. That they have a problem... I've had such a boy. At the beginning we would visit pedagogues every day, so every day there was some row, fighting, we all thought that it was him, who was pestered by somebody, and then actually it turned out that he just wanted some attention to be paid to him in that way. And he would relate at home every such situation as if it were some kind of unbelievable discrimination, or different things they did to him there. But me, however, after each such meeting with the pedagogue, I had to call the parents and explain what was happening... (PL_F1_M_2_F)

6. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre's staff

The question of the definition of integration, its subjective perception or conditions, was not easy. They noticed that the number of migrant children is increasing, so in their opinion it is necessary to

build up systemic measures, to prepare the schools for the arrival of migrant students, not only to be active when a migrant child already arrives at school. Moreover, they see the risk of ad hoc actions - if there is no action plan, there is a danger that if there are not really many migrant children, any action will keep being postponed.

There will be more and more children of this type, so we need to prepare for it. Our school is such an open school, there are new foreigners coming in and this proves that the integration is there, that the children feel good at our school. (PL_T7_F)

If foreigners appear in a particular school in such a way that they are single students, there is such a danger that they are marginalised, that they are overlooked, that there is no person to take care of them systemically. (PL_T1_F)

At the same time, teachers indicated and warned against systemic inequalities. They were convinced that small schools in rural areas are much less likely to receive support for the integration of migrant children than schools in large cities, which is not necessarily due to ill will, but e.g., easier access to specialists, workshops and trainings or higher number of NGOs dealing with the education of children with a migrant background.

Small schools which are places in small villages have less support than in schools in big cities like Krakow or Warsaw (workshops, conferences, NGO presence). (PL_T14_F)

The city authorities which decide on financial resources have an influence on the education situation of the children. They determine the amount of money passed to the school. In rural areas there are fewer opportunities, they do not provide sufficient help for children (language, cultural, psychological). (PL_T9_F)

Cooperation with institutions

To date, teachers do not have much experience of working with different institutions. They stressed that the intercultural assistants were very important in supporting migrant children and helping them to integrate.

I support this position [intercultural assistant] and advised my colleagues to hire one. And in fact, more and more schools employ such assistants. People do not even know about it, because even in the educational law there is no such thing as a cultural assistant. There is an assistant for Asperger's, for children with disabilities, but there is no assistant for children who come from different countries. (PL_T7_F)

At the same time, respondents face difficulties with hiring intercultural assistants. The first obstacle is the authority (municipality) which is reluctant to give such permission because of the costs. Assistants are employed on a part-time basis and rather in order to work with migrant children from culturally distant countries than, for example, from Ukraine. It reveals the assumption that pupils from post-Soviet countries can manage on their own or only with the support of the subject teachers and class teacher.

First, I tried to get an assistant for her [the Nigerian pupil]. I hadn't thought of getting an assistant for Ukrainian children before. However, I contacted [name] and she told me that I could apply to the Department of Education [of municipal office] for a full-time position for such a cultural assistant. I was granted half-time, i.e. 20 hours. (PL_T7_F)

I hired her as an administrative staff member. As such she should have [had she worked full time] 40 hours/week. But they [the city council] only gave me 20 h. She devotes 20 hours only to be physically present at school, she helps P to connect with children and so on. But the whole work of translating the classes and documents into English, and also personal contact with P – it is all voluntary work. (PL_T7_F)

Moreover, some officials are not aware of the importance of the work of intercultural assistants and what exactly their role is. Teachers themselves are not always positive about the assistant's activities in the classroom. This may be because of the limited number of hours he or she spends in the school, as mentioned above, and because it is not possible to agree precisely on how to work and cooperate with the subject teacher.

There was also a cultural assistant, but for children coming from Turkey. He was also Turkish, he sat with these children in class. From my observation and from other teachers' opinions, this assistant was not necessarily helpful. He was interrupting, asking questions, basically breaking up the flow of the lesson. I was not in this class, here it would be worth asking the opinion of the teacher. (PL_T10_F)

Other mentioned institutions, organisations or professionals include psychologists, other schools (e.g. if another school already has experience with migrant or refugee children, the teachers are eager to establish contacts), or NGOs that support migrants, work with families, or offer assistance to schools. In the case of refugee children, it was also important to cooperate with the centre for foreigners to better identify needs and coordinate support. The centre's staff have considerable experience of working with refugee children, and they also have a better insight into the children's family situation, economic condition and cultural background. They also work with children and parents over a longer period of time and interact with them in a variety of situations, not just the specific context of the school classroom and lessons.

He [migrant child] has been attending weekly classes with a psychologist to support his emotional development. This year he is going individually to a psychologist. (PL_T8_F)

I find the cooperation with the Association for the Earth [NGO] the best. It is an organisation that seems to have direct contact with refugees, knows their needs and responds to them. (PL_T1_F)

We work with refugee centres, we have a lot of contact with Bialystok, where school number 26 has a lot of these children and they give us materials on a regular basis, they come with parcels of books that we can use to introduce them to the language even more. (PL_T11_F)

Teachers also pointed out the need to cooperate with the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in certain situations. We will discuss this form of cooperation in more detail later in this report (in the social worker section), since teachers only mentioned situations where the school reports a risk of child neglect (which is not only the case for migrant children).

Although teachers are necessarily used to the challenge of micro-level integration resting on their shoulders, they recognised and indicated the benefits of inter-institutional cooperation. They said that it would be most beneficial to form task forces to look for solutions, perhaps not only when there are already problems, but also in advance. Unfortunately, the main barrier is the difficulty in obtaining financial resources, as schools have so far financed such initiatives on their own.

Certainly, those additional solutions that can be put in place. The most important thing is to systemically take care of these kids. To adjust the exam or exempt them from the exam. There should be a team that works out these solutions. There needs to be finances. Everything that is done in school is done at your own expense. It would be great not to be limited in that way. To have extra motivation to work. (PL_T10_F)

Integration concepts

Teachers do not relate integration questions to macro-level situations or political concepts. Their perceptions of integration and their conceptions of it are also related to their daily work in the classroom and if they do exceed them, it is in principle only by extending the issue to the local community.

For one of the teachers working with refugee children, the concept of integration goes beyond the school walls. For her, the integration process meant not only involving migrant pupils in school activities, but also in the local community. In her opinion, despite initial difficulties, over the years both pupils and residents of the town have become accustomed to the presence of refugees and migrants, today they consider them a part of the community. She drew attention to the process of the normalisation of their presence, which is based on mutual respect and tolerance of customs, culture, and religion. The respondent invoked the concepts of tolerance, normality and respect to describe the integration process, but rarely referred to specific experiences. When asked about specific practices, she most often indicated school activities that enable migrant children to talk about their culture, cuisine, and the history of their country. The latter suggestion - the introduction of intercultural education topics into the daily work of the school - also appeared in other interviews. These statements, however, suggest that teachers focus mostly on cultural aspects of integration, rather than tackling the difficult topics of meaningful difference, power relations, stereotypes, and discrimination. They tend to present desirable situations in their statements, avoiding referring to difficulties, including those related to the relationship between host and migrant pupils: "It's about doing many things together. Getting to know each other. To play together" (PL_T12_F).

Most of the teachers declared an open approach, stressing that they do not differentiate between children, that they want them to feel accepted. As one teacher emphasised, "What is important is the relationship, not the methods used in education, they do not play such a primary role here" (PL_T1_F). The same teacher is one of the few people who made the effort to try to formulate a definition of integration based on reciprocity and respect:

Integration is an activity whose aim is the mutual enrichment of two different nationalities, or in other words the feeling that I give something from myself, that I share something, but I also experience such trust. My personality is enriched, my life becomes more colourful, my perspective on the world broadens. Integration is a win-win situation (PL_T1_F).

It should be noted, however, that such declarations can - and often do - lead to an assimilationist attitude, an expectation to "blend in" with the Polish community, rather than to recognise or support the process of hybrid identity formation. Admittedly, there are efforts to show other cultures at school, but they remain limited and superficial, the dominant line of the core curriculum being a reference to Polish culture. Hybrid identity is perhaps seen as taking into account distinct, sometimes attractive features of a culture, but it does not presuppose dealing with distinctions that are not so easy to reconcile and supporting students in negotiating their identity. Some teachers also avoid being so active and taking action, assuming that 'things should happen naturally' and that it is not appropriate to interfere. At the same time, however, they do not assume, for example, multilingualism in the classroom, and the implementation of cultural values must remain incompatible with Polish educational assumptions. As one teacher pointed out "We are not an easy country to nurture Otherness" (PL_T6_F). However, there are also calls to keep things separate, not to take any special steps to introduce children to each other's cultures, but to let things run their course. It often means

that teachers play down the role of culture of origin, at least in the school environment. As a result, these processes show that teachers are unaware of the fact that integration means both processes: maintaining ties with the culture of origin and accepting a new one.

Our goal as far as integration is concerned is to show her that she is fully accepted (...) and at the same time show her what is nice, what she might like. But we cannot impose anything on her, because she will not accept that, only as a gift. (PL_T19_F)

Integration programs

When asked about integration programmes, teachers mostly declared a lack of knowledge about such activities. However, after this preliminary statement, no one indicated activities on a scale broader than the individual school, but events and activities undertaken as part of schoolwork, either by teachers or by intercultural assistants, were described. For example, in relation to the integration measures, one of the teachers mainly described what she was doing during the lessons. She spoke about the fact that the school had developed an action strategy to include migrant pupils, e.g., by organising events common to all classes or events in classes (such as bonfires) to integrate children with each other. In addition, the school celebrates Refugee Day by organising a performance in which migrant and non-migrant children take part. As a Polish language teacher, she also uses the same material processed during classes so that children can talk about their countries and cultures. She did not mention any top-down solutions.

I do not know about such programmes. The school provides care of an educator, psychologist, has contact with parents of a foreign child, has the possibility of direct contact with the headmaster and teachers, however, I do not know anything about detailed programmes. (PL_T1_F)

We must also implement these educational activities, so that these children are accepted, so that they can talk about their culture. We are doing various actions, we have even published a cookbook with the refugees, some recipes, some history of the country. (PL_T12_F)

To sum up, there is no strong opinion about applying integration programs, the teachers are rather convinced that integration “happens naturally between children” (PL_T16_F), at most with the support of the school/teachers. Integration is reduced to on the spot actions, with no systemic dimension in the teachers' perception.

Social workers

Integration concepts

The most important comment, repeated by practically all social workers, is the lack of a holistic, coherent integration programme for migrants, even though there are more and more migrants and an increasing number of challenges with the presence of migrant families. They are convinced that although there is a clear trend of a growing number of migrant families requiring support from social workers, there is still no overall approach, families are somehow "plugged in" to the general pool of families requiring support and at risk of social exclusion, and specific problems or challenges are already solved individually by the respective social worker. Social workers also stress that the activities of the City Welfare Centre are regionalised, so that if a family changes residence, it comes under the jurisdiction of a different branch, and it is necessary to re-establish contact, which is sometimes very difficult.

Analysing the statements of the social workers concerning their personal definitions of the integration of migrants, they define it in two ways. Some social workers understand integration as adaptation to the culture of the host country, and therefore refer to it in a somewhat assimilationist way. One interviewee emphasised the ease of working with migrants who are close to, or able to “fit into”, the European culture.

And in the case of this family with this gentleman from Russia, with whom I had to deal. Being in contact with them, I did not feel any difference. I felt so European. (...), he was very involved, he got into our culture and our rules of functioning. (...). In the case of that [SW describes another family who she was working with] family, the claim was more noticeable. They demanded, even demanded support from us. That this is a family, these are children, that they need, that we should provide for them. And in the case of the other [third] family with whom I had contact, it was a completely different level. They were already inscribed in our culture in a more European way. They did not feel their different nationality. (PL_SW8_F)

The second concept of integration indicated that it is a matter of peaceful coexistence, without assimilation. Social workers representing this viewpoint emphasized that integration is “learning about each other's cultures, norms and values, and accepting each other” (PL_SW3_F). Lack of knowledge causes communication problems, leading to stereotypical judgments and inciting prejudice.

I would like to see integration in such a way that the people who come here simply live well in this country. We should all be able to coexist in a way which does not offend anyone. I would not like integration to be such that we make the people who come here look like each other. I would not like us to turn the people who come to Poland into Poles. This is not how it should work. I would like us to be able to coexist in a nice way. (PL_SW7_F)

Social workers could not identify too many programmes or activities aimed at the integration of migrants. They are familiar with the so-called Individual Integration Plan addressed to persons receiving refugee status, while they were convinced that there were no such activities towards economic migrants. In addition, despite the positive evaluation of this programme, social workers underlined that the end of the programme means the end of the support - there was no further offer, and migrants themselves have fears and concerns related to institutional contact.

As far as migrants are concerned, we quite often receive families, sometimes individuals, who already have a status in Poland and then we run an individual integration programme. And these are long-term activities. With individual integration programmes, it's usually signed for a year and it's a comprehensive support to cope here and to adapt to life in Poland. (...) However, in the case of the individual integration programme, these goals are set at the very beginning. The person comes, we decide exactly what he or she wants, how to make the most of the year, so that he or she can acclimatize. (PL_SW7_F)

With regard to children, they highlighted activities that include children from families at risk of exclusion, regardless of their background, e.g. a feeding programme. Children may also become beneficiaries of so-called Local Activity Programs aimed at activating a specific local community. However, these programs are targeted more broadly; there are no programs aimed directly at migrant families or the children of migrant families. Social workers are convinced that there is no need - after all, among the families they work with, migrants are still few in number, so there would not be enough takers. They pointed out that migrant families can benefit from general programs, but at the same time they observed that not many of them choose to do so.

There are no such programmes, because I don't think there is much demand for such programmes either. As far as the Roma minority is concerned, I have seen a lot of such programmes, as far as professional activation is concerned, as far as kindergartens for Roma are concerned. However, there are not many of these kinds of things for foreigners. We simply wouldn't have any takers, it would be hard to do something, if there is just one family. But if it does happen, it is directed to our broad programmes for everyone. There is no such thing as programmes strictly for a certain group. (PL_SW1_M)

Cooperation with institutions

Referring to cooperation with institutions, social workers especially underlined the lack of transparency in the support system for migrants / migrant families. They themselves have opportunities to cooperate with institutions and use them, but if a migrant family does not have a “guide”, e.g. a social worker or a family assistant, it will be very difficult for them to find out where to look for support in which situation: “There is no institution, no person who can help guide a family through this system of administration from the beginning, of going through all the offices” (PL_SW8_F). Cooperation with institutions therefore, on the one hand, helps guide through the institutions and procedures necessary for e.g. obtaining financial support. The second path of cooperation results from the necessity to intervene in case of difficulties, and here in the case of adult family members there are e.g. the courts or the police, especially because of the domestic violence or other problems (e.g. related to access to doctors, the implementation of compulsory education, the need for educational support or actions to promote greater family cohesion and better fulfilment of the family's caring and upbringing functions). As the social workers indicated, there are also very difficult situations such as children being forced to beg.

She came to us from a police report. Because it turned out that there was a quarrel and there were already some fights going on. And I have a feeling that we are not able to work out with them how to solve these problems among themselves, but they always need a mediator to bring them together and try to explain how this conversation should look like. (...) And she doesn't seem to understand at all that she could file documents and just remove him from the family. Besides, some threats started to come into play, because he said that yes, their daughters would stay, but he was taking their son away. It's not good, but the family is still under the supervision of the probation officer, the court and the police. (PL_SW7_F)

It was such a specific family, it started with the intervention of the school, that the children did not go to school, that they were seen in the market, that they sold things there, that they engaged in begging. (PL_SW2_F)

In the case of children, there is cooperation with schools and especially school pedagogues or psychological-educational counselling centres. The reason is usually parental neglect in the case of migrant families also due to cultural differences (e.g. because of gender roles). The cooperation can be initiated either by the social worker/family assistant or by the school.

As a rule, I initiate cooperation with schools. If there are worrying signs in a child, the school writes to the Municipal Social Welfare Office or to the court to ask for an interview with the family. Then a social worker goes for such an interview and understands the situation. What support, if any, the family would need. (PL_SW1_M)

As already mentioned, this is also a problem when families move from one place to another. Although the documents are transferred to another branch of the same institution, there is no cooperation and no exchange of experience that could be beneficial for the family.

There they were directed by me to this second social work team, there someone started to supervise them, so these children went to school more regularly, but then they moved, and I don't know what happened to them. (PL_SW5_F)

The need for intervention may also arise in situations where children do not do well in school, e.g., because they do not yet have the requisite language skills. If the family is under the care of a social worker, they are also involved in addressing this situation. They act as intermediaries, helping to find the right people to help or places where such help can be provided to a migrant family.

The other Ukrainian family, where the lady first came alone to work, then she brought her two children, most of the family stayed in Ukraine. (...) And they came to us because the boy had a problem with his vocabulary. (...) So the boy wasn't always able to name things properly, he had problems with these subjects, with biology, geography, Polish too, because his skills were not very good. He was here for a year. The school made a request, we looked for various institutions that could help. (PL_SW4_F)

Whatever the reason, an essential method of cooperation with the school is the formation of an interdisciplinary team, the identification of needs and the evaluation of the implementation of the set activities. Such a team includes teachers, therapists, educators, sometimes even doctors, and also volunteers working with children (PL_SW3_F). Social workers are very positive about this way of working. It has to be noted, however, that it is not unique to migrant families, but to all families under the care of the Centre. It is therefore not surprising that when asked directly about ways to support specifically migrant children at school, social workers cannot name them.

I have never encountered any resistance from the school, there are such interdisciplinary teams organised, consisting of specialists who work with families. In a more problematic situation, a meeting of such a team is convened and actions are planned. It is a nice thing to do as these actions are coherent and are distributed among the people present at the meeting (...) if there is a possibility of sharing the work, it is very good as it is more beneficial for the family. (PL_SW3_F)

Only a few social workers had knowledge of additional Polish language classes or the work of intercultural assistants. This proves that the support systems are not integrated - social workers only deal with problem families, it is already an intervention situation, therefore they do not know about programmes which can be preventive.

Well, these are additional classes to make up for the material. Because for various reasons children may miss some classes or they may be behind in their work due to lack of understanding of the Polish language. Often pedagogues or tutors support such children. (...) I know there are also those cultural assistants, but I've never delved into it, so I can't say anything more. (PL_SW3_F)

Among other institutions they work with, social workers pointed to specialists when a specific type of support is needed (e.g., therapists or doctors to help an autistic child) and NGOs: [name] Association, which supports children and adolescents at risk of social exclusion by conducting educational, sports and therapeutic activities, [name] Foundation, which supports migrants coming from Ukraine, and [name] Association or [name] Foundation, which conduct aid activities (e.g., organizing Christmas packages) and educational activities.

[name of organization], they treated the children with understanding, with their needs. The [name] Foundation has a day care centre here at[address]. Various community centres. They were also very nice and understood the problem of helping the children with their learning and language problems. Especially that some of them already employ Ukrainian

instructors. There is also the Hidden Wings Foundation, which is kind of a backyard foundation, but they are also willing. Besides, they have either an instructor or a volunteer, I don't remember, who is Ukrainian. But I think [name] already has one. More and more various institutions, because of the number of people coming from over the border, have some kind of person in their structures, who is able to understand the culture and language, to bring people closer. (PL_SW4_F)

In conclusion, the social workers cooperate with many institutions. This is primarily because the opportunities for support are scattered - there is no single place where a migrant family can get all the necessary information or help, on the contrary it is necessary to apply in many different places. Secondly the cooperation is necessary, because the help of the social worker is, as they themselves say, the beginning, the minimum support, they have to do the activities, which provide the migrant families with a sense of security.

To do more, it's all about cooperation between institutions. We ourselves as a centre generally take care of the basic things, it seems to me. We rather provide security. (PL_SW7_F)

Intercultural assistants

In the interview with the intercultural assistants, as with the teachers and social workers, reflections on integration policies or state-level solutions did not emerge. However, the opinions of the assistants show the inconsistency of systemic measures and the lack of integration concepts. While their work is premised on a system of support for migrant children, the implementation of this premise encounters enormous difficulties.

Intercultural assistants see themselves as supporting children on the one hand, but also whole families and teachers on the other. They often defined themselves as intermediaries, persons available in case of need. In terms of cooperation, they pointed in particular to schools that approach them with the needs of migrant pupils, organising meetings with parents in cooperation with the assistants to improve communication.

We're kind of like intermediaries

We'll see if that's actually the case, now it's coming to the end of the semester and we'll see if later on there's not going to be this: and please this here, and please that there. Still the one of who comes up with the contact to the parents. Now on Monday I have a meeting with parents and with students. The school has come up with an initiative. (PL_F1_M_4_F)

The second institution is the municipality on which the assistant's employment depends. Here, assistants tended to report a lack of cooperation, casual employment, limited hours, or no employment during holidays. It is difficult to perform well under such conditions.

I'd also like to add that the fact that I work only till June is a problem [MW: employment contact does not cover holidays]. I worked like that and this year I've been working like that, too. Well, it's hard to work without any prospects, especially, when you're at certain age, you're not a university student, have a family, and have no stability. We cannot take a housing loan, and not to mention the salary... I perhaps work better than others, in full time employment, and that's forty hours. (PL_F1_M_1_M)

And we have only one employment, we have only one path. And now... part-time employment is not enough, if any... (PL_F1_M_3)

Intercultural assistants highlighted the need to make the system more coherent for the benefit of children, and migrant children in particular, and to recognise them as educational rather than administrative staff, which is the nature of their work.

That's why there's a lack of this consistency, because every school writes a request for... they have foreign students, they write an application to the City Hall. I ask because in the law we have it written that such a student is entitled to the assistance of an assistant, twelve months from the date of arrival, or from the date of beginning of education. (PL_F1_M_2_F)

It is necessary to emphasise that - especially in the absence of other systemic measures - their role is crucial for the integration of migrant children in the school context and often for building bridges between migrant families and the school. Unfortunately, despite being highlighted, their role is still underestimated and their work inadequately remunerated and without certainty of continuation.

7. Schools during the pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland forced schools to suspend in-person teaching for one of the longest periods in Europe. The shift to remote teaching left pupils and teachers unprepared, struggling with a lack of the proper infrastructure and space for studying, technical barriers, digital illiteracy or insufficient support from parents or lack of supplementary teaching. These barriers revealed the structural problems of the Polish educational system and the inequalities produced by the system. The interviews with professionals contribute to obtaining a better understanding of the changes in schools during the pandemic and their impact on migrant children.

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff

Teachers from the large city as well as from schools located close to the Centre for Foreigners emphasized that the pandemic has been a difficult time for children on various levels – from participation in classes, technical problems or finally – emotional, social and health problems. As one of the teachers remarked: “One pupil said when the distant learning was announced “<<I lost my Polish teacher, I lost my school, I lost my class>>” (PL_T6_F). Yet, these changes do not affect all children evenly, with children from a migration background and younger children hit the most by remote teaching. As noted by teachers:

(...) most of children cannot function like that, (...) especially those small ones. (PL_T6_F)

(...) two children are being look after, but the youngest is not. (...) and it is reflected in his education, because he comes and he leaves. (PL_T6_F)

In the case of younger children, the remote teaching affected their learning process as they just started attending school and they need direct, face-to-face contact with their teacher. Without this contact, and without the proper support of parents, they face many difficulties with learning including some of the most fundamental e.g. how to read and write.

Access barriers

One of the most frequently mentioned problem regarding remote teaching is the access barrier. The teachers often talk about problems with adequate equipment and its availability (especially in larger families) as well as the problem with access to Internet. These problems have a greater impact on migrant children and were even more pronounced in the case of refugee children. The latter were able to tackle the shortage of devices only thanks to support from school, teachers or organizations:

In the spring, when there was a break [because of COVID-19] I organized a collection of computer equipment for children in the centre. The [name of the organization] initiative contacted me in order to help. Migrant children were provided with great equipment, they got balls, bicycles, even a trip to Warsaw. Good people donated 30 computers. (PL_T5_M)

The school provided material support during the first wave of the pandemic –the teacher organized a charity event in order to provide children with computers. (PL_T9_F)

Teachers also reported that children lack sufficient computer skills which put them in a disadvantaged position. These negative processes are clearly encapsulated in the following opinion of a teacher from a school located close to the centre for foreigners:

On-line learning is a tragedy. We work on Librus (on-line platform). Children have not been trained to use Librus efficiently. Parents also could not help them. Children who live in the reception centre do not log in at all. In the spring, during the first wave of pandemic, it was a tragedy, around 80 percent of the foreign students did not participate in the lessons. They didn't have computers; they had some old phones. There was poor internet in the reception centre because it is located in the forest. So our Polish teacher got laptops for them. There was a nationwide charity campaign. But it did not help because the internet was still poor. Now it is a bit better, because we have already showed them how to use the platform but not all of them remember because it is a lot of information. (PL_T9_F)

Invisible children

The teachers emphasize the problem of disappearing pupils: they did not show up during the online classes due to a lack of devices, but also because of their own digital illiteracy and that of their parents. Insufficient cultural and language parents' competencies intertwined with their lack of financial resources made the parents of refugee children unable to help them with online lessons and therefore increased the risk of refugee and migrant children abandoning school. For pupils who participated in online teaching, showing their faces and surroundings was problematic. In the teachers' opinion, children who do not want to turn their cameras on may be camera-shy and being present online all the time may be stressful and cause discomfort for them.

Children do not show their face during online classes. They reply on chat or record their voice but do not want to show on up on the screen. Girls are usually more consistent. They send pictures of paintings they made. (PL_T9_F)

According to teachers, the participation of migrant and refugee children in remote teaching is also hindered by Polish-language attrition. Teachers and psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff emphasized that children' language skills deteriorated during the pandemic as they lost contact with the spoken language, passively participating in lessons. They also use their parents' language more often. Some teachers admitted that migrant and refugee children have regressed in Polish language competencies which definitely hindered their participation in classes. In such cases, they often explained that they cannot participate in the lessons due to broken cameras or microphones.

And then came the online lessons and the situation was reversed to her disadvantage, because during these online lessons she rarely participated, and if she did, she did not speak at all. Here again the language barrier came back. (PL_T3_F)

(...) the camera is always broken, so is the microphone, you know. So when I want to ask about something, just to be sure that they understand, that they are there. Sometimes I say "[name] say something". "Please answer how do you think it should be? What would we write here?" He doesn't say a word, just writes that his microphone is broken. (PL_T13_F)

I saw them using Russian more than when they went to school. (PL_T6_F)

To support migrant children who do not understand Polish well, the respondent from the Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre for Children organized a training course for children who arrived to Poland during pandemic to help them transition to the Polish school environment. While the focus of this training was on enhancing their knowledge of Polish, it was also a way of improving their educational achievements.

Some of these children had already had additional Polish language lessons remotely, some did not. All of them were strongly excluded from the environment, without language immersion, without meeting Polish children. They had linguistic online contact with their parents and family somewhere abroad, but their linguistic competence is significantly affected by not being in the school environment.

The difficulty in following classes is also linked to missing non-verbal communication. During online lessons, the interaction between pupils and teachers as well as between pupils is limited, there is no space for hand gestures, body language or expressing emotions. On the other hand, one of the teachers from a school close to the Centre for Foreigners noted that although the refugee children are not typically active during on-line lessons, and they do not want to turn on their cameras, they engaged more in conversations in class chat as the pandemic developed.

The pandemic also hindered the children's participation in extracurricular activities. Under the COVID-19 regulations, it was not possible to run after-school activities, clubs, or contests. As a result, children lost the opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills, to demonstrate their talents or to flourish:

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)

Insufficient parental support

While discussing the participation of migrant and refugee children in remote lessons, teachers highlighted their greater risk of dropping out of school as they might not have sufficient parental support. In this context, teachers complained about a lack of contact with parents on the one hand, but on the other – the parents' inability to provide tutoring due to their digital illiteracy, inability to speak Polish or lack of knowledge of the Polish educational system. The psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff pointed out that such problems are not so visible during traditional education, when the children receive the support of in day-care centres or associations. As part of the counselling centre activities, on-line language support was organized in response to these problems.

Parents don't necessarily know Polish. So maybe they, I would say it in an ugly way, they can't deal with it. A pupil of the 7th or 8th or even 6th grade can say to his/her parent 'this is like that' but parent doesn't know if this lesson was sent in link, or if it is online on Teams (...). This parent is kind of limited because he/she can't cope with it. (PL_14_F)

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)

Social isolation

Teachers highlighted that school closures, remote teaching, lack of extracurricular activities as well as the restrictions caused by the pandemic (lowering social contacts) have had a negative impact on emotional and social development among pupils. Teachers from the large city claimed that migrant children missed peer-socialization, which in their opinion is a great loss for them: “she does not have any chance to contact Polish children while being there” (PL_T6_F). And she continued:

She met with two girls, and it was very important for her. (...) Those two girls contacted her and I hope it was not a one-off thing, and that they will keep that contact with her. Because she needs that just as everybody needs, and teenagers in particular. (PL_T6_F)

Social isolation and social distancing on the one hand and a need for social contact to mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic was a recurring theme in the interviews with teachers. Limited contact increased the inequalities experienced by migrant and refugee children, putting them at greater risk of not only underperforming at school, but also of mental problems, stress and depression:

She got into some kind of numbness; she says: “Why should go back to school now? I can get some sleep now.” I am terrified because it is a kind of apathy, that is affecting about 80% of kids. (PL_T6_F)

The situation is even worse in the case of children who joined the school during the pandemic. As a teacher from a school close to the Centre for Foreigners says:

We have new Belarusians. They appeared for the first time. Mom talked about the situation in Belarus, but so far there was no contact or meeting. We didn't even see them [Note: PSK the children arrived during the remote learning period]. (PL_T13_F)

Increased teacher workloads

The COVID-19 pandemic not only affected pupils, but also teachers. They faced new educational challenges related to technology and online platforms they had to quickly become familiar with, adjusting the teaching programme to online teaching and sustaining the sense of community among pupils. It took considerable effort from teachers to make online teaching possible and accessible for pupils: from performing tasks related to online instruction and additional support for pupils to preparing online educational resources and exploring various methods to ease the participation of children in lessons. Teachers talked about activities such as setting up additional groups on Teams where pupils could do various tasks or using alternative way of communication:

The teacher is very flexible. She believes that most efficient way is to work by Messenger. The teacher also sends them short movies during which they explain the topic and instruction for homework and YouTube movies. They receive homework via Messenger and upload their homework. (PL_T9_F)

Teachers deemed their work essential for migrant and refugee children. Through additional activities and consultations, teachers tried to keep the pupils engaged and motivated:

I refer them to meetings after class. Then they can talk to me. Now there are online lessons, there are scheduled consultations. There are also students now, as part of their practice they have children from Ukraine under their care. They have to arrange consultations etc.; they can reinforce these students. (PL_T10_F)

Social workers

Social workers admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the way they operate: no longer are they able to support individuals or families through regular supervision sessions at their homes or schools. The visits to service users have been replaced by office-based work and telephone contact. The lack of the opportunity to hold face-to-face meetings hindered their ability to work efficiently with the whole family, to observe the interactions between family members, and to observe them in various everyday situations.

Well, at the moment the situation is such that we don't go out into the field, so our work is completely different from this goal and our work. Because we don't go out to these families, sometimes it was even the case that everything is done over the phone, so I don't even see the person I'm talking to, I don't have the opportunity to get to know them, it's all done over the phone. We conduct the interview over the phone, all the documents are sent by email, sometimes we just sign the documents on the spot, because we have the opportunity to receive them on the spot, but we don't have the opportunity to go into the apartment and do the interview and observe various important things for us. This is completely different from the model of our work. (PL_SW7_F)

Social workers identified a number of specific problems they encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the social workers (PL_SW7_F) talked about her work to provide support to a migrant family (with children) who were in quarantine while another social worker (PL_SW6_F) highlighted the problem of the integration of children from countries with male-dominated cultures during the pandemic. Lockdown made children – especially girls – more prone to patriarchal norms which feature in their parents' culture. As a result, they may drop out from school or become victims of violence.

Everything at the moment is hampered by the pandemic. Suddenly the nature of our work has changed. What can affect children is their development and their integration into home cultures, that is, if someone has come from Turkey, then because of religion, for example, parents may demand that women have more responsibilities. And my concern is that children may be abused in these homes, and for example girls will have more responsibilities and boys will not. Unless these people enter our culture and start living in it, which is something we cannot demand. (PL_SW6_F)

What seems to be important is cooperation between social workers and schools to minimize the consequences of pandemic and the experience of one social worker can be illustrative here. During a supervision session she discovered that one of the children (the youngest boy) had not been attending online lessons, which had not been noticed by his teachers. As a consequence, he was unable to follow classes and required special assistance to catch up with the material.

And as for the youngest boy, he was in the second grade of the primary school, we organised remote learning, because it turned out that the boy hadn't been going to school for three weeks and nobody knew what was going on with him. I called the school to ask if they knew they had such a student, and the teacher was surprised that he was there at all, she thought it was some kind of mistake. And so we quickly organised this remote learning. We organised some kind of a day-room for him, so that someone could help him with the homework, because his parents were not able to, so we also looked for a day-room that was still working, so that he could go there and have someone do the homework with him. (PL_SW6_F)

As social workers do not have direct contact with children and their families due to the pandemic, to get more guidance and to provide adequate support, they need to stay in touch with the school in order

to be informed about a migrant child's situation and to monitor whether they have undergone any changes in their behaviour.

We contact schools, other institutions that cooperate, that may have such a problem in the situation of children. If we want to know something, we have some concern, the school helps a lot. The teacher can talk to the child and observe the child even while they are having a remote lesson. We don't have that opportunity. (PL_SW6_F)

Intercultural assistants

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored and amplified the existing problems experienced in the education system by intercultural assistants. During lockdown they performed their work mostly online. They were required to perform the same tasks as before the pandemic: they assisted children in online classes, helped them prepare for the lessons or monitored their progress. They also addressed parents' concerns regarding remote teaching and advised them how best to support their children during this challenging time. Yet, the scope and modes of their work, as well as the intensity of the contacts with children and their families, have all increased, leading to them overworking and a blurring of the boundaries between personal and private lives. The intercultural assistants noted that the pandemic exposed the deficiencies of the education system regarding the integration of migrant children. They highlighted problems such as the invisibility of migrant children on learning platforms, their low active participation in remote classes but also a lack of competences on the part of parents in navigating educational institutions.

The pandemic also revealed the fragile and precarious working conditions endured by cultural assistants. They indicated a lack of stability in their employment which became even more uncertain during the pandemic: they talked about their short-term contracts, part-time jobs, the need to have parallel jobs in several schools. Due to such working condition, they are unable to get to know the children better and to provide them with a sense of security and stability, which has further negative consequences for their integration and educational development.

8. Recommendations

Teachers and public psychological and pedagogical counselling centre staff

From the heterogeneous picture which emerges from our research, two types of recommendations are clear: on the one hand, there are general meta-recommendations, highlighting the need to build and/or continue a new 'philosophy' of work and methods with children at school; on the other hand, teachers provide very concrete and detailed suggestions based on their own work experience which could help improve the current functioning of schools. Both the meta and specific recommendations will be discussed below.

Meta-recommendations

An important element arising from the interviews with teachers was the need to build a school environment based on the principles of openness, mutual trust, and an acceptance of diversity. The school in the teachers' opinions must guarantee a sense of security and agency for children with and without a migrant background, which can only be achieved by building and maintaining relationships based on dialogue. The conviction of the need to develop an open 'philosophy' of working at school was more often expressed in schools hosting mainly refugee children, those located near the centres for foreigners (usually in smaller cities or villages).

So I can see that it's been years of working on trust, openness, mutual kindness, on not excluding each other, on being open to each other, that this is the most important thing for these people. (PL_T1_F)

In the narratives of the teachers, refugee children were often portrayed as being in particularly vulnerable positions, with different cultural experiences and varying degrees of socialisation (including religious socialisation).

I noticed that these children need a lot of care, care from adults, they need a lot of strengthening of their sense of worth, that they are loved, that they are not rejected because of their nationality, faith. (PL_T1_F)

Such a perception of pupils led them to think about the school as a place where tolerance and cooperation must be emphasised. Recommendations emerging from schools located close to centres for foreigners where refugee families live included guidance not only relating to the functioning of children at school but going beyond the school environment to include the families of refugee children and the local community. This group of teachers stressed the need to organise meetings for whole families, so that not only pupils but also their relatives feel included in the life of the local community and the school. In this approach, the school should also provide opportunities for them to express themselves, their emotions, cultural traditions and identity.

There has been a very positive response to these programmes of trips and excursions organised for whole families. It seems to me that where these programmes included excursions, these problems were probably the most responsive to the needs of refugees, to the needs of whole families. (PL_T1_F)

Furthermore, teachers emphasised that in order to really empower students and enable them to achieve their goals, it is also necessary to take action directed at parents/guardians, providing them with the opportunity to integrate all family members.

It would be something valuable if those parents could learn about the reality [in Poland] from the very beginning, that it's not worth counting on social benefits, that this is not Germany, so that they could see where they can earn money, where to look for a job. For example, in Poland we have such a profession as a packer, or a plumber, and you'll have 4,000 a month. If such an introductory education for parents [was introduced] from the beginning. I don't want to say that these parents are scheming because they have allowances. They are very resourceful, many of them work, some of them even work on the edge of regulations to have more money. (PL_T5_M)

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 pupils.

We have special team for refugee issues, we undertake various activities to work on relations between our Polish children and refugee children. Because if we get to know their culture there will be a chance to solve problems, barriers. We already know our culture, when refugee children get to know it then we will have a chance to solve problems. (PL_T4_F)

Similar voices only resonated to some extent in relation to schools in the large city. Teachers tended to emphasise the 'cultural similarity' of migrant children and to a lesser extent stressed the need to look for a new philosophy of working with pupils. In this case, it was also considered good practice to organise meetings in schools in which different pupils could talk about, for example, Christmas

customs practised by them (this clearly shows the importance and presence of religion and religiosity in Polish schools - as most examples of such practices referred to traditions of religious holidays).

Or groups... here the Poles present how we do Easter, we hear them, and then we hear other groups, from the Chinese for example. And then you could come up and talk. Or maybe even dress up in a costume... like we have in [name of a city]. (PL_T2_F)

There was always something going on in our school. There were various projects or activities which were implemented in our school. It was done exactly to get to know each other, to make cohabitation in school or generally in life easier. (PL_T4_F)

Thus, meta-recommendations concern concrete solutions at school to a lesser extent but rather the general atmosphere at school. Teachers drew attention to the need for openness and a friendly atmosphere at school. However, it also transpires that they use stereotypical and ethnocentric thinking about cultural differences, only noticing and putting emphasis on, for example, the religious or culinary dimension of a given culture. On this basis, we can conclude that it is necessary to promote methods of working with children that go beyond stereotypical thinking, but also take into account the agency of pupils, while offering support to those who need it.

Detailed recommendations

Apart from the general meta-recommendations, the interviews with teachers also provide us with very detailed indications of solutions which can be implemented according to the following categories. Some of these recommendations referred to the need for changes at the level of the education system, while others focused on the competences and skills of teachers.

Systemic change in schools

Recommendations for systemic changes in schools primarily revealed the clear deficiencies in educational and migration policy. The teachers highlighted the lack of clear regulations and adequate solutions that could be implemented in schools. The most frequently recommended tool was the position of an intercultural assistant at school. Although there is legal scope to employ such a person in schools, many of them, together with the bodies financing this solution (usually local governments), are unaware of it or lack funds for implementation. The headmasters and teachers most often learned about the possibility of employing such a person “by word of mouth”, which shows that information about this tool is still far from the norm. The lack of knowledge about the opportunity to provide support by employing assistants is also revealed by the fact that some of our interviewees were unsure as to whether such assistants were needed in their school or whether they had ever been employed.

I support this position [of intercultural assistant] and advised my colleagues to hire one. And in fact more and more schools employ such assistants. People do not even know about it, because even in the educational law there is no such thing as an intercultural assistant. There is an assistant for Asperger's, for children with disabilities, but there is no assistant for children who come from different countries. (PL_T7_F)

The hiring of intercultural assistants by local governments, a role that was not only highly valued by teachers but also by pupils and parents, was difficult due to the specific form of employment (it is an administrative post, based on the Labour Code and not the Teacher's Charter – in Polish: Karta Nauczyciela), low salaries and short contracts (only for the duration of the school year, with no possibility of employment during summer holidays). When intercultural assistants were employed by NGOs in the framework of European multicultural projects, they also had short time contracts and a

lack of job stability. Such precarious and insecure employment conditions not only made the work of the assistants unattractive, but also indirectly contributed to the reinforcement of inequalities in the labour market affecting migrant communities (as most assistants have a migrant background).

What is closest to my work at the moment is that I would like every school with foreign children to have an additional tutor, someone who mediates in contacts with teachers, headmasters, someone who coordinates the education of these children, who mediates in contacts with parents or the school, in other words an intercultural assistant. (PL_T1_F)

It is not common knowledge, even the inspector [from the curatorial office] did not know what a cultural assistant is. I, for example, would like to have someone like that on a full-time basis, 40 hours. It is strange, because this cultural assistant is employed as an administrative worker, she is not a teacher. This is a part-time employee who earns 1500 PLN. This might be an ad hoc, additional job, not the main one. (PL_T7_F)

I had problems with the recruitment of a cultural assistant, because first I looked for a teacher, psychologist or educator and then I sent her to this training, I just referred Ms. J., she is a psychologist, she agreed to do this course. She's with us for the second year, I thought we were going to lose her because it's part time. (PL_T7_F)

It was therefore recommended that the employment of assistants be regulated and stabilised, that they be formally integrated into the teaching staff and that the state budget for these activities be increased.

Another important recommendation was the introduction of preparatory classes, which would serve newcomer pupils in a slower, but necessary entry into the school environment.²² Teachers pointed out that not all children who are forced to attend lessons straight away do well in this situation. This remark mainly concerned older children (ISCED-2) and children who came to Poland during the pandemic, for whom both acclimatisation to Polish school and the acquisition of Polish language skills were significantly hampered. However, preparatory classes were less frequently recommended by teachers working with children from countries that are culturally and linguistically close to Poland (e.g. from Ukraine), which indicates the need for nuanced and flexible solutions. What is important, the postulate of preparatory classes was rejected by some students, who emphasised during the interviews that it would be a 'lost year' for them and that they would prefer to start learning and building relations with peers right away. Attention was also drawn to the need to increase the hours of Polish as a foreign language.

We often talk about it, that it should be organised in such a way that when a child comes to Poland they should not go to school but learn Polish for the first year. (PL_T12_F)

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 form the first grade but I would not throw a child into the second grade. (PL_T15_F)

²² It is worth noting that since 2017 there is a legal opportunity to create preparatory (welcome) classes in schools at the request of the school management. However, due to the unique nature of migration to Poland, which translates into the number of foreign students in schools, as well as structural and financial barriers, this solution has not been widely implemented.

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 examination sheets 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 at the exam.

Another systemic recommendation was the need to prepare textbooks adapted to the needs of migrant children. The need referred primarily to subject-specific textbooks for pupils in older grades (ISCED-2). Teachers also stressed the desirability of preparing worksheets adapted to the needs of migrant pupils.

Maybe access to some textbooks, printables, a whole machine would have to start up that would linguistically secure each subject. Words in every department. If there are already many of these migrants all over Poland, also in terms of education, there is a staff of people, it would be so much easier to prepare such availability of textbooks for teachers. (PL_T11_F)

We also have such classes, so called Polish for foreigners, which are additional Polish language classes, currently run by a teacher of Polish. Such classes are very much needed. (PL_T3_F)

Teachers also emphasised that in schools located near centres for foreigners, non-standard solutions should be allowed, which could build up the migrant pupils' self-esteem. One such solution, for which one school did not receive permission from the decision-making body, would be the option to learn Russian as a second foreign language. This would allow pupils with some knowledge of Russian to develop their language competence, but also help them to see themselves as competent in speaking a language at school.

The competence of the teaching staff

It was also recommended that teachers should improve their competences continuously. The interviewees pointed to various workshops where soft competences can be developed and experiences exchanged with other persons working at the school, as well as training courses improving skills in specific areas, e.g. teaching foreigners Polish as a second language. The interviews showed that such workshops, most often organised by non-governmental organisations, primarily serve as a forum for the exchange of experiences and grassroots best practices, helping them to establish contacts and learn from each other.

That would be very helpful, that kind of equipping you with basic tools that are already very helpful at the start. You can support yourself and shorten the adaptation period. Because it is very time consuming, searching. Of course, every child is different, and everything has to be adapted. (PL_T3_F)

I was at a training course in [name of a city]. It was a course or workshop at our facility. This training in [name of a city] lasted six months. However, we benefited more from the fact that there were people from different schools attended by foreign children. We were able to exchange our experiences, we were able to get some ideas from each other, so that we could function more easily. (PL_T12_F)

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.

Recommendations from teaching during a pandemic

The functioning of schools during the pandemic was also the subject of the interviews. As lessons took place remotely for several months, most of the recommendations from the pandemic period referred specifically to online learning. Teachers emphasised that the pandemic revealed significant social inequalities, manifested in access to a good Internet connection, computer equipment, and suitable space at home for quiet study. This problem was particularly pronounced in the case of students living in centres for foreigners, where collections for the purchase of computer equipment were organised through NGOs. Importantly, the role and tasks of intercultural assistants during distance learning were not entirely clear for many teachers. In this case, it was recommended that guidelines be developed for online lessons, indicating how assistants should be involved.

Social workers

During the interviews, social workers highlighted several key areas where they felt changes were necessary. The vast majority of these recommendations relate to the challenges related to the social work profession. The first area is that of the competencies of social workers themselves. 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.

There were such trainings. Ms [name] runs a nice series of trainings in this field. I try to have regular contact. I had an opportunity to participate in one such a three-day cycle of trainings on communication, which focused mainly on the problem of communication barriers. The Hofstede diagram was analysed. It was a very workshop-like cycle, there were many exercises. It made me aware of many things, especially communication mistakes. If you already know which nationality group you're going to, you try to find out something so that you don't make a mistake right from the start. At work, we are often asked to pay attention to our clothes and appearance so as not to offend or shock.
(PL_SW2_F)

However, it was pointed out that the trainings often repeat the same content and rarely directly address the needs of social workers. These workshops were not available to all of our interviewees - sometimes social workers sought them out on their own and organised their own participation (without the support of their employers). Therefore, the training sessions offered should not only be better tailored to the needs of this group of professionals, but also organised in a systematic and well-structured way. Employers, usually local governments, should increase access to such trainings for social workers.

I have the impression that the training is always the same, with the same information, but this is not particularly analysed. I often get the impression that the same things are said, often even the legal basis is not updated. So, as far as I'm concerned, it's a question of improving competence, but not only through my own means, but also internally. And I do not know whether the solution from years ago, where specific units were separated for foreigners, was not a better one. It is obvious that it was impossible to organise everything

there, because such mixed families were normally reported from the region. However, this legislation and the implementation of the integration programme require much more commitment than an ordinary procedure. Working within the framework of such a basic scheme of work is completely different; we know what help we can give and what not in a given case. And when someone completely new comes along, functioning on different principles. And if you are not prepared for this, you lose credibility. (PL_SW2_F)

The next recommendations referred to the issue of language. Respondents pointed out that social workers have an insufficient command of foreign languages, which makes it difficult for them to communicate with clients who do not speak Polish. It was recommended that this group of professionals be given the opportunity to improve their competences in this field. Another solution pointed out was the systemic use of translators during the provision of services –to date, in the vast majority of cases, translation has been organised through acquaintances and informal networks (e.g. with the local university), but it has not always been possible to provide such translation. The issue of the language barrier also arose in relation to various forms and paperwork, only available to clients in Polish.

I think that kind of procedure how to proceed. Such support related to the language barrier, assistance in contact. These people have difficulties in understanding all these procedures, completing, filling in documents. These forms are only in Polish. (PL_SW7_F)

In my opinion, first of all some language programs would be useful. It seems to me that this is the main problem. It is the language barrier. (PL_SW2_F)

Training issue on cultural differences, language skills issue. Interpreters in social work centres. Or a situation that there would be employees who would specialise in working with migrant families. (PL_SW6_F)

As the above quote indicates, the interviewees also highlighted the need for systemic changes. Some of them advocated a solution that existed in the past - the creation of special departments/cells responsible for clients with a migrant background. Such a solution would ensure that social workers who work there are equipped with the necessary language and legal competences, thus potentially increasing the quality of services provided.

Another recommendation concerned the improvement of information flow between institutions. According to the respondents, the protection of personal data, although obviously needed, significantly hinders communication about clients with other institutions involved and thus reduces the quality of services offered.

I would expect one channel of communication. I would expect a single channel of communication, whether by telephone or e-mail, so that one channel would be established, and not that we would have to find out about certain things by means of a stamped letter or, at other times, by e-mail. This is an issue of document circulation, and I understand that it is an issue of protected data. It seems to me that if we act for the benefit of a single person or family, this should be systematised in some way, that one e-mail, one phone call or some other type of information transfer is enough to enable us to establish certain things very smoothly and quickly, and here, depending on which institution we come across, there are completely different rules for working and obtaining information. This makes work very difficult. (PL_SW1_F)

Social workers employed in centres for foreigners above all emphasised the need to involve volunteers in work with children. Thanks to their involvement, refugee children are much more open to cooperation and find themselves in relationships with others.

This is why the children are very keen to work with volunteers. Because it is an outsider who comes and has time for them and only them. And these kids can talk to such a person. Upon closer acquaintance, they can talk about their problems. And they feel taken seriously, as full-fledged people who can talk about what hurts and what makes them happy. (PL_SW18_F)

It is worth noting that due to the tasks assigned to social workers by law, they primarily work with families - children only become clients indirectly in this case. This also affects the nature of the recommendations made by the workers who, when discussing good practices and suggesting solutions, focused mainly on their own competences and opportunities for action.

Intercultural assistants

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

M2: They [schoolchildren] get to know the culture a bit, have some... I think that then such relation is established faster.

F3: That integration... will happen.

M2: Because they don't see it as a difference, they just get to know it, know it better, learn more about such child, right? And then, perhaps, it helps them a little. (PL_F1_M)

In addition to recommendations referring to the need for intercultural education, the assistants echoed the teachers in the need for improved conditions of employment, salaries, and contract stability. They pointed out not only the insecurity of their jobs, but also the refusal to create the position of intercultural assistant in some schools, despite clear reasons to employ a person to support migrant children.

F2: I don't know... Or maybe schools write that, and each of them has different conditions, each gets a different contract... I've been employed for exactly one year - from the fifteenth September till the fifteenth September.

F4: Oh, you see!

F2: Here - a completely different situation - full time, half time, I know a school that wrote a request and did not get it.

F2: Despite that there are fifty-two foreigners.

MOD2: Oh, you see!

F4: Oh God...

F2: They haven't got an assistant this year.

F3: There's no common ground. Me, I... have some common approach like... I think that it is a problem for school principals. I don't know. (PL_F1_M)

At an organisational level, assistants also recommended a more streamlined integration of their group into the life of the school, including ways of communication and administrative management of work. This would significantly facilitate their work.

Key recommendations at a glance

- Introducing horizontal education on cultural diversity in schools;
- Including intercultural assistants in the communication and work management tools in the school;
- Ensure psychological support for students and teachers;
- Increased hours of Polish as a foreign language for migrant pupils;
- Developing worksheets for teaching migrant children;
- Adapting final exams (grade 8) to the needs of migrant pupils;
- Financially supporting the development of textbooks for subject lessons, taking into account the needs of children with poor Polish language skills;
- Accessible and structured training and coaching for teachers and social workers allowing for continuous competence development;
- Ensuring good employment conditions for intercultural assistants;
- Creating a forum for bestpractice and the exchange of experiences between different groups of professionals;
- Disseminating information about bestpractices and solutions available in schools;
- Creating programmes involving families, parents, and careers in school and community life.

9. Conclusions

The picture of professional experiences with migrant children at schools, resulting from and discussed in the previous sections of this report, reveals that the solutions implemented in schools are fundamentally different: some schools have extensive experience in working with migrant pupils, know and implement various programmes to support the learning of foreigners, while others have limited knowledge and access to innovative working methods. The school response to migrant children depends on both systemic and individual factors. While the former are related to the insufficient measures provided by the national policy framework, the former are connected to the qualifications of the professionals working with migrant children, as well as their approach towards them and the school environment.

The interviews with professionals highlight the lack of systemic and fully implemented solutions for working with migrant children. Based on the opinions of the teachers and intercultural assistants, we claim that existing programmes are often characterised as implemented through the individual efforts of teachers, headmasters and pedagogues who, in the absence of clear guidelines and recommendations, introduce bottom-up solutions, ‘experimenting’ as it were with the available tools. Similar opinions are voiced by social workers who also emphasised a lack of policies and measures directed to migrant families, and migrant children in particular. Although social workers believed that supporting migrant families is a part of their duties, they noted that they mostly support families in their work which are already in problematic situations and require their assistance and/or intervention. There are no programmes and measures aimed at the integration of migrants in a broader sense which would facilitate, among others, access to education for migrant children. Therefore, drawing on the professionals’ experience, a need for developing policies that facilitate access to education for children by offering specific and concrete measures but also financial resources to implement these solutions is clearly discernible. In this context, the importance of intercultural assistant is pronounced since, according to teachers and intercultural assistants alike, such professionals contribute to the successful integration of children into school in terms of their educational progress but also well-

being, self-esteem and overall functioning in social spheres. Although this measure is supported in the Polish educational system, the use of intercultural assistants is limited due to the insufficient promotion of this measure and secondly the instability of employment felt by intercultural assistants (the leading authority, i.e. the municipality, must give its approval and in less wealthy municipalities, it is difficult to obtain such additional resources) and the ambiguity of their status - they are employed in an administrative position, not as teachers. The integration of migrant children into school is also facilitated by teaching practices based on an inclusive approach. Teachers and intercultural assistants have already implemented methodologies which address the diversity of cultures and languages without isolating them as “migrant children”. Yet, these good practices are still rare in the education system and are a result of the efforts of individual professionals rather than a part of the curriculum and teaching guidelines provided in the educational policies.

The challenges which were broadly discussed by professionals also mention the language barrier and cultural differences. These factors were identified as barriers hindering academic progress and integration with peers and local communities. However, their impact is determined by the country of origin of a migrant child: while it plays pivotal role in case of migrants from culture seen as distant, it has a minor role for children from neighbouring countries and whose mother tongue belongs to the same language family. The professionals stress that overcoming these barriers requires a collaborative approach: in addition to working with the child, the involvement of peers and parents is felt to be significant. Moreover, it is particularly important to look at children with a migrant background holistically, taking into account both acculturation activities (as well as the children's efforts to integrate into the community), but also the need to maintain ethnic and cultural distinctiveness and to accept their negotiation of identity, which fosters the construction of a hybrid identity, thus both obtaining a sense of belonging in a new society and a reference to their roots.

The attitudes of teachers, social workers and intercultural assistants represent a kind of continuum, with exaggeration of the difference between migrant students and those without a migrant background at one end, and invisibility of the difference and emphasis on similarities at the other. Most teachers expressed attitudes that were closer to a model of assimilation than integration based on recognition and promotion of hybrid identities. In a way, this may be due to the lack of experience working with migrant students and the homogeneity of the Polish school. The most supportive in terms of self-expression were assistants (often also of migrant background), who emphasized the need to integrate migrant students' culture and language into the school space. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the structural problems affecting migrant children. All of the interviewed professionals talked about difficulties experienced by children in accessing online classes due to technical problems (e.g. lack of equipment, problems with access to the Internet), language barriers, the digital illiteracy of both children and their parents, and a lack of parental support. The pandemic also made migrant children feel disconnected from their peers and had an impact on their well-being and mental health. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic also intensified contact with children – especially by intercultural assistants as well as between different professionals supporting the integration of migrant children.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: SWEDEN

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1. Introduction: Context and method of the study

The Swedish part of the CHILD-UP project is realised in collaboration with three schools in Malmö, the third largest and the fastest growing city in Sweden. The greater Malmö area has a population of around 750 000 inhabitants, and the city itself, which corresponds with the municipality, has 347 949 inhabitants (2020) (Statistics Sweden). The schools included in the study are located in the municipality of Malmö, which we refer to as Malmö City (*Malmö stad*). In this introductory section we shall first briefly say something about migration and schooling in Malmö. This serves to contextualise the three schools that participate in the study. After this we present the selection of schools and research participants, and discuss implications of it.

Migration, segregation and schooling inequality in Malmö

Malmö is located in southern Sweden, just by the bridge to Copenhagen, Denmark, connecting Sweden with continental Europe. This geographical location has implications for its migration experiences. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when emigration peaked, it was a port of embarkation; contrary, today it is a port of arrival. This is notable in its population. The share of foreign born in the population is 34,6 per cent, compared to 19,7 per cent in the total population. If we include persons born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents, the share of persons with foreign background in Malmö is 47,2 per cent while in Sweden it is 25,9 per cent (Statistics Sweden). People born outside of Sweden origin from 179 different countries and the most common countries of birth are Iraq (11 744), Syria (8 299), Denmark (7 469), Yugoslavia²³ (7 407), Poland (6 720), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (6 395). Persons born in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iran reaches around 4 000 persons for each country (Malmö City, Population Statistics on webpage).

Of interest to this study is the proportion of children with migrant background in schools. In Sweden, the CHILD-UP selection criteria of children, corresponds with grade 5 (ISCED1) and 8 (ISCED2) in compulsory school, and the second year in upper secondary school (ISCED3), hence students aged 12, 15 and 18 years. Preschool (ISCED0) is not included in the Swedish part. As table 1 below illustrates, on average in Malmö City, persons with migrant background in these ages outnumbers persons with Swedish background.

²³ The registration of country of birth as registered at the time of immigration, hence this refers to persons who immigrated before the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

TABLE 1. PERSONS AGED 12, 15 AND 18 YEARS WITH MIGRANT AND SWEDISH BACKGROUND IN MALMÖ CITY (DECEMBER 2020)

	12 years	15 years	18 years
Migrant background*	2 002 (51%)	1 847 (54%)	1 722 (54%)
Swedish background**	1 915 (49%)	1 550 (46%)	1 438 (46%)
Total	3 917 (100%)	3 397 (100%)	3 160 (100%)

*Migrant background includes persons who are foreign born and persons born in Sweden with two foreign born parents

**Swedish background includes persons born in Sweden with at least one parent born in Sweden

Source: Statistics Sweden, Population Statistics

Malmö is not only a city marked by a diverse population, it is also a city of social inequalities and segregation. In fact, compared to the national average, as well as the two larger cities in the country (Stockholm and Gothenburg), Malmö is characterised by large numbers of poor households compared to wealthy households (measured as purchase power per household unit). At the bottom line, this means that Malmö, by national standards, is a comparatively poor city (Salonen & Grander 2019). Further to this, it is also characterised by spatial segregation between poor and wealthy, and between persons with migrant and Swedish background, with a considerable overlap of migration background and poverty in the eastern parts of the city, and of Swedish background and wealth in the western parts of the city. This also overlaps with how different types of housing (home-ownership and tenancy) are distributed (Salonen & Grander 2019). Of relevance for the CHILD-UP study is that, overall, compulsory schools recruit their students from the surrounding housing areas, while in upper secondary schools the recruitment of students is instead to be understood in relation to which study programs they offer. In the next section we describe and discuss implications of this.

Collaboration with three schools

The Swedish part of the CHILD-UP project builds on collaboration with three schools, two compulsory schools and one upper secondary school. We collaborate with the same schools and collect data from basically the same students across all three empirical work packages (WP4–6). The two compulsory schools (school_1 and school_2) both have classes from grade 0 to ninth grade, 450–500 students and they are located in areas with high levels of poverty and large shares of persons with migrant backgrounds in the population. They mostly recruit their students from the surrounding area. The upper secondary school (school_3) is located in central Malmö and attracts students from across Malmö who have applied and been accepted into the school. It has around 1 000 students and around 80 per cent study a theoretical program, 10 per cent a vocational program and another 10 per cent an introduction program. An introduction program is a program for students who are not eligible to enter a national program, and it aims at supporting students to enter a national program. Table 2 below shows the share of students according to gender, migrant and Swedish background and parents' educational background in the selected schools compared to the Malmö and national average.

While all schools in Malmö, both compulsory and upper secondary school match the national average as regards the share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education, the share of students with migrant background is higher in Malmö than the Swedish average. This reflects the migration history of the city. While the share of students with migrant background in school_3 is

close to the Malmö average, in school_1 and school_2 this share is much higher, reaching 87 and 77 per cent respectively. In addition, in school_1 and school_2, the share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education is comparatively low. This illustrates how the socioeconomic and migration-background segregation in the city overlap, as discussed above.

TABLE 2. SHARE OF STUDENTS ACCORDING TO GENDER, MIGRANT BACKGROUND AND PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND IN THE SELECTED SCHOOLS, MALMÖ AND SWEDEN (OCTOBER 2019)

	Share of female students	Share of students with migrant background*	Share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education
School_1	47	87	29
School_2	52	77	43
All compulsory schools in Malmö	49	52	59
All compulsory schools in Sweden	49	26	60
School_3	40	56	50
All upper secondary schools in Malmö	49	51	51
All upper secondary schools in Sweden	47	31	52

*Migrant background includes foreign born persons and persons born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents Source: Skolverket, Skolblad 2019/2020

It goes without saying, that this composition of the population, i.e. the share of people with migrant and Swedish backgrounds, in the city and in the selected schools, impacts on how ‘integration’ is understood and approached, including how it is ‘talked about’. We will return to this in the analysis.

Interviews with professionals

Interview persons were primarily recruited from the three schools we collaborate with. Primarily through snowballing, that is, one contact person would typically assist us to get in contact with a new potential interview person. This is also how the interview persons ended up being unevenly distributed between the schools. It was overall challenging to recruit interview persons, not least due to the consequences of the pandemic. In particular, it was challenging to recruit mediators, and this is why we in the end included two mediators from another school in Malmö.

While the first few interviews were conducted face-to-face, as consequences of the pandemic intensified, we transferred to do interviews via an online communication platform and most

interviews were done in this way. In most cases the first contact with teachers, social workers and mediators was initiated through an e-mail, containing brief information about the research project and the interview in the mail, and with an information letter and consent form attached as a file. Most commonly, we would receive a positive answer or no answer at all, on very few occasions we received a negative answer. If the person accepted the invitation, we would agree on a time and use a safe online communication platform from the university to conduct the interview. The video file was immediately erased, and the audio file was saved and transcribed. If the contacted person did not answer we would send a reminder, once or twice and then consider the absence of answer as a negative answer. In particular, this was the case in our efforts to contact mediators. The interviewed mediators based in other schools than the ones selected for the project, work in schools that are similar to these and we estimate that this has no impact on the results in the analysis. Moreover, two of the social workers do not have their base in the selected schools, but work in close collaboration with them. We estimate that their experiences add on relevant information to the analysis. Table 3 below shows how the interview persons are distributed between the schools.

TABLE 3. OVERVIEW OF NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS DIVIDED BY SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY

	Teachers	Social Workers	Mediators	Total
School_1	6	4	2	12
School_2	4	2	1	7
School_3	2	-	-	2
Other	-	2	2	4
Total	12	8	5	25

Several of the interviewed teachers, social workers and mediators in compulsory school (School_1 and School_2) work (or had experiences of working) with children in both ISCED 1 and ISCED 2. In School_3, basically all teachers and social workers work exclusively with children in ISCED 3. Mediators are typically based at a central unit of the municipality, and work with children at different schools and at different ages. In school_3 we only interviewed teachers. The number of social workers was small and we were informed that very few of the students with other first languages than Swedish used the opportunity to have mother tongue tuition and study guidance in their mother tongue (see description of mediators in the section below), and to the extent that they did, it did not take place in School_3.

2. Professional experiences – an overview

This section concerns the professional and educational background, gender and work experiences of teachers, social workers and mediators.

Teachers

The majority of the teachers have a long working experience in the profession, ranging from 9 to 34 years. Two of them have worked respectively 1 and 3 years. The majority of them have worked in

different schools during their professional carriers. Years in the current school vary. The teaching subjects vary; different languages (ISCED 1-3), Swedish as a second language (ISCED 2-3), Natural science (ISCED 2), Mathematics (ISCED 2), Social sciences (ISCED 2), Home and consumer studies (ISCED 2) and several subjects in grade 4-6 (not subject teachers). Three of the teachers work as special pedagogues (*specialpedagoger*) and one as a special teacher (*speciallärare*). Special pedagogues have an overall responsibility for the special needs work in the schools and work with students in difficulties or with special needs. They work in close collaboration with the school management around school development, follow-ups and evaluation to provide good learning environments for all students. In contrast to special pedagogues, special teachers' work focuses on teaching students with special needs, individually, in small groups or in the regular class. Special teachers are specialized in for example hearing impairment, mathematics development, language-, writing- and reading development or developmental disorder. One of the teachers also works with newly arrived students in introductory classes. Four of the participating teachers are first teachers (*förstelärare*) with the responsibility to also work with school development tasks. Ten of the participating teachers are female. All the teachers work in classes where the absolute majority of the children have a mother tongue other than Swedish. The major languages are Arabic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Albanian, Pashto and Somali. They thus have experiences of contexts where different aspects of migrant children's learning and development is a part of their everyday work.

Social workers

All schools are obliged by law to have a Students' Healthcare Team (*Elevhälsovårdsteam, EHT*) that shall have the medical, psychological, psychosocial and special pedagogical competences needed, though precisely how it is put together and organised can vary between municipalities and schools. It is expected to work preventive in school and to secure that all students can pursue their studies in school, but also to remit students to other instances when treatment is needed. Such teams typically include a student counsellor (*skolkurator*), usually trained as a social worker. However, in schools with low levels of study performances among the students, as is the case in our selected compulsory schools, professional categories of what is referred to as complimentary competences are recruited. This is part of a nation-wide strategy to unburden teachers²⁴, so that they can focus on teaching and students' learning, and it foremost involves teacher assistants (*lärarassistenter*) and student coordinators (*elevkoordinatorer*). Several schools in Malmö City are involved in this national strategy, which is implemented in varying ways in different schools. While a university degree is needed for the position as a student coordinator, this is not required for the position as a teacher assistant. Further to this, different schools implement the strategy differently. In Malmö, among other things, this can involve recruitment of other complimentary competences within the school and involve various forms of collaboration around preventive social work strategies, including recreation centres that organise activities for children and adults residing in the area (see reports from Malmö City, Malmö stad 2019a and 2019b). These varying forms of social work initiatives involve

²⁴ See more about this on the Swedish National Agency for Education's (*Skolverket*) webpage: <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/leda-och-organisera-skolan/leda-personal/avlasta-larare-med-lararassistenter-och-andra-kompletterande-kompetenser>.

professionals with varying educational backgrounds. In effect of this, the interviewed social workers have different professional tasks and duties and different educational and professional backgrounds. In light of the limited number of interview persons and due causes of anonymity, we outline their professional backgrounds in a summative way.

Out of our eight interview persons, five are males and three females. Five have a university degree, one a professional degree in social work and four in related social science areas. One has a post-secondary professional degree and three were in the process of completing a university degree. The interview persons have at least a couple of years working experience with their current work, and several have long experience with it though in several cases the interview person has changed the formal position/organisation, while remained with more or less the same work. While only two schools are represented among the interviewed social workers, the two compulsory schools, all professional categories mentioned above are represented.

Mediators

All the participating mediators work with mother tongue tuition and study guidance in the mother tongue. The two positions are regulated by different policy documents. Mother tongue tuition is based on a national curriculum, while study guidance is connected to policy documents on local level; it has not its own syllabus. The tasks and responsibilities of the positions thus differ. The mother tongue tuition is based on a right to tuition, and the parents need to apply for it. The study guidance is decided by the school principal based on an evaluation of the need of the student. The action includes recently arrived students, as well as those who have lived longer in the country. It is recommended that a newly arrived student should be entitled to study guidance for at least 4 years. The guidance is focused on both developing knowledge in school subjects and the Swedish language. The responsibility to organize mother tongue tuition and study guidance in the mother tongue lies on municipalities and schools.

The language and educational background of the participating mediators vary. Three of them work with Arabic, one with Italian and one with Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian. Their education spans fields like; a teacher degree from Sweden or another country, master degree in humanistic sciences or/and languages, Swedish as a second language and diploma in mother tongue teaching. Three of the mediators are employed by the Foreign Language Centre [Språkcentralen], and two by the schools where they work. Their experiences as mother tongue teachers and study supervisors in mother tongue range from four to twelve years. Two are males and three are female, and all of them work in ISCED 1–2 levels.

3. The experience of migrant children from professionals' perspectives

This section set focus on how teachers, social workers and mediators perceive the situation of migrant children through their professional experience. Importantly, in the Swedish case these experiences are shaped by the migration background of the city as a whole and the involved neighbourhoods in particularly.

Teachers

Since the majority of the students (almost everyone in some cases) that the interviewed teachers teach have migrant backgrounds these are the students the teachers refer to in the interviews.

Educational difficulties and challenges

All the interviewed teachers perceive that many of their migrant students have difficulties and challenges regarding school performance. However, there are differences between the students. Different reasons for these difficulties and challenges emerged in the interviews and are presented in sub themes below.

Lacking basic educational skills

Six out of the 12 teachers talk explicitly about that their migrant students lack basic skills and that they have different prerequisites, which is of importance for their schoolwork. When talking about the different prerequisites they both explicitly and implicitly compare their migrant students with students of native backgrounds. For example, SWE_T7_F perceives that her students do not reach the same achievement level regarding e.g., reading and reading comprehension, as students in other schools she has been working in, schools with hardly any migrant students:

I also perceive here, compared to the others (other schools), that... yes, but they have very different prerequisites, which I now think a lot about, because here... the level of knowledge is maybe... yes, but I... You see this with the language, reading and reading comprehension, it has not up... I think, I have done this kind of DLS (tests) for example in others... in the other schools and there they reach the norm. And then there are those who stand out, who you know are about a handful who you know are the ones who are already on the move, but who are having difficulties. But they... it is the norm. Here it is the norm or at a low...(SWE_T7_F)

SWE_T1_F says “There can be large holes in the basics of what they bring with them or not as well.” meaning that her (migrant) students have large “gaps” in basic skills and lack prerequisites, which she perceives leads to difficulties to achieve passing grades and that she must focus her teaching on having the students achieving passing grades:

Considering the prerequisites that the students have, or the lack of prerequisites to some extent, there will be a lot of focus and work around getting our students to reach passing grades to be able to move on in life after compulsory school. (SWE_T1_F)

Lacking sufficient language skills in the language of instruction

This sub-theme relates to the previous since language skills can be seen as a prerequisite, amongst many, for learning the intended subject content in school. All the interviewed teachers refer to language issues in some way or another during the interviews. According to SWE_T1_F many students are very ambitious but will never reach a higher grade than an E (the lowest passing grade) because lacking sufficient language skills in Swedish: “There are students who are very ambitious but who will never get to more than E-level because the language becomes such a big obstacle anyway.” SWE_T5_F is of the same opinion when she says “They are very motivated to study, but I think that Swedish itself is an obstacle, because they do not have the vocabulary and so on. But they do their best, I really think.” Further, SWE_T5_F, says that this deficit becomes evident when they, write, read and speak and she perceives that many students have difficulties because of this:

So, I think the language itself and how to use the language, it is clear when they write and read and speak, that there is a shortcoming when it comes to the Swedish language itself. And I think there are many here who have a hard time with that. (SWE_T5_F)

According to SWE_T4_F, the largest challenge is the students' insufficient languages skills in Swedish. She talks about students' "weak language" and that the majority of the students have a "weak language". However, she says that some native students also have a "weak language":

But the largest challenge is that our students have a very weak language. As a large majority, the vast majority have a really weak language. 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. (SWE_4_F)

Thus, immigrant students' insufficient language skills in the language of instruction are perceived as a major educational challenge amongst the teachers.

Cultural contexts of education

A third sub-theme that emerges as a challenge that may create difficulties for migrant students' work in school in several of the teacher interviews refers to cultural issues. For example, SWE_T1_F refers to different school cultures when she says:

And there is something they have a hard time with, it is to evaluate their own and that they want to get an answer that they can only give back, they are... There are several who are phenomenal at memorizing, but to take them the step forward to memorizing, it is not enough for this grade but you must be able to use it. (SWE_T1_F)

In the quote, different epistemological views are evident, meaning that what it means to learn and what knowledge is, is perceived differently by the migrant students of SWE_T1_F in relation to her view. SWE_T11_F also talks about that the migrant students' school cultures in their home countries as different in relation to the school culture in Sweden, which she perceives may contribute to that the students do not take some school activities seriously and instead start to play and do other things then the expected during class:

We sometimes talk like how the school is in their country and how the school is here in Sweden. And I think they think there's a big difference. Also... Both how the relationships between teachers and students and the teaching methods. We have many students who are used to the teacher writing on the board, you copy it, so that's what matters [?? 0:14:16]. When I say to the students "yes, but what do you think?" This is how it may seem... Then they can, as they like, not take it really seriously, but then they may think that it is jump and play and that you... that it is not for real. So that you can mix this way of teaching, so that you... Yes, for example if I tell them that they should work together. (SWE_T11_F)

Also, SWE_T6_F talks about different school cultures as a challenge, but refers to how education is viewed in the home cultures compared to in Sweden in terms of the importance of education when she says "Their school background looks so different. And also, that they come from different school cultures. And they also come from a home culture where you have different views on how important school is. I think that is a challenge..." This is further elaborated on by SWE_T6_F when she talks about how the students become "caught in the middle" between their "home culture" and the "Swedish culture", which may be considered hybridized cultural educational context, when it comes to what is thought of as important:

And it is reflected on the students as well, that they end up a bit in the middle. From home, they have a culture where other things are important. Like getting married or things like that. And then they are in school, where they see that school is important. So, they end up in the middle there. And it's a lot of work for them. (SWE_T6_F)

Social aspects

Some of the teachers bring up challenges that relate to social aspects such as students' behaviour, which they perceive as something they need to work with. This emerges when SWE_T10_F says:

But also, the social part is a big challenge. How to act towards each other, to be nice to each other we work on constantly. What it means to show consideration and respect, that we do not have to like everyone equally, but we still must behave and move in the right way, we work very hard with this. (SWE_T10_F)

Another aspect that refers to social challenges has to do with what SWE_T5_F says about students' difficulties to focus in class, but also outside of the classroom:

But I think, by large, it's actually a problem that is actually in the whole school. This is that you must be explicit and that the students are not able to stay focused. And it does not have to be in the classroom. So, it may be in the canteen, that you are impatient, you want your food now. Or out in the corridors, in the hallway, out in the schoolyard. (SWE_T5_F)

This most likely causes a rowdy environment. Also, SWE_T9_M gives account of rowdy working environments. However, he perceives that the students with the largest difficulties with the Swedish language are the students that best focus on the teaching. The rest of the students causes the rowdiness:

It is difficult to get a peaceful working environment sometimes. They are very social with each other, they are. But some, and especially those who are... as I mentioned earlier, those who have Swedish as a second language problems, they are usually maybe... they are a little more by themselves and... yes, and solve their task, are more concentrated, focused on teaching, than other students, who are more lazy and look at other things and do other things. (SWE_T9_M)

The influence of socioeconomic background and parents' educational background on students' achievement and education

Socioeconomic background, parents' educational background and students' home situation emerge as influencing students' performance in the teacher interviews, which is illustrated in the following quote from SWE_T5_F:

There may be a difference between the students who have a little harder time at home, because it is so difficult to let go of what is at home, you take it ... you take it to school. And it affects one's studies a lot. (SWE_T5_F)

This is also highlighted by SWE_T3_F when she says that they must compensate for the students' socioeconomic backgrounds when it comes to for example reading and views on education:

The educational background of the students' parents is also very varied. If you talk based on the socio-economic, then you understand that many students also do not have that large maybe ... What to say? They are not so privileged, but we must also make sure of that and try to compensate. For example, when it comes to reading and views on education and things like that. (SWE_T3_F)

Educational needs

Social and relational needs

This sub-theme refers to the teachers' perceptions of the importance of good relations with their students. For example, SWE_T1_F compares her current working place with prior workplaces, in which students with Swedish backgrounds mostly attended, and concludes that social and relational aspects are much more important at her current workplace. According to SWE_T1_F the teaching does not work without good relations with the students: "Yes, but also social and relational because that part is so much bigger, it gets a much larger role, it becomes much more important. Without it, it will not work." Also, SWE_T5_F talks about the importance of good relations and thinks that the better you know the students the easier the work gets, which she relates to trust:

And 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)

This also emerge in the interview with SWE_T8_M. He stresses the importance of having good relations with the students to make the teaching work. He gives an example of that teachers need to decide whether to stay at the school or not. He perceives that the students can tell if their teacher want to work in the school or not which he thinks impacts the lessons since it makes the students feeling (un)safe:

But we have students who are very relationship-bound. It is important that you as a teacher here decide to be here, that you want to be here. The students notice if you do not want to be here and then the lessons will be according to that. It has been like this all the time I have worked here in fact, that... because it has been very much rocked on the staff and staff changes a little too often, so that the students have not found any security in it when they change teachers all the time. And now that those students are older, they feel that it has affected their grades. (SWE_T8_M)

SWE_T8_M explains it further by relating having a good relationship with the students to caring for the students. He tells about how he used to go to the boys' soccer games (in his spare time), which he perceived had good effects for his teaching and how the lessons went:

But we always have... I can also say that we always have... Ever since I started working here, it has been important to care about the students as teachers. And I had for example... I went in my spare time for example and watched the boys' soccer games, for example. And it did a lot for my teaching and how my lessons went. How the students met me in the corridors, and we had something to talk about that was about them besides "how are you?". (SWE_T8_M)

Key factors

Students' opportunities to participate

Several of the interviewed teachers talk about the importance of student participation in terms of student influence. For example, SWE_T5_F stresses this, but also the importance of listening to the students' perceptions of their feelings and needs. However, she makes a distinction between having influence and making decisions and relates it to democracy and the right to have a voice heard:

When I come to the students' participation, I want to say that it is important when students are involved and participate. It is important that we also listen to them and that we get to hear and what they feel they need more of or less of. And that ... Because they are involved

does not mean that they should decide things, but that is that ... We live in a democracy and it must be reflected in the school as well, where everyone can have a voice. And that it should be heard. So, I think it's important to reflect society. Democracy is important in the classroom. (SWE_T5_F)

SWE_T9_M also stresses the importance to listen to the students' perceptions of their needs, but he also makes interpretations of their work and of more spontaneous conversations, which he perceives as a way of grasping the student influence, which he believes impact his relationship with the students and how he teaches:

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)

The importance of having multilingual staff

One of the interviewed teachers, SWE_T6_F, perceives that having multilingual staff in the school as crucial. She thinks it is a large resource and that it creates feelings of safety among the students. SWE_T6_F is not multilingual, but wishes that she was since she believes that it could contribute to another type of contact or relation, a better one, with the students:

Yes, exactly. We have multilingual staff and I think that is a huge asset here. It is A and O in... If you work at a school in Malmö, you must have multilingual staff. Because it gives a huge sense of safety for the students. No, it can be educators, it can be student coordinators. It can be, only if you are... I myself am not multilingual. But that you have multilingual staff. I wish I could have spoken multilingual when working at a school like this, because you get a completely different contact with the students. (SWE_T6_F)

Gender dimensions

The interviewed teachers perceive that there are gender differences when it comes to migrant students' classroom behaviour, social difficulties, and home cultures, which is exemplified in the sub-themes below. However, when it comes to gender difference and school achievement the teachers' perceptions differ, some teachers perceive that there is a difference in achievement, and some do not. For example, SWE_T5_F and SWE_T6_F perceive no differences between boys and girls when it comes to achievement in school. According to SWE_T5_F there is no difference in achievement between boys and girls. SWE_T5_F states that the students who have difficulties to achieve in school are both boys and girls:

No, I do not think it is a large... No, I have never thought that it should be something for boys and for something for girls, but it is actually the same things I see that ... Those who have the difficulties are actually both boys and girls. (SWE_T5_F)

However, SWE_T3_F, says that there is a difference when it comes to students in special need and estimates that one third of the students in special need are girls and two thirds are boys: "Yes. Now I have no statistics in my head, but I would only guess that it is maybe a third of girls and two thirds of boys". Some teachers highlight gender differences in relation to social difficulties and classroom behaviour. For example, SWE_T3_F perceives that there are more boys with outspoken/rowdy behaviour than girls in the school: "Yes, you can see more outspoken behaviour ... Usually comes

from the teachers reporting or talking about it, describes it, when it comes to boys...”. Both SWE_T5_F and SWE_T10_F perceives that the boys take up a larger space in the classroom than the girls. SWE_T5_F says “The boys take up a little more space in the classroom than the girls do”. SWE_T10_F perceives a large difference when it comes to girls’ and boys’ behaviour in the classroom and describes the boys as louder and rowdier than the girls:

So, there may be more girls backing if there is something and the boys take up more space. Are loud and this that... And it may not always have to do with the things going on inside the classroom but you they just must be heard and noticed, that it is more so that the boys take that role. So, there I notice quite a big difference. (SWE_T10_F)

Unlike the perception of SWE_T10_F, SWE_T9_M does not perceive any differences when it comes to gender and behaviour in the classroom:

No. When it comes to girls and boys, it does not matter. It can be... They can be anxious, regardless of gender. It's not like I have to call on the boys more than the girls. I do not experience that. (SWE_T9_M)

Another gender difference that is brought up in the teacher interviews relates to the students’ home situations or culture. SWE_T6_F, SWE_T7_F and SWE_T12_F perceive that girls are controlled and cannot for example participate in sports and meet boys whereas boys have more freedom. SWE_T6_F says “I can say this, that of course, some girls become more controlled. They will be. I have experienced that. Depending on where they come from. While boys have a greater freedom. They have. And so.”. SWE_T12_F and SWE_T7_F express it as follows:

And also now... I do not feel it so much, because I am not in high school, but also the thing about watching the girls. And it has been, on some occasions, quite obvious that cousin... a girl cousin has started here, and then the boy cousin starts... You can see that they keep a complete track of where she is and what she does and so on. So yes, it does occur. (SWE_T12_F)

... And then also... then, yes but with girls, it's also the culture with... you can... yes, you can do and cannot do and so on. I do not say a must is not this with the veil, but many choose to have it and... But that you do not ... you are not allowed to meet boys at all for example. You are not allowed to play sports with... A bit like this, like... yes. Yes. (SWE_T7_F)

Social workers

The analysis of social workers’ experiences of migrant children builds on interviews with social workers based in or in relation to two compulsory schools dominated by students with migrant background. Their professional positions and experiences vary, and this is reflected in their perceptions. Nevertheless, it is central, that while the large majority of the children they encounter, have migration background, there is an ambivalence in how they describe the children, not only between different interview persons, but also in each interview with the social workers. On the one hand it is stated that the children are like any other children, and on the other that this is a special area with special needs that demand special engagement from the professionals.

A mix of (migration) backgrounds

All interview persons describe their students as dominated by persons with migrant background. This makes it difficult to talk about children with migrant background as a demarcated group; migrant background is the ‘normal’:

Basically, all students have some kind of foreign background, many are born here in Sweden but their parents have moved here. It is also many new arrivals, actually. And they are from Syria, Kurdistan, and Somalia. (SWE_SW2_M)

I don't know the exact statistics about how it is in school, but the absolute majority of the children living in [name of area] and who comes to school either have one or two parents born in another country, or are born in another country themselves. So, it is a huge diversity among the children and which languages that are spoken in school. (SWE_SW6_M)

I meet children from all over the world. We have ... I heard some number saying that we have 28 different native languages in this school. Then, I don't meet all //...// individually, but in this school. (SWE_SW7_F)

If we consider which languages that are spoken in school, this is a huge mix. We have a very large number of countries, if we say so. I would say Iraq, I would say Syria, Somalia, Tunisia, I would say Swedes. I would also say Norwegians, and Danes. In fact, it is a mix of everything. (SWE_SW1_M)

In [the group IP works with] more than half are not born here //...// and we don't have a single student with Swedish parents. (SWE_SW3_F)

There are many and demanding problems in the schools. While this in popular debates often is related with the migration background of children, this is not necessarily the understanding of the interviewed social workers, instead social factors, including lack of support from home. However, for newcomers the migrant background impacts.

In my view, this school is a school like all other. There are conflicts, there is bullying, but foremost there are very strong friendships and the children are very supportive in relation to each other. These are also the things that we try to focus on. (SWE_SW6_M)

There are many capable students. Then there are many with challenges as well. It is not ... I believe that many are suffering from tough situations, probably poverty, and maybe with overcrowding at home, which means that one does not ... all students don't have support from home //...// many simply don't have the possibility, they can't offer the support that the education ... the school demands, to succeed in school. And we do our best to catch them here. (SWE_SW2_M)

This school is very good at making students pass, but we should maybe put more effort on those students who want to go from a 'C' to a 'B' or an 'A'. Because we have many strong students, but we also have ... due to the fact that many, I don't have any figures, but a significant number of new arrivals, who have attended schools in other countries before ... so there is relatively much focus on basic skills. (SWE_SW3_F)

An aspect that is lifted repeatedly regards the area *per se*, what can be interpreted as a kind of place-based stigma that impacts on the situation (or rather position) of the children.

And then, of course, many children feel that eh ... I don't have the energy, I will not make it anyway, and [name of area] is no good. (SWE-SW4_M)

All we in [name of area] are as rich as all others, as poor. It is when we start upper secondary school that we realised how good or bad we have it in relation to other children. (SWE_SW8_M)

In [name of area] there are shootings, there is open drug dealing, and one doesn't want one's child to be outside when it is dark. (SWE_SW6_M)

Aspects considered central in the experiences of migrant children, includes the situation of newcomers and the management of social problems, as we discuss in the following.

The situation of newcomers

The situation of newcomers is primarily related to the lack of proficiency in Swedish language, but not only. This causes situations that social workers, as well as other professionals, must manage.

I would say that the biggest challenge for me are the students that are relatively new in Sweden //...// where social factors impacts hugely on their development. This is when you indirectly must feed with social norms without triggering conflicts. (SWE_SW1_M)

While this sometimes means that a formal translator is engaged, depending on the situation, commonly a colleague or child who share mother tongue with the newcomer can assist:

In cases when there is a child that does not understands me, I always have colleagues, or just another child, that can translate and help. (SWE_SW5_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 [native language]. (SWE_SW4_M)

Students with short time in the country, and who does not yet speak Swedish, might have the knowledge of the subject, though s-/he is unable to show it in Swedish. In the first quote below, the social worker acted as translator, and in the second the mother tongue teacher assisted.

She asked the questions and I translated them. He answered and I told [the teacher] what [the student] answered. It was shown that [the student] knew, but was unable to formulate it [in Swedish]. (SWE-SW4_M)

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 [migration background] is a factor really. (SWE-SW3_F)

Low Swedish language proficiency have implications in the communication with parents too:

The majority of the parents talk good and fluent Swedish, and are easy to communicate with. It is primarily those who have not been in the country so long, but we still want these to have the same information as those who speak Swedish. This is why we might print our information material in several languages //...// otherwise we hinder their participation. (SWE_SW6_M)

Social problems in the school and neighbourhood

In the interviews, the social workers point to several areas of perceived social problems. Some students have problems with self-control and behaviour:

But another thing is, it can be persons born in Sweden, with or without migration background, it does not matter, but who has difficulties one could say, regarding their emotional regulation. (SWE_SW1_M)

Often it is about social difficulties, and they often end up in conflicts or do not confine with adults or that they ... this kind of problems. (SWE_SW3_F)

The mentioned problems also include bullying:

Overall, the climate is good //...// but there is a ... what is striking, is that there are some children who are vulnerable and bullied in the classes. //...// we need to work a lot more with social relations in school, or ... they need to get to know each other and have more understanding for each other. They are so quick to throw back 'But it was you who started', it is some kind of revenge. It is a challenge ... (SWE_SW7_F)

Several interview persons lift the combination of social problems with lack of Swedish language proficiency:

We have many children with difficulties. It is one thing to have a school with children with diagnoses, ADHD or autism. But when you at the same time have language challenges, it is a challenge to succeed, and in the view of that, we are pretty successful. (SWE_SW5_F)

It is a challenge *per se*, when they don't have the language. (SWE_SW7_F)

Gender dimensions

Gender dimensions is a complex matter. Many interview persons first respond that gender does not impact on how they perceive the experiences of the children or their work, other are explicit about it. Nevertheless, several interview persons who first state that it does not impact, later outline how gender in fact do play a role. To a large extent, this is a matter of how 'gender' is understood, but also the different training of persons.

In the first quote below the interview person states that there is no difference, it is just boys and girls. In the second, the interview person argues that the problem *per se* is the same, but the expressions of it vary between boys and girls, referring to that boys are more violent and girls more 'socially verbal'.

Not at all, it all depends on you if you want to see a difference, but I see no difference. I have daughters, and I find it smooth to build relations with girls in school. So I see no difference, it is boys and girls. (SWE_SW4_M)

In my view, the problems are the same, but with different hormones. (SWE_SW1_M)

It is about the same, but it takes different forms, boys are more inclined towards violence while the girls freeze out each other and quarrel. (SWE_SW7_F)

Yet, several interview persons have experiences of differences in terms of out-reach to girls and boys. It is experienced that boys to a larger extent than girls can attend different after-school activities, which is explained as due to that parents are more cautious about their girls, but also that girls have more duties to fulfill at home. In some cases this was actively followed-up by the social workers, and they also invited the parents to come and visit the after-school activities, a method that has proved to be very helpful.

If I received a 'no' [meaning that a girl could not participate], I went to the parents and rang on the door bell, and I wanted to know why their children could not participate. Because sometimes, the boy was allowed but not the girl, and I wanted to know why. (SWE_SW8_M)

I then invited them there, like this: 'Come here with me'. If your child wants to take music classes, they might think ... or dance, then they think that dance is something very different from what it is. (SWE_SW8_M)

Contrary, some other of the interviewed social workers, with special training in working with gendered structures of inequality, talk about the impact of gender in a very different way, including LBTQI questions though this is very rare. The interview person describes the problem in the following way:

It was this hierarchy, that the oldest and the male has the power. As a girl you could not hang around in same places as the boys, it was not considered suitable, for various reasons. (SWE_SW5_F)

This is a kind of honour culture that does not come from religion, but from culture, that is the man who decides. The patriarchal system ... we have reached far in Sweden, but many remain in that [culture]. (SWE_SW5_F)

These structures of gendered inequality impact differently on different children, with girls experiencing control from home being one vulnerable group. The same social worker continues:

The girls that I experience as most controlled from home, are those with most disruptive behaviour. They are often angry with adults and have difficulties with trust. And they come here and feel provoked when we try to help them to feel free, as they are very controlled in how they can be. They find their ways, it can end up with a lot of absenteeism ... as a way to have some kind of freedom. //...// They live out their adolescence in school, as they cannot do it after school. (SWE_SW5_F)

Mediators

Educational performance and needs of the children (from mediator's perspective)

The participating mediators experience that the students who they support with study guidance have difficulties with their educational performances due to lack of sufficiency in the Swedish language. This concern newly arrived students but also students who have grown up in Sweden:

As I said, the needs are great, the students have great difficulties, both linguistically and otherwise, and there is not enough time [to help them]. [...]. Some are born in Sweden so the language is not... if you do not have a diagnosis or other worries so... But usually, it is the language that is lacking. (SWE_M1_F).

According to the mediators, the shortcomings in Swedish has implications on the students understanding of the subject content. The students therefore often need, regardless whether born in Sweden or newly arrived, explanations of the subject in their mother tongue:

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).

The students thus need help with the understanding of the subject content rather than translations of text. The task of the study guidance is then more focused on explaining rather than translating:

For the most part, it's about explaining, not translating. So, for example social or natural sciences. They don't understand what the teacher sometimes means by that particular question, "have I interpreted it correctly, can she mean so, can she mean that". An example, but often it is [for me] to explain it (SWE_M1_F).

However, the educational performances in relation to the understanding of subject content differ among the students receiving study guidance. This applies in particular to the newly arrived, who differ greatly in terms of level of education and knowledge:

So, it becomes difficult, and unfair to those who know a lot, who understand immediately when I explain. [...]. A bit difficult for me, that I have to talk to someone who knows a lot in very advanced level. While the others, I have to simplify my language, concepts, give some synonyms to concepts, what does this mean. Or sometimes it is necessary to start from the beginning, (SWE_M4_F).

The same mediator is reflecting on differences among the students who participate in her mother tongue tuition classes. Here the difficulties in educational performance is greater for children who grow up in Sweden, compared to the newly arrived:

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 do not know the letters. I have grade six, some do not know letters (SWE_M4_F).

Factors and challenges influencing children's performances

Educational background and socioeconomic factors

The mediators mention several factors that influence the children's performances. As previously has been mentioned, one is the educational background of the students. Another is the educational background of the parents. This affects the students' possibilities to get help with schoolwork at home: "Some who do not have parents with education, therefore they don't get help at home. This is a big problem, I tell the student "read, read, read", but no one helps at home" (SWE_M5_F).

For example, I have a girl, she is from Syria, dad cannot read and write in Arabic, mom cannot read and write in Arabic. She comes directly to Sweden. If dad cannot read and write in Arabic, how can he help? (SWE_M4_F).

Other factors mentioned are housing and family situations. Some of the students are in the country as unaccompanied with parents stuck in another country. These students worry about their parent's situation which affects their studies. Others do not have a stable housing situation and are therefore always on the move: "Some who do not have a housing. So, every month they move here and there and, yes, that affects my students a lot" (SWE_M5_F).

Some of the students also find it embarrassing to have study guidance, which in turn affects their motivation for taking help from the mediators:

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).

Sometimes teachers make a decision to end the study guidance, even if the mediator can see that a continuation would help the students in his/her educational performances:

For example, I had a student who enjoyed studying, who gave no evidence of being tired of the study guidance. He was good. We had probably reached a sufficient level, but I thought, why stop when you have just climbed over the approved line? But then suddenly the teacher said, "I think this student does not need study guidance anymore, what do you think?" (SWE_M2_M)

Gender dimensions

Some of the mediators mention aspects of gender as challenges for the children's educational performance. One is that girls sometimes has to help with household chores, which gives them less time to study. A mediator tells what a girl from grade five told her: "Mom can't handle it herself. [...]. I have my responsibility at home. There I have to clean, do the dishes" (SWE_M4_I_F).

The same mediator mentions another challenge; that newly arrived students sometimes have difficulties working in groups, and to take help from other students, especially boys from girls. She tells about a situation where she told a newly arrived boy to ask for help from a female classmate: He said "No, I do not want to ask her". So he thinks it's impossible to ask a friend, and especially if she's a girl. I can ask that guy he said, but not her [...]. So in the beginning it will always be difficult (SWE_M4_F).

Other mediators mention individual rather than gender aspects in relation to educational performances. The challenge is related to the level of knowledge in the subjects and the Swedish language:

I would probably say that there is individual variation. It is rather the subjects, you need to read a lot and perhaps the reading comprehension is not so developed that the student should be able to achieve the goals. [...]. It's my experience, it is very much individual variations. (SWE_M3_M).

School inequality

One of the mediators is mentioning unequal schooling system as a factor that affects educational performances of students. She has worked in different schools in the city and observed a difference between schools as regards the share of certified and skilled teachers, materials, school environment, and the students' resources at home. This results, according to her, in a difference in children's educational performances. And it leads to great educational challenges when students move from secondary to upper secondary school: "When the students start upper secondary schools, it's a shame. Too bad for some. They can't cope with it. Some have big problems, and they [the school] ask which compulsory school they come from" (SWE_M5_F).

4. Working with children and their families

This section focuses on practical dimensions of teachers', social workers' and mediators' work with children and their families, including language issues and the way and circumstances of communication with families.

Teachers working with children

In this section different sub-themes that relate to teachers' work with migrant children are presented. The sub-themes all relate, implicitly or explicitly, to language issues. That is teaching students who do not have sufficient language skills in Swedish.

Something more is needed of the teacher profession

The first sub-theme is of a more general character since it includes teachers' perceptions on what it means to teach migrant students in their specific schools. For example, SWE_T1_F compares working with migrant students in the current school with working in other schools with mostly native students. In contrast to her work in other schools she believes the classroom environments in her current school is rougher and that she has to "see the whole student" in new ways and cannot use traditional teaching methods like "teaching by the desk" and having the students read texts and answering questions about the text:

Even if you focus a lot on the school, it's about really having to see the whole student in a different way, you cannot get away with standing and teaching by the desk and then "read the text and answer the questions", because it does not work in these classrooms because they do not have the tools to handle such a task, there is not a chance in the whole universe that it could work in a good way... (SWE_T1_F)

Similarly, SWE_T2_F thinks that more is needed of her when working in this school. She cannot assume that that the students know what she expects them to know and she must repeat, explain and clarify for the students to understand the intended:

So, here I feel that I as a teacher must be... It takes a lot more of me to get them to get... so a level like this where I can feel that yes... So, a lot of things that you can take for granted, that if I say this now I think that everyone has understood but it is not possible to think like this, but you have to repeat yourself and repeat yourself and explain and clarify. (SWE_T2_F)

Also, SWE_T12_F gives account of that teaching migrant student in the current school requires something else and more of the teacher profession than just teaching, which she perceives as tough but rewarding:

I think, if you want a job where you plan a lesson, go in and complete the lesson, have a test, see what it... what you have... what you can check out from it, then it is not such a job, but you have... There is so much around. But then, on the other hand, you also get more back when... There are many times you tear your hair and say "I never go there again". But the times you succeed, you get back so much more, because what you, what shall I say, invest in listening, you also get back. So, it's more about, in some way, working with oneself. (SWE_T12_F)

Further, SWE_T12_F says that she is not only a teacher, sometimes she also must act as a police officer and psychologist and has to be sensitive to how the students feel and show respect towards students' situations:

I think it is... I sometimes think that you are both an educator, a police officer and a psychologist, because you have to be so clear in what you want to present in some way. And you also have to be so sensitive to different moods, or different nuances. I think, you have to be very open because it cannot just be one way. You have to have a lot of respect for other people's situations. (SWE_T12_F)

Multilingualism as a resource

Language and how the teachers work with students' language in their teaching make up a large part of teachers' descriptions of their work with children. Different aspects of how they work emerge from the interviews. This sub-theme consists of examples of how the teachers work in relation to multilingualism as a resource, which means that all languages are viewed as resources for learning and used in the classroom. For example, SWE_T2_F says that she tries to use translanguaging as a pedagogy, and gives an example of how they create wordlists in which she also includes English and the students' mother tongues:

And then I actually try to start a lot from translanguaging, 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)

According to SWE_T2_F the students reacted negatively in the beginning when she started to encourage to use the mother tongue: "In the beginning they reacted, thought what mother tongue, I do not know what... huh, no, then it is nothing for you. But for some students, it is very crucial whether they have that column or not". SWE_T2_F and SWE_T11_F use the students who share mother tongue to explain in their mother tongue to each other when someone does not understand when Swedish is used:

Sometimes when we cannot explain a certain word so just yes, now I know that many speak Arabic here, what is it called in Arabic, I say to someone. So, it says, aha, then the rest have taken over. So, it's pretty open with different languages. (SWE_T2_F)

... I also had a student today who did not... it was a math task and no, we could not... I could not explain well enough to her. So, then I got a boy who speaks her language and

yes, I thought it still seemed like she understood better when he explained to her. Or he just said the answer, I do not know. (SWE_T11_F)

SWE_T6_F claims that the teaching does not have to be one hundred percent in Swedish and that students should get the opportunity to show their knowledge regardless of what language they use to present their knowledge. This is an important element which might enhance conditions of hybrid integration. She gives an example of having students write in the language they prefer and thereafter translate it to Swedish:

... And it is not obvious that the teaching needs to be one hundred percent in Swedish, but I usually say that “but let the student write in the language he can, and then he can translate it into Swedish. But let him show his knowledge regardless of language”. Language should not be an obstacle, but it should be an asset at this school. (SWE_T6_F)

According to SWE_T12_F it is all about communication and the importance of being able to communicate to understand each other both teacher and students. SWE_T12_F claims that you have to use all possible methods to achieve communication and gives translanguaging, body language and visual support as examples of tools for communication:

So, I think that in general in our workplace you have to work very supportive of language, and you have to be open to using all possible methods to achieve communication, so that is really the main focus, that is both translanguaging and body language and visual support and all possible ways you can imagine. So, the most important thing is really to reach each other in a communication, and somehow understand each other, help the children understand each other. (SWE_T12_F)

Language-oriented teaching

Like the previous sub-theme this sub-theme also includes language and how the teachers work with language. However, this theme does not include multilingualism as a resource. Instead the examples of the teachers work in relation to language is focused on students' skills in Swedish. For example, SWE_T4_F claims that it is important that the students use Swedish to develop their skills in Swedish:

But the important thing is to always try to get the students to speak, that's the most important thing, because they speak... We have students with us who speak very little Swedish, they mainly speak, for example, Arabic. So that it is only inside the classroom that they meet Swedish. And then I get... I think it's my job to make sure they actually speak Swedish. (SWE_T4_F)

SWE_T4_F also gives examples of how she works with words to have the students understand. For example, she says that she works with synonyms and that she prepares her teaching by reading the student texts and pick words that she thinks the students will have hard time to understand and then together with the students work with the words (in Swedish):

So, the primary thing for me is to work with synonyms all the time. That as soon as I say something that is possibly an adequate word in the context, I try to give the students synonyms one after the other so that they can understand more easily. And I also do that in Spanish, so in that way I work language-oriented there as well. Then it is very important that whatever I do, that I know the text before and have been able to pick out the words I think are difficult for the students. But then sometimes I also let the students get to the board, if they do not just raise their hand or go in and check on svenska.se what a word means, they can come up on the board for example and write words and then we discuss words meaning. (SWE_T4_F)

SWE_T11_F also focus on words and claims that it is important that the students acquire a vocabulary: “And then we collect words and... It's a lot about collecting words and collecting concepts, they have to get a vocabulary, so it's super important.”

Scaffolding strategies

Different scaffolding strategies emerge in the teacher interviews. Scaffolding strategies aim at moving the students forward in their work. A scaffolding strategi that both SWE_T2_F and SWE_T11_F use is the “teaching and learning cycle” (*cirkelmodell*), which is a teaching and learning cycle model presented by Gibbons (2002). The cycle includes four phases in which a specific text genre is; introduced and contextualized, modelled, practiced together in class and last individually performed by the students. SWE_T2_F says “I work a lot with scaffolding materials, for example I use the circle model quite often”. SWE_T2_F and SWE_T11_F say:

Then you end up with that they shall produce a whole text on their own in the last step. So, it's a way to scaffold. And really, you could say that it pretty much permeates my way. Because every time I do something, I show it like this, I become a model for the students. (SWE_T2_F)

... We work a lot with writing joint texts, we work a lot according to the circle model, that we start in the joint and then we break it down to finally be able to do it ourselves. So that, yes... And then there is very, very much visual support, very much...(SWE_T11_F)

Visual support, also mentioned by SWE_T11_F in the quote above, is a recurring scaffolding strategy mentioned in interviews. For example, SWE_T6_F says “A lot of visual support is another strategy... “ and SWE_T8_M says “I use pictures as often as I can, really”.

SWE_T8_M do not only talk about visual support, but also about using synonyms and concretizing and contextualizing concepts for the students to understand them:

Yes, that there is... In each subject you have a number of concepts, for example, which it is important to concretize for the students so that they actually understand it. So that you can have a perspective of “easy to understand” all the time, and feel free to use both synonyms and visual support and other methods. (SWE_T8_M)

Digital tools

Some of the teachers describe different digital tools that they use when working with their students, most of them relate to language issues. One is Studi (studi.se), which the city has purchased for all the schools to use. It holds short films in different school subjects. The films are presented in different languages. The students can choose what language they speak in the film and what language the subtitles are written in:

And then we add this that "how can we organize teaching that all students can take part in and benefit from?" And then there are also these questions when it comes to language. And there we try to use the tools we also have. Where the city of Malmö, for example, has bought Studi, a tool where you can watch different short films in different languages and school subjects. (SWE_T3_F)

There is a computer program called Studi. There you can choose the language. It is films. Short films that are related to the goals and the curriculum, depending on which year you are in, and in all subjects. And then... The films are about five minutes. And then you can choose which language you want the film to be in, and which subtitle. Which language the subtitle should be in. (SWE_T6_F)

SWE_T11_F also use visual support and films, but also teaching materials that are translated to the students' mother tongue:

There is a lot of pictures, there is a lot of films, there is a lot... We have quite a lot of digital tools nowadays, for example we have a teaching material that translates everything into the students' language. Then you can work in parallel with both their language and Swedish. (SWE_T11_F)

Also, SWE_T4_F, uses tools that translate teaching materials. But she also uses other digital tools that are not translating tools. She thinks it works really well to use digital tools such as Kahoot and Quizlet Live in her teaching. When using these tools, the students have to collaborate and interact with each other:

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. And I do not know if you know Quizlet Live, but there is... 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)

Teaching strategies enhancing student agency

This sub-theme involves teaching strategies, which not explicitly refers to language and scaffolding. To challenge the students so that they do not relax too much and end up doing nothing during class SWE_T4_F uses two different strategies, which she believes are successful. She times the student when they work and after a certain time, she randomly picks a couple of students who must share their work to the rest of the class. She thinks that this strategy also helps her to detect students in difficulties. When randomly picking students, she uses sticks with the students' name on which draws from:

I work with timing all the time. So, I take out my cell phone and then I time the students. It has proven to be a success factor for me because in this way I get a better grip on all students. Then I have these name sticks with... written each student's name on a stick. So, after I say they'll do something and they get a certain number of minutes, I randomly pick a couple, maybe five, name sticks. And then those students get to tell what they have done. And this is also a way to constantly increase the level, challenge the young people so that they do not relax and do nothing. Because that's the big risk, it's just that they do nothing. That they can sit a whole lesson sometimes and do nothing because they do not get started. And if you work the way I do, I think it's easier to pay attention to students who actually have difficulties. (SWE_T4_F)

SWE_T5_F starts lessons with warm-up tasks or games to get all students involved. These tasks may consist of different things but the aim of them is to get all students started, to participate and feel safe:

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. So, I think that is a good way to work a little. That you come in and you talk, and you start softly. I actually think so...(SWE_T5_F)

SWE_T9_M uses some other strategies such as for example EPA (Individual reflection, Reflection in pairs, Reflection in the whole class), which has become a common strategy in schools in Malmö. He also uses peer feedback and certain reading strategies:

Yes, I often use EPA, individually, in pairs, together. I use reading strategies, before, during and after reading. I use peer feedback. Yes, write together. So, it's. Yes, how much really, if you just think about it. (SWE_T9_M)

Extra support – study guidance in mother tongue

Newly arrived students and students in need of it may be provided *Study guidance in the mother tongue* which focus on both developing knowledge in school subjects and the Swedish language. Teachers think of it as valuable and useful. For example, SWE_T12_F says “I thought, we have very great benefit from the fact that we have access to many study guidance supervisors, and that they can then support in the mother tongue”. SWE_T10_F and SWE_T11_F give examples of how the work with Study guidance in the mother tongue and why it is of importance:

Like all the social science subjects and natural science subjects that are quite complex, many new words where understanding is very important in order to be able to connect different things. There, it is very valuable to be able to connect it to the mother tongue and above all these subjects it is great are to, for example, take help from the study guidance supervisor to go through the concepts so you get an understanding of it, to then be able to talk and participate more easily. And when we then discuss in Swedish or watch a film in Swedish, or you have to answer. It helps them because then they have something to relate it to. So, it is a bit closely related, that you need to have it ... also in your mother tongue even if you have not come that far in your language development. (SWE_T10_F)

You can let the mother tongue teachers do... rehearsal. After I have gone through something, the mother tongue teachers can repeat what we have done. Or they can work in the meantime, it's a bit what you do... It's a bit maybe also about purely logistical, I will go through a new theme (content), and I will go through it on Wednesday... So those who have study guidance after Wednesday may rehearse it. But right now, I'm trying to stay a week in advance in the study guidance supervisors'... I have a Google classroom for all study guidance supervisors, so they go in and get their information there. So, I try to put it there a week before we will work on it in class. So that they are a week ahead. (SWE_T11_F)

Challenges – not enough time and resources

Working with migrant children involves several challenges. Many of them are connected to the students' in-sufficient language skills in the language of instruction. Challenges, which also relate to this to some extent, that many teachers brought up during the interviews were that they perceive that more adults are needed in class. It is not enough with one teacher. They also believe that they need more time. That is more time for their work, but also more time together with the students. For example, SWE_T5_F and SWE_T10_F say:

Yes, but there are some challenges. There are many who come from ... There are many who have difficulties and I feel it can be a challenge, to be one person in the classroom and try to meet all needs. And you feel that time is not enough. Because I cannot ... It's hard to spend maybe 15 minutes on someone who needs a lot of help when everyone else is yelling at you. So, it can be a challenge, the time itself. It feels like it is not enough, quite simply. (SWE_T5_F)

And then I can think a bit that, as I said, language again rules because we need a little more time to go through concepts, different concepts, put them in different contexts and then work on. And sometimes it can actually be about very [do not hear 0:23:58] simple

concepts, that is, if you can now say so, which many may not know about. But I think it's also something that does not slow down, but it is also something that is important. And then it kind of takes maybe a little longer to get to where we should, because we have to take care of the foundational first, before we move on. (SWE_T5_F)

I would probably say that in a school like this, it would sometimes have been good to have more adults in the classroom because there are so many different ones. There are many times that I need to sit down and really help one by one. But I have twenty-five children and I may have ten that I need to help one by one. It is a very short moment per student, I wish there could have been more. So that Yes, more people who can help and support the children in their work on site. (SWE_T10_F)

Teachers working with families

The interviewed teachers' experiences of working with migrant children's parents, which emerged in the interviews, are presented in various sub-themes below.

Parents as important resources

According to the interviewed teachers, parents are viewed as an important resource when it comes to their children's schooling, which is for example expressed by SWE_T12_F and SWE_T5_F: believes that involving parents contributes to a larger engagement says:

And my first year here I did not actually have contact with so many parents or guardians, but over time I have actually noticed that it is important that they are involved in their children's schooling and that when they found out more about how it went for their children, then they became more engaged. And this close contact with the home is extremely important, I have actually understood now, after some time here. (SWE_T5_F)

SWE_T5_F believes that involving parents contributes to a larger engagement.

No interference from the parents

Recurring in the interviews were the teachers' experiences of that parents do not interfere with their work because they are of the perception that the school and the teachers should take care of their children's schooling. SWE_T5_F says "I think a lot of parents leave a lot of this that you are a teacher, so you should fix this and you should try to solve this", implicitly putting the burden on the teachers to solve everything by themselves. SWE_T11_F says "I had a parent who said to me last week "when the child starts school I leave the child in your hands, and then it is you who decides...". SWE_T2_F relates this to culture and compares it with how it is in other schools:

while here we get almost... come on, we must sort of pull out... Because there you then have with you a culture like that yes, but the school, they take care of their stuff, which is positive in a way. But we also want a participation with the home and there we get to work a little more for it, you do not need that in other schools.! (SWE_T2_F)

SWE_T9_M relates it to that the parents view the school as an authority:

In Swedish as a second language, I have non-existent contact with the parents. I feel that there is a... with those parents, so there is a view of the school as if the school is an authority, and the school knows what they are doing. And if the school says so, then my child listens to it. (SWE_T9_M)

Communication and parent meetings

Some of the teachers talk about difficulties to communicate with parents. For example, SWE_T8_M talks about it as a hindrance and relates it to the parents' educational background, being of the opinion

that parents with a low level of education do not communicate with school in the way he expects them to do:

Communication with the parents has been an obstacle, you could say. The level of education is generally quite low in this area. And study habits are probably not very highly ranked out here, or what to say. It is not... There are very few here with higher education. (SWE_T8_M)

SWE_T3_F perceives that interpreters are needed when communicating with parents, but complicated: "It is more difficult when you cannot have this direct communication, but it must go through an interpreter. But that's the way to do it". Also, SWE_T6_F brings forward the importance of using interpreters when communicating with children and their parents, which she relates to the importance of having a voice in the conversation:

Then we have interpreters. Always an interpreter in meetings. Because there it is also that there should be the same conditions for all students to be able to bring their opinion, but also for the guardians to be able to present what they want and what they think and what they feel and so on. So, interpreter, very important. (SWE_T6_F)

Some of the teachers talked about having difficulties in getting the parents to attend parent meetings. A parent meeting is a meeting, arranged by the school when parents of a school class meet their children's teacher/s. The meeting taking place after the school day. For example, SWE_T11_F says that the parents do not attend traditional parent meetings and instead suggests meetings in which the children are involved and present their work and, in that way, have parents coming to the meetings:

When it comes to not attending a parent meeting, yes, parents do not come to a parent meeting, it's that simple. So, then I think that then you cannot have traditional parent meetings. If I want my parents here, then I cannot stand there and tell you that you have to bring sports clothes with you to the gym and fruit for the break... So, it is not possible to have traditional then. Then you must think "what can you do instead?" A fairly simple way to do this is to get students to force their parents. It's pretty easy, at least with the younger kids, you may not be able to do this with high school students. But with slightly younger children, it is very easy to do something that they should show to the parents. And if the children go home and beg their parents to come, well, then they will. And all parents want to look at their children when they sing, or have made a drawing, or are going to read or whatever they are going to do. They think it's important. So that this to stand there and inform about everything, yes, I do not know... I also do not think it is so fun myself. I have to do it, but... You can do it fun, something fun, and then you can bring these points. (SWE_T11_F)

SWE_T8_F and his colleagues has stopped arranging parent meeting since the parents did not attend them, but he thinks the communication with parents have be comer better since the school employed study coordinators (*elevkoordinatorer*) whose job involve having contact and communicate with the children's families:

We have not invited to parent meetings in recent years. Not among the older students, anyway. I do not know exactly what the younger ones have done. But since we got student coordinators a few years ago, the contact with the parents has become much, much better, of course, because it is more staff who have it as their job. (SWE_T8_M)

Parental support

During the interviews the teachers primarily talked about parental support as a deficit. SWE_T2_F says "the majority of our student group lacks this support outside of school, that we become a... we

have a very big responsibility there". SWE_T10_F compares the parental support in her current school with another school she used to work in and think it is a large difference in favour for her previous workplace:

But there were more children there who had a good support from home. Which you see here, that here there are more children like... where the support is not as obvious, where the children are expected to sort out their school by themselves a little. That it should just kind of roll on. So, there is absolutely a significant difference. (SWE_T10_F)

SWE_T12_F gives explanations to why parental support is lacking, all of them referring to the parents and their backgrounds:

I think that... So, we have parents who for various reasons, substance abuse, or mental illness, or so, are not able at all. Then we have those who would like to, but of educational... that is, they lack proper education, who cannot. And we have parents who cannot help the children if they get a Swedish homework, because the parents may not be able to speak Swedish. So there... No, it is very varied. Then, of course, we have people who have come from other countries with an academic education, they can be supportive of their children, not least because they know how to study. (SWE_T12_F)

SWE_T10_F also refers to parents' insufficient Swedish language skills, but also says that many parents think of school as important and pushes their children in a positive manner:

It is very different, and I think that many times it can be some language difficulties, that it is a difficulty of course to understand how the school works and what is required as a parent. But many parents absolutely think that school is very important and push their children in a positive way. Then we also have those who are quite absent who are not really there, who of course make it difficult. (SWE_T10_F)

SWE_T5_F also refers to the language difficulties and gives examples of what kind of support parents can provide and not provide:

Yes, that is, those who can do it, that is sometimes. I also think, it is also a language barrier for them. I think those who can or if there are older siblings ... in the family, they also help. And if there is something we need, for example, remind the students or, "make sure now that he or she picks up his or her computer or has the charger with him or be on time". Then the parents help us a lot. But when it comes to knowledge itself, with homework and so on, then there is not much there. (SWE_T5_F)

SWE_T9_M gives another perspective when parents have too high demands on their children's school achievement which may have opposite effect on their children's schoolwork:

Yes. And I think many parents think they are supporting their children, but it will have the opposite effect. Children distance themselves instead, turn off, do not listen, because they feel that they are just being scolded. They feel that they are not good enough, that they are not good enough. Those demands exist... Because when I ask my students in SVA about "yes, what will you be then?" Yes, then they should become doctors, or dentists, or midwives, or something like that, which requires high grades. But then they also say "yes, but I would rather be a hairdresser or makeup artist, and I can be, but first I must have a real education", they say. (SWE_T9_M)

Social workers

As already mentioned above, the interviewed social workers have different educational and professional backgrounds, and they also have diversified tasks in relation to the two selected

compulsory schools. Importantly, these two schools have recruited ‘complimentary competences’, a rather new professional category tasked to work with the more ‘social aspects’ of the school.

Holistic approach to education, also outside of school

Many of the interviewed social workers point to the importance of a holistic approach to the students and their families. This includes not limiting their work to the ordinary school tasks and opening hours.

The school contains everything, and then the school in [name of area] has a bigger task than other schools in Malmö //...// the personnel working here are not just teachers that go home after work, but there are so much more in the role ... you are a parent, a friend, you are so many different things. They can’t just teach and then go home. Well they can, but it is not sustainable in the long run. (SWE_SW8_M)

It is in the view of this that both complimentary competencies and what could be referred to as complimentary activities, that is different forms of after-school activities can be understood. This work involves both the school and time before and after school, and it is not limited to the students, but involves their families and neighbourhood relations as well.

Systematic tools and social relations as a tool

A number of tools are used by the social workers in the participating schools. These are better described as tools for the inclusion of all students, than integration tools for migrant children. Among the tools that are used in a systematic way, there is one called absenteeism stairs (*frånvarotrappan*) and another called the consequence stairs (*konsekvenstrappan*). However, the use of these tools seems to rely on strong social relations between the professionals and the students. Overall, the importance of building strong social relations with the children comes through in all interviews.

My main tasks include absenteeism and attendance at school is prioritized, to identify patterns of absenteeism and attendance, and to try to prevent absenteeism. If there is deviance or pattern in our attendance reporting system, which I check three times each day, then maybe something needs to be done. Contact with the student, contact with parents, see to plans and collaborate with [other professional groups]. The, I would also emphasize the meaning of social relations, the power of social relations, in order to support the students. (SWE_SW1_M)

[I am tasked to] relieve the teachers, so my main tasks are to manage absenteeism reports and violation reports. (SWE_SW2_M)

The tasks are about attendance and absenteeism, that is what we are doing most of the time. Then of course the social part, conflicts, offences, reports ... everything outside the classroom, really. All contacts with parents that do not regard the teaching, the teachers do that. Meetings with the school counsellor, the social authorities, we are involved in basically everything except teaching. (SWE_SW4_M)

The absenteeism stairs is a plan developed by the municipality for how to communicate with students and parents about absenteeism²⁵ in a stepwise manner if absenteeism remains. The consequence stairs is a plan, also this developed by the municipality, for how to handle situations when a student is

²⁵ See plan om Malmö City webpage, link: <https://malmo.se/Bo-och-leva/Utbildning-och-forskola/Grundskola/Moduler/Grundskola/Om-grundskolan/Franvaro-och-ledighet.html>.

interrupting the classes or behaves inappropriately. Another tool mentioned is motivating interviews (*motiverande samtal, MI*). This method is used to increase the attendance in class among the students. Solution focused (*lösningssfokuserat*) is also mentioned as a method.

All of our personnel are trained in something called solution-focus. It is a bit challenging to summarise, but it is a method to find the solution among the person you meet, and that our function is rather to guide those who have a problem or a dilemma by asking questions. (SWE_SW6_M)

Overall, strong social relations with the students are emphasized. Some social workers have this as their main task:

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)

Working with relations in school, involves working with the relations between the students, which is sometimes done in semi-structured ways:

I have had discussion groups for guys and for girls, together with my colleague. She had the girls' groups and I the boys' groups. The we worked a lot with macho culture, vulnerability, and how you do ... we talk about norms and values. (SWE_SW1_M)

Recreation centres, often located in connections with schools, have similar tasks, but with a broader out-reach. Their activities target all residents in the area, both children and adults. Their activities are free of charge and respond to demands of the residents as regards timing and content. They serve breakfast in the morning to children before school starts, during school breaks they organise activities, and after school they organise activities again for both children and adults. The activities for children are planned so that they fit with the school schedule. Popular activities include sports, cooking, arts workshops, music, and discussion groups. Social workers are also engaged in community work, aiming at increased security in the area. Also, this work is done in collaboration with the school, and school is represented in the managing board of the community work. The community work applies the CTC (Community That Cares) method, following a decision from the Malmö City.

Our task is to work to create good conditions for children and youths in [name of area]. While you often check on ... for instance if a child smokes, but we focus on the reason behind it, not the problem *per se*. //...// So we look for risk and protective factors and in this we use surveys [that we distribute in the area]. And then we gather all engaged in this area, so that we all work towards the same goals, including the residents and the youth. (SWE_SW8_M)

In several interviews it is emphasised that in order to do social work in these schools, and in these neighbourhoods, social relations with the children and their parents is a prerequisite.

I have actually said this many times when we have been in meeting with teachers. If you are not prepared to build relations with our students, they you are in the wrong profession. It sounds harsh but it is the truth, that's just how it is. As an adult, you must feel 'I love this, I love building social relations, I love to be with the children'. If you don't have that feeling, they you are in the wrong profession, it is kind of logic. (SWE_SW4_M)

Mentoring and relations with families

Another task that social workers have regards mentoring. In many schools this task is the responsibility of the teacher, but in Malmö it is sometimes transferred to so-called complimentary

competences. This is, as described in the reports referred above (see Malmö stad 2019a, 2019b), organized in different ways across schools.

My prime task is mentoring //...// and that is, related with this, contact with parents, all this with coaching and mentoring appointments, talks with students, following-up on basically everything they do. Inquire into reports, absenteeism ... that is, map if someone has a lot of absenteeism. So, yes, it is very broad, it all depend on the student's needs. //...// I foremost focus on students with special needs, but I also 'hang around' during breaks. (SWE_SW3_F)

This means that the mentors, when needed, have a lot of contact with parents.

If I work with a student, that I am really struggling with trying to get the student motivated, and the student does not get support from home, then I sometimes feel that I am working alone. I then sometimes bring this up with the parents, 'Please help me, so that you motivate from one side, and I from the other, so that we really help your child and my student'. (SWE_SW4_M)

This work typically follows the consequence stairs mentioned above, as this quote describes.

When I have given the student a number of chances and told them 'Now I am going to involve your parents', I call the parents and have a meeting with them. I tell them that 'Now I have talked with your son', or 'your daughter', 'and it has continued'. Now you must help us to help your son/daughter. The students never get offended, because they know that [name of IP] have given them one, two, three, four chances. The parents appreciate it a lot. (SWE_SW4_M)

Mediators

Task and role of mediators

All the participating mediator work with mother tongue tuition and study guidance in the mother tongue. They all have to handle the different aims of the two positions, which is that mother tongue tuition is focusing the development of the mother tongue of the children, while mother tongue in study guidance is used to help students to develop knowledge in school subjects and the Swedish language. The two positions are regulated by different policy documents. Mother tongue tuition is based on a national curriculum, while study guidance is connected to policy documents on local level; it has not its own syllabus. This means that the task of the study guidance can be interpreted differently on school level, for example, regarding the time that a student can get help:

It [study guidance] is interpreted differently in different schools, some are very consistent with the first four years. Some schools finish it after the four years, because they assess that after four years it may not be mainly the language that is the challenge. While other local policy documents say that you can have study guidance for as long as needed (SWE_M3_M).

Even though there are differences between schools regarding the organisation, there are common themes in the participating the mediators talk about their work. One is how they define their role. They all pinpoint the idea that the mother tongue is of major significance to a child's language, identity, personality and educational development. For this reason, their role is to give students with another mother tongue than Swedish the possibility to develop language and knowledge in parallel.

It [the role] is actually part of an equivalent school, so that the students get a chance or opportunity to develop at the same pace as their classmates, in the language in which they are strongest. So, I think it is part of that all students to get the opportunities or help they need. So, my mission is worth gold and I'm passionate about it (SWE_M1_I_H).

Thus, the study guidance provides an opportunity to reduce friction when a student goes from another countries school environment to Swedish environment. (SWE_M2_M)

I am a resource that offers support, compensatory support, for, most often, newly arrivals. (SWE_M3_M)

Some of them also define their role as cultural mediators between students, teachers, social support and the family

The principal here, she often says "You are needed here at school". You know, I understand the situation here, and I also understand the situation at home. So, I mediate in the situation, in a way that parents can understand what I mean. (SWE_M4_F)

I have contact with all teachers, I meet the curator and tell her. She also tells me sometimes when she needs to call parents, I help her. I know all about what problems families have. I help translate the forms. I translate what the social service says. (SWE_M5_F)

Content of work

The work consists of study guidance in groups or individually either in or out of class, depending on if the mediator is employed by the city (Språkcentralen) or by the school. When employed by Språkcentralen, the mediators usually work separated from the class. This because they are working in various schools and with limited time for each student:

Study guidance is too rare and too limited in time. And it is usually only once a week. It is usually once a week, because we get our hours distributed among schools and students. So, I have, been assigned four hours with nine students. Then, some study guidance may be in a group. (SWE_M3_M)

When employed by the school the mediators are more integrated in the routines of the school and the classes. They can therefore more often work with the students in class, especially if their language is used by many of the students. This is for example the case with Arabic:

But, for example, if I only have three students, that means one hour to three students in the ninth grade. There are many speaking Arabic, still they need help. Therefore, I don't only count the three students. I am in the classroom when teachers explain what they should do, what they want to do or how the test should come. When she's done, I come forward and explain in Arabic directly after her. (SWE_M5_F).

This, and another of the participating mediators, work specifically with translanguaging. Concretely, this means, as shown in the quotation above, that they work closely with the teachers, explaining and translating into the mother tongue and then back to Swedish. Another mediator explains:

It happens all the time that I sit with the teacher, the subject teacher. The teacher asks him [a student], he explains in Arabic, and I translate. It helps. The student feels that "Yes, I can. I can, it's just the language". (SWE_M4_F)

However, whether working in class or outside, the dependency on teachers planning is the same for all the mediators. The teachers do the scheduling and are then supposed to share it with the mediators. However, the sharing is carried out in different ways and sometimes not at all:

Either the teacher has sent material in advance or we must work without it, me and the student. But when it comes to the older students, they know most often what they need help with. (SWE_M1_F)

The majority of teachers set up their planning in Google Classroom and they invite me so I can follow it. But often it's just to come completely unprepared and then get on [with the guidance]. (SWE_M3_M)

All the mediators talk about themselves as being generalists, meaning that they have to know a lot about the different subjects that the students need study guidance in. This also means that they need to have general knowledge in many subjects, which requires a lot of preparation: “I have to know everything. You know, I have to prepare everything. If the student asks me, then I have to be able to answer. It takes time for me to prepare, to read it all” (SWE_M4_F).

Strategies/tools

Two of the mediators mention explicitly translanguaging as a tool in their work with study guidance. One of them works with the circle method, meaning that she and the teachers use the same theme but in different languages. The teacher in Swedish and the mediator in Arabic:

We decided that we will work with the family [as a theme]. So, I used the same pictures. First, she found some pictures for different families. Size, skin colour, and so on. I had also from our countries. [...]. So, we had the same thing, discussions about pictures. And also, some concepts that she uses in Swedish, I use the same concepts. (SWE_M4_F)

Other tools mentioned by the mediators are online dictionaries, Wikipedia, Google classroom for sharing the planning of class, and reading services (Studi.se, City of Malmö).

I use fact that I can acquire online. And then there are, for example, reliable dictionaries or Wikipedia pages or NE [National Encyclopedia], which many use as teaching material. (SWE_M3_M)

The city of Malmö is now developing a great reading service. That's really good. All books are translated into different languages. [...]. And they develop some reading service that finds concepts. Under concepts you will find all subjects from grade four to grade nine. [...]. They add movies and the film changes language on different topics. Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Albanian. [...]. During the film there are concepts of words, explanation of words in Swedish and you can change the language. It explains words in different languages. (SWE_M5_F)

One of the mediators would like to have access to more lectures, courses and to have the possibility and time to exchange experiences with other mediators, principals and teachers.

As I said, more time, more lectures, for example, gathering all study guides, to exchange experience. Ask, for example, The Language central, or all principals at all schools, gather all study guides and discuss problems, how to solve problems. (SWE_M5_F)

Challenges

The major challenge mentioned by the participating mediators' is the limited time they have in relation to the student's needs:

With conditions, I think a lot about time. Students need time, students need help. It feels like it cuts to the heart sometimes, that students can but they just need adjustments in their mother tongue. They need more help. (SWE_M1_F)

Study guidance is too infrequent and too limited in time. It is usually once a week, because we get our hours distributed among schools and students. (SWE_M3_M)

Another major challenge mentioned by most of the participating mediators is that both study guidance and mother tongue teaching has a low status; some teachers do not understand the purpose and meaning of it, they do not appreciate it and do not cooperate:

Sometimes I feel like a cog in a machine, and I would like to have... get more of an overview of the situation. (SWE_M2_M)

Not everyone really understands the point of study guidance and does not understand what to do with it and does not really see how we should collaborate. (SWE_M3_M)

More appreciation to all study supervisors. Leave them to develop students in the right way. Leave them to feel important at work, to make something important. [...]. I don't think everyone has a good chance of getting good colleagues. But to me it's great, but some meet teachers who do not appreciate and respect them. (SWE_M5_F)

Other challenges mentioned is when the mediators have to give study guidance to students in different grades and subjects, in the same group at the same time:

I can have three middle school students, but different classes, different subjects. So, it may be someone who should have guidance in Swedish, one in social science, one in natural science. (SWE_M3_M)

Another is that children in need of study guidance sometimes do not get it. Teachers do not remove students from study guidance groups. This means that others cannot join the group, due to the limited time that the mediators are given:

Right now I am in such a practical situation, that I have some students, their mentors and teachers judge that there is no need [for study guidance], but they are not very good at dismissing the student [from the group]. This means that I have students who are registered but who do not need it. But until they are removed, I actually have a bunch of newly arrived students standing in line. Because I only get a certain number of [total] hours. Hours have to be removed at one school for me to get hours to another school. (SWE_M3_M)

Another challenge is that some of the mediators do not have designated workplaces due to that they work in several schools:

Too often, study supervisors have great difficulty with premises, especially if you are not at one and the same school. You go into the classroom and pick up a student and then you go out and around and look for a room to sit. (SWE_M1_F)

Working with parents

Two major themes emerge in relation to the mediators work with parents. One is that the contact with the parents differ depending on whether it concerns study guidance or mother tongue tuition. It is the teachers' responsibility to have direct contact with parents in relation to study guidance, and the mediators in relation to the mother tongue tuition.

My contact with parents concerns the students' development [in mother tongue], those who risk getting their grade lowered, then I contact the parents in good time for a meeting. (SWE_M1_F)

There are different roles depending on whether it is study guidance or mother tongue teaching. The head teacher is responsible in the first case, in the second case I am more independent. Have my own talks with parents and students. (SWE_M2_M)

As a mother tongue teacher, there is quite a lot of parental contact. And I have also had some parental contact regarding study guidance. Then it is on the initiative of the parents, because they are interested. [...]. I have really tried to make a clear distinction between mother tongue and study guidance, because it should not be their [parents]decision or desire or anything. But they have wanted to talk about it. (SWE_M3_M)

The other theme is that some of the mediators see themselves as cultural mediators between school, parents and children. One task in relation to the mediations is according to one of the mediators to explain how things work in the Swedish school:

I usually talk to parents all the time. I have to explain to them all the time, because I know the language, I also know their culture. I understand their culture. Some parents understand very easily. And it is directly noticeable on their children's integration into school, and they make friends very easily. And also learn easily. While the others do not understand. (SWE_M4_F)

The mediation also includes explaining why it is important to let girls do activities such as swimming and sports:

For example, why it is very important for girls to swim, or why it is very important for her to dance in sports class. So all the time it is, you can say, a little challenging, that I have to explain to them all the time, and every year and every month, that it is a new society. (SWE_M4_F)

According to the mediator, the explaining how it works in Sweden also relates to gender and religion:

I don't want to go deep with this with religion, but sometimes it gets difficult. Students are always influenced by their parents. For example, I noticed, "you are not allowed to talk to that girl because she is a Christian and you are a Muslim", and so on. So I have to explain to both parents and students all the time. (SWE_M4_F)

Another of the mediators pinpoint the importance to quickly get the parents "onboard". She sees the parents a resource in the mother tongue tuition:

When I started, I right away called all the parents and I told them "it's only an hour [mother tongue tuition]. If I only work with your children myself, they cannot develop Arabic. So please, you have to help me. I will share information. I'll try to explain. But you have to help me, otherwise there will be no results". (SWE_M5_F)

5. Framing integration and evaluating policies

In this section focus is on integration policy, tools and programs as these are perceived by the professionals. Integration is a contested policy area, and it has continuously been both critiqued and revised since its introduction (see Dahlström 2004 for a review). In the view of this, we shall first contextualise integration policy in Sweden.

Integration policy was introduced by a government decision in 1975. At this time, integration policy was formulated in terms of 'immigrant policy' (*invandrarpolitik*). This means that it set focus on rights and obligations of the immigrants, and societal responsibilities in relation to them. Three goals were formulated: equality, freedom of choice and collaboration. Basically, the equality goal meant that immigrants should be on equal footing with nationals, the freedom of choice-goal that immigrants should be able to maintain religious and cultural identities from their countries of origin, and the collaboration-goal that tolerance and solidarity between nationals and different groups of immigrants should characterise the work towards the two previous goals (see government bill Prop. 1975:26 and government report, SOU 1974:69). This approach to integration was critiqued over time. It was argued that its one-sided focus on immigrants as a homogeneous group, disregarding the diversity among immigrants, including e.g. varying levels of education, imposed and strengthened a division between nationals and immigrants, or 'us' and 'them', which was directly counterproductive for integration. Finally, and not least in the view of how the size of immigrated population had grown over the last decades, in 1997 a new direction of integration policy was laid down. This turn meant that particularistic policy tools were degraded and that integration policy as a designated policy area was abandoned. Instead, 'integration' was to be mainstreamed within all relevant policy areas (see

government bill Prop. 1997/98:16). This approach to integration is also contested, in the post-2015 situation more than ever. Nevertheless, this historical development of integration policy has implications for the implementation of the CHILD-UP project which cannot be disregarded.

While this depicts the development on the national level, on the local level municipalities might have different approaches to integration. In our case, Malmö is not only a city with a large share of foreign-born residents, it is usually also depicted as a comparatively ‘welcoming’ city in Sweden (see e.g. Hansen 2019). This can, for instance, be seen in its approach to integration, which was laid down in a commission work for a socially sustainable Malmö. The commission work was completed in 2013 and reported in a number of reports²⁶. Central to its approach to integration, is that it set focus on the whole of Malmö, that inequality and segregation are to be understood as relational dimensions of the city. Obviously, this fits well with the national policy of 1997, seeking to mainstream integration into all relevant policy areas.

It is against this backdrop, along with the demographic situation as presented earlier, that it can be understood that ‘integration’, at least to some extent, is a contested concept among professionals in schools in Malmö. This also implies that it was challenging for us to ask about ‘integration’ using this precise word. It did not only make us feel uneasy with the interview person, but it did also not serve to make the interview person talk about their integrational work as a designated way to work with migrant children since a large majority of the children have migrant backgrounds. While we in some cases have asked the interview person to reflect upon the meaning of ‘integration’, in most cases we have reformulated the question and asked about equality of opportunities in school (*likvärdighet i skolan*) for girls and boys, with and without migrant background. Below follows an analysis of how teachers, social workers and mediators responded to this.

Teachers

Teachers’ definition of integration

In some of the interviews the teachers reflected on their understanding of integration. For example. For example, SWE_T5_F believes that integration is important and that she needs to work more with it. She relates integration to out-of-school activities. She thinks integration is difficult to achieve since many students spend most of their time in their neighbourhood and do not meet other children from other areas in the city:

And to try to activate them in a way after school. That the job also continues there. That they go to different activities or sports or whatever it may be. But it's hard, because sometimes it's like this area is their whole world. There are many who do not know the way to Gustav Adolfs torg for example or Stortorget (two squares in city centre of Malmö), they do not really know where it is located or how to get there. And there are also many who are afraid, when it comes to attend upper secondary school, that, "oh, now we will meet a lot of others, who may not look like me or come from the same area as me." And it's also a little hard. So, integration I would have liked to work with more, but I do not really know how, because it is a bit difficult. (SWE_T5_F)

²⁶ See a description on the Malmö City webpage, with summaries in English: <https://malmo.se/Sa-arbetar-vi-med.../Hallbar-utveckling/Kommission-for-ett-socialt-hallbart-Malmo.html>.

SWE_T6_F mentions shortly how she understands integration when she says “Integration is when you... when everyone feels good and participate. Then it does not have to be our way, but it is about creating an understanding of each other's differences, in some way”. SWE_T9_M refers to integration in similar ways when he relates it to students being friendly and hang out with each other regardless of where they come from. He also gives an example of how he works with integration:

No. I think integration, that's how you integrate, but both in... with other people here at school, and we are a multicultural school, here are many students from different parts of the world. And the nice thing here, is that you hang out and you are friends, no matter where you come from. Of course, sometimes there can be some conflicts, absolutely. But just this, that everyone is friendly and kind. (SWE_T9_M)

I work with something we call student coaches, and that is that we educate students in grades two and three (in upper secondary school) in different inclusive exercises, and then they go out and work with grade one students and do these exercises. And that's twice a year. It is in August, at the school start, for newcomers to come here to feel safe and taken care of, and then in April, to remind people of the importance of actually respecting and having a democratic attitude. That's what it's about. (SWE_T9_M)

SWE_T12_F talks about that she does not want “we and the others” and therefore her students need to have other ways of expressing themselves, both verbally and gestures/bodily, than how they express themselves with their friends and in the school. Implicit in this is a need of integration in terms of adaption to a norm of how to act, behave and talk. SWE_T12_F explains it further when she says:

Your way of expressing yourself is not wrong, but you must have more ways of expressing yourself in your luggage, because your way will not work everywhere. It will... So, that in a way you understand... You understand the rules of the game in some way, so that you know that you can play with different pieces on different playing fields, that you give a luggage that works even outside our world, so to speak. And it's not that easy, because it's very... It's tough. And it can also be the case that... I mean, a way of expressing oneself can also be a sense of security, something common within in the group. And therefore, I think it is important to say that it is not dirty, but you must have something else with you, which you can use in another situation, therefore otherwise, in some way, it will not be really... it will not be true, somehow. (SWE_T12_F)

Collaboration with institutions

The teachers give examples of several different collaborations, both internal and external collaborations. However, there are also examples of collaborations that may be both internal and external. One such example is the collaboration with study guidance supervisors (in the mother tongue), which depend on if they are employed at the school or if they are employed centrally in Malmö city. If they are employed centrally, they work at several schools and thus are not a part of the working teams with the other teachers in the schools which hinder the collaboration, whereas if they are employed at the school, they are a part of the working teams and collaborations between the teachers and study guidance supervisors can be organized. Below this collaboration is presented in the sub-theme *Internal collaborations*.

Internal collaborations

In this sub-theme some examples of the different internal collaborations that emerged during the interviews with the teachers are presented. Examples of internal collaborations, that is activities and collaborations with professionals within in the school, are the student health team which includes

school nurses, student counsellors, special pedagogues and the study and career counsellor, the school library, the student coordinators, study guidance supervisors in the mother tongue and the teachers in school-age educare and special teachers.

When it comes to the collaboration with the study guidance supervisors SWE_T6_F says “I think the study guidance supervisors (in mother tongue) are super important. They are like... If school is to be equal, they are super important.” SWE_T5_F thinks the collaboration works very well since they now are included in the work team at the school compared to before when they were not. Together they both plan the teaching and assess the students’ work:

Yes, well, I think the two I work with ... I think we have a very good relationship. A very close relationship too. We also try to co-assess together, so it's not just that we plan, but we do this here together, even though I'm the head teacher. But we do this together. So, I think it works very well. And now they are much more involved than they were before. They are part of the work team. Before it was like it was ... Yes, but here were the teachers and there were study guidance supervisors and mother tongue teachers and so on. But now they have really included them into school to ... (SWE_T5_F)

Several of the teachers mention the school library as a partner that they collaborate with. The following quotes illustrate what this collaboration may consist of. SWE_T4_F says “We collaborate on an almost daily basis with the Media library in the school. They are very involved in our teaching projects. And they also have their own..., book circles and...other challenges for students”. SWE_T9_M says that the library offers “book attacks” to inspire students to read and SWE_T12_F get help from the library to choose books that match both the students’ reading level and their age and interest:

Yes, they (the library) run an information today about... yes, how to search for books and such. And then they also have... they offer something they call book attacks, and then they come out into the classroom and present a book, and read a little from it and so on, to inspire students to read. And I usually invite them to that, because I think it's nice. (SWE_T9_M)

And we have also worked a lot together with the library, bringing in fiction, where the content is about teenagers, although the text might be more suitable for grade three, or... So that you do not make it childish, because you make it easy. (SWE_T12_F)

SWE_T5_F mentions that she collaborates with the study and career counsellor to motivate the students in their schoolwork:

Yes. Yes, I use her as a little motivation for the students when you feel like they are starting to give up a little, that, “do not forget now that you wanted to enter this program (in upper secondary school) or become this. And you need these credits and ... “A bit like a reminder when you feel it starts ... the motivation starts [does not hear 0:41:31] a bit”. (SWE_T5_F)

Another collaboration that some teachers mention is a collaboration with student coordinators. This collaboration is highly valued by the teachers which is exemplified by SWE_T8_M when he says:

Everyone is happy. 100% of the teachers. And we have done that survey in three rounds, I think. Same result every time. So that the student coordinators are a huge resource, and you should have that in more schools, I think. (SWE_T8_M)

Mm. Yes, and we teachers have a tight schedule when we are here, and we are not available for the students if they need to talk or if a conflict starts or if someone gets a threat somewhere during the day. There is always an adult they can talk to and turn to. So, it will

probably be their little security, you could say. It's something we teachers have wanted, to get unloaded with that bit. Especially important at a school like this where there are some conflicts that erupt from time to time. Then it is the contact with the homes that can always be improved, and with the student coordinators it has improved. And when there are certain reasons, they are also included in our meetings with parents and students, whether it is about too much non-attendance or social... social problems or something else. So, the student coordinators are a huge strength we have at this school. (SWE_T8_M)

External collaborations

In this sub-theme examples of the different external collaborations that emerged during the interviews with the teachers are presented. Examples of external collaborations are activities arranged after school hours or out of school activities and collaborations with other authorities and organizations, such as e.g. homework support, sport clubs and children and youth psychiatry and social services.

There is also a central student health team in the city of Malmö, which the schools and teachers can turn to for advice and support when it comes to special needs education, which is an example of a collaboration that SWE_T3_F mentions. This is not a permanent collaboration; it is initiated when the school needs support. Two other collaborations that some of the teachers mention, are BUP (children and youth psychiatry) and social services. For example, SWE_T7_F says: “Yes, social services are a part, BUP as well”. SWE_T7_F describes a collaboration when both social services and BUP are involved:

We collaborate when it comes to specific students who have difficulties, where there is contact with BUP ... Or they for example are in a treatment. And it may be that the social services also are included. And then we have SIP meetings. (SWE_T3_F)

But I would like to say coordinated individual plan (SIP-meeting). And it is exactly this that it should be coordinated. That we are then school, social services and children and youth psychiatry together in meetings with the parents so that the parents do not have to go to several different meetings. And that we should get a consensus and a plan ahead for the student. (SWE_T3_F)

Another example of collaboration in one of the schools is a collaboration relating to different sports, that is students getting opportunities to exercise different sports. However, since the teachers are not involved in this collaboration, they cannot say anything about it. Teachers in two of three schools mentions collaborations which involve homework support. However, they do not know which organisation that provide it. SWE_T4_F also talks about organizing school during the students' school breaks. It is arranged all over Malmö, but from the interviews it is not evident if it is a collaboration within the city or something the individual school organize.

We also have... What is it called? The math cottage or math centre, the math cottage. Yes. They come here once a week for two hours and help the students. Then we have during each holiday, but you have that [do not hear 0:30:15] all over the city of Malmö, holiday school. So that students can come to school when it is sport break, autumn break or Easter break for that matter, we have a holiday school. And it is also a great resource. (SWE_T4_F)

Another collaboration that SWE_T9_M mentions is with Pedagogisk Inspiration (Pedagogical Inspiration), which is research and development department in the city of Malmö. The department provides different ways of support in different school related areas to schools and teachers working in the city of Malmö.

Social workers

Social workers' definition of integration – Enabling diversity

In response to questions about how 'integration' is perceived, the social workers respond in varying ways. Several of the interviewees agree on that integration is when each student is seen and heard, when each student feels recognition, and can receive the support he or she needs to have agency. This resonates with a less unidirectional traditional understanding of integration, thus closer to the idea of hybrid integration. One interview person expresses this in terms of assisting the student to reach his or her goals. In the view of another interview person, this also includes measures to secure that all professionals can work in appropriate ways, so that equality of opportunity in education can be strengthened.

Several social workers point to the relevance of transculturality, for 'integration' in diverse schools and areas. Many of the interview persons did not only talk about cultural diversity among the students and their families, but also among themselves and how this adds on to their understanding of integration:

An advantage of growing up in an area like this, is that you easily can shift between cultures. This means that I am not a stranger //...// I don't know how to explain it, it is just part of childhood, you grow up with persons from different countries, from different worlds. I know my native language well ... it helps. The world becomes less foreign. But, in some parts of Sweden you might not fit in ... you are a stranger, but the world to me is not so foreign. (SWE_SW8_M)

My look means that they feel some kind of belonging, that is since I am a person of colour. //...// This is an advantage since it makes them feel more secure in contact with me. Many have prejudices about Swedes and how they think, and are afraid of authorities and even society. (SWE_SW5_F)

Several social workers point to the importance of after-school activities. Below follows one quote from a social worker who experience a lack of this, and then another social worker who has positive experiences of such activities:

It is ... in this area there are very few after-school activities, that is out of school activities. We have, in school we have ... well right now activities are cancelled [due to the pandemic], but we have school sports. We try to work with activities //...// so that they can get out and learn about what there is, have the guts to try things out. (SWE_SW7_F)

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 are there with the same purpose. So, we have seen advantages as regards activities. (SWE_SW6_M)

Inclusion measures

The interviewed social workers apply different measures for the inclusion of children. One is to tone down differences, and instead see to what is common.

And instead of working with national cultures, that is where they come from or where we come from //...// I usually say that cultures also exist in schools. We have a school culture that we work with, not national cultures. //...// when I talk with students about transculture,

they say ‘yes, but I am Arabic and she is Somali’, and I answer ‘yes, but I am talking about the school culture. We are talking about school cultures. What is your school culture?’ ‘Oh, then we have the same’. (SWE_SW1_M)

Another set focus on positive reinforcement. It has its background in the fact the parents were commonly contacted when something negative, a problem, had happened. In contrast to this, and with the purpose of building positive relations with parents they started to contact parents to tell something positive.

We have a method that we use, that we call parental contact. It stipulates that all personnel each week shall call a minimum of three parents to tell them about something positive that their children have done. (SWE_SW7_M)

In this language plays a role. All of the social workers interviewed speaks Swedish and English, and these languages are used in school. Some of them, speak additional languages that they can use in contact with students and their parents. Sometimes, the social workers ask colleagues and other children to help with translation.

Collaboration

Among the interviewees, collaboration consists of collaboration between organisations and between professions, which can occur both within and across organisations. The interviewed social workers collaborate in both ways, for instance, within their schools they can be part of the Student Healthcare Team, which is interprofessional. They can also collaborate with other instances than the school, and interprofessional collaboration within schools is lifted as central. This includes the teacher that is trained to teach in the subject, the special teacher trained to assist students with learning disabilities, and the social pedagogic trained to manage behavioural problems in the classroom. All these competencies are needed in the classroom, in collaboration.

Mediators

When asked about equality of opportunities, some of the mediators point out mother tongue tuition and study guidance as efforts on national level to create equality in school. The positions give according to the mediators, opportunities for migrant students to get support in their strongest language by persons who share their language and culture:

It [the position] is actually part of an equivalent school, so that the students get a chance or opportunity to develop at the same pace as their classmates in the language in which they are strongest. So, I think it is part of that all students get the opportunities or help they need. So, my mission is worth gold and I'm passionate about it. (SWE_M1_F)

You could say that mother tongue teachers and study supervisors are the only persons, in my opinion, who can help students to integrate in a very good way or bad way. (SWE_M4_F)

According to one of the mediators, study guidance can provide an opportunity to reduce friction when a student transfer from one country school environment to the Swedish. Mother tongue, however, is according to him the best ways to integration: “Mother tongue tuition is the king's path, I think, to integration. [...]. Mother tongue teaching is good particularly for those who want to develop both their Swedish and other cultural personality” (SWE_M2_M). Translanguaging is also mentioned, by two of the mediators, as tool for achieving an inclusionary school, “Translanguaging, I noticed that it increases student participation. And it helps a lot with the integration. It does not set a limit or obstacles for the student, for example, that he may not use the mother tongue” (SWE_M4_F). One of

them explains that she uses translanguaging to include all (Arabic speaking) students in the classes where she works:

I am in the classroom when teacher explains what they should do, or how the test should be. When she's done, I come forward and explain in Arabic. She accepts that I repeat after her in Arabic, because many of the students who are weak and do not pass the subject, they need to understand. That's why she leaves me "yes, okay, you can explain to them in Arabic". (SWE_M5_F)

Recommended actions for school equality

Two of the mediators mention actions that can lead to school equality. One action is to raise the status of study guidance and the mother tongue tuition by integrating them to the school's regular schedule. This would increase the students' sense of pride and belonging:

Now this year, exactly this year, mother tongue is now on the students' schedule. They have Arabic, in the schedule. Then the students get the feeling that "Okay, the mother tongue is in their schedule". It is not outside the school schedule. It also gives a bit of that feeling. (SWE_M4_F)

Another is to have more certified teachers in schools where students have difficulties to achieve the knowledge goals: "They have to count the percentage of teachers that are eligible. [...]. All schools must have good teachers" (SWE_M5_F). The two mediators also think that mixing and spreading students would be one way of achieving school equality:

Most of the students here are Arabic speaking, that's not good. We have to spread them to different schools. Not living... I don't know, of course it is a democratic country, so it... not... living in the same area, it is not good either. It is better that they are spread to other areas. (SWE_M4_F)

First of all, why is everyone who is an immigrant only in one school? [...]. Get a visit ... how to say ... a visit from Rosengård, students from Rosengård go to Limhamnsskola for a day. You know, it's better to get in touch. It is now that it is being built. [...]. And the same thing in high school. There are many high schools, "yes, you are Muslims, go to this high school. Yes, you are Swedish, go to this high school. It's not good. (SWE_M5_F)

Collaborations

All the participating mediators mentions that they mainly collaborate with other professionals in the schools where they work. Some of them mentions that they collaborate with other study supervisors through a network organised by the Malmö city. One of them collaborates with a researcher who wants who is writing about translanguaging. She has had meetings with researcher on two occasions but then the pandemic came and made it difficult to collaborate:

I met her twice, but since it became corona, now everything is digital. [...]. She visited in the classroom when I had study guidance and asked some questions. And then she decided to come in mother tongue, but the corona came. (SWE_M5_F)

6. School during the pandemic

In the Swedish case, the impact of the pandemic is probably more diffuse than in the other country cases. In Sweden, the process of closing down schools were slower than in many countries, and the close down was only partial. Initially, only upper secondary school (ISCED3) were closed down, this happened from the spring semester of 2020. Secondary schools (ISCED2) were closed was closed down in varying degrees and periods in the spring of 2021, depending on the local situation. Close

down of primary school (ISCED1) was overall avoided. In the Swedish study, most interviews conducted with professionals, were conducted before close down, and hence in the interviews experiences of this is limited. Further to this, in the Swedish case, issues and consequences of the pandemic was not covered in the interview guide. Overall, the pandemic did not come through as a strong theme in the interviews. Naturally, this does not mean that the pandemic did not impact on schools in Sweden; it did, and not least were people in the housing areas of the two compulsory schools affected by it. This is, since in Sweden as in many other countries, the pandemic struck hardest among poorest (Grander and Salonen 2020).

Nevertheless, some issues did come through, primarily in the interviews with teachers. Hence, what is reported here was not covered in a systematic way in the interviews and it is limited to the interviews with teachers.

The pandemic and the situation it created in the schools were mentioned in two of the interviews. SWE_T1_F talks about negative consequences whereas SWE_T2_F talks about the consequences in a more positive way. SWE_T1_F talks about the hard work of getting the students to school when the pandemic first started in March 2020 to be able to provide teaching in school:

It was directly a very hard effort to get the students to school in order to be able to maintain teaching at all. And this is what also happens, that when... because they may not have the same support from home, they cannot get help at home with schoolwork and it may be home environments that may not be so study-promoting. (SWE_T1_F)

SWE_T1_F provided both teaching online and in class at the start to be able to provide teaching for all students. However, she does not think this support is enough and talks about providing support after school hours. She also talks about who is worst effected and why when they have online teaching:

And then I notice... It is those who have the toughest, they are hit absolutely hardest by a change like this. And something that is also very, very, very clear, is this with the structure, as soon as you leave the schedule, it becomes chaos. It is very difficult with changes for them, it is difficult when there are teacher changes ... new teacher, if there are changes in the schedule, if it is a schedule-breaking day. For example, we had to break the schedule for a while because it was... half the teaching staff was sick It is important with the safety that they know what is expected, they know what will happen when they come to school, that they know... surprises are not good //..// It quickly gets very turbulent. It quickly gets very turbulent. (SWE_T1_F)

In contrast to SWE_T1_F, SWE_T2_F talks about positive consequences of pandemic situation, which led to a re-organisation of how support is provided for the students:

Yes, but we probably thought that in the last semester when there was so much with corona and we had to reorganize a lot due to a high absence, both among students and staff, so they ran some targeted efforts against some groups of students, which proved to be very successful. We also noticed that the whole staff became more flexible suddenly, that we had to train in this that oh, okay, what is most important now if I have to... if I only have this time to do it. So, we actually got to test this and tried to take such positive things with us further. And one of them was probably that they reorganized this with support measures. So, we have two special need teachers in grades four to nine, who now work ins small workshops, support workshops. (SWE_T2_F)

7. Recommendations

This section set focus on recommendations to policy and decision makers that emerged during the interviews.

Teachers

During the interviews the teachers talked about what they need for their work to be improved. Many of the teachers then mentioned more time and resources (which was reported above in...). However, also other suggestions were made that may enhance the students' agency, participation and hybrid integration. These suggestions all relate to the students' multilingualism. For example, SWE_T6_F believes that they have to continue to develop their work with translanguaging: "I believe in this with translanguaging. So that there... continuing training in it and developing that work I think would have been good". SWE_T11_F has two suggestions, one which involves a more flexible schedule so that teaching can be organized based on the students' needs. The second involves a larger and closer collaboration with the study guidance supervisors (in mother tongue):

But then, at the same time, I sometimes think that you need... A more flexible... I think that... Much of the school is so strongly framed. You should have 40 minutes of math, then you should have 40 minutes of Swedish, then you should have 40 minutes of SO, then you should have it... Now I work in high school. There is a schedule that governs every step we take. We always have a schedule to follow. Had you... It's super fuzzy, but if you had not had it, but instead departed from the content areas, themes where you could work together, where you could see what the students needed to achieve the goals in this content area. There were opportunities for larger and smaller groups, where there were opportunities for different teachers with different competences, not least linguistic. (SWE_T11_F)

So, if you need something more that would be a little more reasonable, it is very much about more support in the students' language. More study guidance (in mother tongue) time. It would have been the very best thing, in fact, to be able to work together with the study supervisors more. During several more hours a week. And also get opportunities to plan together with them, because as it is now, I give them the tasks. So, we do nothing together, they translate what I want them to do. And it would have been very interesting to work with the study supervisors. (SWE_T11_F)

Social workers

Several of the interviewed social workers pointed to the need for more resources, but they also offered other recommendations. One type of recommendation has to do with dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, in school but also on a more overarching societal level.

I think that one needs to work much more with the transcultural approach, and one have to work much more solution oriented. One has to find many more solutions, not just look at problems, but solutions. (SWE_SW1_M)

Politicians must secure that everybody have the same opportunities in Sweden. And then that is not 'when you come here you must learn Swedish, pull yourself together, you must fight'. I wished that everybody could understand, that everybody could study a course in norm critique, and understood that we must meet people where they are and offer them appropriate conditions. //...// and not see everything as immigrant problems, but our problem. Not 'we' and 'them', but 'we'. The children in this area who are doing the worst. And this must be fixed, as simple as that. (SWE_SW5_F)

As a more concrete kind of recommendations, regards the complimentary competences in school and the after-school activities. Several interviewees plead that these measures shall not be withdrawn but remain. According to their experiences, these resources are needed, and they make a difference.

Mediators

Mediators provided several suggestions to improve their work and thus the effect of students' education, participation and agency. The majority of the mediators' experience that they are excluded from teaching teams and discussions about teaching methods. One recommendation from their point of view is thus 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. Another suggestion made, related to discussion about methods, is shared training and knowledge development (e.g., seminars, workshops) with teachers, principals and other study supervisors. This would give professionals working with migrant children possibility to get access to materials and methods, and a collaboration that can result in a more cohesive evaluation of students' needs. The mother tongue tuition and study guidance have according to the mediators a low status. Shared seminars and knowledge development could higher the status of the positions in the municipalities' school organisation. Two of the mediators recommended working with translanguaging as tool to increase student participation and feeling of belonging. This could also represents a precondition for the enhancement of hybrid integration.

8. Conclusions

The conclusion is divided into a summary of the key findings, consequences of the pandemic and a discussion of theoretical implications.

Summary of the results

Teachers

In all interviews with the teachers, migrant students' difficulties and challenges regarding school performance were brought up, which have consequences for students' possibilities to participate in the schoolwork and thus influence their agency. The difficulties and challenges brought up were related to students lacking basic educational skills and having insufficient language skills in the language of instruction (Swedish). Another challenge that was brought up by the teachers refers to cultural issues, for example differences between the school cultures in the students' home-countries and in Sweden and thus also epistemological issues. Further, social aspects such as students' behaviours, socio-economic backgrounds and rowdy classrooms were brought up as educational challenges. These are all explanations for their migrant students' performances in school, or rather lack of achieving the expected. These explanations are all grounded in a deficit perspective, meaning that the students do not achieve the expected because of lacking or having deficits in the Swedish language and culture. These kinds of explanations are highly problematic since they enable for blaming the students themselves for not achieving because of their backgrounds and thus (re)produce categorizations of migrant students as students with deficits. Categorizations of people may work their ways into the lives of the people and become a way for them to define themselves, in this case as migrant students with deficits, which have consequences for students' identity formations, agency, hindering hybrid integration.

An aspect that is emphasized in the interviews with the teachers as important for migrant students' schooling is the relationship between the teacher and the students. The teachers seem to think of good relations with students as very important, when working with migrant students compared to when working with students of native backgrounds. This includes trust. It is important that the students feel that they can trust their teachers. Thus, creating a good relationship between the teachers and their students may enhance students' agency.

Some key factors for the situation of migrant students that were identified from the interviews with teachers were migrant students' opportunities to participate and have influence. For example, the importance of listening to the students' voices, perceptions of their feelings and needs were stressed. These are also important precondition for hybrid integration.

The interviewed teachers perceive that there are gender differences when it comes to migrant students' classroom behaviour, social difficulties, and home cultures. However, when it comes to gender and school achievement the teachers' perceptions differ, some teachers perceive that there is a gender difference in achievement, and some do not.

When the teachers talked about teaching migrant students different themes emerged. All the themes, implicitly or explicitly, relate to language issues. One theme that emerged was *Something more is needed of the teacher profession* (in relation to teaching students with native backgrounds). Another was *multilingualism as a resource*, which consists of examples of how the teachers say they work in relation to multilingualism as a resource, which means that all languages are viewed as resources for learning and may be used in the classroom. This stands in contrast to a deficit perspective and may enable for students to enhance their agency in the classroom and promote hybrid integration when using their mother tongue for learning, which also may facilitate the students to form identities as multilingual learners with valuable resources.

A third theme, *Language-oriented teaching*, in contrast to multilingualism as a resource, focus on developing students' skills in Swedish, which may enhance students' agency but since Swedish language skills are the desired it may also contribute to students trying to hide their migrant identities. When it comes to the theme *Scaffolding strategies*, "the teaching and learning cycle" (*cirkelmodell*), a model presented by Gibbons (2002) and visual support were mentioned. Some digital tools were also mentioned by the teachers when talking about teaching migrant students. Tools that translate into the students' mother tongue were mentioned, but also digital tools to enhance student interaction like Kahoot and Quizlet Live were mentioned by the teachers. These tools may all enhance students' agency since they promote student interaction or facilitate learning by using translating tools.

Other teaching strategies that may enhance students' agency, mentioned in the interviews were warm-up activities, timing student work, name sticks and EPA (Individual reflection, Reflection in pairs, Reflection in the whole class). Another aspect that are valued by the teachers in their work with migrant students is *Study guidance in the mother tongue*. It means that newly arrived students and students in need of language support may be provided *Study guidance in the mother tongue* which focus on both developing knowledge in school subjects and the Swedish language.

Working with migrant children involves, according to the teachers, several challenges. Many of them are connected to the students' in-sufficient language skills in the language of instruction. Challenges,

which also relate to this to some extent, that were brought up during the interviews were the perception that several more adults are needed in class. The teachers do not think that it is enough with one teacher in the classroom. The teachers are also of the perception that they need more time. That is more time for their work, but also more time together with the students.

According to the interviewed teachers, parents are viewed as an important resource when it comes to their children's schooling, since involving parents contributes to increased engagement in their children's schooling. Recurring in the interviews were also the teachers' experiences of that parents do not interfere with their work because they are of the perception that the school and the teachers should take care of their children's schooling and not the parents. When it comes to communication with parents some of the teachers talk about difficulties to communicate with parents. One hindrance that is mentioned is related to the parents' educational background, meaning that parents with a low level of education do not communicate with school in the way that is expected. Another difficulty for communicating with parents that is mentioned is that interpreters are needed and therefore teachers perceive that they cannot have a direct communication with the parents. During the interviews the teachers primarily talked about parental support as a deficit, that is a they perceive a lack of support from the students' parents, which they relate to the parents' backgrounds.

The teachers' perceptions of integration are related to out-of-school activities, meaning that these activates enable for migrant students to meet students from other parts of the city, and to students' opportunities to participate in school. One teacher says that it is about creating an understanding of each other's differences.

The teachers give examples of several different collaborations, both internal and external collaborations. However, there are also examples of collaborations that may be both internal and external. One such example is the collaboration with study guidance supervisors (in the mother tongue). Examples of internal collaborations, that is activities and collaborations with professionals within in the school, are the student health team which includes school nurses, student counsellors, special pedagogues and the study and career counsellor, the school library, the student coordinators, study guidance supervisors in the mother tongue and the teachers in school-age educare and special teachers. Examples of external collaborations are activities arranged after school hours or out of school activities and collaborations with other authorities and organizations, such as e.g. homework support, sport clubs and children and youth psychiatry and social services.

Social workers

In their work with children and families, the interviewed social workers foremost emphasise a holistic approach to the students and their families. Besides engaging with the families also in social activities, it also involves engaging with them both during and outside of the ordinary school, in evenings and weekends. Social relations are emphasised as the most important tool in their work, and the schools have employed so-called complimentary competences to focus on and strengthen this. This is also a way to enabling teachers to focus more on teaching, and less on social problems when these occur in school. The social workers also use a number of systematic tools. Interestingly, the systematic tools are more focused on control, while the relational work, that is more focused on strengthening the agency of the students, is less systematic.

The interviewed social workers, out of whom several have migrant background themselves, frame integration as enabling diversity among the students. This might support processes of hybrid integration and means that they strive to strengthen the agency of girls and boys in the superdiverse cultural environment that the studied schools comprise. Sometimes this involves the use of several languages, not least in situations that involve newly arrived students.

Mediators

The challenges in educational performances of the students that the mediators work with are related to lack of sufficiency in the Swedish language. This concerns newly arrived students as well as students born in Sweden. Other challenges are low levels of educational background of parents, socio-economic factors such as poverty and housing situations. Some of the mediators also pinpoint challenges related to gender, for example, girls having to take responsibility of household chores. Other factors mentioned are related to structural aspects such as low numbers of certified and skilled teachers, lack of time in relation to the students' needs and lack of relevant material.

The mediators identify both mother tongue teaching and study guidance in mother tongue as strategies enhancing equality in schools. This because they enable the students to get support in their strongest language as well as to strengthen this language by professionals who share their language and culture. Further to this, these strategies are also identified as enhancing students' participation in education, and as being significant for the students' identity formations.

The mediators' strategies for strengthening student participation are to a high degree related to their view of themselves as cultural mediators between students, teachers and families. To parents they explain how things work in school and generally in Sweden, and to teachers and other professionals they introduce the parents' and students' home cultures and languages. Other strategies that mediators use for enhancing participation is translanguaging pedagogy and reading services, such as movies, social media and translation tools.

Challenges to the support offered includes the time given for the classes in relation the students' needs, and the somewhat low professional status of the mediators. To raise the status of the professions would give students a sense of pride of their backgrounds and belongings. Thus, facilitating for migrant students to form multilingual identities that are valued in school.

Summary of the situation of migrant children during the pandemic

In the Swedish case, the impact of the pandemic is probably more diffuse than in the other country cases. In Sweden, the process of closing down schools were slower than in many countries, and the close down was only partial. Initially, only upper secondary school (ISCED3) were closed down, this happened from the spring semester of 2020. Secondary schools (ISCED2) were closed down to varying degrees and periods in the spring of 2021, depending on the local situation. Close down of primary school (ISCED1) was overall avoided. In the Swedish study, most interviews conducted with professionals, were conducted before close down, and hence in the interviews experiences of this is limited such as for example experiences of online teaching. Nevertheless, there are some conclusions to be drawn. One challenge has been to give support to the students who need help with structuring their studies, and those who do not have educational support at home. Many parents kept their children at home in the beginning of the pandemic, which led to difficulties for students to structure their days and keep the motivation for schoolwork. The schools also had to restructure their teaching because

of rules of physical distancing. This resulted in the dividing of students into smaller groups and organizing support workshops, which was a positive effect of the pandemic due to that it led to a more flexible organizing of the teaching.

Theoretical implications of the Swedish case

Here we want to highlight three implications that builds on insights from the Swedish data.

Integration and diversity in schools

One issue that the Malmö-case brings along, regards how to study the integration of migrant children as a *particular group* of children. The schools included in this study, but also the city in general, are characterised by migration. The students in the upper secondary school are on the average with the city, and in the two compulsory school the students with migration background are in vast majority. In the view of this, these schools can be described in terms of super-diverse societal contexts (Vertovec 2007). This also fits the descriptions of the interviewed professionals, who describe their students as a very diverse groups of children. They represent persons with different migration and other backgrounds. In the view of this context, on a general level the interviewees understand integration as enhancing an inclusive context where each and everyone are recognised and can have agency, which is in line with our idea of hybrid integration.

Language and children's agency

In the interviews, language(s) has an ambivalent position in relation to children's agency. On the one hand, children's lack of Swedish language proficiency is described as a deficit, and on the other hand the use of languages is described as a way forward for inclusion and children's agency. This means that while the 'old' idea of integration as being included into a national context is representative, a response to the super-diverse context is also prevalent. This ambivalence is both unarticulated and unsurprising. The questions are how this is experienced by the students and what impact it has on their identities of belonging and agency.

Children's identities, trust and enhancement of agency

Overall, as presented in our interviews, trust built through social relations is at the core to strengthen children's agency. The strategies to enhance this can be identified at multiple levels of operation. In part this involves concrete methods used in and outside the classroom, the recruitment of new categories of personnel, but also a strategy to create a supportive and engaging social environment in relation to the school, but not limited to the school. This means that the school have strategies to work with peer relations during and after school, and that it supports the involvement of the students' families in activities that are only indirectly related to the school (in the meaning of studies).

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CHILD-UP WP5 local professional report: United Kingdom

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1. Methods of the study

Introduction

This report discusses the results of qualitative interviews with teachers and social workers, designed as a component of Horizon 2020 Child-UP. In particular, this report contributes to the collection and comparison of professionals' perspective on intercultural education and social work which constitutes the core component of Child-UP Work Package 5.

In line with the design of the research project, teachers and social workers who participated in the initial survey (Work Package 4, delivered early 2020) were invited to take part in individual semi-structured interviews. All participants contacted accepted the invite. Besides teachers who had already take part in the initial survey, 2 more teachers working in the same schools albeit with different cohorts volunteered to take part in the interviews. More social worker participated in the interviews than the ones who contributed to the initial survey too: it was possible to interview 14 social workers, 3 more than the social workers who filled the questionnaires earlier in the year. Social workers were recruited with the support of a social services manager in Local Authority. The manager was initially contacted to participate in the Child-UP Stakeholders' Committee and subsequently accepted to collaborate in the recruitment of participants. More social participated in the interviews due to the employment of additional workforce after the completion of the survey.

Due to restriction imposed by the management of Covid-10 pandemic, all interviews took place remotely, using commercial platforms such as Zoom or via phone. Information sheets were modified to acknowledge the new context of the interviews, so to secure a valid informed consent. The restrictions to social interactions imposed by the management of the Covid-19 pandemic did not affect recruitment of participants which had been secured before the first lockdown, in February 2020. However, the lockdown delayed the research process, due to unforeseen difficulties in arranging online interviews with professionals who were overburden and stressed. It was possible to regroup and finally negotiate dates for interviews on return from the summer break. Further national and local lockdowns imposed minor delays over the autumn and another ext3ende national lockdown prevented the completion of the interview until early March 2021. However, the initial targets were achieved.

Interviews took place between November 2020 and March 2021, with the participation of 42 teachers and 14 social workers, as for the table below. The length of the interviews was consistent across al participants, ranging between 35 and 45 minutes.

TABLE 1 SAMPLE

	Total	Males	Females

Teachers	42	8	34
Social Workers	14	5	9
Total	56	13	43

Participants' background

In order to support the interpretation of participants' contribution, the interviews included some questions concerning education, professional status and qualification, experience and in particular experiences of working in intercultural contexts and with migrant children.

Teachers

All teachers work in primary schools, teaching with children between year 3 and year 6 (7 to 11 years of age). In line with legal requirements, all teachers hold at least a degree, BA or BSc, and a Post-graduate Teaching Qualification, that could be awarded by a university, a teachers' training college or through work-based schemes overseen by Higher Education partners, such as Teaching Direct. Only a minority of teacher hold further post-graduate degrees, 2 in total, albeit a few more expressed an interest in undertaking post-graduate studies. All teachers are qualified to work with ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 children, accordingly to the scope of their Post-graduate Certificate of Teaching. However, all participants work with ISCED 1 children.

Working experience was quite diverse among participants, ranging from 2 years to 25 years. Most teachers had worked in several schools before moving to their current workplace. The years of employed of participants in their current school ranged from 2 to 12 and the overall years of work in the teaching profession ranged from 2 to 41 across several schools, with only two participants having less than 10 years experience in teaching.

The organisation of teaching in English primary schools follows the 'single teacher' model. Each teacher was responsible for delivering teaching in all curricular subjects for a specific cohort of pupils. Teachers are supported by non-qualified teaching assistants who are not involved in pedagogical planning and delivery. Teaching assistants did not take part in the interviews.

Whilst all interviewees had undertaken training in intercultural teaching, mostly offered by their employers over the years. Training in intercultural education undertaken by participants consisted in short courses (usually 2 half-days or 4 weekly meetings of two-three hours each) led by private training companies, approved by the National Regulators for Standards in Education (OFSTED). None of the participants, however, had any experience, or any training, in the use of facilitative methods.

As expected in light of the demographics of the schools' catchment areas, all interviewees had a robust experience of working with children from migrants backgrounds. Differently from other national contexts in Child-UP, the catchment areas of the schools are characterised by a long history of international migrations, dating back to the third quarter of the 19th century (Irish diaspora). Other large influxes of migrants concerned the Jewish diaspora from Eastern Europe before WWI, migrations from southern Europe between the two World Wars and again from the 1970s, migrations from the Commonwealth area from the 1950s and a great number of arrivals from Eastern Europe

since the 1990s, again with a strong Jewish component. In the last 15 years migrations have mainly concerned qualified and highly qualified professionals from the European Union and Eastern Asia.

According to the initial survey, the percentage of children with migrant background ranges between 30% and 50% across the schools involved in the research. However, the definition of ‘children with migrant background’ in the survey was, according to EU conventions, confined to children who were born in a foreign country or have at least one parent who was born abroad. The implication of this restrictive definition of migrant background, children with both parents born in the UK were not considered as having migrant background.

Social workers

The social workers who took part in the interviews work for Local Authority in the South East of Greater London. However, a majority of participants work also with clients who live outside Greater London, in the County of Kent. This is due to ongoing partnership between Kent and the London Borough of Bromley which includes the joint delivery of some services.

Social work in England is part of a multi-agency strategy where it cooperates with the central government and the National Healthcare System England to provide integrated services. A multi-agency entails a complex governance where government departments and local authorities cooperate in the delivery of services. For instance, social work with children involves collaboration between the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, the NHS and Local Authorities. In particular, local authorities are responsible for funding and organising social work within their boundaries. Social workers who participated in the interviews were all full-time employed by the Local Authority providing services in two areas: Children, Family and Young People services and Immigration and Asylum Support services.

Children, Family and Young People Services are managed according to the *Early Intervention* model, developed around the idea that effective early intervention can prevent problems occurring, or to tackle them head-on when they do, before problems get worse. The Early Intervention model is based on a strategy of risk analysis, based on the observation of a series of risk factors that are supposed to threaten children’s development, limit future social and economic opportunities, and increase the likelihood of mental and physical health problems, criminal involvement, substance misuse, or exploitation or abuse in later life.

Social workers in the Children, Family and Young People services are therefore engaged in an array of characteristic early intervention activities, from home visiting programmes to support vulnerable parents, to school-based programmes to improve children’s social and emotional skills, to mentoring schemes for young people who are vulnerable to involvement in crime.

A cohort of interviewees (7 participants) also engages with Immigration and Asylum Support services. In statutory terms, Immigration and Asylum Support services work with clients living in the Local Authority who're subject to immigration control but have no entitlement to the majority of welfare benefits, including income support, housing benefit and a range of allowances and tax credits. This status is formally defined as *No Recourse to Public Funds* (NRPF) and usually concerns asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers, people who are in the UK after their leave to remain has ended (overstayers), people who have been granted refugee status in an EEA state.

When Immigration and Asylum Support services work with children, including unaccompanied minors, the services may be provided in partnership with the Children, Family and Young People area. These are the circumstances when the participants in the interviews engage with needs more directly related to immigration status.

Social work is regulated by *Social Work England*, a legally instituted professional body that defines the professional standards that any social worker in England must satisfy in terms of conduct and qualifications. Currently a degree in Social Work is required although there is a widespread expectation for social workers to achieve a post-graduate qualification. All participants in the interviews held a degree in Social Work with a majority of them enrolled in master's Degrees in Social Work.

It is important to contextualise the relatively high level of education for the social workers who took part in the interviews. Differently from other Child-UP national contexts, students applying for either undergraduate programmes in Social Work (from the second year) or postgraduate programmes in Social Work can benefit from non-means tested government-sponsored bursaries to cover fees and maintenance.

With regard to their professional experience *in the field*, all participants in the interviews had worked in the same local authority for more than 5 years. According to the participants, several courses are provided to support continuing professional development. These include training for working with Immigration and Asylum Support services and with Children. However, continuing professional development does not seem to include training in the use of facilitative/dialogical methodology for interacting with clients. Also, training for working with Immigration and Asylum Support services appears to be focused primarily on working within the changing policies landscape rather than exploring the intersection between social work and intercultural communication.

2. The experience of migrant children from the perspective of professionals working with them

Teachers

Educational performances

The majority of teachers do not observe any causal relationship between differences in educational performances and migrant background. Problems in educational attainment are often related to individual circumstances influenced by the state of the family. These intersect the immigration status and are more related to socio-economic status.

There are individual difficult situations, but this is not because of the background, more about the individual circumstances of the family which can affect local or immigrants likewise. (UK_T4_F)

However, a minority of teachers observe that educational performances are generally negatively affected by an immigration background when children are newly arrived in the education system.

It is obviously wrong to expect the same from all children; there are different levels of personal and emotional development, different stages, and there are variables that change that, for instance for children who have just joined from overseas from very different systems in particular: it would be wrong to expect from them the same that we expect from more established profiles. And it is OK really, you know when to give more space or less,

what kind of stimulation for each child. Observations are key to support decision about each child, who can do more and who needs more of us at the moment, for a whole array of reasons, surely a typical case is a different background. (UK_T15_F)

With regard to the important aspect of the position of children, and in particular migrant children, in educational interactions, teachers' perspectives can be categorised in two groups. Notwithstanding the lack of specific training in the use of facilitative methodology of teaching, participants in the interview presented themselves as committed to child-centred pedagogies to value the uniqueness of each child. Children-centred pedagogies and the idea of the unique child can underpin a culture of education where teachers and children are positioned as co-authors of knowledge and mutual learning, based on the epistemological premise that each participant in educational interactions can be the author of valid knowledge. Performances are replaced by expectations of personal expressions and evaluation is replaced by co-construction of knowledge and mutual learning, with the teacher working as an organiser of learning.

Teachers who position children as authors of valid knowledge observed cultural diversity are an opportunity for education, the challenge for teaching being the ability to learn how to harness different ways of expressing knowledge. For instance, it is possible that children may have excellent reading, writing, and speaking skills in their heritage languages that do not match those required in the classrooms. This lack of match does not imply that these children are in any way in deficit. What it does mean is that they present a special challenge for teachers.

Scratch the surface, I see it like that, or dusting an old window to see through. I have never been disappointed every time I got to know a child; and I would say this is true about the children who are usually trusted the least, for example, children who are seen to be in some sort of deficit place, for instance children from migrant situation with little English sometimes, initially I mean. What disappoints can be the academic progression, but this is about standards not about the true child. Yes, I trust each and every child in its uniqueness as much as I know that each child deserves to be trusted and have their voices heard. Without trust no voice is heard. (UK_T1_F)

If we are concerned with measuring how a child speaks, we missed out the point because we think about what the curriculum wants them to say and how, but the truth is that we should listen for real so how children use the language that they have to do things with others. The many languages and ways of expression and this is how we discover just with real listening how children with little English maybe, how they do engage actively even before developing the language. (UK_T5_F)

It is up to us as professional to make sure that we do not discard the child in his unique talents because we are not tuned in to him. So many times, I could have thought "you know, this is just arrived, or this is the issue because of that background, let's stay in the case and make sure he catches up with the rest"; however, this would have hidden the true child in the here and know behind deficit or better expectations of deficit. Which is fine however it being not fine because catching up means putting some sort of measures that in a way put the child in a peculiar position in the group, he is seen as the one who struggles. So, what I do 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)

Valuing all children as author of valid knowledge is a condition for an integration that does not depend on a view of migrant children as children in deficit. Integration in the classroom can be based on trust and the promotion of autonomous choices. The choice to value each and every child's participation

in education, however it is expressed, was effectively referred to by a participant as a ‘pedagogy of listening’.

Listening to children is the basic pedagogical act, I should say. But it must be true listening, not listening through the filter of the portfolio of the child’s schoolwork or even more awkwardly through the report from the previous year’s teacher. This is not listening because there are expectations from the past that condition it. True listening is about the child who lives the moment with you to appreciate what he has got to say not what he cannot say. This changes the perspective, and it is so inclusive because what a child can give and wants to give is shared. This is so fantastic when it happens with children who’d be generally seen not listened properly because they would be seen through the lenses of their academic issues such as children who come from completely different experiences. But the child stands whatever the experiences. (UK_T19_F)

Personal trust emerges from teachers’ perspective where it contributes to position children as agents who can make a difference in the educational contexts. A clear illustration of the consequences of personal trust for the positioning of migrant children is offered by the excerpts below:

The unique child, this is key to education; it means that each and every child brings skills and knowledge and talents into the classroom that maybe he does not express verbally as other and maybe they are skills that go beyond the curriculum or better that they hit the curricular areas from side-ways. I had that child who was not academic at all but so resourceful and a true leader outdoor. But in order to actually see those talents it is necessary to trust the child to make decisions to have a voice and power. Not the other way around because if one waits for the child to keep up with the subjects and because of that to give the child some space that skills I was talking about are not seen. This is so true for children who come from abroad, they are two different children in the classroom and outdoor, if we could only see it more often, if we could only get to know each and every child apart from subjects. (UK_T21_M)

It is true in my experience that there is no child who is not ready to express his or her opinions and who does not deserve attention for the ideas and dreams and creativity. This cannot be conditional on academic achievement, because this would create differences with some children to be trusted more when trust is actually about their freedom and determination in their own life, a very basic right, I would suggest. And then, one can see that very often those children who are trusted the less are profiled, they are from specific backgrounds or situations like recent immigration where until they prove to be at that level academically they are kept in a sort of bubble, or half-bubble. Surely, they must be ready to know and think about their own lives! (UK_T16_F)

However, some degree of ambiguity emerged from the analysis of the interviews, in particular with regard to teachers’ representation of cultural diversity (firstly, related to language) and its implication for children’s participation in the learning environment. Child-centred pedagogies and the idea of the unique child can be framed within expectation of academic performances and evaluation. Child-centred can refer to a hierarchy based on roles where teachers work for children, making decision for their good and on their behalf. Uniqueness of the child can refer to considering the characteristic of each to devise pedagogical means to support children in achieving curricular goals that are pre-defined by adults.

Teachers who position children in a status of inferior epistemic authority observed cultural diversity as a risk for education, the challenge for teaching being to minimise that risk in order to support migrant children to achieve better performances.

The question is to have a clear picture of what each child needs. It is important to understand what realistic expectations are at one moment in time and move from there. If a child comes with needs in terms of language for instance, we have got to have plans that are right for that profile, to make the right decisions for the child who can be a bit displaced. We understand what he needs to adapt quickly. (UK_T17_F)

In the mainstream narratives of education, pedagogical routines are based on a differentiation between social roles, where children are not trusted as authors of valid knowledge as they are recognised low *epistemic authority*. A minority but not marginal perspective on the position of migrant children in the classroom emerging from the interviews position them as objects for teaching practices *on* them, rather than *with* them. The authority of teachers and the legitimacy of the exercise of control over children increases as children's epistemic authority decreases: the authority of teachers is therefore higher and demands of control are more stringent with regard to migrant children.

Looking at migrant children through the lenses of their deficit rather than the lenses of their capabilities can construct positions of marginalisation, transforming the categorisation of migrant children in the ingredient of self-fulfilling prophecies of educational problems. This can be traced back in teachers' narratives, as illustrated by the excerpts below:

There are systems in place, all systems go as they say; I remember a child from Albania into year 3 which they usually have some English but that was not the case and this is clearly a situation when the expectations needs to adjust to meet the needs that we know will show up at some point; and the language needs are of course more obvious but there are needs that are hidden, so to speak, but still they regularly pop up at some point so there are those system that allow for extra case and maybe more consideration for the children who have diverse experiences as they get into the classroom. (UK_T14_F)

What a child can do it is not age but there are many variables, and as a teacher it is imperative to know that extra freedom, who can be given that and who would be a risk because he has shown over the year not to be ready, or maybe not to be so confident in the interaction with other, this is the case of children who join at some point of the year from different contexts who cannot hit the ground running and it may not do them any favour to give them that space that others have at the moment. (UK_T11_F)

Categorisation and hierarchy based on expertise may be coupled as the effects of one are presuppositions of the other, as suggested by this excerpt from a teacher's interview.

As I have said it is the experience and the pedagogical knowledge that support the teacher who is a well-prepared professional to see up to where that individual child can go, what is the profile that fits better at the moment, where the child stands and what are the situation where the child can be given more space without this being detrimental for the child. (UK_T2_F)

However, it is important to notice that no participant shared an idea that the migrant background is directly related to poorer educational performances for second generation children.

Children's needs, aspirations and expectations

Based on their contributions, it is possible to argue that teachers strongly reject any causal relationships between migration background and educational aspirations and expectations. It is true that teachers do recognise that aspirations and expectations are not the same for all children; however, differences are connected either to personal differences or, more often, to the socio-economic status of the family which is not necessarily linked to migration background.

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)

I see more individual cases in both direction good and bad, but there I would not be honest if I said there are aspirations that are more for one group than another. (UK_T3_M)

Considering that they are 9, mine are 9 to 10, it is a bit early, I believe, to talk about aspirations; there are children who are more receptive to teaching. This is not connected to their background, not in my experience, more individual cases. (UK_T13_M)

Only in two cases perceived difference in aspirations were related to gender. This may be due to the relatively young age of the children that teachers are working with in primary school. Incidentally, the contributions below represent the two instances when teacher referred to gender as a relevant variable across all interviews.

My group is year 6 so they come up to 11, there are some differences between boys and girls maybe in term of attitudes but not much in terms of achievement; not really difference about background. (UK_T11_F)

I'm in year 4 so they come up to 10 and this is when there is some difference in behaviour between boys and girls that impact on how they experience learning. Not a great impact on outcomes thought, differences are just coming up. (UK_T10_F)

The analysis of data suggests that the historical context of the research played a substantial part in shaping teacher's perspectives therefore their answer. An example of this is offered by the discussion that aroused around the theme of children's aspiration that systematically put the consequences of the pandemic at the centre.

Usually, it is the big exam year so everything would be focused on it but as exams have been pulled off this time due to the situation, it is a bit different, the talk about aspiration to get into a good school is less prominent maybe. (UK_T1_F)

It is difficult talk about aspirations this year is more about material conditions that of course can double pre-existing situations. (UK_T28_F)

The consequences of the pandemic were considered by the participants in the interviews the most important variable also with regard to children's needs.

The needs are needs of the situation we have been living, this trumps everything this year. On return to school a need to talk to share experiences and stories, and we are keen to do that with children. (UK_T4_F)

In particular, the consequences of the pandemic were systemically coupled by teachers with the socio-economic status of the family (rather than the immigration status). Learning from home over extended periods of time generated new and unforeseen needs that, according to the teachers, affected less affluent families the most, doubling on the already existing effect of inequalities.

Not all children have the same pace and can enjoy the same support, this is so true these times where what they can do at home really depends on how much parents can help them whilst working from home themselves or even worse when parents are still working outside. (UK_T1_F)

This year the needs concern the possibility to transitioning to learning from home in a positive environment which is connected to quality of accommodation and resources and time that the parents can give them. (UK_T8_F)

Challenges

According to teachers who took part in the interview, the only challenge that can be related to migration background regards language. However, linguistic integration can be challenging only in the short term, immediately after the arrival of the child in the classroom. According to the teachers' contribution, linguistic integration is a swift and smooth process. This can be related to the relatively young age of children in primary school which may support a faster linguistic integration, albeit such interpretation was not presented by any participant in the interviews.

Of course, 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 comfortable with English. (UK_T16_F)

Some more challenging situation are recalled by participants; nevertheless, they are presented as individual cases linked to unique characteristics are not frequent enough to support any general observation.

The ability to understand teaching is key to learning so language is the challenge that fortunately is generally quickly won by most children. Then there are individual needs that demand attention and support, but this is about individual cases. (UK_T17_F)

It is possible that the local context shaped teachers' experience of working with migrant children, therefore their perspectives shared in the interviews. Based on the experiences shared by participants, it seems that the integration of migrant children is more frequent in early years, pre-school, settings, at least in the areas where the schools operate. Most children with migrant background arrive in the primary school classroom after having experienced the English education system in pre-primary education.

Most children settle well and easily, it is not common to have problem with integration of children however it that happens it is more about language, but I'd say that in a statistical sense it is more for early years that in primary. (UK_T11_F)

Linguistic adaptation is observed as a challenge the magnitude of which systemically shrinks as children participate in the classroom life. For instance, none of the participants reported any causal link between migrant background and educational challenges, including linguistic adaptation, with regard to second generation migrant children, as illustrated by the excerpt below

I work with children with migrant background every day as everyone here and everywhere. I would say that it really depends on what one means for migrant background because children who were born here really it is not possible to see any difference. (UK_T10_F)

Interestingly, several participants framed the challenge of language within the positioning of migrant children as competent and authors of valid knowledge. This is particularly important in the context of the Child-UP project, because it sketches the profile of a coherent culture of education, based on the support of children's personal expression and the recognition of children's high epistemic authority. The idea of linguistic deficit is therefore turned upside down and replaced with the acknowledgement of the importance for teacher to construct a form of adults-children interaction that can enable adults to tune in with children's personal expressions.

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)

Factors influencing participation and performances

Again, and maybe more markedly that with regard to other themes, the pandemic, its management and its implications were at the centre of teacher's reflection on the factors influencing migrant children's participation and academic performances. However, the effects of the pandemic were not linked to linguistic or cultural variables; rather, the migrant background was mentioned with regard to the living arrangements that connotes migrant families more than indigenous one. Once again, teachers' referred to a variable such as socio-economic status that may be sometimes related to migrant background but is characterised by cutting across ethnicity, language, cultural habits.

This year is all about the disruptive experiences of learning from home for so many months and with possible further disruptions in case of outbreaks etc. If this is about migrant background it is because it can be that home is more likely to be shared across generations so less space for a calm learning. But this can be true for native families as well. (UK_T29_M)

The differences are connected to variables that no one could consider, e.g., access to devices, for instance families with 3 or 4 children of different ages, it is harder to look after them educationally. Is this more true for migrant families? It may be but surely not exclusively true, there is not a correlation, the correlation is the quality of spaces. (UK_T7_F)

Apart from language integration what I have noticed is that the quality of the living arrangements at home has come to make a difference which was not considered before. If there are many generations, individuals in the house at once and many agendas and needs crammed in the space for learning is reduced. (UK_T34_F)

These year, two years it'll be, the lockdown has changed everything somehow, the big difference is how children cope with learning from home, the resource available and this is to do with the financial position and professional situation of the parents which can be combined with background, but it is not due to that. (UK_T18_F)

Teachers were very firm in their idea that it was not possible to consider children's participation without referring to the effects of the pandemic. This might be due to the convergence of national lockdowns and school closure and the specific situation of the participant schools where a series of outbreaks during the autumn, around the time of the interviews, imposed additional closures, with the results that in the first two terms, most children had been in schools for a fraction of the time, between 6 and 8 weeks out of 12-18 depending on the time of the interview.

The lockdowns have been the major player in the last two years, so it does not make much sense to talk about children's experiences without considering that they have been away for months. There was optimism when they came back, and they caught up very easily but of course it also depends on the support they can get at home. (UK_T24_F)

Function of peer networks and discrimination

In line with the observations of teachers in other Child-UP national contexts, participants in the interviews recognise that peer networks are key in children's experiences. This holds true for either migrant children or children without an immigration background.

The result that emerges more clearly from the interviews concerns the observation of positive peer-relationships in the classroom, as for the excerpts that follow.

I think they are doing great; they are quite young and many problems that you can live at a later age are yet to come. (UK_T18_F)

Although in year 6 they are fast approaching the teens and you can see more marked uniqueness and personalities with the obvious clashes still they are a great group and I personally I have never had to manage exclusion or marginalization. (UK_T31_F)

Some teachers working with the older cohort (11 years old) refer to be noticing signs of a growing influence of gender in peer-relationship. However, some initial evidence of a gender-based separation does not weaken the network of peer-relationships and does not create situation of social exclusion.

There is some degree of separation in the playground between boys and girls, but it is not in the sense of problems or exclusion. (UK_T20_F)

Peers are pivotal in supporting the integration of newly arrived children. This important function of peer relationship, illustrated in the excerpt below, will be further discussed in the section dedicated to the strategies undertaken to promote integration

Newly arrived children often naturally find the best friend of the time, a sort of chaperon that always helps more than anything from their perspective. (UK_T1_F)

Peer-support is observed as an instance of agency in some of the teachers' contribution. Children autonomously access the role of supporters of newly arrived classmates, independently from teachers' elicitation.

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)

The excerpt above includes a cue for teachers' acute awareness of the effects of the pandemic also on the network of peer-relationships. A general consensus regards a concern about the negative consequences of prolonged periods of separation.

Of course, not being together for a long time does not help, does not help children's relationships and does not help our job. (UK_T7_F)

However, a strong optimism in the ability of children to reconstruct their networks of relationships in school could be observed throughout the data from interviews, as illustrated by the excerpt below.

It is not possible to think about relationships without thinking about the situation this year we're living so we er we need to see how it pans out but with lots of faith in children's resilience. (UK_T2_F)

Teachers did not refer to practices that could indicate some form of discrimination such marginalisation, exclusion in the playground or during mealtime. Interestingly, and differently from other Child-UP national contexts, teachers do not observe exclusion or marginalisation even with regard to newly arrived children. The relatively young age of children was suggested by participants as a possible reason for the absence of obvious discriminatory practices.

No, this (note: *discriminatory practices*) is not something I and I think others have ever noticed neither in the playground or in the classroom. Yes, I am aware that this can be a problem sometimes somewhere, I guess that older children who are more affected by peers or some negative communication, they may be more inclined to; but our children are probably too young and less affected. Anyway, I do not see that. (UK_T37_F)

Another possible cue for discrimination, or at least for a difficult integration, would be the articulation of the cohort of children into groups separated along ethnic, religious, linguistic or national lines. The

playground, with the higher degree of freedom allowed to children's choices could offer evidence of such separation. However, teachers do not refer to similar practices and some of them explicitly deny them.

They just naturally mix, in the playground, when we have away days there, and use the public transport, have lunch outside, whenever, I cannot think of a single time when I look at them and thought 'see they are sitting, or they are playing, separated in some sort of ethnic groups. (UK_T8_F)

I could not tell what they do away from school, it'd be speculating really, but as far as I can see as a, let's say, a citizen, I see children mixing in any park or playground. There are so many problems bubbling around, but I would not add discrimination to the mix, at least not for schoolchildren like ours. (UK_T4_F)

The local context of teachers' professional experience is nevertheless important. All participating teachers work in a Northern Borough in London, characterised by conditions of super-diversity dating back to early years of the twentieth century. The Borough where the schools are located is located in what used to be sparse rural hamlets in the county of Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The transformation in a densely urbanised area was fuelled from waves of immigration since its early days. Sharing spaces and experiences with people from different backgrounds is considered by teacher an obvious component of children's lives.

Here is NW (note: *the NW is the first part of postcodes that identify North-western areas of Greater London*) and of course diversity is normality. What is normal in school is normal in the neighbourhood, in the park, in the shops. The situation where families are sort of segregated in different streets or estate then children are together in the classroom is not true here. Luckily, for me, it is a mix in any situation of life where children grow up. The school is just one of many. (UK_T13_M)

Look, the name of this place is something like 'a rest place for dons' in Saxon language. There is not much of a rural feel now, is it? From day one, in the early 1920s this has been driven from immigration, the Jewish diaspora, Greeks, the Windrush generation (note: *the Windrush is a cruise ship that in 1948 transported thousands of workers from the Caribbean into the UK in a bid to support post-war reconstruction. Since then, 'Windrush generation' is synonym of the mass immigration from the Caribbean during the 1950s and 1960s and its legacy*), Eastern-European, from the Middle East, now so many professionals who commute into the City. This is to say that diversity is the normal, is everywhere and this must be why children do not act discrimination even soft discrimination like separated groups. (UK_T10_F)

Social Workers

Working in Children, Family and Young People services, 14 social workers took part in the interviews. Some of the social workers interact on a regular basis with Immigration and Asylum Support services, when children are involved.

Problems of unaccompanied children

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are young people who arrive in the UK without adult carers. They are seen at the Home Office and enter into a Local Authority (LA) care on a Section 21 order (statutory duty for the LA to provide accommodation, education, healthcare and social care for minors). Children, Family and Young People services engage with UASC from their placement under LA care. Of all children under LA care, 50% (nearly 400) are UASC, the second largest number of UASC in England, behind the bordering county of Kent, as a consequence of the migratory patterns, with an overwhelming majority of UASC arrivals in the UK following the Calais-Dover route.

Participants in the interviews observe that whilst financial support from the central government has been continuing, the sheer number of UASC exercise a steady pressure on all social services.

The problem is the disproportionate number of unaccompanied children who reaches for the borough. There are resources but the financial impact is huge. The problem is that the services are stretched because there are also other children to unaccompanied children to leave care falling off the radar. (UK_SW2_F)

It is not just working with children, there is all the admin, age assessment teams, costs of bureaucracy, extra number of duty social workers (*note: duty social workers deal with urgent case with children and young people, usually during out of office hours*). It is continuing draining and complication over complication. (UK_SW7_F)

Problems of UASC are thus related to the challenge of securing high quality services to an exceptionally high number of clients, which also impact on social workers' capacity to support other children in the LA, including migrant children. This is acutely felt by participants with regard to health, as for the excerpt below.

Most health needs, and this is also about mental health needs, of unaccompanied children are urgent and not deferrable. But the provision of services but a strain on the overall system, most obviously a slower access to services for residents, with a lot of dissatisfaction that does not create a positive environment. (UK_SW5_M)

In line with the overall approach adopted by English social work with children, early intervention appears to be considered by participants as a possible way to alleviate pressure on services, although there are difficulties related to the status of UASC.

Early intervention can prevent the escalation of problems however, it is not so straightforward when children come to the borough with huge issues already that cut out the possibility of early intervention. Early intervention however is still important because if it works with residents still reduces the overall pressure and costs in the long run. (UK_SW12_F)

Whilst participants shared challenges related to the provision of services in ordinary times, all interviews touched the theme of the pandemic and its effects. The pandemic has made social work more stressful.

Of course, it is the nature of the job. Everything that could go online it was put online including assessment but there is component that is necessarily face to face in communities that were badly hit. So, yes, the stress was high and impacted on the services, also due to staff sickness and self-isolation. It was more difficult reaching out for children, the early intervention was in tatters really but still we have not stopped working throughout this (UK_SW2_M).

Families

Partnership with family is key for the organisation of education in England. The same is true for social work and social care, with an important caveat: in some circumstances, rather than a partner, the family can be the context of dangerous situations that affect the well-being of the child. Dealing with multi-challenged families is part of the professional routine if the social worker. Importantly for the research, no causal connection was advanced between migrant background and family challenges.

This is a diverse borough, where affluent areas sit side by side with areas where it is more likely that support will be needed. One could not believe the number of cases we open every week. Neglect and abuse, I am taking about residents now and I cannot see any

difference related to ethnicity or immigration. I mean, there are BAME (note: *Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnicity*) people who live in more affluent areas and they are not on our system as white people are not in those areas. Yes, there are many families who are struggling with a BAME background but then again, in the same areas there are lots of white families who are not any better off and we are working with. (UK_SW14_F)

Similarly, to teachers, social workers reject any association between migration or ethnic background and problematic profile of the family; rather, it is the socio-economic status that makes a difference.

I think it is common experience that if there is a higher percentage of difficult families within a community it is easy to see that what most families have in common across different groups is the social class, the low level of education, the area where they live, the level of deprivation. (UK_SW6_M)

Working with families is more problematic with UASC who, by definition, are separated from the family. However, the experience narrated by several social workers refers to a more complex situation where possible partnership with UASC families are made more difficult by government policies, which also make children's problems more acute. Please see the interesting excerpts below:

It is important to get one thing right: unaccompanied does not mean lonely or abandoned. So many times, we have families who may live in London but also somewhere as far as Sunderland contacting us, an uncle, grandparents, siblings of a child we have in care. However, the Home Office check for the validity of the asylum seeker status then leave the child with us. The point for the HM is no make sure we are not dealing with an illegal migrant but there is nothing in practice to facilitate the reunion with family members who come forward. I think it is to make crossing less inviting? So, we have children who stay with us for one year or even more when they would have a home to go to from day 1. It is not only the costs but the mental health of the child. (UK_SW11_F)

So, the position is that an unaccompanied minor may be an asylum seeker, yes, but cannot be an asylum seeker if he stops to be unaccompanied because he kind of become a migrant who mugged the Home Office off. I think that to be honest, there is a lot of ideology with little practicality, I know there was legislation being brought forward to make re-homing children with relatives easier and part of the process, really but I think it is not going anywhere. (UK_SW13_F)

Also working with family and the position of the child in the family have been dramatically affected by the pandemic, as discussed by several participants in the interviews. The negative effects of the pandemic on vulnerable children cut across ethnicity and migration backgrounds, as suggested by the excerpts below.

The financial hit of the pandemic was bad in areas already deprived, where many families depend on self-employed jobs that did not quite match the requirement to be supported by the government's furlough (note: *the furlough scheme, inaugurated by the British government in March 2020, consist in monthly payments or grants to support workers and self-employed who could not work due to Public Health measures*). Financial struggle made difficult situations worse, and this spilled over relationships with a huge spike in interventions. BAME or not BAME, migrant or non-migrant, abuse on children has rocketed over the lockdowns. (UK_SW2_F)

The pandemic has meant for many families who do not enjoy a great quality of accommodation to spend times in not-so-great space without being used to do so. Children have suffered a lot and still are, abuse and neglect have flourished so to speak. (UK_SW3_M)

The abuse of substances and alcohol first has been dramatic in the last year. Dramatic for the adult but also for the children who often had to live with it, I mean literally in the same

room. That was as bad as not actually worse with residents rather than immigrants, new immigrants. (UK_SW4_M)

The management of the pandemic has affected working with UASC as well, in particular the maintenance of minimum leave of safety in the shared spaces and often cramped spaces where UASC are accommodate while the LA is caring for them.

Not to mention the stress and the struggle to keep L**** House (note: a large building where UASC are accommodated whilst in care. L**** House is a managed estate that offers individual rooms with shared bathrooms, shared kitchen, shared social spaces). It was an unwanted extra burden really, of course we were not in charge of sanitising the spaces and I have to say that the kids in general have been good but these spaces where not the most suitable and the need to arrange for the ones who had to self-isolate without even start talking about the stress for us, as that was sort of our workplace. (UK_SW6_M)

Gender

The contributions of Social Workers did not refer to gender as a variable that make a difference in their relationships with children or in the situations experienced by children. A serious concern expressed by most interviewees related to the risks faced by UASC who leave care. Falling off the radar may mean becoming victims of trafficking. This applies to females but also to males. Although there is no accurate data on the number of children in migration who are trafficked, it is estimated that more than 30,000 children went missing after their arrival in Europe between 2014 and 2017²⁷.

Unaccompanied children leave care so much more than other looked after children, and this is to me, to us a big worry to be honest, because leaving care is not only a failure in the duty to support integration but often is the avenue to slavery, to speak clear. We are supported to relieve pressure on L**** House by the pan London rota, but this has been challenged a lot by this COVID situation, as other boroughs quite understandably struggle to take new referrals from us. However, the consequence is that more children than usual fall through the cracks, leave care and frankly disappears. This is an immediate concern for girls of course, we are well aware of trafficking and slavery. (UK_SW10_F)

It is not only true for girls of course but there is this awareness of the risk of trafficking because it is not possible to keep under control all children when they are in the order of thousands almost. But there is something we are doing, for instance we have a pilot to support families to foster care girls, but also boys, who are from countries, such as Vietnam or Albania where the rate of care leave and trafficking seem to hit the most. (UK_SW8_F)

Interestingly for a project like Child-UP, a social worker reflected on the pilot project to promote foster care of unaccompanied children as an occasion for other young people to participate actively to the planning and delivery of the initiative.

²⁷ Sigona, N. and Humpris, R. (2017). *Child Mobility in the EU's Refugee Crisis: What Are The Data Gaps And Why Do They Matter?*. Available at: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/01/child-mobility-eu>; European Migration Network. (2018). *Approaches to unaccompanied minors following status determination in the EU plus Norway*. Available at: http://emn.ie/files/p_201808090907072018_emn_sythesis_unaccompanied_minors_09.08.2018.pdf; ECPAT UK and Missing Children Europe. (2019). *Interact: Towards a more efficient cooperation across borders for the protection of children in migration from trafficking and exploitation*. Available at: <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=118849be-152f-40f5-b62e-c186eebae58b>

Yes, the foster care support project. I found it quite positive, also because there was work with children themselves, to provide perspective families with training involving culturally sensitive information to support children to settle faster and better. (UK_SW5_M)

3. Working with children and their families

Teachers

Parents' involvement

Family-School partnership is a cornerstone of the planning and provision of education in England. In the same fashion as the Early Intervention Model, the engagement of families with children's lives in schools is considered imperative to prevent problems occurring, or to tackle them when they do before they can jeopardise children's academic journey. Most participants expressed a positive outlook on migrant parents' engagement in their children's education.

I think that partnership with families is good, it works overall, including immigrant parents. Some are sort of hard-er to reach and this affects the quality of the partnership and what is the early intervention. But his is not really linked on migration or not immigration. Actually, migrant parents are involved from the first day as they are seen as the best allies, they have a perspective that we do not have, and this is important because children do not leave their life behind when they come to school. (UK_T11_F)

The use of several channels for communicating with families, including the Internet, is often recognised as key to secure a steady interaction with parents who could experience more difficulties in visiting teachers in schools. As an important piece of contextual information, the participating schools (as many in England) use a robust School Intranet System for communicating with parents as a key instrument of family-school partnership.

All channels are used, it is key of course, and I do not recognise that a family's background will necessarily make things easier or harder for partnership. This is the model of school-parents partnership that underpins our way of working, using all channels, as it has been for years and it works. This is my experience of course. (UK_T41_M)

Sometimes how parents respond and liaise is not the same of course, and this is not only connected to will but to possibility. I am talking about working hours and distance from school. Although I am aware that this issue of working patterns and engagement is supposed to hit migrants families the hardest, I do not see that, maybe because we do try to be flexible and offer possibilities of communication, the Internet of course with possibility of direct interaction. (UK_T36_F)

Problems in family-school partnership were mentioned; nevertheless, difficulties were not linked to migrant background of the family. This observation reinforces the recurring point made by participants: it is the socio-economic status rather than the migrant background that may impact on children's participation in schools.

In ordinary times the important variable is partnership between school and families, when it does not work it is there where there are more difficult situations, that cut across any ethnicity really. (UK_T20_F)

However, in one case a teacher's reply indicated a limited trust in migrant families and in the possibility of an effective partnership. As for linguistic adaptation, the recent arrival in the country is causally related to more difficulties. As exemplified in the excerpt below, chosen for its clarity but representative of a minority although diffused opinion, teachers see themselves as advocates who act for and on behalf of the child, sometimes *against* the family if necessary.

I have, we have got some experience and it is not easy but not hard to see what a child needs maybe at the beginning of a new journey, coming from a completely different situation of learning and sometimes from a series of different situations if the family is more, more mobile. If it has been a long-complicated journey for the child. I feel that we are the child's advocates and his voice really, also with the family, to explain what the child are needs the work that needs to be done which not all parents have the knowledge of education in here to grasp. (UK_T12_M)

Parents' expectations

Similarly, to their reflections on children's expectations, teachers were not prepared to advance any causal link between migration background and expectations. Problems in parents' engagement as a consequence of low expectations were not mentioned. Rather, rare situations of low engagement were connected to lack of interest or difficult parenting, always depending on individual cases.

Well, every parent wants the best for her child except cases of neglect and abuse of course, sometimes the point is that education may not be seen as the best or so needed so this is where relationships become erratic with parents is it related to migrant background? I would not think so. (UK_T28_F)

I would not be honest if I say that there are categories of parents who have less interest than others in children's achievement. (UK_T42_F)

Once more, the relevant variable was identified with the socio-economic status, not with ethnicity or migration background; as indicated by a very frequent reference to the 'catchment area' of the school, that is, to the areas in the borough where pupils come from.

The catchment area of the school is quite even in terms of social profile so there are very few cases where families are hard to reach or to engage (UK_T42_F)

It is quite a plain school in terms of the social profile of families, because let's not forget that this is the variable rather than migrant background so to answer I'd say that there are not difference not in my experience (UK_T10_F)

The effect of the pandemic on family-school partnership

Another theme dominated by the discussion around the effects of the pandemic was family-school partnership. For this reason, a sub-section was created to highlight teachers' perspectives, with the support of some illustrative excerpts from the interviews.

The management of the pandemic, in particular schools' closure and, even when schools had been open, social distancing and limitation of interpersonal contact, greatly reduced the possibility of face-to-face interaction, hindering family-school partnership.

This is the area that the pandemic hit the most, I believe. It dilutes the possibility of contact with families, makes it more cumbersome. (UK_T1_F)

As I have said many times, partnership with families is everything for the success of education, this has been made less diluted by the pandemic, closure and social distancing. (UK_T37_F)

Only one teacher recognized that social distancing might have affected the possibility to interact with teachers more for families with a migrant background, albeit with this was related only to younger families without a strong social network around them.

It is always possible to have a few words when children are picked up, not much but it is important to give the idea of a continuing attention; this has been more difficult if not impossible for many months. So, maybe this was worse for those family coming from

abroad without the support of grandparents who cannot attend parents' evening because they work or have other children to look after so it was a good change to have a chat as they were picking up children. (UK_T21_M)

It was discussed how family-school partnership relies also on the possibility to connect remotely offered by the Internet. This might have supported a continuing communication even during lockdowns and in an enduring situation of social distancing. However, this was not always the case, due to some situations where the access to the Internet was more difficult for families. Again, it is important to highlight that possible difficulties in connecting remotely were not linked to migration background but to the socio-economic status of the family, for instance reflected in the house not being ready for broadband Internet.

Of course, this is much more difficult with the social distancing and the need to rely on technology that is not as universal as we might have thought so this year is more difficult, yes, and this is about the situation of the family, the technology that they can afford and how the house is set up or not for broadband. (UK_T36_F)

Although noticed in some cases, difficulties in maintain communication with families during lockdowns or with social distancing guidelines in place, were not the main problem for family-school partnership. Rather, the challenge has consisted in the lack of face-to-face interactions, often inserted in non-planned occasions.

It is important not to make the mistake of thinking that everyone has a great access to the internet, and when there are issues this is where relationships with families over the last few months have conditioned but I would not say that any serious problem has work well and allow to catch up with a child's situation. (UK_T19_F)

Social workers

Partnership with families is a cornerstone of social work in England. However, the specific context of participants' professional experience should be considered. All social workers who took part in the interviews engage with multi-challenged families. However, it was possible to analyse whether social workers associate a migration background is with difficulties for families. The result of the analysis suggest that social workers do not consider neither a migration background nor other culture-related variables as significant. As a leit-motif in social workers and teachers' contributions, the relevant variable is the socio-economic status of families.

If I was asked to predict whether there will be problems I would say, as a rule of thumb, where there are addictions, and this could be any sort of, including gambling which is quite serious, there will be problems for children. There is not some sort of ethnic inclination for that. (UK_SW8_F)

The migration background is not a predictor of challenges that a family may encounter. Quite the contrary, recently settled migrant families are observed by the participants in the interviews as less affected by problems of addictions.

To be honest, the challenges are mostly for what we could call the residents, I mean the families who have been in the Borough for a long time, whatever their background. This is about addictions, neglect and sorts of abuse which are by the way which come as one. It is however normal for the families that settle to be very job-focused, less touched by those problems. (UK_SW8_F)

However, a social worker recognized that the nature of their job, where the contact with families is generally established after a referral, that is, when problems emerge, may entail that other types of issues are not seen, unless they exacerbate.

Of course, I am sharing what I see, I do not want, and I cannot if anything else for an issue of professional standard, assume that this or that must be happening in the borough. However, what is obvious because it is the nature of the job, is that there must be tons of situation that are not quite on the verge of abuse or neglect or intervention-worth, but they are happening. Of course, with infinite means we could knock at every door like HV to say 'hi, how's things for you today?' (note: *HV stand for Health Visitors. Health Visitors are NHS nurses that visit on a regular rota, regardless of referrals pregnant or feeding women*). This would be the ultimate early intervention, but the reality is that we work on referrals, and referrals needs someone to refer. (UK_SW13_F)

Besides the organisational challenges previously discussed, if the attention shifts to interpersonal relationships with UASC, the primary task for social workers is to establish mutual trust. Lack of trust is observed by participants in the interview as a risk because it may discourage children to share issues or needs, hindering the early intervention model.

I believe there are expectations, they do. I mean that most children not ignorant about what they will have to go through, their journey from when. They arrive in the country. The problem is not unawareness, but the problem is exactly the opposite, in a way, they are aware of the system and the immigration control so they kind of see all civil servants, including us really, as part of this relentless effort to make their life harder. So, building trust is striking a balance, yes, we are the government in the sense that yes, we have the means to support but no, we are not the government in the sense that our agenda is not set on control but on support. This can be demonstrated with actions, but it is ultimately up to the child to trust. (UK_SW14_F)

Trust is key of course, without trust there is not true communication, I mean communication that is not barely functional. If a child does not let us in, it is difficult to see what is going on in her life until it becomes evident which is a problem because it can also be that evident means the child leaving care before time where the risk is serious, and it is called slavery. (UK_SW5_M)

Building trust, according to the social workers who took part in the interview, requires time, requires sharing experiences. However, the unbalanced relationships between resources and number of clients directly impact on the time available to build trust.

It is the 0.07 conundrum (note: 0.07 refers to the government threshold of 7 UASC every 10,000 children under the age of 17 above which extra-support is put in place and relocation to other LAs should be implemented). We are four times higher than that and the pan London rota is not coping, this is clear, and the pandemic has not helped of course. This is taking that time so needed to develop trust because trust is not a subject to be learnt, it is based on knowing each other which is sort of hard when most of the time it is necessarily all about functional communication. (UK_SW12_F)

However, the same social worker points to the risk of intervention to relieve pressure on services in some LAs, if a holistic view of the child does not underpin decision-making.

But there is the other thing: being moved somewhere else can be a relief from a pressure point of view but it is really? Not for the child who may be moved as he was settling, this is about school first but not only, with negative implication so more time in theory to work with children but at the cost of other children's well-being? This is why a faire distribution

should be done from day 1 after HM (Note: *the Home Office*) assessment so that it is one place, stability for children. (UK_SW12_F)

The difficult balance between consideration for the voices of children and organisational needs is discussed by another participant with regard to the decision of moving children to other LAs and its implications for the child well-being. The observation of a complex relationship between children's self-determination and protection of the child that demands social worker to make decisions on behalf of the minor is very interesting for a research like Child-UP.

Any sort of decision should involve the child whose life is going to be affected. We are all aware of the UNCRC (note: *United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child, ratified and incorporated in national legislation by the UK in 1991*) and the right of self-determination (note: *article 12 of the UNCRC*). We all are, and I believe we all subscribe to it, it is a tenet of democracy after all that should start from childhood to make sense, to be real. However, there is also a duty of care which is in the same way part of the UNCRC (note: *article 3 of the UNCRC*) and this is about us as professional with a legal duty to protect the child to make decision for the child. These are decision that may not be what the child wants, this is the whole idea of acting on behalf for the best interest of. I would say that when a settled child is moved somewhere else, this is often not what the child wants but there is the thing of the best interest that tells us that he will be better off where there is more time and resources. This is true also for foster care in families because let's do not assume that children are always happy to leave L**** House to live in a family home, because L**** House has become their home. (UK_SW5_M)

4. Framing integration and evaluating policies

Teachers

Representations of integration

The analysis of data concerning of teachers' representations of integration allows to recognise two themes: 1) integration is framed within the paradigm of pedagogy of listening and support of children's agency; 2) integration is interpreted as promoting equal opportunity, cutting across migrant background and ethnicity as the focus is placed on socio-economic status of the families. Those two themes contribute to a largely coherent interpretation of migrant children's experience in education shared by teachers in the interviews. Such interpretation can be articulated as follows:

- For a large majority of participants, integration related to create favourable condition for children's personal expression, regardless of their background. Integration is often understood as integration as agents, active participants in education. This is true for all children;
- Integration is not only children's adaptation to the education system. Based on the widely subscribed idea of 'pedagogy of listening', participants recognise that if integration aims to be more than unidirectional assimilation, then teachers are required to adapt to the many ways in which children express themselves;
- Integration is challenged not by migration background or ethnicity; rather, it may be challenged by the socio-economic status of the family, which cuts across migration status or ethnicity. Promoting integration is first and foremost promoting equality of opportunity: a) in education by valuing what each child can bring into the classroom in terms of skills, knowledges, experiences. This concerns upgrading children's epistemic status; b) through an empowering education, by supporting children's unique talents as a resource for academic achievement rather than imposing standardised knowledge and behaviour. This concerns utilising children's agency as a resource for education.

The following excerpts from interviews were selected as particularly effective in illustrating the results of the research with teachers. The two excerpts below illustrate the idea of mutual integration between the child and an education system that must enable itself to hear the voices of children, the several languages, often non-verbal languages, that they may utilise.

I see integration as a two-ways process, not only integrating in the school, but also the school integrating in children's lives. (UK_T24_F)

What do we do to value what each child brings into the classroom; integration cannot be imposing to leave everything at the door, it must be empowering each child with his or her knowledges to become cultural capital for all. (UK_T4_F)

The next four excerpts illustrate the most diffuse interpretation of integration among the teachers who took part in the interview. Integration could describe the main aim of education if integration understood as constructing equality in the opportunity to participate in society. The meaning of integration as empowerment of children was much more common than a culturalist meaning of integration, which was limited to some reflection on the challenge of linguistic adaptation, as previously discussed.

Integration is offering a good start for everyone that is about equality of opportunities. There is not integration without equality not true integration. (UK_T19_F)

Integration is about opportunities, it cuts across other factors, race, religion, everything, it is about enabling to play an active role, sometime against the grain, let's say, against what a chap would be expected to be in life. (UK_T12_M)

This (*integration*) gets real when there is not any gap in the opportunities for all children, if there is inequality there is not a meaningful integration, and this is the goal of education, to open opportunities. (UK_T9_M)

This school and not just this school is committed to create possibility of success through education, this is integration to me, and this is where our energies go, my energies go. (UK_35_F)

Support of integration

- Participants in the interview converge in describing that the support of integration at school level as a three-pronged strategy based on:
- Organisational procedures;
- Partnership with families;
- Active role recognised to other children in supporting integration of peers.

The main instruments to support integration of newly arrived children is induction. Induction consists in a series of meetings between the child, the family and the school, including visits to the school facilities. The aim of induction is two-fold: on the one hand induction provides children the opportunity to familiarise with the school environment; on the other hand, induction allows teachers and school leadership to liaise with the family in order to co-construct a profile of the child.

The induction is key to assess needs, to create a profile that allows a tailored approach to the child. (UK_T14_F)

The school has a good system of induction to support integration because it allows to design plans for each child, including considering language needs. (UK_T13_M)

Working as a community with families and children is what helps integration, as example of that being our induction programme where we get to know the child as he or she starts. (UK_T29_M)

In addition to induction, another instrument to support integration of newly arrived children is the offer of part-time arrangements, aimed to slow down the pace of integration. Part-time arranged are mostly agreed on induction, after consideration of the child's unique situation and discussion with the family.

Part-time attendance if a child cannot cope and also buddying them up with children of a similar background, however they often know each other already, e.g., cousins or relatives so it is mostly natural process. (UK_T24_F)

However, whilst induction seems to be universally acknowledged as a pivotal strategy to support integration, part-time arrangements were criticised. The critique to an initial, temporary, part-time attendance was based on the observation that spending less time in school reduces the opportunity for peer-interaction, with the risk of paradoxically slowing down integration.

I see less and less part-time arrangements and I think that it is a positive turn because the best way to adapt is to join and share experiences. (UK_T33_F)

The effectiveness of organisational procedures such as induction is observed by many participants as conditional on family-school partnership which therefore emerges as a cornerstone of working with children in the English contexts of Child-UP.

Partnership with families is key of course to understand the needs of each child which very often are easy to accommodate, we talk with parents a lot at the very beginning, and we continue to do so. (UK_T22_F)

Planning around each child's reality which we normally gather through families and the profiles from early years but in some cases, children gets here directly so we really need the help of the family because starting from a realistic picture is imperative. (UK_T38_F)

A previous excerpt related to part-time arrangement included a reference to the role of children in supporting integration of peers. The excerpt is reproduced here for reader's convenience:

Part-time attendance if a child cannot cope and also buddying them up with children of a similar background, however they often know each other already, e.g., cousins or relatives so it is mostly natural process. (UK_T24_F)

Peer-support is recognised as an important instrument to support integration. It was previously discussed as offering support to newly arrived children was observed by teachers as an example of children's agency, based on their autonomous choices. However, this is combined with internal procedures, often not formalised, that promote the role of children as school's ambassador with newly arrived peers.

Other children are always amazing they are little ambassadors then there are cases where it is more difficult, but they are always related to not origin but to situations of families. (UK_T29_M)

Induction allows to see if there are children who could maybe help in the very first days, we called the school's ambassador. It could be because of links being relatives of family friends or from the same country. Children are always very keen to help that way, also because it is true that often they know each other before the other child gets into the classroom. Families often move close to people they know. (UK_T6_F)

Ultimately, several contributions recognised that the effectiveness of school's support to integration often depends on sedimented knowledge and experiences.

the experience we have, we have things in place that go off in a when a situation if need is evident; it could be when a child arrives in a year and because of experience we can kind of expect the needs and what to do. It's of course on a case-by-case basis but experiences, many years of practice which is in a way the school's memory support each teacher in making the right decision to support needs that can be expected. (UK_T9_M)

Collaborations

This section concerns teachers' perspectives on collaboration with external agencies in the support of integration. A first observation based on the analysis of data may concern the vanishing partnership with Local Authorities, consequently to the policies that, since 2010, have imposed schools' financial autonomy and responsibility and favoured a direct link with the central government that distributes funding conditional on schools' academic performances, evaluated by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

The local authorities have less and less of a voice and less and less of a hold on schools, it is now basically all in the hand of the government that has chosen this route of autonomy which is a challenge when it comes with less funding and pressure to achieve academically and the OSFTED. (UK_T20_F)

The relationship with the central government is described as a relationship of command and control, rather than a relationship of collaboration.

Curricula and inspections and exams, this is really how we communicate with government. (UK_T41_M)

Financial constraints have been felt for a long time now, we have learnt to live with it although there is always more pressure. (UK_T18_F)

The collaboration with the institutions is more of a conflictual one sometimes, because pressure to push pupils' achievements can conflict with the child-centred approach that works so well, putting pressure in terms of time. (UK_T19_F)

Also, with regard to the partnership with the central government, in particular in terms of funding, the effects of the pandemic were frequently mentioned as an important variable by the interviewees, as exemplified by the excerpt below

The finances are there to work I do not say it's not but of course is a situation of emergency like this one so unexpected, the extra-bit, for instance supporting families with devices or organising remote came down to individual efforts more than systemic. (UK_T1_F)

Evaluation

The evaluation of the initiatives to support integration is closely related to the evaluation of the nature of relationships with external agencies. Whilst partnership with families is recognised as pivotal, a much less important role is assigned with collaboration with the different levels of government.

I think we are doing the most and by we, I mean the whole community, schools and families I feel a great unity of intents. (UK_T11_F)

We do well, there is not a huge lot of initiative trickling from above to be honest, each school choose how to invest, and I think we have been doing it well, the support of the child-centred planning is the main avenue. (UK_T18_F)

A few teachers advanced an interesting link between government's pressure on school to demonstrate academic excellence, measured based on pass rates and final grades at exams and the risk that such pressure pose in terms of discouraging investing time and money for children who may need extra-support.

There is that continuing pressure to achieve to improve performances to exceeds metrics that in could lead to leave someone behind who moves at a different pace, but we do manage to move between those two forces, it is difficult though. (UK_T12_M)

As suggested by the excerpt below, a strong accent is posed in the autonomy of each school, which extends to the strategy to support integration.

Each school can be unique, depends on the situation and choices of the management, you can have teachers who work with new arrivals separately for some hours, part-time provision, moving children in younger cohort to ease pressure, I am OK with what we do here. (UK_T14_F)

The success of the effort to promote integration is systematically connected to the school's ethos and methods, rather than to guidelines and support from the central government. The observation of integration as framed within the child-centred pedagogical approach of the school is an interesting piece of data that confirms an important observation already discussed: integration is see as embedded in the school's way of working with all children, rather than being a special task to be fulfilled with specific categories of children.

What is in the policies counts fewer what works well works well because of the child-centred approach that allows to focus on the individual needs of all children. It is about everyone but everyone unique. (UK_T22_F)

Social Workers

Integration

Social workers participating in the interviews do not consider integration to be a pressing challenge in their work. As a general observation based on the analysis of data, cultural aspects are nor represented as a relevant variable. They are not mentioned in the interviews and dismissed when presented to them. As for teachers, socio-economic status is the key predictor for the possibility of problems in the lives of children. See the excerpt below, as representative of the position of the social workers interviewed.

The integration that is missing is the integration in opportunities. I mean the opportunity to access good education, and you know much more than that all the context that support well-being holistically, sports, clubs, arts. Integration in a culture of good food and health which always comes back with a vengeance later in life when is neglected. This is the integration that so many kids need and that unfortunately is not quite there. I'm not comfortable with unfortunately, though, it is a very well rooted inequality that should be tackled and could be tackled with investment. It has happened like Sure Start (note: *Sure Start was a policy inaugurated by New Labour in the early 2000s, based on the idea of integrated service to guarantee to young children in deprived areas the access to good quality of education, health, socialisation*) but it is ups and downs and it has of course vanished now, for a long time actually. (UK_SW3_M)

Similarly to the boroughs where participating schools are located, the LA where social workers operate is context of mature super-diversity, where integration is part of everyday experience. The excerpt below offers a powerful metaphor of the condition of super-diversity that characterises the professional experience of the interviewees.

I would not really out integration on top of my professional agenda, also because to be realistic, integration of who into what? This is a minority majority borough (note: *majority-minority refers to LAs where the majority of the population consist of BAME communities and first-generation immigrants*) and this is of course even more so with kids. It's a jigsaw

without a figure, pieces mix, they clutch one onto another, sometimes in a weird way but nevertheless it holds but again without let's say integrating into a figure. (UK_SW2_F)

As for teachers, a general conclusion is that for social workers promoting integration is first and foremost promoting equality of opportunities.

Evaluation of Policies/Resources

Evaluation of policies was tightly intertwined with issues of resources. Resources was a central theme to social workers' contributions that took over any more theoretical or strictly policy-related consideration. What emerged from the analysis of the interviews was the acknowledgment that whilst financial support has been provided over the years, also keeping the same levels of funding might not be enough when demand for services increases.

We are looking after around 1,000 children in the borough, which is a huge number and much higher than the government threshold for providing targeted extra-support (note: *extra-measures are triggered when number of children and young people in a LA's care remains exceeds 0.07% of the population, which is current more than trebled in the Borough*). The thing is that support is per child but does not cover the costs that surround caring for the child, the administrative work and the fact the risk of problems that are not accounted for but would demand money to be fixed raises exponentially the more children are in care. (UK_SW4_M)

A system, called the 'pan London rota' has been under discussion for a long time. The pan London rota is a system of redistribution of new arrivals to alleviate the pressure on LA with a higher number of UASC. However, the participants in the interviews are not fully confident that the distribution across Greater London Borough is enough to cope with the number of arrivals

If the number of new arrivals increase then current pan London rota capacity as discussed might not be enough so that new arrangements of course they need to be confirmed, could fail even before they are put into place, as previous schemes in the past. It cannot be left to the GLA (note: *Greater London Authority*), that is my point, we need a clear effective national transfer scheme so that new arrivals can be fairly dispersed across England. (UK_SW14_F)

Also, the pan London rota needs to be managed itself, more admin costs more pressure on services coming from all angles, so this is why a nationally managed strategy is needed. (UK_SW9_F)

A growing concern expressed in the interviews regards the provision of access to education for children in care, both UASC and residents. Legislation obliges LAs to commission school places for unaccompanied children and children in care in general. Such places are funded by a combination of schemes: Pupil Premium Grant, Dedicated Schools Grant and, for UASC, the Controlling Migration Fund. Concern is expressed about the viability of those schemes in the near future.

The Controlling Migration Fund is at risk, there is no doubt about it, it is a political movement towards stopping arrivals rather than managing them. If that goes, there will be undue pressure on the Council to support the education provision that is expected to support. (UK_SW11_F)

Education is a worry to me and not just to me, I guess. The provision of it because funding is so unstable, and unpredictable with the effect that we might find ourselves to manage emergency situations concerning schooling as they happen, so not really early intervention, is it? For example, the DSG (note: *Dedicated Schools Grant*); its continuation depends on annual decisions that are unpredictable, the DSG is not ring-fenced, this created problems for planning and managing services. (UK_SW4_M)

5. Recommendations

Teachers

Not surprisingly, teachers' recommendations are coherent with their observation and evaluation of collaboration with other agencies. It appears that participants in the interviews do not recognise the need to change the strategy to support integration chosen by the school. Recommendations for improved concern support from external agencies, first and foremost in terms of funding.

The financial dimension is key more than anything really, the schools are independent in how they manage funding, but they cannot make them up if there aren't enough. (UK_T23_M)

Funding is pivotal to maintain the 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 an important component rather than a separated endeavour. A more robust and continued financial support is the most frequent recommendation by far; for this reason, a long series of excerpts are presented as follows:

More support would allow to employ more people and of course smaller classrooms endure less pressure with more possibility to work with children's individual needs. (UK_T17_F)

Integration in this country has always been seen as helping children settle down, really, with a lot of responsibility for individual schools to sort them out and of course funding becomes important. (UK_T32_F)

It is really up to the ability of the school to attract funding for projects and activities, there is competition in this respect. (UK_T16_F)

More investment in education overall helps everything including integration. (UK_T11_F)

More investment means smaller classes and more time to plan for individual needs. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel over and over with policies that are not backed up by investment in education. (UK_T42_F)

The more funding the more possibility to recruit staff the more time for each staff to work with children respecting their uniqueness, I think this is the point, rather than big but like shot in the dark projects often not in touch with the needs of the schools and children. (UK_T9_F)

Social workers

Besides their evident commitment to reduce inequalities based on socio-economic status, when it came to offering recommendations to improve the condition of UASC, social workers looked at specific, practical and often financial-related problems.

First, the awareness that being transferred to other LAs can affect negatively children's well-being, combined with the acknowledgement of the undue pressure on the LA exercised by the number of UASC in care, underpins a frequent demand for new arrivals on the coast of Kent to be directly transferred to local authorities who are under the 0.07% threshold.

The London Rota is not working, the pandemic has made it unviable because no other Borough is prepared to take children in the current state when services everywhere are already at the tipping point. It must be a legal and automatic process, there are thousands of LAs well under the 0.07% and children should be directed there as they are assessed by the HM. Which is by the way much better for them as they have the possibility to settle where they will stay without being pulled and pushed all the time. (UK_SW9_F)

Another recommendation concerns, not surprisingly, additional funding that are not related to the maintenance of children but to support the administrative and management costs.

From, let's say, 10 to 20 is not doubling the cots as the government seems to want to believe. There are more costs for bureaucracy and management, for instance to fulfil our duty function, not to consider one thing that is often not clear to the public. The big thing of the legal challenges that the Home Office continuously advances against previous age assessments, which demands so much work and costs to manage bureaucratically because it gets to the Borough, for instance taking children to court to be assessed. And let's not forget to stress to them that really money cannot buy. (UK_SW_1_M)

A final series of recommendations concern a clear and well-funded route for children who leave care as they become adults towards further education or employment opportunity. Most urgent, for the social workers interviewed, would be the commitment to secure the access universal services such as Housing Benefit and Universal Credit for care leavers who are granted indefinite leave to remain.

It is so important not for the services at that point, not for children's services but for the well-being of the person that the access to universal rights is made more straightforward, automatic without the need for further stressful and cumbersome assessment. Not knowing where to go for instance, without a clear support to access accommodation, is really scaring for many children as they move into adulthood and leave our care, and it can really end up in difficult situations and very unhealthy situation, physically but also socially (UK_SW7_F)

6. Conclusion

The results of the interview with professionals who work with migrant children, teachers and social workers have been discussed in the previous sections of this report. It is possible to summarise the discussion as follows:

- The majority of **teachers** do not observe any causal relationship between differences in educational performances and migrant background. Problems in educational attainment is often related to individual circumstances related to socio-economic status of the family.
- Whilst a minority of teachers observe that educational performances maybe negatively affected by the immigration background for newly arrived children, no teacher believes that the migrant background is directly related to poorer educational performances for second generation children or settled children.
- The majority of teachers position children as authors of valid knowledge and observe cultural diversity as an opportunity for education. Valuing all children as author of valid knowledge is a condition for an integration that does not depend on a view of migrant children as children in deficit. The choice to value each and every child's participation in education can be described as a participant as a 'pedagogy of listening'.
- Some teachers, however, observe cultural diversity as a risk for education, the challenge for teaching being to minimise that risk in order to support migrant children to achieve better performances. Looking at migrant children through the lenses of their deficit rather than the lenses of their capabilities can construct positions of marginalisation, transforming the categorisation of migrant children in the ingredient of self-fulfilling prophecies of educational problems.
- For teachers, the only challenge that can be related to migration background regards language. However, linguistic integration can be challenging only in the short term, immediately after the arrival of the child in the classroom. According to the teachers' contribution, linguistic integration is a swift and smooth process.

- Teachers reject any causal relationships between migration background and educational aspirations and expectations.
- Teachers' reflections on children's aspiration put the consequences of the pandemic at the centre. The consequences of the pandemic were considered by the participants in the interviews the most important variable also with regard to children's needs and associate with the socio-economic status of the family. Learning from home over extended periods of time generated new and unforeseen needs that affected less affluent families the most, doubling on the already existing effect of inequalities.
- The pandemic was at the centre of teacher's reflection on the factors influencing migrant children's participation and academic performances. However, the effects of the pandemic were not linked to linguistic or cultural variables; rather, the migrant background was mentioned with regard to the living arrangements that connotes migrant families more than indigenous one.
- Teachers recognise that peer networks are key in children's experiences. This holds true for either migrant children or children without an immigration background. The result that emerges more clearly from the interviews concerns the observation of positive peer-relationships in the classroom. Peer-support is observed as an instance of agency in some of the teachers' contribution. Children autonomously access the role of supporters of newly arrived classmates, independently from teachers' elicitation.
- Teachers are acutely aware of the effects of the pandemic on the network of peer-relationships; however, there is a shred optimism with regard to the ability of children to reconstruct their networks of relationships in school could be observed throughout the data from interviews, as illustrated by the excerpt below.
- Teachers did not refer to practices that could indicate some form of discrimination such as marginalisation, exclusion in the playground or during mealtime. Teachers do not observe exclusion or marginalisation even with regard to newly arrived children. The relatively young age of children was suggested as reason for the absence of obvious discriminatory practices.
- Most teachers express a positive outlook on migrant parents' engagement in their children's education. The use of several channels for communicating with families, including the Internet, is often recognised as key to secure a steady interaction with parents who could experience more difficulties in visiting teachers in schools.
- Teachers do not advance any causal link between migration background and expectations.
- The management of the pandemic, in particular schools' closure and, even when schools had been open, social distancing and limitation of interpersonal contact, greatly reduced the possibility of face-to-face interaction, hindering family-school partnership.
- Teachers' representations of integration can be articulated as follows: 1) For a large majority of participants, integration related to create favourable condition for children's personal expression, regardless of their background; 2) Integration is not only children's adaptation to the education system. Based on the widely subscribed idea of 'pedagogy of listening', participants recognise that if integration aims to be more than unidirectional assimilation, then teachers are required to adapt to the many ways in which children express themselves; 3) integration may be challenged by the socio-economic status of the family, which cuts across migration status or ethnicity. Promoting integration is first and foremost promoting equality of opportunities.
- Teachers describe a three-pronged strategy for the support of integration in schools: 1) Organisational procedures; 2) Partnership with families; 3) Active role recognised to other children in supporting integration of peers. Teachers consider peer-support as an important instrument to support integration.
- Regarding teachers' perspectives on collaboration with external agencies in the support of integration partnership with Local Authorities seems less important, replaced with direct links with the central government. However, the relationship with the central government is described as a relationship of command and control, rather than a relationship of collaboration.

- Also, with regard to the partnership with the central government, in particular in terms of funding, the effects of the pandemic were frequently mentioned as an important variable by the interviewees.
- Teachers' evaluation of the initiatives to support integration is closely related to the evaluation of the nature of relationships with external agencies. Whilst partnership with families is recognised as pivotal, a much less important role is assigned with collaboration with the different levels of government.
- The success of the effort to promote integration is systematically connected to the school's ethos and methods, rather than to guidelines and support from the central government.
- Not surprisingly, teachers' recommendations are coherent with their observation and evaluation of collaboration with other agencies. It appears that participants in the interviews do not recognise the need to change the strategy to support integration chosen by the school. Recommendations for improved concern support from external agencies, first and foremost in terms of funding.
- **Social workers** observe that whilst financial support from the central government has been continuing, the sheer number of UASC exercise a steady pressure on all social services.
- Social Workers express concern with regard to the provision of access to education for children in care, both UASC and residents.
- Partnership with families is key for social work and social care, with an important caveat: in some circumstances, rather than a partner, the family can be the context of dangerous situations that affect the well-being of the child. Dealing with multi-challenged families is part of the professional routine if the social worker. No causal connection was advanced between migrant background and family challenges. Similarly to teachers, social workers reject any association between migration or ethnic background and problematic profile of the family; rather, it is the socio-economic status that makes a difference.
- Social workers do not consider neither a migration background nor other culture-related variables as significant for the quality of partnership with families. As a leit-motif in social workers contributions, the relevant variable is the socio-economic status.
- Working with families is more problematic with UASC who, by definition, are separated from the family. However, the experience narrated by several social workers refers to a more complex situation where possible partnership with UASC families are made more difficult by government policies.
- Working with family and the position of the child in the family have been dramatically affected by the pandemic. The negative effects of the pandemic on vulnerable children cut across ethnicity and migration backgrounds. The management of the pandemic has affected working with UASC as well, in particular the maintenance of minimum level of safety in the shared spaces and often cramped spaces where UASC are accommodated while the LA is caring for them.
- With regard to interpersonal relationships with UASC, the primary task for social workers is to establish mutual trust. Lack of trust is observed by participants in the interview as a risk because it may discourage children to share issues or needs, hindering the early intervention model. Building trust, according to the social workers who took part in the interview, requires time, requires sharing experiences.
- Social workers recommendations to improve the condition of UASC concern the management of UASC distribution across LAs, more funding to support administrative and legal costs accessory to care of UASC and more determined commitment from the government to secure support to UASC as they enter adult and leave care.

APPENDIX: PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERVIEWS

	Profession T: Teacher SW: Social Worker	Gender F: Female M: Male
UK	T1	F
UK	T2	F
UK	T3	M
UK	T4	F
UK	T5	F
UK	T6	F
UK	T7	F
UK	T8	F
UK	T9	M
UK	T10	F
UK	T11	F
UK	T12	M
UK	T13	M
UK	T14	F
UK	T15	F
UK	T16	F
UK	T17	F
UK	T18	F
UK	T19	F
UK	T20	F
UK	T21	M
UK	T22	F

UK	T23	M
UK	T24	F
UK	T25	F
UK	T26	F
UK	T27	F
UK	T28	F
UK	T29	M
UK	T30	F
UK	T31	F
UK	T32	F
UK	T33	F
UK	T34	F
UK	T35	F
UK	T36	F
UK	T37	F
UK	T38	F
UK	T39	F
UK	T40	F
UK	T41	M
UK	T42	F
UK	SW1	M
UK	SW2	F
UK	SW3	M
UK	SW4	M
UK	SW5	M
UK	SW6	M
UK	SW7	F

UK	SW8	F
UK	SW9	F
UK	SW10	F
UK	SW11	F
UK	SW12	F
UK	SW13	F
UK	SW14	F

Student solidarity as an expression of agency amongst Belgian students

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1. Methodology

Qualitative fieldwork began in February 2020 with four focus groups being conducted in one school before lockdown began in March of 2020. Schools attempted to move to remote teaching as quickly as possible, but this process varied from region to region and even from school to school. After a period of fully remote teaching, Belgium moved to a hybrid system in May 2020 and that meant some students would be in the classroom while others would remain at home and continue distance learning. This was intended to reduce the number of students in the classroom and therefore reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. After this reopening, there were several school closures due to outbreaks of the virus. There was also an extension of the fall school holidays in 2020 due to the second wave of the virus. The new and quickly changing rules concerning visitors to schools made it nearly impossible to conduct in-person fieldwork for a large part of 2020 and 2021. This is why the Belgian team decided to conduct remote one-on-one interviews. Teachers were not willing to give up any class time for focus groups, mainly because they had lost so much teaching time during school closures and because lessons now took longer due to the complications of remote teaching. The research team attempted to arrange online focus groups after school hours, but many students would not show up. Given this complexity, it became necessary for the researchers to schedule one-on-one remote interviews with students.

The team reached out the schools who had participated in WP4, and used nonprobability and snowball sampling (Sigona and Hughes, 2012) to find participants. Participants were also reached through personal contacts. This resulted in 4 focus groups and 11 interviews being conducted with students in Brussels and in Wallonia. All participants went to school in large cities. Three interviews were conducted with students in ISCED 1 and the rest of the interviews and focus groups were with students in ISCED 2 and 3. From the individual interviews, 3 were male students and the rest were female. Only two students from the individual interviews reported having no migrant background. The interviews and focus groups were all conducted in French, with the exception of two which were conducted with a mix of French and English to facilitate the understanding of participants. All interviews were translated by the researchers.

Focus groups were conducted with entire classes because it was not possible to remove small groups of students from the classrooms. In this setting, it was not possible to ask students about their migrant background because this would risk alienating them and revealing information to their classmates that they may not wish to disclose. We heard from the teachers that their classes were mixed, with a large number of migrant background students, but they also did not know exact numbers. Teachers are not given this information by default and they are not likely to ask students. They understand who may have a migrant background by hearing general remarks from the administration, learning more about a student if there is a specific issue, knowing students' language abilities, meeting and speaking with parents, and from what students may share in class or private conversations. Given this, we did

not have information about students' backgrounds in focus groups, but were able to pose these questions in individual interviews.

For remote interviews, verbal consent was obtained from parents and children prior to the interview. Participants did not all have access to printers and scanners in their homes, so oral consent was the only option in these cases.

Conducting remote one-on-one interviews was quite effective as students were more likely to show up for one-on-one interviews than for group sessions, and older students could use their mobile phones. This meant they had more flexibility and privacy in terms of the location of the interview. Despite this, students were often still at home during the interviews and were regularly disrupted by family or other distractions. The other issue was that students who used mobile phones sometimes did not have access to Wi-Fi internet and had to use the data on their mobile device, which can be costly and the service can at times be patchy.

Table 1: Focus Groups

Focus Group Number	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Ages	Location
1	9	9	13-14	Wallonia
2	8	16	14-16	Wallonia
3	11	12	12-14	Wallonia
4	13	11	14-15	Wallonia
Total: 4	41	48		

Table 2: Individual Interviews

Student #	Male	Female	Non-binary	Age	Migrant background	Location
1		X		16	None	Wallonia
2		X		16	3 rd gen Spain and Italy	Wallonia
3		X		16	1 st gen Albania	Wallonia
4		X		16	3 rd gen	Wallonia

5		X		16	2 nd gen Burkina Faso	Wallonia
6		X		16	2 nd gen Morocco	Wallonia
7		X		16	None	Wallonia
8	X			14	3 rd gen Spain and Italy	Wallonia
9		X		10	1 st gen Italy	Brussels
10	X			8	1 st gen UK	Brussels
11	X			9	1 st gen UK	Brussels
Totals:	3	8				

2. School as lived space

Real school - ideal school

When asked what they would improve about their school, or what their ideal school would be like, students' responses fell into three general categories: 1) Environment and routine, 2) course content and activities, and 3) Affective and relational dimensions of school.

Environment and Routine

In terms of environment and routine, teenage students (ISCED 3) in focus groups stated that technology was a key area for improvement. They said their school experience would be enhanced by interactive white boards and all students having access to computers (both inside and outside of classroom). This was not something that was mentioned as often in the individual interviews, however. Students in focus groups also largely agreed that classrooms were too small for the number of students, and one focus group stated they would like to have a garden and a place where they could nap (FG3, ages 12-14). It is important to note here that all focus groups were held in person in the students' classrooms while one-on-one interviews were conducted remotely, mostly while students were in their homes. This may have had some impact on why students in FGs spoke more about the physical environment of the school, because they were in this environment during the conversation. In fact, one student in FG3 pointed out of the window, indicating the wire at the top of the gate. He

said that this made the school look like a prison. The physical environment was a significant part of what made students in focus groups feel welcome, comfortable, and at ease.

Students were mostly in agreement that the school day was too long and too full. In an ideal school they would start later, have longer breaks, and have less homework. Students felt that what could be accomplished in a six-hour school day should be enough, and then they should be allowed free time at home. They also wanted to break up the routine of the school day and have more opportunities to move physically. Students mentioned that since going back to school during the COVID pandemic, their movement during class has been greatly restricted. While they acknowledged that they didn't have much freedom to move before the pandemic, they found that they were even more strictly confined to their seats in the current situation. They would prefer a school where they didn't have to ask for permission to go to the bathroom, throw something in the trash bin, have a drink at their desk, or get up to stretch their legs. Another rule directing their movement is that students are required to stand up when a teacher or educator²⁸ enters the room. They must be given permission to sit back down. Students had mixed opinions on this practice. Many said they didn't mind because it was a sign of respect, but others had negative feelings about it. Student 8 [16 years old, boy, third generation migrant, Spain and Italy] did not like the way this practice made him feel. "I know it's a form of respect from us, because they're older than us and everything, but I feel like we're submissive" (BE_I6_B). He, and other students, found this practice to be contrary to the agency of students, and disliked the way it reinforced the already strong hierarchy in the school. Students in FG2 spoke fondly of a time when they told a teacher that they did not like the positioning of their desks and the teacher allowed them to make changes. They appreciated this ability to adjust their environment to suit their own needs and found that they were not often given this type of opportunity.

In the 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 of girls. They did not want to be separated by gender for sports practice and gym class, and they wanted to have the opportunity to participate in the same activities. One girl (BE_F2_1_G) mentioned that the girls did not get the chance to play football and she disliked the fact that this was an activity reserved for the boys. While this topic came up in several focus groups, FG2 was very focused on the topic of different treatment based on gender. They explained that the educators have extra clothes in their office for students who the educators deemed to be dressed inappropriately, and these are normally female students. Students saw make-up and their clothing as expressions of their identity that were being inhibited by the school's rules.

Simply having fewer rules was a common component of an ideal school that came out in the focus groups and interviews alike. Rules like not being able to freely drink water or to go to the toilet, restricted their movement, but students said they were also unable to speak freely or to have their mobile phones in class. One student stated, "they do not trust us" (BE_F2_2_B) and in another focus

²⁸Educators in French Community education support the education of students by offering support similar to that of social workers and concerning themselves with children's psychosocial wellbeing. They work in schools on a daily basis.

group a student stated, “they should trust us” (BE_F1_1_B). In FG3, one male student was clear that he and other students understood that some rules were necessary, like rules against fighting, but other rules were unnecessary and the students would behave well without them. Students were asking for space to exercise their agency (Baraldi 2014) and felt that the imposition of too many rules showed that they were not trusted and that the school often expected the worst from them.

Being able to give their input about how the school and classroom should function was highly valued by students, and it was younger students who reported having this opportunity. Student 9 (10 years old, girl, migrant, Italy) said that in her school there are designated areas for different kinds of activities, and these places were colour coded. In the green zone one must be calm and quiet, in orange zones one can run and do whatever one wants, and blue zones are for organized sports. She explained that if there weren’t at least some rules it would be too chaotic. “Because, if we don’t, it’s poop!” [BE_I6_G]. She also explained that the school has a place, like a suggestion box, where students can submit their ideas. She and the two other primary school students who were interviewed spoke about a kind of student council, and each class has a meeting where teachers and the staff listen to the concerns of the students. If this kind of system exists for the older students, they did not mention it, which could speak to their perception of the efficacy of such a system. In fact, Student 3 (16 years old, girl, first generation migrant, Albania) told a story about when she and her classmates tried to express their opinion about the school dress code, and the result was that they felt a complete lack of support from the school.

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)

It was female students who were impacted most often by the dress codes at school, but the problem the student is referring to above is lack of communication about the rule. She felt that even female staff members at the school didn’t empathize with the female students and she was upset that students were not supported in sharing their opinion. Students’ agency in this case was being hindered and they were being sent the message that their clothing and hanging posters were not ways they were going to be allowed to express themselves. In this example, Student 3 is an example of students’ voices not being heard.

Course content and activities

Almost all of the students, both migrant and non-migrant, defined their ideal school in ways that echoed the tenants 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. Students also said their ideal school would be a place free from harassment, and that currently harassment is a significant problem in their institution. Students do not have much flexibility in choosing their classes and they must take the classes that are required by the school administration. What came out in focus groups and interviews is that students would like to have options in their course schedule and a larger variety of classes to choose from. They often felt that the classes they were required to take were not

relevant for their future and also did not offer them help with their current struggles. Student 2 (16 years old, girl, third generation migrant with family from Spain and Italy) said she would like, “more lessons about society, about the interactions that you may or may not have. Lessons that explain that some people don’t think like you...” (BE_I2_G). Another student suggested that first aid be on offer at school and several others talked about trainings and classes concerning harassment. “Especially having an educational team in relation to harassment etc. because at the moment there is a lot of it” (BE_I3_G).

When asked about tensions in the classroom, this same student explained that there was a group of other girls in her class who mocked her and her friends. In an ideal school, these tensions would be more quickly and effectively addressed, and this will be further discussed in the next section.

As stated above, students said that in their ideal school, the courses would be easier to follow. This means there would be less content and it would be covered over a longer period of time. They also spoke about fewer exams and envisioned a place where it would be easier to ask questions (as will also be explained in more detail in the next section). These issues were raised in interviews and focus groups with students in ISCED 1, 2 and 3, so there was not a difference on this topic based on age, though Student 9 -from ISCED 1 -was the only student who stated that her classes were too easy and she did not like this. “It’s better when there’s more work to do” (BE_I9_G).

A key component of students’ ideal schools was also that teachers would be more attentive to the class and “*live* their jobs” (Student 5, 16 years old, girl, second generation migrant with family from Burkina Faso), “Love their job” (Student 1, 16 years old, girl, no migrant background). One student (student 8, 14 years old, boy, third generation migrant with family from Spain and Italy), described how he sometimes saw teachers behave in class.

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)

Engaged teachers, who use active pedagogy and participatory methods and a mixture of class activities (such as a mix of group and individual work) were an important part of an ideal school. An important caveat, however, was that students wanted the *option* to engage, speak out, work with others or alone, and answer questions. They did not want to be forced into any of these activities, which would also be a way of limiting students’ agency in the classroom. “I like it when you can manage your work and participate, but also when the teachers at different times take charge of the course” (BE_I2_G).

Fewer restrictions on communication between students was also important. Students wanted to be able to support one another and ask for help or explanations from their peers. This was especially important if they were having trouble understanding the teacher’s explanation. Students ask for teachers to “leave free communication between the pupils when necessary” (BE_I3_G). They also wanted to have a mix of group and individual work, and to be able to have discussions. One student found that the more the students were trusted by the teachers, the more focused on tasks the students were, and they could have fun while also learning.

The French teacher had a very fun lesson and put us in a group to discuss the lesson. Since the lesson was well done, we discussed the lesson and we didn't go all over the place. We

were really in a playful spirit of the course and I found it very well done, but otherwise yes, everything that is physical or playful I find nice. [...] I like it when you take the students' advice and try to conclude something with the lesson. In French it's more like that. In French we discuss, we try to see what can be linked to the course. (BE_I7_G)

The overwhelming majority of students in focus groups and interviews disliked the traditional classroom lectures. Student 3 described this as when the teacher just speaks, the students write, and nothing more happens in the class. This was the way most classes were conducted in students' schools, and they appreciated any divergence from this model. In focus group 3, several students said they wanted to engage in activities with the teacher and answer questions, and that it “would be better if we were able to express ourselves” (BE_F3_3_G). They spoke highly of teachers who took them on outings or were creative with their classes and tried to teach the material in many different ways, as Student 7 (16 years old, girl, no migrant background) explains below.

I find it really interesting to be able to learn one thing but in another way at the same time and it hooks us more into the material I find. Going out, going to a museum that is interesting [like what's done in Latin class] makes us want to learn the subject related to that even more in class. (BE_I7_G)

Finally, students spoke about the timing and scheduling of exams. They wished for their input to be considered when it came to planning exams because they were often overwhelmed by having too many exams on the same day, or having an exam too quickly after learning the material. They wanted to be more in charge of their own schedules. Only student 9, from ISCED 1, reported having input in when she would take an exam. “You can also choose in some classes, like in math, which day you would like to take an exam” (BE_I9_G). According to Student 6 (16 years old, girl, second-generation migrant, Morocco), in an ideal school, teachers would ask for students' opinion on most of the organisational issues in the class.

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)

Students said they realised it would not be realistic to expect to have complete freedom, no rules, and control over every aspect of their learning and school day. They did, however, feel that it would be possible for their opinions to be considered more readily and for them to be trusted to do their work and organise themselves, and overall, to have their agency respected.

Affective and relational dimensions of school

Students' ideal school included an environment that was free of harassment and where they felt free to express themselves. When speaking about their current schools, some students expressed issues with teachers, principals, prefects, and educators, while others cited problems with their classmates. Students gave mixed reviews of all of these groups, their level of trust in them, and their degree of closeness. It was certainly the case that younger students felt a higher degree of trust in their teachers, found them ‘nice’, and were willing to confide in them. “We can share things. I trust them” (BE_I9_G). Even when students in ISCED 1 stated that their teachers were strict, they nearly always qualified these kinds of statements by saying that they still understood that the teachers cared about them and worked hard for them. The responses from students in ISCED 2 and 3 were far more mixed.

The students in ISCED 2 and 3 also had a great deal more to say about their interactions with the PMS 29 and educators.

Hierarchical relationships between students and school staff

Many students in ISCED 2 and 3 mentioned their distaste for the hierarchy in their schools. They said that many of their teachers made it clear that teachers had the power in the classroom, and this diminished students' desire to participate and, as a result, their agency. In FG 2, a student stated that the teachers felt superior to the students and Student 2 stated that because of the strict hierarchy, the relationship between teachers and students was one of distance. "The relationship between teachers and students, well, we are distant. With some, there is a little more affection I will say, but with others not at all. It's more politeness, and that's it" (BE_I2_G). Student 2 and 3 were also very clear that they would not report a teacher to the principal or some other school authority if they had a problem. Due to the hierarchy in the school, they felt school staff would always side with the teacher.

Interviewer: If there is tension with the teachers, how is the situation handled?

Student 2: 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_I2_G)

In fact, most students said that they did not feel comfortable going to teachers or the school administration if they had problems with a teacher. Most students in focus groups said it was clear to them that the principal and other school staff would usually side with the teacher if there was a conflict. "The management does not often believe the students and often agrees with the teachers. Even a teacher against a class, it's usually the teacher who is right". [BE_I8_B].

Many students also said they wouldn't go to teachers or school staff if they had personal problems or issues with other students.

Student 2: 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.

Interviewer: How did you go about fixing the problem?

Student 2: 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)

²⁹ The Psycho-Medico-Social (PMS) centres are free public services which offer social workers and psychological support. They are readily used by schools in Wallonia. <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24633&navi=365>

Even Student 9, who was very trusting of and close with her teachers, expressed dissatisfaction with how teachers handled conflicts when she reported them.

If we tell things to the teachers or educators, they will say, well you're older so if a younger kid hits you it's nothing. Or girls don't do anything. I don't like this because there are certain girls who do things. And little kids do too. [BE_I9_G]

She wanted to be listened to and believed, and not have teachers basing their reactions on preconceived ideas of age or gender. Even students who were willing to go to teachers with an issue did not go to them as a first course of action.

Interviewer: If you have a problem, who would you go to?

Student 7: To my friends I think, and then to my teachers with whom I get along well. Maybe to an educator. If my main educator returns, I will go to him. [BE_I7_G]

At the time of the interview she was having problems with a group of girls in her class and said that the only thing she can do is ignore them. If the teachers don't directly see what's happening then there is really nothing that can be done. Another student witnessed discriminatory behaviour from a teacher (as will be described in the following section) and explained why she and her classmates would not go to the administration to report this.

Student 6: Well, we [the students] are upset but we can't do anything since this teacher is in charge... So it's no use getting upset. We say to ourselves that we have 1 year and a half left with her and therefore it's not serious.

Interviewer: So you don't dare to go to the direction?

Student 6: 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)

Students were also concerned about the perceptions that teachers had of them, and the fact that teachers sometimes showed favouritism. Students in FG1 felt that teachers always kept their first impression of a student. If one was labelled as a troublemaker or bad student on the first day of school, then this label followed them even if the student had made significant changes. One student was very open about the problematic past behaviour that ultimately got him expelled from his last school.

Well, me two years ago, I was a bit the student that nobody liked. So I had the impression that they [the teachers] decided that "yes, we will listen to him, but we will not really answer anyway. He is the bad student, so it is useless for us to teach him." (BE_I8_B)

This student also said that his reputation as a troublemaker preceded him and so teachers had preconceived ideas about him.

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)

Despite saying that these kinds of comments and perceptions of him did not bother him, this student recounted these experiences in great detail, so it would appear they had an impact on him. Even students who considered themselves to be attentive and well-behaved students worried about being labelled, misunderstood, or judged by teachers.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a teacher put a label on you?

Student 3: I'm going to say, yes. A stupid example is, you understand the material but just a little exercise, you ask the question and the teacher will say to you "but are you doing it on purpose, or are you just stupid?" Just that, it stops the communication and the desire to work. (BE_I3_G)

These types of experiences made students mistrustful of teachers in general and also inhibited their agency and hybrid integration. Classroom management and relationships with teachers are key factors in students' learning (Fisher et al. 2002, Slee and Cook 1994, Buswell et al. 1999), so mistrust of teachers can impact not only students' emotional wellbeing, but also their school performance. In the case of Student 3, we see an example of this because she was no longer willing to ask questions in class. It appeared that her confidence had been injured. Despite this negative experience, Student 3 still reported that most teachers listened to the students. If she had a problem, she would still go to a teacher, but she was careful to go to the teachers who were not judgemental.

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)

Student 5 described one such non-judgemental teacher as the French teacher. She enjoyed this class and felt that students were free to express their opinions and have debates on difficult topics. This was possible because the teacher was open and respected the students' agency.

She always listens to our opinions. She always establishes the rule of "we do not judge anyone". Everyone has the right to speak, so we are more comfortable in class. We participate more because we are more used to talking with her so it is good. (BE_I5_G)

The teacher lets the students propose and choose debate topics, therefore promoting their agency. The environment of the classroom is also such that after the debate, if there have been tensions, things go back to normal and the students don't hold grudges. This student also highlighted that there were some teachers who supported students in achieving specific goals and making changes in the schools. She gave an example of two boys who wanted to have classes outside. They worked with a teacher to get the proposal approved. She felt positively about this situation and the way students were encouraged to be leaders.

Students were very attentive to how their teachers perceived them and which teachers adhered to traditional hierarchical classroom relationships. They tended to prefer the classes where teachers were open, respected their agency, and simply listened to their ideas and questions without judgement. These are indeed important aspects for the empowering of dialogue and thus of hybrid integration. While students agreed that this was the kind of teacher and classroom they preferred, some students reported having many teachers like this, while others found them to be rare.

Discriminatory behaviour of teachers

In terms of the different treatment of students based on the background, several students cited examples that they found problematic. Student 6, who is a second-generation migrant of Moroccan background, said that she has one teacher who clearly shows preferences based on a student's background.

In chemistry we have a teacher who has a lot of preferences. Suddenly, I work a lot, and when I work, I cut the teacher off when she speaks. But I don't do it on purpose. And she answers me kindly. And there is a friend of mine who is Pakistani and he as soon as he

speaks, she yells at him, while two seconds before I did the same thing as him. She yells at him as soon as he speaks and it pisses me off when the little white guy, even the little white guy who doesn't work, she's going to be nice to him. While he was just asking one more class related question and she yelled at him, and many times she did that to him. Or like if it's a little white guy who doesn't knock on the door, she won't say anything to him but if he's a Chechen or someone, she will scream. (BE_I6_G)

She further explained that she and her classmates won't report this kind of behaviour because it won't resolve the situation and will just make their lives more difficult. As explained in the previous sections, students were mistrustful of the school management and hierarchy, so they often don't report problematic behaviour of school staff.

Student 2 (3rd generation migrant with family from Spain and Italy) had a very similar story, and stated the she noticed one teacher treated students with Belgian names differently from those who had names that sounded like they were from other origins. She said that this teacher was patient with the questions of students with Belgian names and aggressive with the rest. She also stated that even though many of the students had noticed this behaviour, and that the students spoke about it amongst themselves, it was never reported and they didn't know what to do about it. Two students with no migrant background, Student 1 and Student 7, stated they never saw a teacher treat a migrant student differently than other students. "I know there are those who complain about different treatment because of their origins, but I have never seen one" [BE_I7_G]. This student, and many students of a migrant background, also found that discussions and debates on racism and religious differences in the classroom always proceeded smoothly and didn't pose any problems.

Confidentiality and trust

A key concern that students had was that teachers, educators and the PMS staff did not adhere to confidentiality rules. Students in FG1 actually described teachers as unwelcome intruders in their private lives. A student gave an example of having shared some confidential information with a teacher and then hearing the teacher speaking about this topic on the playground where other students could overhear. In FG 2 the most that was said about the PMS was that the students did not use these services. 'We don't go there, if we have a problem, we keep it'. Students in FG4 who reported that they had used the services of the PMS, said that one could not be certain that confidentiality would be upheld. Most of the students who spoke at length about the PMS were female. One female student stated that the PMS staff always shared things about the students that were meant to be confidential, while two other female students said it depended on the staff member. Some staff would respect your privacy while others could not be trusted. Two other students in this focus group, both female, felt that the PMS always respected their privacy and one said that they really helped her. In one-on-one interviews with students in ISCED 2 and 3, most of the students said that they had never used the PMS services. Some said they would go there if they felt they needed to, and others said they had seen their friends use these services and these friends had positive experiences. Whether or not confidentiality was actually breached, the perception of the PMS or teachers as untrustworthy was problematic and increased students' reluctance to ask for help and feel safe in the school environment.

Classmates

While students said that harassment amongst students was a problem, many students also reported a high level of trust and strong friendships amongst classmates. When asked about his ideal school, Student 8 said that an ideal school would be where no students were marginalised or put down by

other students. “That there are not ‘more powerful groups’ in the sense that certain groups are persecuted, etc...and that no one be rejected” (BE_I8_B).

This shows that he had experienced school environments where he felt that many students were rejected and persecuted. Several other students reported that harassment amongst students was a problem, and Student 2 described a situation where she reported a group of female students for insulting her and her friends. She said she went to the prefect, kept proof in the form of screen shots of messages that rose to the level of harassment, and finally told the harassers that she would go to the police. This is when the harassment finally ended.

On the other hand, many students had only positive things to say about the relationships between classmates. Student 8 said that in his previous school there were situations of harassment and rejection between students, but he evaluated his current school more positively. He stated that, “at the student level, everyone is friends with everyone, I see no persecution” (BE_I8_B). A student in FG1 stated that classmates were less judgemental than teachers, so one had better trust in their classmates. Especially in cases where students felt teachers weren’t answering their questions or listening to them, solidarity and peer support began to grow. “Suddenly, in this kind of case, we stop asking questions to the teachers and we ask the questions among ourselves” (BE_I1_G). This kind of situation, and solidarity, occurred even more frequently as students tried to manage hybrid learning during the COVID pandemic, as will be discussed in more detail in the section about school during the pandemic. Students in FG 2 explained that they have an Instagram group to help each other if they have questions about the class, but then they added that not every student in the class was in the group³⁰. In general, even if the students said that they had some problems with certain students, they felt that the students mostly got along with each other. As will be discussed in more detail in the section on intercultural relations, students almost never reported experiencing or witnessing racism and discrimination amongst students, while they did sometimes see this kind of behaviour from teachers.

Educational aspirations

Students’ educational aspirations did not seem to be divided along lines of gender, migrant background, or age. Nearly all of the students said they wanted to go on to higher education and they mentioned a variety of different careers and courses of study.

In FG2, the professions that students mentioned were lawyer, police officer, and graphic designer. The majority of the respondents said that they thought they will still be living in the city of Liège, which is where the school was located and where most of them were currently living. Even when students didn’t have an idea of what they wanted to do for a profession, they still said that they imagined that in 10 years they would either still be studying or have completed their studies.

I might be working if I have finished college. Be a biologist and doing a job I love.
(BE_I5_G – second generation migrant)

³⁰ It wasn’t clear why this was the case, and we did not pursue this line of questioning in case it made some students feel singled out.

In 10 years I will try to continue my studies, to be fairly independent and to continue my studies and to have a stable job after my studies which I like anyway. (BE_I3_G – first generation migrant)

Student 1, who had no migrant background, and student 3, a first-generation migrant from Albania, both said they would be studying medicine in 10 years' time. Most respondents had ambitious plans for rigorous courses of study. Overall, students seemed to value education and stated that they felt it was important for their futures.

Students also shared, however, that they felt the content of courses was often not important for life outside of school. As stated previously, they wanted more content that was about 'real life' and they wanted more flexibility in exams and how their school performance was evaluated in general. Only a student in ISCED 1, Student 9, stated that evaluations were not only fair, but helpful. She explained that they had quizzes almost every week and that this helped the teacher to see where the students were struggling and how they can be supported. Additionally, she found that teachers were thoughtful in the way they gave marks. She explained the philosophy that she'd heard from her teachers.

The teachers say they won't give the worst marks to students because if you get the worst mark you'll only think about that and not concentrate on other things. It's better to continue. So they'll say, pay attention to this and we'll still move on. (BE_I9_G)

Some students mentioned feeling sorry for those who got bad marks because they assumed the parents of these students would be upset. None of the students mentioned this about their own parents, however, and they seemed to find their parents to be supportive and understanding.

School during the pandemic

The pandemic appeared to impact younger and older students very differently. The students from ISCED 1 did not have much to say about school during the pandemic. When asked about it, they shrugged their shoulders and said it was fine but not as much fun as going to school. Older students, however, had a lot to say about the impact it had on their school work and their wellbeing. As stated in the methodology section, school during the pandemic went from being entirely shut down, to entirely remote, to a hybrid system of spending some days in the classroom and some days learning remotely. Currently, most students are again back in the classroom full time. While we were conducting our interviews, students were still unsure about how the end of the year exams would take place. Older students were eager to talk about school during the pandemic, how their lives had been affected, and what they liked and didn't like about school during this period.

Students highlighted that they liked being able to work from home, but they disagreed on other aspects. Some students said they felt more comfortable asking questions when people couldn't see their faces, while others said they had been more likely to ask questions in person and found that setting less intimidating. One student highlighted that she needed to be monitored in order to focus in class, and when learning remotely she would often fall asleep, feel distracted, and struggle to find motivation. Another student said that if teachers had done things the way they were meant to, then they would have been more accessible than before. The teachers had certain times where they were meant to be available for questions, but the students said that many teachers did not respect this and were in fact, not available. Several students said that the system could work well for students who were very organised and who had access to the proper technology and resources, but it only made

things worse for those who were already struggling in their classes and those who had limited resources – which is also what teachers reported.

Technology, access to it and training on how to use it, was a major cause of concern during pandemic learning. Students reported not having access to computers during the first session of remote learning and struggling to follow lessons on their mobile phones. Often, the family computer was reserved for parents working from home or for younger siblings. In the later stages of the pandemic, students were sometimes able to borrow a computer from the school. Students also said they weren't taught how to use the technologies they needed to follow their course and that there were often technical issues that kept them from properly following their classes.

For older students, it was not the case that they didn't like the remote and hybrid systems in general, but they cited the lack of organisation on the part of their schools. They disliked the fact that they sometimes had assignments and homework on material that teachers hadn't taught them. Students were sympathetic to the difficulties of teachers, and reported that some teachers were struggling to organize themselves, and felt a great deal of pressure, and then this negatively impacted the students in class. Some students, however, felt that many teachers and school administrators didn't listen to them or take their suggestions into account. Rather than the remote teaching/learning system being the problem, students saw the lack of resources and access to technology as a key issue that kept the system from working for everyone, and in fact was contrary to the tenants of inclusive education (Fisher et al. 2002). Students also felt that there was too much homework and not enough class time. New material was not fully explained, but then they were expected to take quizzes and complete the homework. "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]. Most of the students reported being more stressed during this period because of the added pressure of learning the material on one's own and having to be very self-motivated.

Students were divided on whether or not they got sufficient support from the school during the pandemic. Some reported that there was no support and they were on their own and not listened to, while others said that educators were even more attentive to the needs of students and were very understanding. During a focus group one student explained that she needed tutoring and the extra supports that were offered at school. All of these activities were suspended during the early stages of the pandemic and she would try to get help remotely but found that it took a long time to get responses from teachers and educators. Students also felt that their agency was less respected during the pandemic. Student 7 said that she appreciated that educators called their homes during remote learning to check in on students, but the educators spoke only with parents.

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)

Students in FG 4 were also sceptical about the efforts of school staff to support them. "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]. This student found that educators lacked empathy and didn't listen to students, again not respecting children's agency.

What students did agree on, in terms of support during the pandemic, was that the pandemic led to increased student solidarity. Below are comments from students in FG4.

Greater solidarity compared to the period before COVID. Young people help each other. We all have to help each other so that there aren't any who fall behind. (BE_FG4_4_G)

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_FG4_5_G)

Students were supporting each other with technology issues, questions about class material, and emotional concerns.

3. Intercultural relations at school

Students overwhelmingly described their schools as diverse and as having students from many different backgrounds. Overall, students said they appreciated the diversity in their schools and felt free to talk about it, even if these topics were spoken about more outside of the classroom than inside the classroom. “In my school there's a lot of culture so it's cool and like there's not too much racism between the students and everything. We get along well” [BE_I6_G]. Another student stated, “I think there are two or three Belgians in my class, all the others have foreign origins” [BE_I8_B].

Students overwhelmingly reported that they did not think it was not against the rules to speak other languages. A few students said that they heard students speaking other languages, but they never found it to be something that separated people. Additionally, students felt that most students were able to speak French very well. “I can hear several languages a bit, sometimes words and phrases and all, but not big conversations. It's not forbidden in the school rules and you never have an educator who made the remark” [BE_I8_B]. Student 9 said that she didn't have classmates who spoke her native language (Italian), so she only speaks French at school and with her friends, though she did notice other students speaking other languages amongst themselves.

More than language or migrant background, however, students noted that groups were often divided based on race and class. Student 8, a third-generation migrant with family from Spain and Italy, explained a division between students in the following way:

Student 8: We don't pay attention to the origins. I don't notice that. Well, yes and no, because in fact, there are classes, this will be a bit cliché I warn... Especially the Latin classes, where there are a lot of, it's cliché eh, rich whites. So they stay with the rich whites in the yard. Otherwise, no, not really. There is diversity in the groups.

Interviewer: So you think there is a rich white group and the others, is that it?

Student 8: Well no, not all white, rich people (laughs), they do not form a clan among themselves, but there are several groups like that of people who are white and rich and who stay among themselves. Now I don't know if they're sticking around each other because they don't want to hang out with people of other origins, or if it's just because they're in the same class.

Interviewer: What are the differences between them and the others?

Student 8: I'm not in that group, so I'm going to talk about myself now. They do fewer stupid things, they are less, in quotes, 'bad students'. This is the wrong word, 'difficult-students'. They are 'good students'. (BE_I8_B)

While students generally felt they and their classmates were well integrated in terms of getting along well, understanding each other, being able to speak about differences, etc. they also agreed that structural supports for integration were lacking. When it came to language support for migrant students, Student 7, who had no migrant background, summed up the situation in a way that illustrates what most respondents expressed. She stated that she felt migrant students who did not speak French were on their own and got very little support from the school. "I think they're a little bit out on their own. ... Well, I don't know any particularly myself, but I suspect that the teachers don't necessarily try to help them" [BE_I7_G]. Student 6, a second-generation migrant of Moroccan origin, confirmed this concern. While she explained that it wasn't a problem when she spoke Arabic in certain school situations, she stated that students are expected to interpret for their parents. If the student does not understand something, then there is nothing done to resolve this misunderstanding or to pass this missing information to the parents. "Often, when parents do not speak the language, often the children come and suddenly they interpret. That can happen, but the pupils who do not understand, there is nothing to help them. They will be left like that." [BE_I6_G]. She said that she only spoke Arabic on the playground, out of earshot of the teachers, and she only spoke it in front of her teachers if her parents were present.

Student 3 was a first-generation migrant (from Albania), and stated that the official integration structures from the school were basically non-existent. Newcomers relied on other classmates if they needed support in their integration.

From this point of view, from the outside, it is clear that the other students integrate a student better than the principal. The management, the first day the student is introduced to the teachers, they are there saying, "yes if you need help we are there, we are there, we are there." But the student does not know how to express himself if he's new, so we are really trying to integrate him. 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). This shows how, at a managerial level integration is still conceived as a unidirectional process, while the students request for more innovative and based on listening and mutual engagement processes, which would lead to hybrid forms of integration.

While students were generally in agreement that teachers handled diversity in the classroom with no major problems, they also said that there were not many organized activities concerning diversity.

Interviewer: How do teachers react to diversity in the classroom?

Student 3: Generally good because we are a class with so many origins and cultures so they all react well and often we talk to our history teacher about all that. No, they are all responding well. (BE_I3_G)

Student 5: Yes, I think they handle it well. There is no racism, no differences either and I think we all get along. (BE_I5_G)

Student 1, who had no migrant background, said specifically that she wished there were more formal initiatives to speak about diversity. She appreciated speaking about cultural backgrounds and

traditions and differences with her friends, but she would like to also hear about the experiences of people she didn't know and to have discussions with a wider group. This kind of initiatives would also enhance opportunities for hybrid integration. Research into multicultural education has found that teachers are often unprepared to teach a diverse group of students, and have very few tools to use in addressing cultural diversity in the classroom. This can mean that classroom management suffers as a result (Neito 2017: 2). Researchers stress, however, that it is school governance, rather than teachers, where one should look for solutions to this issue. The key issue is that school governance does not offer training opportunities and the proper support to teachers (McAndrew 2013; Banton 2015; Shepherd and Linn 2015).

For these reasons, their favourite subjects were usually recreation time, or their French class. Many students, in 2 different schools, stated their favourite subject was French because they discussed interesting topics and were welcome to share their opinion. Student 9 said that her favourite classes were French and math, both for the same reasons – they were given a great deal of freedom by the teachers.

4. Identity and belonging

Students did not often highlight their migrant background during interviews and focus groups, but they did repeatedly speak about the diversity of their classrooms. Their experiences of how their classmates responded to diversity was overwhelmingly positive, with only one student saying that her classmates were not open-minded (Student 7). As stated above, students did not report forming groups or cliques based on their migratory background (or lack thereof), and they often described friend groups and the classroom atmosphere, as mixed: “We all mix. That I think is good, because we learn about others, they learn about us, and we don't highlight any differences between us. We all really stay together” (BE_I5_G). Even when students talked about classmates who were proud of their origins, this was not described in a negative way.

In my class there are some who are very, very proud of their origins, so we talk about it. We talk about it often. Cultures, what they do on vacation, and all that ... I dunno, their traditions how it goes. All that stuff. (BE_I1_G)

Even when there were debates, they were described as respectful and fruitful and they did not cause tensions.

Interviewer: Do you have any debates between yourselves on this subject?

Student 1: Oolala a lot of debate very often. How cool is that because we share a lot of stuff.

Interviewer: Has it ever happened that there is tension?

Student 1: No, not really because, since we share our culture and all that, we can't get upset. You may not agree with one culture, so you can just say you disagree, but there is no reason to be upset. We talk about everything. Sometimes we talk about marriage traditions, sometimes religions, we talk about everything in general.

I: Do you usually talk about it in class or outside?

O: No, outside of the classroom. During recess or study hours.

Students explained that they often talked about these kinds of topics outside of structured class time, but that they spoke about their backgrounds very often and some students reported having these conversations with the whole class.

Student 2: It's the whole class. In fact, in my class now we get along well, and there is a bit of all origins. So now in some lessons we talk about it, or at lunch time when we are all together: either anecdotes or we notice the common points or the differences etc ... For the anecdotes, it's how it is with grandparents, how it is on vacation with the family, things like that, what we eat.

Interviewer: Does that help you bond?

Student 2: Yes, I find it does. Besides, we like to learn about other cultures and all that, so I never had the impression that someone was criticizing a culture or an origin. It's always benevolent. (BE_I2_G)

Students expressed that they often shared with their classmates about their families and how things worked in their households. Things like rules, what parents allow and expect, and family and cultural traditions were often topics of discussion. While most students said they did not have friend groups based on their origins, Student 6 (second generation migrant, Moroccan background) explained that sometimes she saw these kinds of groups, but mainly among girls.

Between me and my friends, we are multicultural. But it is possible that there is a group of Arab girls. It can happen, yes it can. But the boys, often they mix, and the girls often put themselves between them. Like, because they speak their language. Me, I'm with the girls, but we're multicultural, so that's fine, but there are groups in the playground where it's the same culture. (BE_I6_G)

While some groupings of students were based on migratory origins, students mainly highlighted the multicultural nature of their schools, classes, and friend groups. They also stressed the fact that they were able to discuss cultural particularities amongst each other without fear of judgement or being ostracised. When students did speak about harassment from other students, they did not seem to connect this to racism or cultural differences. Their hybrid identities (Nair-Venugopal 2009) were not only accepted but appeared to be the norm in their peer groups. Students, both migrant and non-migrant, did not expect classmates and friends to assimilate into a specific cultural identity and were constantly engaged in social negotiations (Holliday 2011; Piller 2011). This is an important precondition to hybrid integration, showing how students are creating spaces for dialogue and mutual exchange. It appeared that students' saw their identities and their integration as things that could shift and change when they employed their agency. Identities were readily treated and understood as multiple and variable, and were therefore hybrid (Nair-Venugopal 2009). In our conversations, students of all ages did not speak much about their country of origin or their feelings about it, but students from ISCED 2 and 3 spoke about experiences of sharing their backgrounds, cultures and traditions with classmates. They highlighted the fact that their schools were diverse and speaking other languages and having students from diverse background in the same classroom did not cause issues amongst students. Particularly for interviewed students from ISCED 1, there was very little attention paid to migratory background, language differences, or different treatment based on these. Interviewed students tended to only mention migrant background when the interviewers specifically asked about this topic, and when they spoke about the formation of groups amongst the students, these groups were rarely based on migratory background. Some students from ISCED 2 and 3, however, noticed that teachers sometimes treated students differently based on race or migratory

background. They found this troubling, but saw no solution other than trying to ignore it and waiting for the academic year to be over so they would have a new teacher.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

When students spoke about their ideal school, they envisioned a place of inclusion, trust, and openness. They spoke about a school with plenty of physical space, that was more welcoming than their current schools, some of which had imposing gates with wiring on top, and with adequate and up-to-date technology. Courses would be easier to follow, include plenty of discussion, have varied pedagogy and activates. Most of all, an ideal school was a place free from harassment and where teachers and the school administration would take students' opinion and input into account. Students wished to feel trusted and to feel their agency was valued in the classroom. They felt the rules in school were too strict and imposing, and wanted to be more able to express themselves through their dress and speech.

Diversity in the classrooms was reported as being normal, and in general it was handled well by the teachers. There were not often problems springing from the lack of acceptance of difference, but students did sometimes notice that teachers treated some people differently based on their origins or visible differences. This, however was not seen as a problem amongst students. Both migrant and non-migrant background students, however, observed that structural elements to support migrant newcomers and to speak about intercultural relations were lacking. New students who struggled with the local language were said to be 'on their own' in terms of school adjustment, but students reported being supported by other students when it came to their integration.

This is a relevant point, which shows, on one side, how students already practices in their relationships actions which can support and enhance hybrid integration. On the other, it highlights how the educational environment is still adopting a traditional and unidirectional understanding of integration, lacking in the recognition of its unidirectional and hybrid form.

School during the COVID pandemic left a strong impression on students and many students expressed concerns about the lack of support from teachers and the school. They reported not having sufficient access to the technology that was necessary to follow remote classes, and the support structures that were put into place by the school did not function well. Students struggled to get support from teachers and educators, who they realised were also overwhelmed by the situation. The result was increased solidarity amongst peers as they worked together to answers each other's questions and to offer emotional support. They felt their agency and voices were often not considered by the school staff. They, therefore, directed their agency elsewhere and created robust networks of peer support.

Based on the students' experiences and suggestions, there are several key recommendations that would improve students' school experience.

- First, more 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.
- Secondly, students would benefit from more formal treatment and discussion of interculturality and diversity in the classroom. They were already having these discussions on their own, outside of the

classroom, and they suggested more widespread discussion about these topics in class and facilitated by trained teachers.

- Finally, students felt that their voices went unheard and that their agency was often ignored. Taking their opinions and experiences into account through a structured system of feedback could ameliorate this issue. For example, taking their preferences into account when scheduling exams or choosing the methods with which to present a lesson. Students had a number of ideas that would contribute to making the school a more inclusive environment where students' agency would be valued in every aspect of their education.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Finland

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1. Methodology

WP5 focus group interviews (FGIs) with children concurred with the second and third wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. After postponing research first from early spring to early autumn 2020 and again towards the end of the year, interviews were gradually being conducted from 16.12.2020 onwards until 26.5.2021. The classes represented ISCED1 and ISCED2 level schools in semi-rural towns in the Finnish areas involved in the CHILD-UP project (Southern Ostrobothnia; Tampere region). The interviewees studied in schools that were involved in WP4 and WP6, as well. The interviews with children were carried out in conjunction with classroom observations in WP6; three teachers participating in WP5 interviews as professionals also co-operated for observation (WP6) and children's interviews (WP5 and WP6).

However, there was a higher number of teachers in WP5 professionals' interviews who were not willing to engage their classrooms and pupils in WP5 and WP6 because they saw it as (1) too time-taking and demanding for them, especially because of the process of acquiring permissions from guardians (as it is not, they said, easy to connect with them in the first place), and (2) distracting children's safe routines and learning which they said were constantly under pressure as many pupils were newly-arrived and were only familiarising themselves with their new everyday life.

The state of emergency caused by COVID-19 posed further challenges for data collection. In Finland, there was a national school lockdown from March to May 2020; further, during August 2020–May 2021 individual schools and classes closed for quarantine when needed. COVID-19 stopped fieldwork for some time in spring 2020; during August 2020–May 2021 researchers and other outsiders were still not welcome into school premises. Recurring quarantines postponed and eventually cancelled fieldwork in one central school at the end of the academic year 2020-2021. This said, two new classes were reached towards the end of the academic year after persistent requests and negotiations.

As a result of these hindrances, seven classes in five schools were involved and seven FGIs conducted in them (see Table 1). While not reaching the target number set to 30 classes, the sample size is an achievement because the societal situation was severely fragile, impacting all parties' everyday life in multiple ways. Here, necessity became a virtue and all opportunities to collect all kinds of data were welcomed, even when it meant that access was granted only remotely and only for interviewing the teacher, or only for observation and videorecording classes without FGIs with the pupils. The impacts of COVID-19 on research methodology and ethics are discussed in more detail at the end of this section.

The group size in FGIs was small in general, ranging from two to four pupils. The modest size is due to the fact that the groups in question were not big to start with, because the collaborating teachers usually worked with individuals and small groups designed to aid and support learning of speakers of Finnish as a second language^{32,33}. The share of boys and girls in the sample is fairly even. The sample includes pupils with a migration background; with at least one parent being born outside of Finland. The countries of pupils' or their parents' origin vary; common areas include South East Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Often, not everyone was present as there was a strict national COVID-19 -based guideline urging all with any flu symptoms to stay at home.

Table 1: Focus Groups

Focus Group Number	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Ages	Location
1	2		16	South Ostrobothnia
2		2	15	Tampere region
3		3	14-15	Tampere region
4	2	2	14-15	Tampere region
5		2	15	Tampere region
6	2		14	Tampere region
7	2		7	South Ostrobothnia
Total: 7	8	9		

The topics of the interviews derived from consortium-level guidelines. In this report, the interview findings are presented under three main headings: School as a lived space; Intercultural relations at school; and Identity and belonging. Among the key questions asked were:

- What do you like/don't like in your class?
- What do you like to do with your friends on your free time?

³² For more on the educational system in Finland, see the WP3 report at http://www.child-up.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CHILD-UP_Report-on-legislation.pdf

- What is the atmosphere like in your class? E.g.: Does everyone help others and receive help when they need it? In case of conflicts, how do you act, and how do you overcome challenging situations?
- What does it mean to be active and to be involved in school? How does it show?
- Do you have a favourite subject to study? What makes it fun or inspiring?
- Is there something that makes learning difficult? How so?
- Who do you talk to in times of trouble? What makes them easy to talk to?
- What does education mean to you?
- What do you think about assessment in school? Is there something you would like to see changed?
- Which languages do you use at school and on your free time? How are different languages and different language backgrounds taken into account in teaching and assessment?
- What does ‘culture’ mean to you?
- How are different cultures taken into account in teaching? Do you learn from each other’s cultures?
- What kind of future plans or desires do you have? Where would you like to live in the future?

The interviews were conducted in remote settings where the interviewed pupils gathered together in class and the interviewer was connected via video and audio through Microsoft Teams software. Once recorded, the interviews were saved and placed on an institution-internal hardware disconnected from the Internet and used by project personnel only. Technical challenges were met in all schools. In some schools, it was not easy for the teachers to acquire a laptop with a built-in microphone and camera to carry out the focus group interview. Some school equipment did not co-operate cross-organisationally in the use of software and applications, and when they did, sound quality tended to be poor because of the non-portable built-in microphone.

The language of the interviews was Finnish apart from one where interpretation to and from Arabic used. In this case, the interpreter also participated from remote settings. Some of the questions proved difficult for children to answer; they asked for clarification or answered, ‘I don’t know’. This was particularly the case in the interpreted session. It remained unclear whether difficulties resulted solely from the questions or was there something in the interpretation or in the remote technology that caused challenges. As a safety measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19, all teachers and for ISCED2-level also pupils wore face masks, which made identifying who is speaking challenging. Overall, the interviewees did not talk extensively; they usually kept their answers short even when asked to elaborate on them. It seems likely that in face-to-face settings with the researcher and interviewees in closer physical proximity, interaction would have been livelier and more relaxed– the remote format made the situation somewhat formal and mechanic. In the following, these changing circumstances and their meaning for the research framework are described in more detail.

A note on the effects of COVID-19 on research

As described earlier in this section, WP5 activities were severely challenged and limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland and in other countries participating in CHILD-UP. During the pandemic, co-operation with schools changed and diminished to some extent as teachers were faced with a major shift in their everyday work: a constant worry over health and well-being of themselves and their pupils, as well as a giant leap towards technology-aided remote teaching. Participating in research was not a priority for them. Acknowledging this and the fact that teaching is a demanding profession even without a state of emergency (Kauppi et al. 2020; Lerkkanen et al. 2020), researchers choose to act in a sensitive and respectful way and granted teachers a “time-off” from research. Such

an ethical approach was valued by teachers who were then willing to welcome research activities at a later, more stable point.

As the state of emergency continued and evolved, it became clear that the plans for data collection needed modification. As remote activities were not listed in the original research plan, a fair amount of time was dedicated to the revision and translation of documents, such as ethical statements required at the levels of both CHILD-UP consortium and the Finnish partner organisation, and consent forms for both pupils and their caregivers.

The pandemic and its consequences on research methodology were unforeseen for the project overall. In qualitative research based on interviews, rich data is usually gained through implementing face-to-face interactions in a discussion mode (Torrentira 2020, 6). Remote interview is a different field, and many practical issues need careful reconsideration in both preparation and implementation.

Gaining interviewees' trust is essential in all interviewing, and in remote settings, everything that is communicated may contribute to the building of trust – especially through *the ways in which* it is communicated. In remote research settings, participant(s) need to be properly informed before asked to give their consent, not only about research as such but also about the practicalities of interaction and about the storage and access to the recording possibly made. This will enhance participants' trust in the situation. (See Hautamäki et al. 2021 for a more thorough discussion on this.)

In WP5 interviews with both children and professionals, some interviewees have shared not only personal but even sensitive issues, which shows that trust has been gained and that both the interviewer and the interviewee(s) have been highly committed in carrying out the shared task even without sharing the physical space (Torrentira 2020, 5).

In practice, before starting to record an FGI interview session, the researcher greeted the participants and ensured they were ready to talk and to be recorded as agreed earlier in a written form. They were also reminded about the confidentiality of the interview contents as well as of the fact that the aim is to discuss and that there are no wrong answers. The participants were further informed about the moment when the recording starts.

Considering the massive reorganisation of research activities because of and during the pandemic, the FGIs progressed well, and covered issues described earlier in this section. This was only possible through a conscious and an ethically informed approach where researchers balanced between the aims of the project, local and national safety guidelines, organisational guidelines, as well as research participants' needs and wishes.

2. School as a lived space

The children interviewed for the study pointed to similar sources of (dis)satisfaction in school contexts. Most explicitly stated that the best thing in going to school is seeing friends. They valued the atmosphere where everyone is welcome, appreciated, and treated equally by pupils and teachers alike.

In addition to the importance of spending time with friends in school, the interviewed pupils gave high value for the possibilities of learning. The favourite subjects of the interviewees varied from arts to social studies, biology, and physical education. For the more recently arrived pupils, learning

Finnish was a priority. All pupils saw school as a springboard for their future lives, studies, and professions, although not everyone knew what they wanted to do when growing up:

The dream is to go to school, learn Finnish very well and go to university afterwards. At the moment we have no clue as to what field to study, but we search for it every day and make a decision later. (FI_F1_CH_1_B)

Some were more nervous about their future plans:

I don't know. [laughs] Cause I don't know if I want to get married or not and I don't know if I have the guts to study to be a dentist, or what will I be when I grow up. It's sometimes really stressful to ponder upon all these things. (FI_F5_CH_1_G)

A difference between girls and boys showed in their visions for the future: it was only girls who pointed to relationship status as playing a role in their future. Although the sample is small and no final conclusions can be drawn of gender differences on the basis of this, even this slight difference should be paid attention to in study counselling: it seems that girls especially need to be encouraged to study for a profession as it may be demanding for them to plan or even imagine studying further if higher education has not been desirable for girls earlier in the eyes of the older generation (Telve 2020, 85). Today, there is reason to show that in Finland, a democratic welfare society, it is possible for women to build a family *and* a career.

Pupils' agency in joint planning of class activities seems scarce on the basis of this sample. Even ISCED2 level interviewees were not familiar with the concept of active participation in its broadest sense (Finnish 'osallisuus' *involvement*). It was a common experience that it is the teacher who does the planning of lessons, carries out the teaching, and chooses the methods for learning. One interviewee favoured using a variability of methods to help individual learners:

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)

Moreover, speakers of Finnish as a second language made it clear that there are differences among teachers of different subjects on ISCED2 level in how they take pupils' language backgrounds into consideration in their teaching, in the kind of language they use. This alone makes some subjects more difficult to learn than others. One example of this is maths: while numerical calculation itself may be fine for learners of Finnish as a second language, verbal assignments tend to be much more difficult because they build on understanding Finnish.

The interviewees also emphasised the asset of learning in small groups where it is easier to make questions and show uncertainty than in bigger groups. The teaching of Finnish as a second language often takes place in rather small groups, and respective teachers were also recurrently mentioned as trustworthy and empathetic sources of support.

When asked about assessment in school, interviewees described it as a top-down announcement where they themselves have no say. Studying hard seems pointless when the work does not pay off in good grades. Self-evaluation, an increasing practice on all ISCED levels, was not experienced as a useful or effective method in general, and many said they do not see the point in completing self-

evaluation forms. Focusing on exams and grades was not welcomed, either – learners of Finnish as a second language pointed out that exams are sometimes difficult linguistically; knowing the substance does not help if one does not understand the questions. Also, they criticised the emphasis given to exam grades over participation and activity in class in the final evaluation.

While the interviewees valued the mostly positive atmosphere and group spirit of their classes, they also pointed to ‘the other side of the coin’ of their lived reality at school: the pleasant atmosphere is at times disrupted by individuals – pupils or even teachers. In addressing these emotional and relational disruptions, interviewees were quick to say that they do get along well with teachers and other pupils and disagreements and conflicts are not commonplace and should not be generalised. However, even occasional experiences of unfairness need to be considered when aiming towards enhancing pupils’ participation and well-being.

Among singular experiences of conflict and disagreement, the interviewees mentioned teachers who they perceived as treating pupils differently depending on whether or not pupils have a migrant background.

There’s one teacher who we judged as behaving in a racist way towards us. Cause if a Finn next to me in class is using the mobile phone for playing in class – I took my phone to check the time – the teacher yelled to me from the other side of the classroom, in front of everyone, that I should put my phone away and “don’t use your phone in class and focus on the lesson, this is why you never learn anything.” I once asked for remedial teaching cause [the subject] is difficult to me and the teacher was like, you should focus more in class to learn something. The teacher did not grant me remedial teaching.
(FI_F2_CH_1_G)

If something unpleasant happens at school, most interviewees said they would turn to their siblings or friends in and outside school for support; some girls further mentioned they open up for their mothers in case of trouble and said the mother will then contact school if they so wish. Some said there was a particular teacher who they can trust in all kinds of matters, because the teacher was perceived to understand a) young people and b) multicultural issues. Sometimes, however, interviewees said they let the issue be (reproduced from FI_F2_CH):

Girl 2: Usually I don’t tell [teachers] if [other pupils] say something cause adults make it a big thing I think. I don’t feel like going to the teachers’ office all the time.

Girl 1: Makes too big an issue.

Girl 2: Yeah, make too big an issue. Like five times a week to the office, what’s the point. For one word only.

Interviewer: So you don’t usually bring it up or complain or anything?

Girl 2: Right.

Interviewer: So for you it stays unresolved?

Girl 2: Yeah.

Girl 1: Unless the teacher notices something has happened.

Girl 2: Yeah. Sometimes they do and then they come and talk to me but I’m like whatever, leave it, or stuff like that.

In the sample, pupils seem unwilling to make a case over one insulting word (the precise word in question is not uttered during the interview) even when it is a recurring insult. They know teachers

do not approve insulting in class and are worried they will act to make it stop. In terms of agency, lending oneself to insults can be described as either self-harmful agency or giving agency away – in any case, the practice of not telling prevents intervention and creation of safety while strengthening inappropriate behaviour and inequity in school. However, all said they can turn to their parents for support and guidance. On the other hand, issues at home and in personal lives may also involve something that pupils prefer to remain silent about in school (reproduced from FL_F3_CH):

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

Interviewer: 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.

Although reproduced from different interviews, the two previous cases paint a gloomy picture where pupils with a migrant background are caught in not-telling for the sake of the consequences. This is a serious hindrance for children's well-being as well as empowerment and agency.

A timely challenge to everyone's well-being has been COVID-19, affecting pupils', teachers', and whole families' lives in multidimensional ways. When it comes to the needs of pupils with a migrant background especially, it has been found that their needs should have been recognised in more effective ways in all educational levels nationally (Goman et al., 2021).

One consequence of the pandemic was that after-school activities were closed. For ISCED1 level pupils with a migrant background, these afternoon hours are important for learning Finnish in interaction with peers in a casual, yet professionally organised and monitored educational environment. This club lockdown was a major factor decreasing contact with peers in general and with Finnish-speaking peers specifically. Further, pupils lost the support for homework they had received in the club. The pupils interviewed in the sample were rather pleased to have been entitled to return to their studies at the school premises again for social relations and better learning.

3. Intercultural relations at school

When asked about how different cultures are addressed in teaching, the interviewees pointed to two specific classes where the topic is most frequently considered: religion and English. As such, multiculturalism lies at the bedrock of the Nation Core Curriculum in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016) and is embedded in the teaching of transversal skills across different subjects (Jousmäki et al. 2020).

All interviewees were explicit in saying they themselves endorse multiculturalism and that it is self-evident for them that everyone's background, including ethnic and religious, is respected. In a similar vein, multilingualism was a norm for them, an everyday practice, although in some schools there was more diversity among pupils than in others. As to mainstream pupils, the interviewees said that not all of them show respect or tolerance towards diversity, which shows in bad humour and impoliteness

or even bullying in the form of intrusive looks and commentary. As one interviewee explains: “In some classes we can’t... It just makes you angry that there’s nothing we can do [to address disagreement, unfairness, or bullying] and then in other classes we can talk about it together” (FI_F4_CH_2_G).

In some groups, thus, there seems to be overt yet unaddressed bursts of prejudice and racism:

Joint understanding. Some people don’t understand your background. Some people don’t understand what you’ve experienced. Like if you’ve experienced racism, they make a joke out of it – even some in this school. And they circulate the joke and everything, but it doesn’t feel---like if you’ve experienced racism yourself. How would you feel if I started doing the same things to you that you’ve experienced? (FI_F3_CH_1_G)

Such situations need to be addressed by the teacher to help all pupils find common ground and build joint understanding about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, and why.

Interviewees who were more recently arrived ISCED2 pupils or pupils with only elementary skills in Finnish did not address outright racism and prejudice. They did make a strong point that making friends with native Finns is challenging (this was also noted by professionals, see Local report: professionals in Finland). The following excerpt (from FI_F1_CH) illustrates migrant pupils’ disconnection from their Finnish-speaking peers:

Boy 1 or 2: In class, we do have a close relationship with each other, but I meant Finnish people, we can connect if they come to us and we can talk to each other and...

Interviewer: Does it mean that it is sometimes difficult to make friends with Finnish pupils?

Interpreter: [interprets]

Boy 1 or 2: [answers]

Interpreter: Yes, it is indeed difficult to make friends with them.

Interviewer: What could help to do it? What do you think the reason is?

Interpreter: [interprets]

Boy 1 or 2: [answers]

Interpreter: It doesn’t mean that they don’t like us, no. We just don’t have common things to talk about. It is because we don’t have anything to talk about.

Interviewer: I see. Do you wish the school would help you out in that, to find common ground? Or do you hope that some of the school personnel could help you to do that?

Interpreter: [interprets]

Boy 1 or 2: [answers]

Interpreter: Of course, it’s fine and normal, we don’t have anything against that if that’s what the school wants.

The example shows that while the atmosphere in one class may be pleasant with migrant pupils actively participating in activities, at school level migrant pupils may be marginalised. Further, the interviewee does not actively support an intervention by school staff even when asked to imagine such a possibility. This kind of weak agency (Hökkä et al. 2010), or lack of agency, is something professionals should become aware of to be able to support the positive development in peer relations and in shaping one’s own conditions of participation (see also Spets & Laitinen 2014).

4. Identity and belonging

Even if born in Finland, some interviewees seemed to identify closely with the ‘migrant’ background of their parents: “I don’t think everyone even knows that I’m not Finnish cause I’ve been here like... or I was born here but...” (FI_F6_CH_1_B). Having been born in Finland and speaking Finnish on a native level yet not perceiving oneself as Finnish—or vice versa—exemplifies transnational identity where hybridity is the norm and different cultures live side by side:

Interviewer: What do different cultures mean to you? ---

Speaker 1: 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)

Hybridity also shows in language practices. The sample shows that young migrants use various languages in their everyday interaction. The language of education is, for most, Finnish, and so is the language used with peers in school. In their leisure time, interviewees said they use a language that suits the friends they interact with – whether they speak Finnish, English, or a shared migrant language. Migrant or heritage language played a foremost important role in interaction with parents and older relatives; with siblings, however, translanguaging was fairly common, incorporating useful elements from all language repertoires they have access to. Importantly, all interviewees used different languages as *a resource* to serve their communicative needs.

Hybrid identity thus conjoins feelings of belonging and heritage as well as language use. Additionally, also socio-economic and religio-cultural features play a role for the interviewees when asked about their future prospects. One interviewee hoped to be working as a doctor and being married with children. “I’ve had enough of life as a single woman [laughter]---to have a family of my own and live in an Islamic country, be a doctor and gain my own wages” (FI_F3_CH_2_G).

This is quite unlike to a persistent stereotype of the subjugated woman in a radically Islamic context – living in the home-sphere under the control of her husband and male relatives. The example illustrates the core of ‘hybrid integration’ and individual’s agency in shaping one’s social conditions.

It was indeed common for the interviewees to envision living somewhere else than in Finland in the future. In the sample, this did not depend on the years of living in Finland nor on the level of Finnish, as even some of those born in Finland or speaking fluent Finnish imagined of a life elsewhere. In addition to social, economic, religious, and cultural factors, one reason for dreaming of living abroad in the future related to emotions and feelings of belonging, of “having it easier to be who you are”, as there, “people understand you better” (FI_F3_CH_1_G). This can be read as disappointment or critique towards mainstream Finns for not understanding or respecting difference. By contrast, on the basis of the sample, hybrid or transnational identity seems to embed multicultural awareness:

I think [different cultures] are interesting. It’s good to sometimes... It’s good for people to take a moment to read and gain knowledge about other cultures so they can acculturate.
(FI_F3_CH_2_G)

Although moving abroad was a desirable prospect for the interviewees, some were realistic about the matter:

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, cause I've lived here almost all of my life, so it feels terrible to think that you're going to start everything from a scratch. Anew, there. You forget the language you've learned here and everything you've come to learn. (FI_F2_CH_1_G)

Pupils' transnational aspirations are important to consider in so much as they relate to social conditions and societal structures. It should be better understood how school and social work, and other sectors in society, can support all pupils' feeling at home as they are. This is key in empowering them with agency and in enhancing their participation as active citizens.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The interviews with ISCED1 and ISCED2 level children with a migrant background pointed to that each transnational youth experience is unique, yet they all share some similarities. The migrant background grants pupils with multicultural awareness and appreciation of diversity and of all people. Thus, they portray features needed for constructing a sophisticated and sensitive culture built on mutual respect. The value of this should be better taken into account in Finnish schools to empower all pupils with their own particularities for agency and learning. **Education can improve the potential of children's agency and their ability to act and construct their hybrid identities in order to change the social conditions of their lives, in both schools and communities they live in (Kinossalo et.al. 2022).** Moreover, it is worthwhile recognizing the potential embedded in these pupils for the building of future society in Finland. While the finding that pupils with a migrant background have transnational aspirations may not be surprising, it should be read with a serious mind. Can Finland, as a country with decreasing population afford to lose any one of the young persons it has educated? The reasons behind young people's will to move abroad stem, on the basis of this sample, from prejudiced attitudes and atmosphere in Finland towards migration and diversity. Therefore, the question to ask in educational contexts is, how do we ensure everyone feels safe and welcome? The following recommendations can be given:

- At school level, anti-racism and anti-racist practices should be explicitly promoted to ensure equality and equity among all pupils in their learning environments. The school needs to prepare pupils for the future and to provide them with skills needed in an increasingly interlinked and globalised world. The school should also serve as a role model of a diverse working community and municipalities should normalise employing multicultural staff.
- In class, teaching and learning should be built on open discussion and mutual respect. Every pupil 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.
- Especially girls with 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.
- For teachers, more education on anti-racism is needed. It is only by becoming aware of colonising and discriminative practices in the past and present that a teacher can start shaping space for respect towards diversity in the classroom.

- Teachers would benefit from training in trauma counselling to be more prepared to encounter and support traumatised pupils and to understand the consequences of their undesired experiences for their learning and involvement in school.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Germany

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1. Methodology

Introduction

This report refers to qualitative research with preschool children and pupils between the ages of 5 and 20 years. As in the previous quantitative work package (WP4), the data for the qualitative work package (WP5) was collected as part of a mixed methods methodology in two German states: Hamburg and Saxony. Most of the data was collected in Saxony due to its accessibility and due to the COVID-19 conditional sampling strategy. The survey period took place from October 2020 to May 2021. During this period, there were major restrictions in public, economic, social and private life due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the survey period, there were therefore two phases in which schools had to close completely and switch to distance learning. These lockdown phases took place in Saxony from November 2020 to May 2021 and in Hamburg from December 2020 to May 2021. The situation of distance learning and also the restricted access to childcare facilities affected the survey. As a result, the survey period was limited and focus group interviews were often changed to individual interviews. Interviews in day care centres therefore took place in October and November 2020 and then from May 2021. Interviews with students did not start until February 2021 and took place either in an online call or outside with distance and mask protection. During the pandemic, the school continued to have an educational mission for the pupils and tried to remain a contact point for pupils with and without a migration background. Homeschooling required students to be more independent and integrated the use of online equipment. This self-organisation and access to digital equipment increased the students' enrolment and participation in the research. Through the participation of the students and the possibility to get access to the day care centres, a final of 50 surveys with children could be conducted, which was more than expected before.

The sample

Place of research

The original sampling strategy was to ask schools that had already participated in WP4 or WP5 (professional report). Due to COVID-19-related hygiene regulations, distance bans and school closures, this did not work. The schools and also some day care centres cancelled or postponed appointments to see if the situation would improve and the pandemic restrictions would be lifted. To

adapt the survey to the pandemic situation, an online version of the interviews was set. The new strategy was to run two tracks. On the one hand, a new proposal was written for the Ministry of Education to engage with students online within the school context. On the other hand, students and families were approached directly through social media, notices at sports grounds, family centres, institutions for people with a migration background and after-school centres, and also through information workshops in calls. With the help of this direct approach, it was possible to attract families and pupils to the study. Participants then motivated friends, relatives, classmates and community members who were also interested in taking part in the interviews. Through this form of snowball sampling, it was possible to recruit pupils from different schools.

Two day care centres, which had already participated in WP4 /WP5, allowed access. This was possible because the facilities could act more independently and individually during the pandemic than schools.

Sampling

The following table gives an overview of the sampling that was interviewed for this report.

Table 1: Sampling

Age group	Female participants	Male participants	Participants in total
ISCED0 (includes five to six year olds)	22	28	50
ISCED1 (includes seven to twelve year olds)	12	4	16
ISCED2 (includes 13 to 14 year olds)	2	1	3
ISCED3 (includes 15 to 20 year olds)	8	2	10
In total:	44	35	79

A total of 79 children took part in the survey. Of these, 50 were aged between five and six years (ISCED0). These interviews were conducted in two-day care centres in two different towns in Saxony. In one day care centre 245 children (within approx. 18% with a migration background) and in the other 109 children (within approx. 30% with a migration background) are being cared for. Among the preschool children who took part in the study, 22 children said they felt they belonged to

female gender and 28 to male gender. Throughout the study, no participants reported feeling of belonging to diverse gender. For this reason, it is not listed in the tables and in the report, although the category was an option.

In the age group between seven and twelve years (ISCED1), a total of 16 children took part: twelve stated to be female and four stated to be male. All grades between one and five are represented among the respondents.

ISCED2 is the smallest survey group. In this group, three interviews were conducted with three children (two female and one male). One child was in fifth grade and two in seventh grade at the time of the survey.

In the age group 15 to 20 years (ISCED3), a total of ten interviews were collected. Eight participants stated that they were female and two male. At the time of the interview, the participants were attending classes between grade seven and grade eleven.

A total of 50 conversations were conducted. Of these, 23 were focus group interviews (FGI) with two to four children and 27 were individual interviews (I). Most of the group interviews took place in the day care centres. Due to the pandemic conditions described above, the pupil interviews often took place as individual interviews. Siblings or neighbours took part in group interviews. For a more detailed classification, see Table 2:

Table 2: FGI / Interviews I

Age group	Focus group Interview	Interview	Conversations in total
ISCED0	21	2	23
ISCED1	2	12	14
ISCED2	0	3	3
ISCED3	0	10	10
In total	23	27	50

The following table shows the participants by gender in the focus group interviews.

Table 3: FGI participants and gender

Focus group number	Number of boys	Number of girls	Other	Age group	Location
F1	3	0	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F2	1	1	0	ISCED0	Saxony

F3	0	2	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F4	1	2	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F5	2	0	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F6	1	2	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F7	2	0	0	ISCED0	Saxony
F8	1	1	0	ISCED0	
F9	1	2	0		
F10	2	0	0	ISCED0	
F11	1	1	0	ISCED0	
F13	0	2	0	ISCED0	
F15	0	2	0	ISCED0	
F16	2	0	0	ISCED0	
F17	2	0	0	ISCED0	
F18	2	0	0	ISCED0	
F19	2	1	0	ISCED0	
F20	2	1	0	ISCED0	
F21	1	2	0	ISCED0	
F22	0	2	0	ISCED0	
F48	2	0	0	ISCED0	
F24	0	2	0	ISCED1	
F30	0	2	0	ISCED1	

F27	0	2	0	ISCED1 /ISCED2	
F37	1	1	0	ISCED2/ ISCED3	

The data collected are from different types of schools: Primary school, secondary school (Oberschule and Gymnasium) and special education for foreigners.

Because families and pupils were made aware of the study directly in their private context, the participants came from 22 different schools. These schools are located in seven different cities in Saxony and Hamburg. In order to get an impression of where the students live and go to school, and in order to respect data privacy, the cities are described below according to their number of inhabitants. All seven cities have good infrastructure, including schools and public transport.

Tables 3: Place of residence and school

City	Approximate number of inhabitants	Conducted interviews
City 1	14.000	1
City 2	19.000	1
City 3	20.000	2
City 4	250.000	1
City 5	500.000	22
City 6	500.000	1
City 7	1.8 million	1

Both children who were born in another country and children who were born in Germany but whose parents or grandparents were born in another country were surveyed. Only one of the pupils interviewed has no migration background. Thirteen pupils stated that they had lived in at least one other country between their country of birth and their current German residence. Of these, seven students spent more than twelve months in another country. At least seven pupils stated that they had experienced flight for various reasons. This sample provides insight into the perspectives of children related to hybrid identity. Data on the migration background of the pupils can be taken from the following table.

Table 4: Migration background

Background	Number of children	Insight into the origin
Born in Germany / no migration background	1	Germany
Born in a different country	21	Turkey, France, Burkina Faso, Iran
Born in Germany, but one or more parents from a different country	5	Belarus, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Iran, France
Born in Germany, but grandparents from a different country	2	France, England

Pupils in very rural areas, which are characterised by low population density and a lack of infrastructure, could not be reached. This could be due to the sampling strategy.

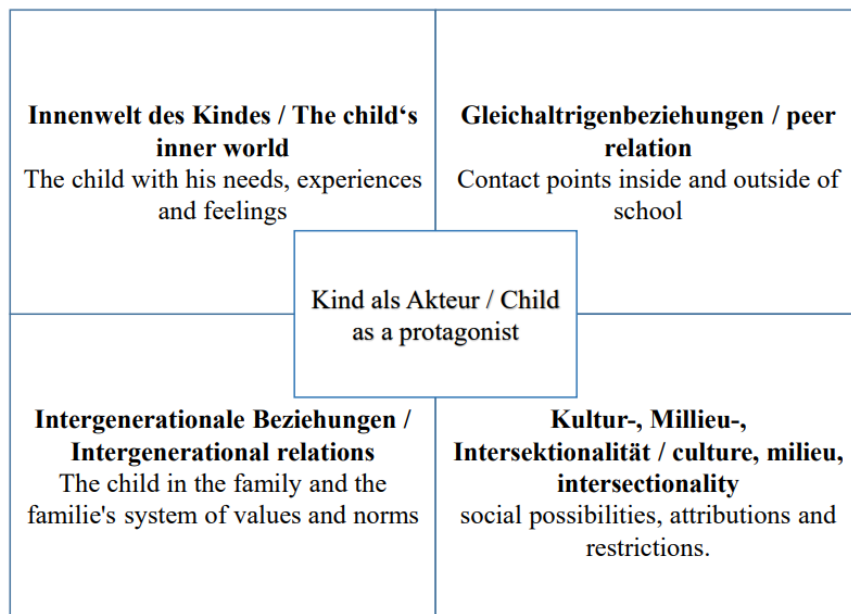
Course of the study

The survey process was designed holistically with regard to the achievement of objectives. The questioning of both children and professionals was about exploring the current integration conditions for children with migration background, recognizing difficulties, discovering potentials, identifying development needs and identifying opportunities for improvement. This overarching objective was implemented in practice in such a way that the respective groups of actors (i.e., children, teachers, social workers, mediators) were addressed with specific key questions. The aim was to include the respective perspectives in order to enabling a comprehensive perspective in the end.

Interview description

The focus of qualitative research is on understanding and improving children's agency. All interviews were guided by this focus. As in the surveys with the professionals, the four-field scheme was used as a central model for the children's agency in the interviews with the children.

Figure 1: Interview basis model



Children have agency and are able to interact actively. At the same time, they are embedded in different factors such as the child's own needs, experiences and feelings (see upper left corner of the diagram), in peer relationships (see upper right), in culturally specific, milieu-specific and intersectional attributions, possibilities and limitations (see lower left) and in intergenerational relationships (see lower left).

In order to see the child's agency holistically, it is important to consider and classify the different influencing factors during the interview.

The atmosphere during the interviews was mostly relaxed and calm. The interviewer made sure that the children felt safe and comfortable. The children were informed about the topic before and had the opportunity to get to know the research team or to ask questions by phone or email. The children knew from the beginning that they could stop at any time if they did not feel like it, did not have to answer questions and could speak freely and openly. The interviews were designed as narrative on-the-fly narratives. The focus of the discussion was on the topics of participation, diversity and being with each other in the school.

In the day care centres, the interviews were conducted in a separate room so that the children could be sure that their teachers were close by. All ISCED0 interviews were conducted as focus group interviews with two exceptions. In one case the child preferred to be interviewed with a teacher rather than with other children and in another case the child preferred to be interviewed individually.

The interviews with the students took place either outside with mask and safety distance or online via a video call. The children were usually in the kitchen or in the living room of their home and their parents were within calling distance. The interviews that took place face-to-face were organised with the help of after care or independent child and youth services.

The interviews were usually conducted in German. Two interviews were conducted in English. This was not the mother tongue of the two participants, yet they felt very confident in the language and

could speak fluently and share their thoughts. In one interview, the big sister was present as an interpreter.

Since most of the interviews were conducted with students whose mother tongue is not German, the words and sentence structure are not always entirely correct. This language barrier was also tried to be maintained in the translation. The following quotations are often not proper, but based on what the children said.

For some pupils who are new to Germany and have not been at school for long, it was difficult to answer the questions about participation. This was partly due to their understanding of the vocabulary and partly because they had not yet consciously come into contact with participation in their institution. Often, when the question was asked more specifically, they were able to relate individual situations, such as: How does your class decide where to go on excursions?

During the interviews, there were sometimes linguistic barriers. In these cases, however, the interviewees knew how to help themselves, they asked or looked up individual words in the dictionary. Some of the participants did not want to or could not talk about their refugee experiences and either made this clear at the beginning or avoided the questions that went in this direction.

All interviews consisted of two parts. In the first part, the data for the accompanying questionnaire was collected. This includes information about the person (name, age, gender, migration background, etc.). The interview was then conducted. To start the face-to-face interviews with the students, number cards between 1 and 6 were used. With the help of these cards, the children were asked to rate their school. This method was intended to make it easier for the children to get started and to create a narrative-generating experience.

The online interviews with the students took place without any further equipment. Rather, it was a conversational situation in which the interviewers' camera was switched on at all times. The students could decide for themselves whether they wanted to switch their camera on or off.

The interviews with the preschool children involve different methods. The interview was accompanied by the interviewers and by hand puppets (a snail and a fox). Both hand puppets interacted with the children and participated in the conversation, sometimes from the interviewer's side and sometimes from the respondent's perspective. Furthermore, an instant camera was used. With this camera, the children could take pictures of their favourite places in the day care centre. Afterwards, the pictures were used to invite them to tell their stories. Furthermore, there was a so-called researcher's passport for the children. This served as a guide so that the children could estimate how long the interview would take and what they would have to expect. As a thank you, they received colouring pictures and a certificate of participation.

All interviews were recorded, then transcribed and anonymised. Only children for whom the children themselves and the parents gave their written consent were interviewed. The exception was children over 18 years of age, for whom the declaration of consent of the adult pupil was sufficient.

Methodological reflections

Despite the initial difficulties in acquiring interviews, in the end even more were conducted than originally expected. This was due to the fact that the sampling strategy was effective and the participants spread the information. In this way, many interviews could be conducted with children

with a migration background, different schools and types of schools were described and pupils from different cities could be reached.

The interviews were designed with an open atmosphere and based on the children's interests and agency. In the day care centre, different methods were used, which could have been reduced to focus more on the conversation. The children liked the hand puppets very much. Some of the children played with the puppets themselves during the interviews and thus developed the interview further. Taking photos was also very well received by the children as it activated them.

The word for word transcription (transcription according to extended rules) enabled a clear representation of what was said. Language barriers were adopted one-to-one and reflect the children's own world.

The horizontal and vertical analysis enables a theoretical saturation of the data material. For more information, see chapter “Interpretation”.

Impact of the pandemic on the survey

The survey was affected by the pandemic, especially in terms of acquisition and interviewing, as described above. The topic of Corona automatically played a role in the interviews, even if it was not the main focus. Surveys using video calls worked well. Only in a few cases are individual words no longer understandable due to connection problems. A major disadvantage of video interviews is that focus group interviews are more difficult to handle virtually than in real life. There are transmission delays, distraction situations that cannot be avoided and connection problems. A big advantage of the online survey can be seen in the fact that the children are not in the school itself during the questioning about their school, but in privacy. This could counteract social desirability at one level.

Interpretation

For the interpretation, we used the software MAXQDA 2020. The code tree we developed on base of the WP5 leader’s suggested grids. The same code tree is used for the age groups ISCED1 to ISCED3 to enable comparability. The code tree for ISCED0 is very similar. As an example, see the following code tree for ISCED1- ISCED3.

Table 5: Code tree

Codebaum / code tree	Häufigkeit / Frequency
Codesystem / code system	1105
Identität und Zugehörigkeit / identity and belonging	9
Sprachgebrauch / language use	23
Nationalität (Herkunft, Deutsch) / nationality (origin, German)	11

Familie / family	11
Interkulturelle Beziehungen in der Schule / intercultural realtions at school	23
Unterstützung /support	12
Freundschaft / friendship	21
Sprache / language	31
Agency / agency	77
Konflikte / conflict	40
Schule / school	1
Ideale Schule / ideal school	103
Reale Schule / real school	152
Objektive Beschreibungen / objectivs	33
Corona in der Schule / corona in school	40
Isolation / isolation	3
Beziehungen & Kommunikation mit anderen Schülern / reationship & communication with other pupils	15
Online-Schulunterricht / online schooling	26
Unterstützung beim Lernen / support for learning	47
Vorbilder in der Schule / role models in school	2
Schule und zukünftiges Leben / school and future live	21
Aspirationen / learning aspirations	49
Familiäre Unterstützung / family support	17

Lehrer- und Schulbeziehung / teacher & school relationship	103
Freundschaften und Peergemeinschaften / friendship, peers	55
Schülerbeziehungen / pupil relations	86
Gefühl zur Schule / feelings about school	47
Migrationshintergrund / migration background	15
Gender / gender	32

The interviews were interpreted in an analysis matrix. This means that first a horizontal analysis along the code tree and the respective categories was carried out. The second step was a vertical analysis. This describes an analysis within the individual categories. Combining the horizontal and vertical analyses produces the results, which you will find in chapters 5 to 8.

In a first step, ISCED1, ISCED2 and ISCED3 were analysed separately from each other horizontally and partly also vertically. In order to provide a deeper insight into the three different age groups. The three age groups were then linked and directly compared to represent the student population as a group in this report.

The interviews of pre-school children (ISCED0) were also analysed independently of the other age groups in a first step. Then the categories Identity and Belonging and Intercultural relations were compared and linked with ISCED1, ISCED2 and ISCED3.

As day care centres are a different type of institution than schools, the categories in chapter 2 were considered in the kindergarten context independently of the school context.

The information attached to the quotes can be used to identify the age group to which the quote belongs, where it can be found in the interview, whether it is an individual interview (I) or a focus group interview (F) and to which gender the respective speaker feels he or she belongs.

For example: G_I42_ISCED3_M means: country (Germany)_Interview type (F/I) Interview number (1-48), Age group (ISCED0 / ISCED1 / ISCED2 / ISCED3)_Gender of the participants (male / female / divers).

2. School as a lived space

Real school / day care – ideal school / day care

This chapter describes school and day care from the children's point of view. It shows what they like most and least, which activities give them the most satisfaction and what role their parents play in the context of the ideal and real school. In the interviews of ISCED1, ISCED2 and ISCED3, questions

for these categories included: "If you could build a school, what would that school be like?" and "What do you think about when you grade your school?". In preschool (ISCED0), the questions asked were about the children's favorite place and: "If a fairy godmother could cast a spell on the day care centre, what would the day care centre be like?".

Day care from the perspective of pre-school children (ISCED0)

Real Day care

From the child's point of view, the day care centre is above all a place to play, but also a place for social contacts and learning together.

Boy, 6 years old: We always want to play, so sometimes we also do preschool. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

Boy, 5 years old: Sometimes we learn something here and I also play with my friend sometimes. (G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

For some children, it is also a safe place to test their own limits.

Boy, 6 years old: So (I like to) romp around, throw everything around and stuff. (G_F5_ISCED0_MM)

In the interviews, it can be seen that the children in the real day care centre mainly look for the difference between quiet and active types of play. Here, the children particularly emphasise their own agency. For example, some of the preschool children reject the explicit requirement to take a nap in the day care centre.

Girl, 5 years old: I wish we didn't have to take naps anymore. (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

In contrast, they underline their independence.

Girl, 5 years old: We can do it all by ourselves. (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

This shows that they want to be independent. Children who feel confident to do this express the desire to judge for themselves when they are tired, need to rest or when other children are tired and need rest.

Girl, 5 years old: No, if you are a child in the morning circle who lies down, then you have to let them sleep on the mattress because they are tired then. (G_F13_ISCED0_FF)

For the children, places of retreat in the day care centre are above all small hiding places that they have built themselves or that have already been provided, such as caves or tents and functional rooms in which a quiet atmosphere is giving.

Girl, 6 years old: Boy's name [A] and I slept a little bit in a small round tent there today. (...) so then we are allowed to (set up the tent and sleep) in the corridor (G_F19_ISCED0_MMF)

Other places where the children can retreat are, for example, the library, the mats in the sports room and the so-called dream room. This room also has mats and a relaxing atmosphere.

Girl, 5 years old: And in the dream room, we like to relax and have massages or press on our backs (G_F13_ISCED0_FF)

Girl, 5 years old: I sometimes sleep in the sports room and there I rest a bit (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

As already described, the interplay between opportunities for movement and rest is important to the children. They say that they like to do sports. Climbing in particular is frequently mentioned by the preschool children. Popular places are the garden, playgrounds and the gym.

Boy, 5 years old: I like doing sports. (G_F16_ISCED0_MM)

Girl, 6 years old: Because you can do gymnastics there and I would like to climb. (G_F4_ISCED0_MFF)

The children particularly like places in their day care centre where they can combine different forms of play. For example, two boys explained in a focus group interview that they feel most comfortable in the building room of the day care centre. Here they engage in creative work (painting and handicrafts), in construction games (building with bricks), in role play (playing with cars) and also in movement games (breaking things).

Boy, 5 years old: Yes, I have a [favourite place]. The construction room.

Boy, 6 years old: Me too, the construction room, because you can build so much there. But today we have to destroy everything (...) Because on Fridays we always have to destroy everything. (...)

Boy, 5 years old: [That's] Great. You just take something, a part with your hands and then you throw it and break it again (...) Yes, of course it's fun! (...)

Boy, 6 years old: Yes (...) (In the construction room) you can even paint, otherwise we were only allowed to paint in the art room. (...) I like to paint and do handicrafts.

Boy, 5 years old: (I like) games. Cars. Boy, 6 years old: There are also cars in the construction room. (G_F10_ISCED0_MM)

Another boy also feels most comfortable in this room because of what is on offer and the possibility to develop freely in his own play.

Boy, 5 years old: I only like the building corner because there are so many things. You can play a lot there, that's why I like the building corner. (...) We always play Fireman Sam there. (G_F16_ISCED0_MM)

Being outside is very important for many children in the two day care centres. This gives them pleasure. They talk about nature, such as trees, which are important landmarks for them.

Girl, 5 years old: Yes, but my (favourite) place is outside. (...) Where the big one is: where the birch tree is. (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Girl, 6 years old: Because that's where I am the most and because I like it that way, because I like nature. (...) So I play with my friends by the apple tree. (G_F19_ISCED0_MMF)

As in the example of the construction room, the children also enjoy a variety of opportunities for discovery and play outside. They mention above all the opportunity to play movement games (e.g. on the climbing frame and with the vehicles), but also role-playing games, construction games (e.g. in the sandbox) and also rule games (e.g. football). Many of the games can be combined with each other or can be assigned to more than one type of game.

Boy, 5 years old: Well, I drive a vehicle and play football.

Boy, 6 years old: And I drive vehicle, play football and sandbox. (G_F17_ISCED0_MM)

Boy, 5 years old: *I always make tunnels in the sandpit.* (G_F17_ISCED0_MM)

Ideal day care

The children's ideal day care centre can be divided into five different categories. Variant a) is the idea of a fantasy day care centre, in which fairy tale characters, superheroes and fantasy creatures and objects are present:

Girl, 5 years old: A unicorn that should fly around with me. (G_F11_ISCED0_MF)

Boy, 5 years old: Yes, I would like to have a real dragon here, (...) a real dragon that can also breathe fire. (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Girl, 5 years old: I would also have a superhero. (G_F9_ISCED0_MFF)

Boy, 5 years old: And / have to think. What else do I want? That the roof, I meant that the whole ceiling and the walls are made of glitter. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

Variant b) of the ideal day care centre refers to the possession of more toys and other toys than already exist, for example, a boy shows interest in electric toys, such as a remote-controlled car. In this context, it could be discussed whether the children in the day care centre would actually like more toys or whether it is only the idea of new things that appeals to them.

Girl, 6 years old: I would just, if I was a teacher like that, I would just have spent my money on toys that are new. (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Boy, 6 years old: I would like to see electric things coming in here. (...) An electric car and an electric plane and an electric robot. (...) With the plane I would fly everywhere, with the car I would drive through all the tunnels that the children build. (G_F10_ISCED0_MM)

Girl, 5 years old: Yes, I would like there to be other toys. (...) I would like to have a princess castle. (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Variant c) refers to the community and social context of Kita (day care centre). In this category, the children want activities and adventures that involve the whole Kita.

Boy, 6 years old: To bring a huge boat to the day care centre (...) because in case that water comes to the day care centre, all the children can get into the boat and then we can go everywhere. (G_F1_ISCED0_MMM)

Girl, 5 years old: So I would give away tickets for the theatre (...) To everyone (from the day care centre). (G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Boy, 5 years old: But I want two hills (...) And smaller hills. Girl, 6 years old: Or bicycles. Boy, 6 years old: Then we can do a cross track. Girl, 6 years old: So cross bikes with small hills. The whole garden, then we could chug, chug, chug, chug. Boy, 5 years old: You have to be careful not to fly over the handlebars. (G_F19_ISCED0_MMF)

Variant d) describes a more "beautiful" nursery in the eyes of the children. For example, a boy suggests beautifying the nursery with more nature.

Boy, 6 years: That the kindergarten would be beautiful and look better. (G_F7_ISCED0_M)

Boy, 5 years old: To make it more beautiful (...) a tree (with) leaves. (G_F10_ISCED0_MM)

And variant e) describes a day care centre where the children are allowed to determine the rules and have more agency.

Girl, 5 years old: I would like (...) that we don't have to clean up mats (...) and that we don't have rules. (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

Girl, 6 years old: With the magic powers I would do that I get everything I want.
(G_F21_ISCED0_MFF)

Feeling towards the day care centre

Most of the children answered in the affirmative to the question about whether they feel comfortable at the day care centre.

Girl, 5 years old: Everything is nice here. Everything is really nice here in the kindergarten.
(G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

Despite a general feeling of well-being, some of the children's statements indicate that they would like to spend less time at the kindergarten and more time with their parents. For example, one child describes that he is at the day care centre so early that he is still tired and goes to sleep at the centre. Other children formulate the wish to be a "midday child". This means that they would like to be picked up by their parents at lunchtime instead of spending the afternoon at the day care centre.

Boy, 5 years old: (...) when I always come so early and when I'm tired, I go to bed in the kindergarten. (...) and when I go out, kindergarten is really long. (G_F7_ISCED0_M)

Boy, 5 years old: I don't want to be in kindergarten like that all the time, I want to be midday child all the time, (...), but I was only allowed once (...) then my dad picked me up. (G_F16_ISCED0_MM)

Boy, 5 years old: Yes [I like it at day care] but I already told my dad and my mum that I want to become a midday child soon. (G_F16_ISCED0_MM)

Girl, 5 years old: *I would like (...) to be a midday child.* (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

There are also children who do not feel so comfortable in the day care centres. One boy, 5 years old, says that he does not like to go to day care voluntarily. The reason he gives is that there are other children who bully him.

Boy, 5 years old: I have to. (...) Yes, I don't like kindergarten (...) because there are always some who annoy me. (G_F17_ISCED0_MM)

Another boy also says that he does not feel very comfortable in the kindergarten. The reason he gives is that he has better toys at home. In the interview, he repeatedly mentions that he would rather be at home than at day care. When he is at the day care centre, he looks for contact and closeness to the teachers.

Boy, 6 years old: Do not like to go to day care. (..) Do what I want (...) Go from kindergarten (...) To home (...) (Favourite place is) next to all kindergarten teachers.
(G_I12_ISCED0_M)

Both boys go to different kindergartens, both were born in Germany and have a parent who comes from another country. In the interview, they both say that they have friendships at the kindergarten. However, they show less explorative behaviour than other children show and feel more insecure and uncomfortable.

School from the perspective of pupils (ISCED1, ISCED2, ISCED3)

At the beginning of the interview respectively focus group, children were asked to rate their school in a general perspective. These ratings summarily draw a quite positive picture of school related experiences and perceptions. More concretely and in quantitative terms, there were at least 14 ratings at grade 2, one rating at grade 3, five ratings at grade 1, which is the best, and also one rating at grade

6, which is the worst possible. This results in an average rating of 2 and thus in a quite positive evaluation of school. However, reported experiences and perceptions are differentiated, depend on different factors and circumstances, which might influence how children feel at school, what brings satisfaction to them and what is disappointing. Accordingly, ideas and wishes concerning ideal school often refer on critically considered and/ or disappointing experiences, but also to positively mentioned aspects. Hence, real school experiences often refer to ideas and wishes in how to change school to become somewhat of an ideal school.

As the average rating shows, those students, who participated in interviews or focus groups, usually like to go to school, because there they can learn new things, find interesting places, can meet with peers, play with their friends or receive support and encouragement from teachers.

Girl, 9 years old: Because, when we have lessons, teachers do this in a funny way. The court break could be longer and because I have many friends there.

I: Nice. Sounds good. ... There is a garden, a school garden, where we can do nice things. And playing games a lot. (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

The quotation illustrates the spectrum of things and aspect students like at school, and which students also criticize or do not like.

Social climate

Social climate, peer relations in this context represent a favoured aspect as well as an issue, when being together with peers respectively friends is something what almost all children like, but from time-to-time classmate's behaviour is considered as disturbing and disappointing.

Girl, 10 years old: In my class it is quite noisy. When teacher leaves, then they are doing party or something like that. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

When children mention such behaviour, then they feel negatively affected in their aspirations to learn or in their opportunities to play at school or in after school care. Sometimes children express a complete lack of understanding and they feel stressed from those classmates.

Girl, 9 years old: During lesson this boy, he is playing around during lesson instead of being aware. During breakfast, they are very noisy as well and in after school care, at the playground to disguise and with the beanbag, they usually beat each other instead of negotiating a game and play it.

I: And this is difficult to you. You said it is stressful.

Girl, 10 years old: *Because it is so noisy. And this is stressful.* (G_I23_ISCED1_F)

Especially girls criticize such behaviour as disturbing and describe it as typical for their male classmates. Considering age and at least gender, such behaviour and corresponding conflicts might be typical and finally students find ways to deal with, be it that they avoid each other or that they ask teachers for support and assistance. If possible, for instance in after school care, they try to avoid these boys when playing at places, where boys usually are not used to be or doing activities boys do not like that much. Of course, there are boys with whom girls like to play with and if all boys would be of this kind, school would be perfect.

Girl, 9 years old: The school we have, the same, where I go to. Only the boys, with the same students, but the boys are not that annoying and nasty. (G_I23_ISCED1_F)

In addition to these experiences in age- and gender-specific behaviour and related potentials of conflict, students reported experiences in bullying, which for some of them is a serious issue in classroom, regardless if they are affected themselves.

Girl, 10 years old: We also have such a child, who has an illness, when he is tired, he has to lay down. And then, he is offended quite often and he cannot fight back and teachers do not really do something. They say in front of the whole class that he has a weakness, but is not accordingly stupid. However, this does not has an impact to them. [...] Yes, and it is often the case that they blame children, who are more corpulent. Girl, 10 years old: Yes, they look more at the outside. They do not really care about the inside.” (G_I30_ISCED1_FF)

Children, who are different, obviously are classified as weaker and worse, even physical and cognitive characteristics, such as illnesses, gender or weight play a role here. Also, migrant background is reported as a reason for bullying and other types of stressful experiences.

Boy, 11 years old: [...] Or yes, because I have so bad friends in my class. Or bad children, so I rate three minus. I: What are these children doing that they are bad? Boy, 11 years old: Yes, their grades are bad. Or you simply have a bad encounter with them every day and our teachers do not like them. Yes, also not. Yes, and there are more than twenty kids at our school. That is bad [...] behaviour. That these kids show bad behaviour. I: And what are these kids doing for example? Boy, 11 years old: Example, they do not really help or shout all the time, when we are in classroom. Or, sometimes they do during lesson [...] offend other children. Or they make, yes, some of the children from the bad children hurt somebody. There are many violations done by them. There are also migrant kids, who showed that bad behaviour. [...] I: And what are the teachers doing, when they beat somebody or show bad behaviour? Boy, 11 years old: Nothing. Yes, nothing. I: Even when they see it or when you tell them about? Boy, 11 years old: Yes, sometimes they write into the homework [...]” (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

Girl, 15 years old: So, my class is, how can I say, the worst class? They are very racist (in English). There is many racism in my class, therefore.

I: Okay. Could you give me an example, could you describe a bit more?

Girl, 15 years old: There is a group in my class, around six or seven people, who do not like migrants. And as I was first in my class, the bullied me very much. So, they threw a ball against me in sports. That is why I do not like sport class. And they told stupid things to me. Yes and so on, but the other, well, despite this group, my class actually is good to me. Yes.

I: Mhm. And the other children in your class help you, when this group is that nasty to you or what happens in such case?

Girl, 15 years old: So first, I am here for two and a half years, in this school. When I came to this class first, they bullied me, but further they did not see me. I was like a ghost, and when I needed help, nobody saw me. I could not speak German, I could only speak English and nobody could speak English. Thus, it was difficult to me, but now I have a friend in my class and she is helping me, when I ask her. And the others speak to me as well, but this group does not talk to me. They do not like migrants. So, you can say that perhaps one of them is a Nazi. He says, he is Nazi or so. (G_F37_ISCED3_MF)

In both cases, feeling at school is strongly influenced by annoying and stressful experiences with aggressive children and their blaming behaviour against other children, in one case explicitly against migrant children. Although those children in both examples are quite a few, their behaviour obviously dominates school experiences and to some extent has an influence on other children, who at least in the first time did not support migrant students in class.

Dealing with a migrant background

Having a migrant background in certain interviews was mentioned as a challenge, correlating with several difficulties in different dimensions. This does not mean, that it is challenging due to a general lack of sensitivity, awareness, help and support in general. Moreover, challenges or stress with regard to aggressive respectively open xenophobic behaviour in school was the exceptional case. Nonetheless, awareness, help and support given by classmates and especially teachers are essential on how migrant children experience school, how they can deal with school related tasks and expectations and thus if they like to go to school or they do not.

Girl, 17 years old: So, really my classmates were so fast and I was feeling that I could not contribute anything. So, during group work I felt as a zero-person, so like that. Now, of course, it is better. However, we actually do not much group work. Currently it is better. Otherwise, probably my teacher in history, when I cannot answer this fast in this subject. Because, she is talking the whole lessons, does not write anything on the chalkboard for instance. I try to understand and to write down. Then she asks around. And if she asks me and I cannot answer, it feels bad. [...] I count the minutes, these ninety minutes. Oh, they are so... Yes, when she says something bad in class, because every time, when she says any warning to me, there are other persons in class, my classmates. I do not feel good, when she wants something. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Because school in this example did not take their language proficiency into account, for instance during group work or other tasks, she felt like being worthless, a kind of “zero person”. Also, during regular lessons, here in history, no awareness was spent on her needs and the challenges she has to deal with, especially according to language. However, especially teacher’s awareness and support are considered as crucial factors regarding their feeling at school and highly appreciated when given.

Boy, 11 years old: So, there are teachers, I love them, right. They are good for me. How do you say? They do good things to me, right. (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

Boy, 17 years old: Okay. I like my school very much. [...] Teachers are all very good. I like them all, because they want to help every time and because they are no racists. There are no racists. Such teachers I would not like. I am satisfied. (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

Girl, 17 years old: So the teachers I like, they text you all the time to know if you are ok or if you need anything. And there was like something very funny, because I wasn't used to that. Because I was always by myself and I always asked the teachers like what to do. And yes, most of the time like that. And now they just make you feel, I don't know, yes part of the school. (G_I45_ISCED3_F)

Teachers have significant impact on the experiences and perceptions of school and thus play a very important role for children, especially for those with a migrant background. The way, in which children consider teachers and “rate” them, depends on different aspects of their behaviour towards children and their acting as a teacher. Migrant students to some extent need special attention and if necessary special support from teachers.

Girl, 17 years old: For instance my German teacher. I sometimes have some questions, which I just do not want to ask during lesson, because they might be too easy for my classmates. I only want a short explanation at the end of the lesson. And she reacts angry, says that she does not provide private lessons, private tutoring. We shall ask our questions during lessons. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

But:

Girl, 17 years old: Yes, in computer science course, when I have a question, she comes to me and says in a way: 'You can do it, we can do it together.' Says it to me every lesson. And regardless if I am interested in computer science, because of her, so that she is happy, I want to do it. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

This, receiving substantial support, not only according to educational requests, but also and more important when strengthening the self-confidence through support, trust and encouragement, sometimes might be a matter of the particular persons, who migrant children meet. In one case, L2-teachers was the only resource in school.

Girl, 16 years old: Yes, I can go to my L2-teacher, she tries to help me as much as she can. But she can only help me to a point, the other half is up to the teachers and up to the classmates. But she can only help to one point. But that's not enough. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

Teachers

Regardless to a migrant background, students sensitively reflect on their teachers in different perspectives. Teachers to some extent represent a crucial factor in how students get along with school.

Girl, 9 years old: *I like my teachers.* (G_F27_ISCED1_FF)

Boy, 10 years old: 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, 10 years old: *Not that angry.* (G_I26_ISCED1_M)

Their behaviour and their acting as teachers are aspects, which children like or of which they are disappointed and on which they reflect. This reflection addresses teacher's kind of teaching and thus their ability to motivate and support learning and their reliability as persons.

Methods of teaching, the way in which teachers present their subject to the students are quite essential to children's perception of school and their motivation to learn new things. Students like it, when teaching is to somewhat entertaining, and teachers use diverse teaching methods. Teaching should not be boring or technical.

Girl, 9 years old: *Sports.*

I: You do not like sports. Why do you not like sports? [...]

Girl, 9 years old: Because we are doing the same things repeatedly. That is annoying. (G_F27_ISCED1_FF)

Accordingly, students actually consider possible restrictions due to content reasons and corresponding necessities to teach in a somewhat traditional way. Also, individual characteristics are considered and accepted.

Girl, 11 years old: It depends to some extent from the subject and from teaching. I like teachers, who teach not that boring, explaining something shortly, writing at the chalkboard what we have to copy. However, sometimes this is necessary too. But some of them teach creatively and they just are nice persons and to somewhat behave like students, not as friends, but they are pretty kind and when they have a reason to praise someone, they do this very good. However, sometimes it is good as well, if they are a bit strictly, because my class is, I do not want to say a loud class, but quiet we are definitely not. [...] And there are teachers, who are strictly, and this is quite good, because then we are aware. We know we have to be silent. Thus, you probably may better focus. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

However, students like to learn, and learning is easier and makes more fun, when teachers pay attention on students interests on the one and on their strategies and methods on the other hand. Moreover, modern teaching methods may support learning in a more effective way, which allows to deal with more topics in less time.

Girl, 9 years old: It would be nice, if our teachers could better narrate. The lesson. Then it could be better. (G_F27_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: Court break could be longer. And we could work much more.

I: What do you mean? Could you describe?

Girl, 9 years old: So, we learn a bit, because we are slow, so we could learn much more.

I: Whom do you mean to be slow? What do you mean?

Girl, 9 years old: So, we stay at one topic for a long time. We could learn more topics.

I: Okay. You want to be faster, that you do more topics?

Girl, 9 years old: *Yes.* (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

For some students, openness and flexibility in teaching seems to be a matter of age, when they report that concerning to their experiences young teachers teaching is more interesting and funnier and those teachers more often cooperate with students.

Girl, 10 years old: I have in mind, that mostly the younger teachers ask, if we like it or not. And that those, who live in the past to some extent, things only see from their perspective and got used to it, I think. However, of course there are older teachers, I may say, who sometimes have some kind of creative tasks or invent something nice. And yes, at least it occurs, I would say, it occurs so medium that teachers ask us, if a task was good or not good. (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

Almost incidentally participation is outlined as an important aspect regarding the precepted quality of teaching, which is not only ascribed to young teachers, but also mentioned as a substantial element of ideal school, regardless that in this context rules and their execution by teachers are considered as well.

Girl, 10 years old: Nice and they should participate children in decision-making a lot and also establish strict rules and they should be nice, but if there some problems occur also be strictly. So, they also could be strictly. They just should participate children in deciding things. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

According to the tension between creativity, participation on the one, rules and necessities on the other hand, a primary school student suggested an interesting experiment following the idea to learn more about the different perspectives of teachers and students.

Girl, 10 years old: I would say, teachers would teach me, but there is a day, when teacher takes the role of the student and student takes the role of the teacher. I imagine that very funny, because then students could figure out, what they want to share with the teachers. And I believe indeed, this would be funny for the students, if such exchange occurs, because they could realize, how difficult it is to play the role of a teacher. And then the teacher might get a short insight, how difficult it can be for students or how difficult it can be made by the teacher for the student. And I think, this is also very, very funny, important task, I think now, when [...] the teacher may invent at least on creative task for the teachers, so that the students, anyway which teacher, anyway which person, can have some fun too, even if not for long. (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

Another, no less important facet of student's reflection on teachers is, if they experience them as reliable persons, who treat children fair and are there for them. In different contexts students reported their disappointment with lag of engagement of teachers for children's interests or safety.

Girl, 15 years old: But the teachers do nothing if you do not say anything. You have to say that they are doing something. I: Even when teachers are present and see, what happens? Or do you have to say, because they do not notice, what happens? Girl, 15 years old: Yes, even if they see. I had a lesson in biology. Our teacher is actually nice. But these two guys did something to me. They were laughing about me and saying something to me. He noticed, but did not say anything and I thought, when I do not say something, they will say nothing. I could not say something, I was so angry, I could not think. So, I went to another teacher. (G_F37_ISCED3_MF)

In turn, students really appreciate when they can rely on teachers according to all the different affairs of daily school life, regardless if this means schoolwork, conflicts or the need of individual support and encouragement.

Boy, 20 years old: At school I like the teachers. For example, when I have homework or something else, then I can ask her or so. [...] and when I have done the homework, I send it to her, and she corrects or so. When I ask, for instance like today or so: Did you check correct my homework? or so, or Did you see? When she says: Oh, I do not have time. Or so, but she answers to me what happens [...] Either she cancels, or she does it later. She lets me know. I do not have time and later I do. Or: I did and later I send you the evaluation. I like that. She is always there for us. (G_I41_ISCED3_M)

Girl, 9 years old: So, they do some things sometimes, for example, that each girl, each girl was allowed to say what bothers her about the boys and whether she likes something about the boys. And the boys, they were not allowed to contradict. They had to listen to that and they were not allowed to contradict. (G_I23_ISCED1_F)

Student's perception of children is guided by many different perspectives, which not only consists of teaching and learning support, but also fairness, individual encouragement and support and at least protection, when necessary. The most important aspect, almost every time included in the very often mentioned sentences "I like my teachers." is their reliability.

Places

When, as in case of conflicts between girls and boys, avoiding each other is a proper strategy, places are needed where girls can stay on its own without being annoyed by the boys. This might be the painting table in after school care, because most of the male classmates do not like to paint and thus girls can talk freely and do what they want. In general, places and activities are closely linked with and stay for what students like at their school. There are multifaceted examples, where children refer on places they like and/ or where they can do favoured things, play freely, meet friends etc.

Girl, 10 years old: There is a place, where we shall not go to, but where children buried some plants like daffodils, lavender or tomatoes. And then, children pick it and there are new activities all the time. I like it very much there. [...]

Girl, 9 years old: And I like the courtyard, we have a playground, a football pitch. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: Football pitch [...] Yes, rave room. [...]

Girl, 10 years old: And relaxation room. Where I can be alone with my friends. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: In library are many books, many interesting, many exciting, many funny books. And there is a corner and in this corner are beanbags and pillows and there you can pull off your shoes, sit down and browse in a book. (G_I23_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 9 years old: My favourite place in school is the school garden. (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

Boy, 7 years old: The building room.

I: What are you doing there?

Boy, 7 years old: Sometimes I am building robots using LEGO-technic brick, which you have to connect. Not really LEGO-technic. There I can build. There are building blocks as well, from which I can build towers. And from LEGO I can build what I want. (G_I29_ISCED1_M)

Girl, 11 years old: (deliberating for 1:27 min.) (laughing) I think the basement. Because there are our lockers, there I at least is my locker and then I go there before school and sometimes in-between and often my friend joins me. And all the time, when I think of the basement, I am there with my friend very often and there we talk. And when I think of it, it is a place, where I am with her; I can talk to her and then we dally a bit and take us time. And down there you can simply sit down and I really like it there, this cosy area.

I: How does it feel there?

Girl, 11 years old: It is really cool, because lessons almost finished and so we can take us time and then we just talk and I am mostly really happy there. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 16 years old: At the library it was very nice all the time. Of course, it is quiet there. I liked to be there. My former best friend and me, we have been there during breaks, because we did not want to go to the courtyard and you were not sent out from the library. (G_I39_ISCED3_F)

I: Is there a place in school, which you especially like, where you like to be?

Boy, 17 years old: No. But I think there is a kind of reading room. It is nice there.

I: Describe a bit. I do not know it. How is it there?

Boy, 17 years old: There are couches in this room.

Such a room couches in every corner and in the middle too. There you can sit down and a book/ there is a library. There you can get the books and sit down and during lunch for instance read something. Yes, this is nice.

I: And what do you like there?

Boy, 17 years old: I can be on my own because of the classmates. Because there is no other place in school where I can be on my own. (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

Although students during the interviews or focus groups were asked for their favourite places in school, the presented examples show that places are closely linked to individual needs, interests and favoured activities as well as to social relationships with peers. In almost all cases, favourite places in school stands for something that students like or for what they are seeking for like quietness, retreat or some kind of privacy. Accordingly, places fulfil different needs and function from student's point of view, when they provide opportunities for certain activities or particular qualities, which allow to retreat from daily stress at school. Thus, certain places in some cases are better places compared to school, because children there can join their interests and find more diverse opportunities to play, to realize own ideas, to be creative and to be together with friends.

Boy, 11 years old: Sometimes I like to go to after school care. I talk to my friends there. My peers say, you have to go to after school care. [...] We have after school care and we

have a school. And we have home kids and after school care kids. I am after school care kid. Home kids leave at noon, when lessons are finished and go home. We go for something different every day. [...] There are so many games, we can play there in after school care. There are Playmobil or LEGO. We built something, buildings. I made a ship. And this was quite good. And I made a house, a small one. [...] And played UNO with my friends and that was fun. (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

Sometimes favourite places are not physical places, but social activities, which provide safety, connectedness and a sense of belonging and thus play an important role concerning the individual feeling to school.

I: Okay. I want to know, if there is a place at school, where you going to say, this is nice, there I feel well to some degree?

Girl, 17 years old: Yes, in computer science course, when I have a question, she comes to me and says in a way: 'You can do it, we can do it together.' Says to me every lesson. And regardless if I am interested in computer science, because of her, so that she is happy, I want to do it. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Another place of this somewhat social kind are L2-classes. 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 a helpful and important resources and reflections, which consider them as boring, because there is no individual progress in learning German.

Girl, 9 years old: 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, 9 years old: 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_F)

Other children see L2-classes as an important resource, regardless of if they attend these classes regularly, while they can use them in a flexible way when there is need for help or advice.

I: Okay. Do you attend L2-courses?

Boy, 17 years old: No. For one year I attend regular class only. Only sometimes I go to my L2-teacher and we do some kind of short lessons.

I: How does it happen? When you say that you need him?

Boy, 17 years old: Yes, yes. When I say, we do.

I: And how do you like?

Boy, 17 years old: I like it. If I need some help, I go to my teacher and ask her to help me in this and this. And she says ok, and we have lesson and do this together. That's fine. (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

However, L2-classes actually work as considered and thus are important places or children, when they can learn German in these classes.

Mediator: She [sister of the translating person, Girl 16 years old] has German as a foreign language. So, they have lessons in school and there is a teacher, who explains German to students. Sometimes she must look after into the dictionary, but the teacher in such situations helps very much. [...]

I: Are you in regular classes too or only in L2-classes? Sister: Yes, when teacher says: Yes, you can very well. Then she asks us or my parents, if we want another lesson for her. I: And, do you like it? Girl, 16 years old: Very much. (G_I46_ISCED1_F)

Moreover, L2-classes provide the experience of social connectedness and sometimes represent a place to retreat from the ordinary stress in school, in case of conflict or when seeking encouragement, what makes them to a kind of secure space.

Girl, 16 years old: I love my L2-class. That's the only teacher I like. She really does care that we are learning something. She checks up on us a lot.

I: Can you give me an insight into an exemplary L2-lesson?

Girl, 16 years old: We learn German. I do not know German a lot. And there are other people who are just like me. Other people like me, we go in that class and learn German together. And we learn grammar and basic stuff that we need to know in basic life. That's all.

I: And how is it between you students in L2-class?

Girl, 16 years old: People, there are people like me. A lot of immigrants. And so we feel connected, because we are all immigrants in Germany and we are learning the same stuff and we are trying to learn the same language so we all understand each other. But in my normal classroom they all German and I am the immigrant one, so they don't understand how I feel among them. (G_I47_ISCED3_F)

Ideal school

Ideas concerning the ideal school often are related to places but also to the kind of schooling. Places at least here are as well linked to activities, which students miss or like and which should be implemented or improved in school. Environmental aspects according to well-being and opportunities to do something relaxing or what students possibly like play a role.

Girl, 10 years old: My first wish is, our school is placed in the middle of a jungle, in a forest, where also is a lake, where we can go swimming. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Boy, 13 years old: I would make one more yard, many opportunities for leisure time. For instance, a big sports yard. Our sports yard is so small, so I want to make it big, so we can play volleyball, table tennis and football. (G_F37_ISCED2_MF)

Girl, 8 years old: There would be lessons. And there would be a creativity room and an atelier and a sports room, a huge sport pitch, where you can do sports, and a huge garden, where you can play during court break. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Although ideal school should provide plenty space for play and leisure activities, students consider school as a place of learning and teaching. Moreover, when they mention improved opportunities to participate, students focus on school as an institutional and social context, of which they are part of and accordingly they should have proper opportunities to influence what happens there and how it does.

Girl, 10 years old: There should be a courtyard with many nice trees and many bicycle stands and yes. There should be many opportunities and wide rooms. Furthermore, there

should be a p.o. box, where students could put their wishes into, and there should be a janitor, who fulfils all these wishes. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

I: Okay. What does the ideal school look like. If you could build a school, not just the building but everything around it, what would be the perfect school?

Girl, 14 years old: Definitely no homework, definitely let more kids in on more situations.

I: Inaugurate? Initiating.

Girl, 14 years old: *Engaging then just.*

I: In what situations, for example?

Girl, 14 years old: Well, with creative ideas, for example. Mostly we always have to do what the teachers say, but that's usually really boring (...), I don't know. And maybe prepare us a little bit for the jobs, well, jobs I guess. And yes. (G_I38_ISCED2_F)

In this example, the students accept the school as a school, as an institution, and criticize it at the same time. On the one hand, the school is criticized for its grip on the students' lives after school and in terms of its usual practices and strategies. However, the students ultimately only doubt these practices and strategies, but not its principal goals, regardless of the desire for gradual improvement of the goals as well. In other words, ideal school means a school with modern principles and practices in terms of participation, creative methods in teaching and to some extent of educational contents. In this context and possibly influenced by the pandemic, students mention opportunities if not necessities of digitalization.

Girl, 16 years old: What I would improve in my school, what I would like to improve, is digitalization. Even my school is not that good and there are not that much digital devices. And this I would improve. So, I want to have it improved, because I cannot do it.

I: If you could, what would you do? To improve? [...]

Girl, 16 years old: Yes, at first, as I mentioned, I would like to have a digitalized school. So we could work during lessons with laptops or we could use our smartphones, at least sometimes, because in our school it is forbidden to use smartphones for students beyond sec two to have the smartphones active. They have to be switched off. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Such ideas might be as convincing as they are urgent when considering that some students reported that usage of smartphone for translating is forbidden according to rules rooting in more or less traditional beliefs of what is good and what is bad for students at primary schools.

Finally and without further comments, ideal school is free of bullying, violent and blaming behaviour.

Girl, 17 years old: I think I would build a school where there is no bullies and no bullying, because it really infects children and their minds and I think it just like follows everyone until there adulthood. (G_I45_ISCED3_F)

[Affective and relational dimensions of day care / school](#)

This chapter describes the emotional and relational dimension of day care centres and school. The relationship with peers and the relationships with teachers, the importance of embeddedness for learning and the children's' perception of participation are discussed.

Affective and relational dimensions of day care (ISCED0)

Relationships with peers

In both day care centres, children with a migration background and children without a migration background are equally friendly with each other and are seen as each other's play partners. To some extent, this is an essential precondition of hybrid integration due to social relationships between the children, the experience of individual belonging as well as mutual activities of children regardless to their individual cultural background. Accordingly, there are different forms of playing together. On the one hand there are children who like to play together because of their common interests. The focus is not on the other person, but on the game.

Boy, 5 years old: (I play on my favourite place) with a boy I don't know, I always forget the name. (G_F9_ISCED0_MFF)

And on the other hand there are children who play where their friends are.

Girl, 5 years old: Well, I'm always there with my two friends (...). Yes, because we hardly ever leave each other. (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

Being together among friends is important from the children's point of view. Play partners who are not in the kindergarten for a longer period of time are still listed as important play partners and are missed by the children.

I: And do you get along well? Do you have friends? Yes? Can you tell me who it is?

Girl, 6 years old: Girl1 [A], but she's on holiday now. (G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

Boy, 5 years old: (I play) with boy1 [A], boy 2 [A] and boy 3 [A]. He used to be here too, but he has moved away now. (G_F2_ISCED0_MF)

Boy, 5 years old: Yes, I also just said the name 5 [A], I missed her. She's had an operation on her leg. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

The children enjoy playing in groups, but they also enjoy playing alone for themselves and can communicate this need. They can also communicate their other needs. This mainly concerns conflict situations among the children. The children have learnt that if they don't like something or don't want something, the first thing they do is express this to the other person.

Girl, 5 years old: Well, I don't like it when someone annoys me and when I argue with my girlfriend and I don't like it when girl 2 [A] always draws on my pictures. (G_F9_ISCED0_MFF)

Boy, 5 years old: *That's when we say stop.* (...)

Boy, 6 years old: Sometimes they go on. Boy, 5 years old: They sometimes continue and sometimes they don't. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

Children who not only have a common topic of interest, but who are also given a common task within this topic of interest, feel a strong bond with each other. The following example shows three boys who all like to play in the building room. The three of them are proud to be part of the "construction room police". They have the task of making sure that things are fair. Among the boys is a boy who was born in India and only joined the German kindergarten group later. The joint task has an integrating effect, makes the three proud and strengthens their friendship.

Boy, 5 years old: Yes, because there are always three of us playing, aren't there Name 1 [A]? (...) And we are also the construction room police.

Boy, 6 years old: Yes, the three of us, that's why the three of us came down (to take part in the interview together) (G_F1_ISCED0_MMM)

Relationships with teachers

The children see the teachers as people who care about them and are there for them when they need help. The most important task of the teachers is seen as solving conflicts that the children cannot solve themselves or taking care of the children when they are not well.

Girl, 5 years old: Well, if the children do something bad, then [the teacher] say stop it. That is the important rule of being educators. (...) Yes. Except when some kids are crying and bleeding. If they're bleeding, then you have to put a plaster on it. And if someone hits another child, then you would have to say 'well stop it' and 'that hurts'. And if someone scratches, that hurts too. (G_F11_ISCED0_MF)

On the one hand, the children want the teachers to punish or scold other children when they have done something wrong. But on the other hand, the children don't like it when they themselves are scolded, when teachers get loud or when they have and keep strict rules.

Girl, 5 years old: The teachers scold us and we don't like that. (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

Girl, 6 years: Well, I like them. Only if they are strict then I don't. (G_F3_ISCED0_FF)

So, the children want teachers who calmly but consistently allow them to be together in the kindergarten and who also calmly make sure that rules are observed.

The relationship between the children and the teachers is an appreciative and caring relationship. The children like that the teachers are there for them, listen to them and that they feel welcome.

Boy, 6 years old: Then [the teachers] first say, hello. And then they say, hello I missed you. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

Boy, 5 years old: We can tell everything to the teachers. (...) they listen to us. (G_F18_ISCED0_MM)

Girl, 5 years old: And behind the room I always look at my folder (...). The teachers (made it for me). (G_F13_ISCED0_FF)

Perception of participation of pre-school children

Children who feel safe and comfortable in the day care centre show a highly developed exploration behaviour. They explore the day care centre and use different places to play.

Boy, 5 years old: I like everything here. The dream room, the sports room, our construction room, our room, I also like to play there. (G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

Girl, 5 years old: Everything is nice here. Everything is really nice here in the kindergarten. (G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

They know the facility, the structures, the daily routine and the other children and teachers. They also know their opportunities for participation. They can formulate their opinions and know who they can turn to if they want something. Children who have settled in well at the day care centre take advantage of their opportunities for participation and make use of them.

Boy, 5 years old: Sometimes. On our birthday we get to choose what we want to do. Sometimes we go to a playground, sometimes we go for ice cream.

I: So when you suggest something to your teachers, sometimes they do it?

Boy, 5 years old: Yes. I: And what do you suggest?

Boy, 5 years old: *I want to eat ice cream.* (G_F6_ISCED0_MFF)

Girl, 5 years: Then (if we have an idea) sometimes we say that and sometimes I don't.

I: Mhm and then what happens when you say it?

Girl, 5 years: Sometimes I can do that and sometimes I can't (...) Whether you are allowed to do it or not. Then (whether it is allowed), if you tell you may do it. And if it's too dangerous, then you have to do it together with the educator. (And), if it is too dangerous then you have to do it together with the educator and if it is TOO dangerous then you must not do it. Because then that's when you're not allowed to (G_F13_ISCED0_FF)

Some children reported that, if they want to change something or if they want to complain, they would go directly to the head of the day care centre, which indicates not only a kind of basic openness towards children's opinions and wishes, but also children's agency itself, when they would use this opportunity to somewhat confidently and naturally.

Boy, 5 years old: *Ask educator.*

Girl, 5 years old: Or you ask Mr. Name 3 [A].

Boy, 5 years old: *Yes, that's the boss.* (G_F2_ISCED0_MF)

Affective and relational dimensions of school (ISCED1, ISCED2 & ISCED3)

Relationships with peers

Overall, most pupils report feeling comfortable and satisfied with school.

Girl, 9 years old: I think it's good. I have many, many, many best friends there, almost the whole class is my best friend. So I think it's good. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 10 years old: So I think the school is very nice, because all the teachers are very nice. And we also have a very nice courtyard, a very nice courtyard. And the after-school care is also really nice. Everyone is totally nice and I have a lot of friends and yes. (G_I33_ISCED1_F)

Most children report only minor arguments and disputes in class. However, if they report conflicts, this clearly affects their well-being and their motivation to go to school.

Boy, 10 years old: I have no problem with school, (...) there is a child (...) On first months that I came to school, we were friends, [but] then he lied to me, called me names (...) and then one Friday we were at lunch at after-school care and there we were fighting, there (...) he scratched me on my face (...) for two weeks I was sick for it, I didn't come to school on that week. I'm looking at next week when school starts. (...) I will never be friends with him. (G_I26_ISCED1_M)

Among younger kids, gender seems to play a role and children report more same-gender friends. For instance, girls report that they have been teased by boys or that they swear at them. They also state that it is more likely for boys to come to blows. Boys are also seen as responsible for the loudness in the classroom, a factor that was mentioned by several children independent of their age.

Girl, 10 years old: So some boys are so bad, from our class. (...) For example, they say a bad word. (...) they always, even though I haven't done anything, they always break my satchel and other girls' satchels and then they say bad words again. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: They [the girls] were allowed to say to each other, each girl was allowed to say what bothers her about the boys and whether she likes something about the boys.

And the boys, they were not allowed to contradict. They had to listen to that and they were not allowed to contradict. Besides, sometimes Ms. Name 4 [A] hits the singing bowl, that's always the sign that it's quiet, that she has something to say. And with me it's always like that, I was just pretty angry and then, with another girl, with the permission of Ms. Name 4 [A], I hit the singing bowl and complained that the boys were once again too loud and that it totally gets on our girls' nerves. (G_I23_ISCED1_F)

With regard to gender, stereotypes are one topic between girls and boys. In an interview with two girls from ISCED1, one of them states:

Girl, 9 years old: Well, sometimes I think it's stupid that the boys say that we, as girls, are not as strong and that we don't play soccer as well and that we can never learn to play soccer as well. That we'll never be as strong as them or something. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

Both of them wish more support from their teachers and a need for accordant role models:

Girl, 10 years old: Maybe (...) the teacher (...) [should] make a clear statement, like, girls can also become as strong as you, or can / if they want, they can also play soccer so well, or something like that maybe. Girl, 9 years old: For example, there are also girls who are really strong. Or also women. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

For most children, it is not important whether they have a migrant background or not. This represents an essential precondition of hybrid integration, whether it is not mentioned in a sense of intentionally, pedagogically produced. However, respective perceptions and experiences of students against a corresponding social climate in school may provide opportunities of negotiating cultural attitudes in a way that supports building hybrid identities and thus enhances hybrid integration. Particularly in younger age, similarities in interests and activities as well as friendliness and sympathy are more decisive than cultural origin or migrant background.

Girl, 8 years old: So we have very many common points and very many different ones. For example, one common point is that we all like to talk in class (laughs). Yes, that sometimes gets on the teachers' nerves, it's a bit silly. And also, quite a lot of the class play instruments. And then it's also quite different, for example we do different sports and also the goal of the people is actually different. For example we have small groups. One group, for example, is always so smartly dressed, so modern and then also always so loud and with the boys and so loud and then there is another group, they just do a bit what they want. Well, not what they want, but they do a little bit, they don't care what the others think of them. So it's not about hitting or anything, but if you do something that the others don't find so cool, that they wouldn't do themselves, then the groups always keep to themselves a bit. But then you can always see which group you belong to, because one of them does it this way and that way. Yes. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

However, in older children, the importance of language skills is increasing. A common language is seen by the children as significant in building close friendships and as a necessary base to participate in the lessons and in school life. Often the migrant children see the responsibility by themselves and in their lack of accordant language competencies.

Girl, 18 years old: So, I would say my teachers are good, the school buildings and the janitor, all the other services are good too. So the students are also good. But I have problems to talk with others. So the problem is on me. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

Boy, 17 years old: They are nice to me and we haven't had any problems until today. I am satisfied, yes (...) We don't have bullying. So I am satisfied with the fact that there is no bullying. And I don't have a really good German friend, but we are good with each other. We are good. I have this Hungarian boy who comes from Hungary. And I am best friends

with him. He is a good boy. So we are always together in the class and so. We also speak German, but with other Germans I am not so close to each other. (...) I think, what's it called, because I don't talk so much in class. I'm not like that, so I don't talk so much with others. But with my friend, we talk together (...) So that they talk a lot, but because I don't talk so much, that I can't talk and so. With Germans, that's why I can't talk so much, but because he doesn't know German either. He also knows how much I know. He doesn't know German like the others. That's why I can talk to him much as the German. (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

Girl, 17 years old: There were so many phases that I felt like I/ I don't know if I'm exaggerating but like dying or something because (...) I couldn't understand anything in class. (...) So I had had a girlfriend that I met in ninth grade in this school and so ninth and tenth we were together. And she had been very, very, very bad to me at the beginning. So when teacher for example spoke very fast and I couldn't understand what the task is. And I just asked, what exactly are we supposed to do now. And she said, "what she said". And didn't say what we should do. So I wait like this, until the completion, so until all finished, because I didn't want to ask sometimes to teacher. Because they could say why I didn't listen. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Sometimes contact in schools are restricted to school and do not expand to leisure activities. Here, a separation between school life and life at home is noticeable. At the same time, many pupils also refer to friends and social contacts in their neighbourhood, in the Christian community, or communities based on their native language (e.g., Turkish community).

Girl, 12 years old: Yes, they [classmates] are nice. (...) We talk about what we like or something. And we play.

I: So do you play outside of school, or only when school is in session?

Girl, 12 years old: At school. (G_F27_ISCED1 ISCED2_FF)

Relationships with teachers

There is a wider variation in the evaluation of teachers, from favourite teachers and those who are perceived as friendly or nice, to teachers who fail to build a positive relationship with the children. In this context, positively perceived teachers are characterized by the fact that they respond to the children, their interests and their background. They take children seriously, enter into dialogue with them, and treat them equally.

Girl, 10 years old: Yes. I want Mrs. Name 10 [A] to come back, she is so old, but I want her to come back. She is my favourite educator. (...) Because she just gives us vegetarian gummy bears because I'm not allowed to eat gelatine and pork and we build teddy bears, birds out of a play-doh / she is so smart and she knows how to build it. We can build birds, out of play-doh, and we can build rabbit or a dog, there's pictures, you decide which one you want to make. And last time we painted that and we can take it home. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 10 years old: 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_FF)

Girl, 11 years old: Yes, exactly, then you're not afraid, for example, if you do something wrong. But then you know that the teacher won't scold you. So with the stricter teachers it's not like that: they react very sensitively when someone is too loud (...) And then there are teachers with whom it's not so much like that and they are always so relaxed and so on. For example, with my French teacher it was so good somehow. So she always talked to us as if we were, well, not her friends, but just in that way and then she wasn't so strict, but also played games with us sometimes. And yes, she was also so nice and she liked everyone. There wasn't one of them that she nagged all the time, while the other one was always very nice and praised. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

Children from migrant backgrounds emphasize that it helped them when teachers actively approached them, asked them if they needed help. Since some of them do not dare to approach the teachers, the responsibility here clearly lies with the teachers.

I: Um, you said earlier that you got along well with your English teacher from the beginning and that you could always ask your L2- teacher for help. Maybe you can describe a little bit more what they do that works so well. Girl, 15 years old: (...). In math, the teacher didn't say anything to me because I was new and I thought he'll say something to me because I was new, he'll help me or something. But he didn't help and in physics also but in English, after the lesson he came to me and he first spoke in German and then he spoke in English and we spoke in English. And uh I: we talked so much why I was here, why I could English and so. And he helped me. And the L2- teacher, she was really nice to us. (...) She helped us so much about German and our subjects, if we didn't understand something, for example, we could go to her. She explained for us and explained to us what was there. Yes, that's why I like: she helped us so much. In German subject and in German. (G_F37_ISCED2ISCED3_MF)

Boy, 17 years old: So for example, if I don't say something in a lesson or don't ask questions, they come to me for example after the lesson and ask me if I have a question about a topic. Or something with work, for example when we write work and when I make mistakes like that. They come to me and ask if we can check it again together and look at everything again. So they deal with us especially, because we are new here and don't know German as well as the Germans. And yes, that's why I'm satisfied. They always want to help and answer our questions. (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

Girl, 16 years old: 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_F)

Teaching-wise, the kids like teachers who use interactive methods, get the kids involved and participate. At the same time, children express that they also prefer clear instructions and boundaries.

Girl, 18 years old: (...) Well, our math 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_F)

Girl, 10 years old: So our teacher, I think she's cool, because she's strict. ... Some don't find that so nice, but others do, like me. Because it's better when she's strict, then you learn

more. And if we listen to her ourselves, then she also does something nice with us. (G_I33_ISCED1_F)

Children appreciate teachers as support of their learning, and most children emphasize that they want to learn and that they enjoy learning something new. This motivation is a great source that need to be used by educators and teachers.

Girl, 8 years old: We play something with our after-school teacher, or we tell something, or we make something. With our teacher we always do something/ we always learn something. I like that very much. I like learning very much. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

In the case of problems, most pupils report that they can talk about them with at least one person, either teachers or, if available at the school, with social workers. In the case of peer conflicts, the picture is more mixed. It depends on the type of conflict and the teacher. If it is a minor conflict, the majority of children try to solve it themselves, by directly communicating with each other, talking with peers who are not part of the conflict, leaving the situation, and do not involve the teacher. One reason is that the children don't want to look like a tattletale. However, often they report that their strategies are not successful.

Girl, 8 years old: I argue most with name 3 [A].

I: And then what happens, what do you do then?

Girl, 8 years old: Then we just don't play together for a day. Then we say: Do we want to be friends?" Then we say, "Yes" or sometimes "No" but mostly "Yes." Then we are friends.

I: That means you sort it out among yourself? (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 8 years old: Every school break they make an argument, sometimes two. I: And do you have any idea what they might need to make them stop? Girl, 8 years old: I think they just need friendly friends, not always teasing the others. Most of all, name 9 [A] and name 11 [A] need quite a lot of friendly friends. I: And what makes a friendly friend then? Girl, 8 years old: They always play so friendly and they don't hit anybody. And they don't fight that much there. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

They also criticize that there are no consequences for complaining to a teacher about the behaviour of other children. They often miss clear statements and stricter action when rules are not followed. Thus, the children ask for clear borders.

Girl, 10 years old: for example, a boy said a bad word to me, when I told that to a teacher, sometimes they don't do anything. Sometimes. If they see that, then they sometimes do nothing at all, so that the / I find that very bad. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: Yes, sometimes it's stupid that they don't really get punished. The after-school teachers say we'll go to them again later, and that's never done. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

In contrast, asking children to resolve the conflict, bringing them together, is seen as helpful.

Girl, 9 years old So our after-school care teacher now, Mr. Name 2 [A], to him, it is quite important to rehearse with each other and he really addresses this. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

One aspect that was referred to several times was the loudness in the classroom as well as disruptions from fellow students. Here the teachers try to intervene more or less successfully, also depending on the class. They often resort to sanctions, first warning the children and if there are several warnings, the children have to do punitive work (e.g., cleaning tables) or get other sanctions (e.g., warning

report to the parents). Usually, these sanctions are not that promising and children register very well the hopelessness of sanctions as a last resort.

Girl, 9 years old: So when it's loud in our house, Mrs. Name 1 [A] has a squeaking duck (...) and when she squeaks on it, that means we should be quiet. I: And is everyone quiet then? You nod. Yes. Girl, 10 years old: We have that too, but they don't get quiet. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 10 years old: They [teachers] annoy us. (...) Girl, 9 years old: Yeah now it's kind of better because Mrs. Name 1 [A] has set up a new rule, who is badly determined there Mrs. Name 1 [A] makes a line on the board every time and writes the child's name there. And if there are five strokes, then the child is picked up. If there are three dashes, she writes it in the homework notebook. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

The children also try to handle disturbances by their classmates on their own and are more or less successful in doing so.

Girl, 8 years old: (...) Sometimes I don't think it's good and sometimes it's good that I help someone.

I: And why do you sometimes not find that good?

Girl, 8 years old: Because there is someone from the class that I don't like that much. For example, name 9 [A] I don't like, name 10 [A] and name 11 [A].

I: What do they do?

Girl, 8 years old: They're not friendly, not nice. They always bother me, they always talk when they're working. That's what bothers me. Name 10 [A] is my neighbor and that bothers me a lot. I can't concentrate there.

I: And what do you do then, do you say something to them, or do you say something to the teacher?

Girl, 8 years old: I don't say something to the teacher (...) I always say to him, "Can you be quiet, please," I say. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

Teachers who make themselves heard by being loud, yelling at the children and trying to get their way are experienced as very negative.

Girl, 12 years old: I don't like some teachers because they are not nice and they are always yelling. That's why I don't like them. I: Why does she scream? Person B: I don't know. (G_F27_ISCED1 ISCED2_FF)

Importance of embeddedness for learning

Peers play an essential role in learning. Pupils mention that they learn from each other, in the exchange. For instance, a girl describes that they have learnt to play football by practicing together.

I: (...). You just told something exciting about playing soccer, that you learned that. How or from whom did you learn that?

Girl, 10 years old: 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_F)

They also support each other in learning. This either structured by teachers or not, as the following two quotes illustrate:

Girl, 9 years old: Well, they always help me and sometimes, when we have to do tasks on our own, for example, some children who want to help others, Ms. Name 1 [A, teacher]

writes the names of the children on the board and the children who need help can go to them quietly. And we also have group tables, where you can ask the table/group table if you don't know what to do. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 10 years old: So we do it like this, Mrs. [teacher] gives us the assignments, when the first ones are done, they say I'm done, if you need help, you can come to me. You can come to me, but the teacher doesn't write the name on the board. They just go / they just say, I'm done, I got everything right, if you need help, you can come. We do it like this. (...) The teacher also helps. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Children recognize the benefits of sharing with each other, e.g., in group work. However, this requires a good climate in the class.

Girl, 9 years old: Yes, in the class it's always funny, there are funny kids and I think it's nice when our teacher asks something (...) all know something I meant. And I also like that our row so always close to other children, so we can talk what faster so. Yes, if we look to the back, we can talk to one, if we look to the right, we can talk to one.

I: And when do you use that, so when you have to do group work or how is that used?

Girl, 9 years old: Yes, when we do group work, we share at a table. And think together, how can we solve it then like this. (...) And if we find a solution, then we do it together and then we imagine it. (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

For newcomers in particular, peers play an important role in the acclimation process and thus in the emotional evaluation of the school.

Girl, 16 years old: Well, I didn't have to introduce myself, fortunately, because I don't like to talk in front of many people now. They were very open, I must say. Well, it wasn't that they looked at you stupidly or something, as you would think. I also talked to many of them and so on. (...) Well, he introduced me a bit, but he was new himself, the class teacher, because they had a different one before, (...) And that means he was also relatively new, but the class, they involved you themselves. (G_I39_ISCED3_F)

Boy, 11 years old: And my friends are honest. They help me when I forget a word, for example (...) For example/ if I don't understand a word, for example, I ask to my partner [German boy sitting next to him]. And he tells me if he can't, then I should learn like this (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

One 20-year old boy, a refugee from West-Africa who takes part in a special education program, reflects on the importance of peer-interactions for learning Germans. He compares his situation with refugees in Southern Germany and claims that there are more opportunities than in Saxony. He utters that it needs more opportunities between natives and refugees in order to learn the language and arrive in the country.

Boy, 20 years old: But because sometimes many refugees are afraid of how to talk to someone. The refugees (...) [are supposed to] learn German, (...) if you cannot speak German better and faster here than a boy or so in southern Germany. (...) a refugee is in something like Mannheim or Stuttgart or Munich or you are here, we learn German, this one can speak more one after three months or so say, who can speak more German than you. Because here sometimes I have no contact, [he] can play soccer with the boys, can walk together with them. Always speak, write is good, but speak is better. Always speak in Germany always with people. But here they are distance. (...) Outside of school you are at home. It is like that. But we have to accept that. Yes. We have to. (G_I41_ISCED3_M)

However, with regard to children with migrant background, some interviews also point to a differentiation between German children and children with a migrant background, just as a hidden barrier that hinders exchange on the eye-level.

Boy, 13 years old: my class good, all students good, are good to foreigners. (...) Hmm yes (thinking) When I was uh new there my class was good, so good to me. They did everything with me, played, they asked me everything good with you? Or so. They went with me in the yard and so. Yes, that was always the case until now. Yes, I hope they, it always goes like that. (G_F37_ISCED2_MF)

Educational aspirations

In this chapter, we take a closer look at participation, focusing on motivation to learn, challenges and opportunities of educational aspirations, social embedding of educational aspirations, L2- classes as an ambivalent special case and envisioning the future.

Participation

Concerning participation in school, students report a more or less narrow bandwidth of experiences, which at least lead to the conclusion that there is no real participation in terms of influence and choice regarding substantial aspects of school life. Although, the children variously report that they are allowed to participate in decision-making and co-determination. This seems to be less the case at school than at the after-school care centre.

Girl, 9 years old: So we make it so that we always go out in after-school care anytime except when it rains or hails or snows. Yes. Otherwise we always decide if we're going to go out, but if we stay inside, for example, and some kids want to go out, then Ms. Name 3 [A] usually allows that and lets us. And the kids that want to stay inside, Mrs. Name allows that too. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 10 years old: In the after-school care, we're allowed to. In the after-school program, we're allowed. But in the yard break, we have to go outside. We are not allowed to stay inside. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

However, students report opportunities of participation usually with regard to formal, institutionalized contexts and practices of participation, for example, the Children's Parliament. Here, not everyone is equally satisfied, not always feeling fully represented by the children in parliament.

Girl, 9 years old: With us it is so that we always make such votes. Or we always do things like that, where the children give their own advice. So by that I mean that everyone says something. For example (...) we have our own group, there's also a leader and a helper, and other children are always there, they decide for example what can be done. (...) this is called the children's parliament, and for example they say it would be / for example they give a sheet where everyone is supposed to write down their opinion and they then evaluate it and take it to the school director. For example, some say, new pencils, because most of the pencils have dried up and so they always make plays, or what can be done in a week, or sometimes they have even determined that twice a week is toy day, Wednesday and Friday (...) I think it's good. Only I used to be part of it, but then I didn't want to anymore, because it always took a long time. And we always had conversations. (...) somehow, it's funny that the children's parliaments always decide something. (...) Well, because the other children don't decide anything. Actually, they are allowed to, but the children in the children's parliament always say, well, that can't be, or so. And I think that's kind of mean. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Also, the children's parliament is seen as more responsible for minor decisions, whereas possibilities of student's participation are widely reported as limited to marginalized topics and affairs.

Girl, 9 years old: 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, 10 years old: Yeah, so our teachers. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 16 years old: We only can participate on decisions concerning classroom. (G_F43_ISCED3_FF)

However, sometimes opportunities of participation or at least situations where student's voice is considered may occur in school, whereas this seemingly depends on the particular teacher or educator instead to be usual practice.

Girl, 10 years old: To Mrs. X you can tell more and she usually thinks about. Therefore, with her you also get to have a say and she also asks us quite a lot. (G_F43_ISCED1_FF)

I: Are there opportunities where you can say, when you do not like anything or if you want something to change?

Girl, 11 years old: So, to some teachers we can tell such things directly, when we for instance know, you can tell it to them, because they are open and take this for serious. And sometimes, when we do not like teachers that much, then we tell it to our class teacher and she says, either the class representative has to deal with or otherwise, when this teacher is going on to do so, she writes an email to him. However, if it is about participating, we just ask directly.

I: And do you think, that those teachers, whom you can say it directly, this take for serious?

Girl, 11 years old: *For the most yes.* (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

In older age groups, the children mention that they can participate in decisions about school trips and excursions, but often do not know more ways to be involved. In an interview, a girl from ISCED 3 points to the importance of the teacher-children-relationships in order to enhance participation.

Girl, 15 years old: And um I would make a class uh a class hm with 20 students, the teachers I would decide myself who comes in which class and so. (...)

I: (...) You would let the teachers decide which class to take?

Girl, 15 years old: No, no I would let them decide which class to take. So for example, a teacher would want to go into ninth grade but I would say no you have to go into eighth grade because it's getting better and stuff.

I: And how would you justify your decisions?

Girl, 15 years old: Like the teacher is and like the class is. Because it's sometimes very hard the teachers and the classes, that doesn't fit. So there are so many in our class: for example our GEK teacher she doesn't fit our class. So they can't talk so well. (...) It, it's also important for me like the class and like the teacher is, so they have to fit too. Like friends. With you cannot go it your friends, you cannot talk to her all day. If there is a good friend, you can talk to her all day, but if there is bad friend, you cannot. (G_F37_ISCED2ISCED3_MF)

The regular case instead represents institutionalized forms and practices of participation, combined with well-balanced opportunities for students to participate. Concerning these opportunities and practices, student's participation usually is limited to margin aspects like what can be done during breaks between lessons or to some influence on activities within lessons at the end of the school year.

Girl, 11 years: Yes, subjects are simply defined and they make their plan. So, according to subjects we cannot decide anything. Sometimes, for instance now in the last lesson before holiday, for instance in Geography we may ask, if we can play city country river or so, but otherwise usually not. Or sometimes in Sports, there we play games at the end, ask our teacher. However, the problem is that he always wants to play dodgeball. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

However, even in this example student's participation is seemingly limited to choose from more or less obvious options administered by the teacher. Regardless to this, such opportunities of participation teachers provide, if there is from their point of view place and time, and thus student's participation this way seems to be situated in some kind of educationally secured space.

Girl, 8 years old: We love to play. On Friday, we have toy day in after school care. Then I take my pony with me. [...] I like it, because we can bring with us, what we want. [...] You should not bring your toy on another day actually. If you do so, you are not allowed to bring it on Friday. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Even in these cases student's participation is sanctioned and controlled by teachers, because adults' power and influence are almost present in the background of such contexts. Otherwise, teachers anyhow control substantial aspects of school life as lesson planning, activities during lessons or the seating arrangement in class.

Girl, 17 years old: Yes, courses. So, in the eleventh grade we chose the extension course we further wanted to attend. However, concerning lessons etc., if we want to do this, they do not ask. They tell me what to do and this is to be done. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Participation is limited to intended practices and opportunities. In this particular case this means student's participation in choosing intensified courses, as foreseen in the school-law, and student's council. Otherwise, for instance during lessons teachers do not consider student's participation.

However, if there is anything that students like or dislike, then they usually have the opportunity to tell it to the teachers or to school head, which on the other hand usually means that their wishes, suggestions and complaints are threaded into official practices of participation, whereas few students reported not to know about such opportunities.

I: And, if you have a suggestion, want to change something at school, is there anybody you can ask or what could you do?

Girl, 18 years old: No Idea. So, how can you change school, what can you change in school... No idea. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

I: Okay. I would like to talk about participation. Are there opportunities for students to participate in school?

Boy, 17 years old: *Never heard of it. I do not know.* (G_I42_ISCED3_M)

Girl, 8 years old: *We do not have class representatives.* (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

In turn, students mostly report institutionalized practices of participation, whereas these practices are considered differently concerning implementation and effects.

Girl, 11 years old: So, I would tell it to the student's council that they tell it to the principal. So, first I would tell it to my class teacher [...] and then we probably would ask the principal ... So, we have a class representative and he is elected. And right, he goes to meetings, where the principal is too and he tells, what problems are about and then they forward it. And sometimes he makes a vote about things, which affect students, then class representatives vote in class. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

Class representatives, student's councils and regular meetings with school heads are widely mentioned as institutionalized forms of participation and linked with different experiences. While students experience these opportunities of participation and to be heard as important and reliable, of course in terms of intended topics of participation, others criticize that they do not have any substantial effect and thus are considered as some kind of fake participation.

Girl, 16 years old: As I said, I am not that good at this, but we are asked by our class representatives about things, which bother us, and about these things they will, the representatives, in this, I do not know, speak in this conference they have. So, they always ask us about what is on our mind. The so-called pedagogical conference, I think. I do not really know, what they are doing there, but this are conferences, where they talk to teachers, I think. And to the principal too, I think. I do not know. And there we can tell about things bothering us, but I think it is almost, our teacher once said as well, they still ask us, what we think, but in the end, they do what they want. The rule concerning smartphone use they just decided, without asking us. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Accordingly, students, even those who reviewed their opportunities of participation in school critically, are frustrated on practicing participation shortened to the opportunity to decide more or less unimportant things as well as insufficient practices in formal, officially institutionalized participation, whereas some of them seemingly resigned, others reflect the situation as outdated.

Girl, 17 years old: Possibly the student's council. Otherwise not. So, yes.

I: Would you like to be more participated?

Girl, 17 years old: So, I actually know. These were my aspects, but I do not know, how it could be better. As I mentioned, I still get used to it and accept it. I do not try to change it. However, actually I have no idea. Yes. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Girl, 16 years old: I would say, our class representatives do their job quite well and try the best they can, but, as mentioned, when they cannot change anything. They are actually there to, so they tell us afterwards the results of the conference. So, this is us, they go to the conference and say what they want, there are made different decisions, they are just there to tell us, what was spoken about. Yes.

I: And how do you think?

Girl, 17 years old: This is frustrating already. It is sad, I think, because we all live in the 21st century and in a democratic country as Germany. And I think also in small institutions as schools more participation should be provided to us. Yes. I would appreciate, if class representatives could change anything. And that they are not only there to organize courtyard services. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Regardless to this and with that all aspects and practices of participation in school to be critically mentioned, students report small opportunities of participation in all-day life in school. Such, only supposed small practices and opportunities are important, because they may provide a possibility to choose and thus may strengthen their self-confidence and sense of belonging.

Girl, 8 years old: Sometimes we have station lessons, where we can choose what we are going to do. And when we finished already, we have to do the next task. I like this, because we can decide what we do. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 8 years: Yes, you could say it.

I: And whom could you say it?

Girl, 8 years: Probably my teacher.

I: And what do you think will happen?

Girl, 8 years: I do not know. I think, if it is a good idea, she would say yes and if the idea is not so good, she would explain to me, why it is not good and would make a better idea. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Moreover, such experiences provide students at least the opportunity to learn, how decisions can be negotiated and made in class or and in general terms, when they affect a group of people, concerning “better ideas” as well as ways of democratic decision-making.

I: And then, what more students preferred, this will be done?

Girl, 9 years: *Yes.*

I: And how do you like it?

Girl, 9 years: Very good.

I: What do you like?

Girl, 9 years: That we look for the number and not a child says, this should be done and more children do not want. This does not happen, but it happens that we look for the number, that is, what I like. (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

Finally, student reported ideas and expectations regarding their participation and possibilities to improve it. These ideas concern aspects of teaching, rules in school and at least environment and materials in class and thus so-called margin aspects on the one and elements of the order of schooling on the other hand.

Girl, 10 years: And there is one more thing I am really interested in. This would be, if there would be a student in every subject, who agreed to do something. As it is, that these students develop a project, containing a nice game and that all can do such a project, so classmates can join and test it. (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 9 years old: That you can decide, what all goes into a room, ideas or so. Because otherwise educators decide about, buy something. And you do not know, if this all is necessary, what is here in the room.

Girl, 10 years old: Also in the reading room, probably make a wish list on books. (G_F30_ISCED3_FF)

Girl, 16 years old: That we could participate more. So, this is the only thing you can change. We should have more influence on rules, I think. Those rules, which not come from the school administration, because this smartphone thing is nothing, what school administration regulates. I think, they decide it on their own, and yes. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Emphasis on the motivation to learn

Many of the children interviewed emphasize that they enjoy learning, that they like learning, being active and engaged with the class and in the school. Most of them are confident in their competencies and their motivation to learn. Their experience of learning reflects their diversity of interests.

Boy, 10 years old: My favourite subject is math.

I: What do you like about math?

Boy, 10 years old: (thinking) Well, the questions. We have a notebook, it's called Indian notebook, I do math there when I want to. When we have math class and when we have French, I can do anything I want (...). (G_I26_ISCED1_M)

Boy, 11 years old: Math, my first favourite subject. (...)

I: What do you like about math?

Boy, 11 years old: Yes, in math, what do I like? That I do it very well and yes, had good grades and I would like to say that. (...) I have a lot of skills in math. (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

Boy, 11 years old: I love math, music, art, and sports so much. In math I love arithmetic. In art I love painting so. So often painting I love. There it gets so quiet, nobody plays and everybody paints something. In music I love singing and dancing. Sometimes we dance too. In sports we play. (...) (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

Children utter their striving for more knowledge, but are often not capable to communicate their needs and wishes to their teachers or other authorities.

I: Is there any other subject you'd like to have in school that doesn't exist?

Boy, 11 years old: Geography is it. Because I love to know things about countries and their capitals. Predominantly. Where they come from, I want to know everything.

I: And you don't have that at school yet, or do you already have it?

Boy, 11 years old: *No, not yet.*

I: And is there anyone where you could say that you would like to learn geography? (...)

Boy, 11 years old: No, because that's not possible. There must be a teacher who knows geography. (...) Because in elementary school there is none. (...) (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

In part, this is also expressed in a particular willingness to perform, a desire to get good grades. Tests seem to be an instrument to measure individual learning progress.

I: What do you like best about your school?

Girl, 8 years old: The exams and my friends. (...) Math test or German exams.

I: Ah, and you like to do that?

Girl, 8 years old: *Yes.*

I: Well, what do you like about it?

Girl, 8 years old: I like so much about it that then we get grades and I like grades. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 17 years old: So, for example in math (...), it's my favourite class, but only got two points because I was doing badly. And that makes me so crazy, because I don't know. I had been quite good in Turkey. My average was one (...). And well, it's just now/ you feel bad, got such bad grades. And when you feel bad, you get bad grades again then like that. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

Challenges and opportunities to educational aspirations

There are a number of factors influencing perceptions of education, experiences of school and education, and plans for the future in general and future learning in particular. On the part of the teachers, requirements must be very well adapted to the students. Too few or too many tasks and requirements slow down motivation, either by causing boredom or resulting in excessive demands. This means that teachers must be very good at assessing and adjusting the children's abilities on an individual and group level.

Boy, 11 years old: I don't think I want ethics like that. (...) So when the teacher tells me something, sometimes it's so boring now. And the ethics stuff is a bit difficult for me. (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

Girl, 10 years old: And I found the tasks and sometimes there were also, especially in Corona, some teachers have come up with something extra good or something else so that we do not sit there so sad and then write something off. And of course, there are also some teachers and unfortunately, they stick strictly to the plan and do everything with assignments as it is supposed to be done. I don't like that, of course, but actually I have to say that I learned the most from such teachers in elementary school, according to my experience. And not every student likes it, but actually these methods are also quite good. What was stupid, then when the teachers just give up so many tasks at once and especially so many boring ones. I really don't like that, because then the student just doesn't feel like doing it anymore (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

I: Is there a subject you don't like?

Girl, 12 years old: History. (...) I just don't understand this subject. (...) Not because of German, but yes, I don't understand. These tasks.

I: And is there someone you can ask and who can help you?

Girl, 12 years old: *No*.

I: Does the teacher help you?

Girl, 12 years old: [*No*.] (G_F27_ISCED2_F).

Furthermore, many children want tasks that are as varied as possible and that they are included in the decision-making process. However, this is realized very differently by the individual teachers (see section 2.2). The following statements from two girls from ISCED1 underscore that motivation to participate:

Girl, 8 years old: So sometimes we have stations and we get to choose what we want to do. And if we have something already done, we have to do the other one. I think that's good because we get to decide what we do. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 11 years old: Well, it usually depends a bit on the subject and the lesson. I think teachers are good who don't make the lessons so boring, who don't just briefly explain something, then write something on the board and you have to copy it down. (...) some of them also design the lessons a bit creatively (...). (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

On the part of the students, linguistic competencies or subjective assessments of these play an important role, e.g. when it comes to naming their favourite subject. For example, some children state that they like language-bound subjects such as German or history less because it is difficult for them to understand, to communicate and to participate in group work accordingly. Here, it is important for children to know that they get support if necessary.

I: And what is your favourite subject?

Boy, 13 years old: Math. In math there is not what I have to understand. So I can do everything. I: And which subject do you not like so much?

Boy, 13 years old: Hm (thinking) biology. I, I don't understand so much. There are so many, many different words that I don't understand. (...) I don't like history, because that is too difficult for me to understand, because of German. There are so difficult words that I can't understand and then there are so long stories that I can't understand. So that's why. (G_F37_ISCED2_M)

Girl, 18 years old: (...) lessons change according to teacher and also according to subjects. For example, in some subjects you have to do more independently. In others you have to do, so with groups or with teacher or, I don't know, from lectures and so on. So I would say, so, as a L2- student, so as a foreign student, so who doesn't know German as a mother tongue, [I] also can't always work in groups, bring something to my group, because first I

have to understand everything and I can/ I help sometimes in subjects like in math or, so in chemistry, there I can help my group. But in groups, in subjects the German or, what else is there, or ethics I can help very, so less than normal and not so know. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

Girl, 18 years old: But the subjects that use languages, like German, history, I wish I could do them. But I can't do them because of the language. And yes, the language ones are hard. History I liked to do very much in Turkey. And I was also very good in literature. But only the last years not. I was in ninth grade. Yes, I like, literature was very nice for me and it interested me too. And I also could not express very well. (...) And then, when I didn't so, when I came to Germany, so then, this motivation of mine went down again and yes, I can't trust myself again and express myself so well. I also don't have so much courage and I also don't have so good language skills, language skills. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

When asked about their favourite places, children often refer to quiet and calm places, where they can rest or be with their friends. This kind of quiet oasis allows them to recharge their batteries and recover from the otherwise often noisy school atmosphere.

Social embeddedness of educational aspirations

Social contacts, that is peers, teachers, and parents, play an important role in educational aspirations. On the one hand, peers are seen as a source of help, for example when something is not understood, but on the other hand, children like to learn in exchange, by joint problem solving, and by engaging with each other. Moreover, older children are also seen as role models for educational aspirations.

Girl, 9 years old: In class, I like to do group work the most (smiles).

I: What do you like best about it?

Girl, 9 years old: *That it involves a lot of kids thinking.* (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 16 years old: And then I just changed, because my big brother was already at the high school. Yes, I don't know if my sister was there too, but my big brother definitely was and he recommended the school to me and yes, I'm quite happy with it. (G_I39_ISCED3_F)

Similarly, teachers can endorse educational aspiration by establishing a positive, trusting relationship with their pupils, but also by offering support when pupils are facing challenges.

Girl, 9 years old: I like my class teacher, that's why I like German. That's how it is. Because she helps me with my assignments, if I get something wrong, I understand it. That's how it is. (G_F27_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 11 years old: Our other teacher, our fifth grade bio teacher, she always gave examples. Sometimes quite funny examples and that somehow also explained more vividly. I think it was also a bit like that, because she was so nice, you felt more like participating with her and then she immediately gave examples and made it a bit funny. (...) Or in history, if you really tell the story in a more lively way, then you also notice that the teacher simply has more fun explaining it. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 17 years old: Yes, in computer science class, because she [the teacher] just always, when I have questions, comes to me and says (...), "Oh, you can do it, we can do it together." She just says that in every class. And even though maybe I'm not interested in computer science, (...) so because of this teacher, so that she'll be happy right away, I want to do it. Yes, so I'd much, much rather go to class. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

On the other hand, they can also be demotivating, for example, if they question the children's abilities, do not make an effort to respond to them. In addition, societal attitudes toward children with a

migration background and refugees, as well as existing prejudices and discrimination, also play a role.

Girl, 17 years old: So for example some teachers come and just say sometimes that I can't do my Abi because it's so high level. And well, that kills some things, sometimes you can't have hope anymore. (...) Well. A little bit I felt very bad in school. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

L2- classes as an ambivalent special case

L2- classes are perceived very differently by children. They are often the first contact with school for children with a migration background. Initially, they are supposed to learn German together in these classes, and only gradually, depending on the assessment of their linguistic abilities, do they participate in the normal classes and subject lessons. This happens gradually. While for some of the children L2- classes represent a protected space that is free of performance assessment, other children experience the separation, an isolation from regular classes and the lack of standards in subject lessons as unsatisfactory or even stressful.

Girl, 8 years old: I don't like the L2- lessons because I wasn't with the others. Because I was together with others. (...) I don't like that so much. (...) First I was alone and then I was with name 1 [A]. (...) And we went to L2- together and then that was more fun. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

Girl, 15 years old: So first of all, it was difficult because when we were in L2- lessons, we didn't get grades. So when we had bad, it's not in report card (laughs) that was very nice for us because we don't know German and it was hard. But now it is in report card and now is hard (laughs). But it's nice that we learn whole subjects like this. I always wanted to learn in subjects. When I didn't have math or I didn't have chemistry, I was sad. I don't have chemistry, but I want to learn chemistry. (G_F37_ISCED3_F)

Envisioning future

With regard to ideas for their own future, on the one hand there are children who do not yet know what they want to do, and on the other hand there are children with very precise ideas. If there are ideas, then the children usually aim for higher degrees, want to study and become lawyers, inventors, medical doctors, engineers, or artists.

Boy, 17 years old: So, life in Germany. We started new, I don't know what would happen in next years in 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_M)

I: You're a senior now, what are your future plans? What do you plan for the future, what do you wish for the future?

Girl, 16 years old: So graduating class, by that I mean the upcoming Exams we're writing this year, I'm going to be a senior next year, and I really want to have a good high school average so I can study medicine and, yeah so that's actually my plan. I want to try harder, improve my German, participate more orally, read more literary books, so that I have good results at the end. Because I think these two years will determine how my life goes on. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Here again, older children and parents serve as role models.

Boy, 11 years: And mom's profession is water engineer and a teacher too, a teacher. Two professions my mom has. And my dad is a software engineer. (...) Yeah, I'd like to be that too. (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

School during the pandemic

Consequences for school live

Overall, there is some variability in the Corona measures and their impact on children. On the one hand, this depends on the survey location (e.g., Hamburg, Dresden and wider Saxony), the school and the classes concerned. For example, in Saxony, schooling in final-year classes was prioritized and the focus was placed on main subjects such as German and math. In addition, most schools provided emergency support, for example for children of parents with so-called system-relevant professions. Accordingly, there is also variability in how children have experienced and dealt with the consequences of the pandemic.

On an immediate level, the pandemic meant for the children, that (a) they had to wear masks, also in class and during breaks; (b) break and leisure rooms were closed, (c) certain areas in the outdoor area/schoolyard were cordoned off or divided and only available for certain groups at one time, thus, limiting contacts with pupils from other classes; (d) were taught by a limited number of teachers; and (e) were not allowed to be picked up by parents. Thus, the measures clearly intervened with children's daily routines and daily life.

Girl, 10 years old: So, we are not allowed to go outside without a mask, for example, we have to wear a mask outside as well. (...) even when we are alone, we have to wear a mask. So some children have to wear masks the whole day, in class, in the schoolyard and (...) the parents are not allowed to pick up the children anymore. Because of Corona. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: 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 meet together at one point, there we can't have contact with other classes either. 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_F)

Girl, 8 years old: Actually, we had another teacher in art, but now because of Corona we can't be with other teachers like that. So, we actually do it with our class teacher. (G_I31_ISCED1_F)

In some interviews, children emphasize that these restrictions are essential to their learning and their development, as the following statement underlines:

Girl, 8 years old: Because of Corona we have four hours, but I wish six hours. We have only six hours in the second class. But because of Corona, we only have four hours.

I: And you think that's a pity?

Girl, 8 years: *Yes.*

I: What's falling away then?

Girl, 8 years: *Learning.*

I: And what lessons are dropped there, or how is that done, or is it just shortened?

Girl, 8 years: Yes, just shortened and one hour is/ there we can't do anything for one hour. That's French.

I: And you would like to do that though?

Girl, 8 years: Yes. And we can't do ethics either. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

Moreover, since no outside people were allowed in the school and extracurricular activities were cancelled, many additional offerings, but experienced as enriching by the children, were cancelled. This encompasses meetings with external experts and practitioners, but also excursions and class trips or festivities.

Girl, 9 years old: 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_FF)

However, some of the kids perceive also the chances and positive sides of the pandemic. More concretely, they report a better support key (less children who are supported by few teachers) and more space, because the areas are restricted for a certain group. One girl also mentioned that, for her, it was easier to get in contact with her new class; but always we have to take personal factors (introvert or extrovert) in account.

I: And what do you think about online classes?

Girl, 17 years old: Online classes is the best for me actually, because I don't really like talking to people like you know in school, new people, making new friends and it's really hard for me. So online is better for me, because I don't really have to talk to anyone or to make group work or something.

I: (...) Did you get to know some of them [other pupils] or was there any chance to connect to them somehow?

Girl, 17 years old: Like two people texted me from my class. Like asking and checking in, but it was, I don't know, it was like I was happy. (G_I45_ISCED3_F)

There was considerable variation in whether children had contact with their classmates during the pandemic and, if so, what form that contact took. For example, a substantial proportion of children reported that they did not have face-to-face-contact with their class members, but that their social life was limited to the family (and a few neighbourhood children).

Girl, 12 years old: So sometimes we [siblings] play together. Alone sometimes. Sometimes, in my old street I also have a friend, we can go to the playground with her and play. (G_F27_ISCED1/ ISCED2_FF)

I: And do you have contact right now, during Corona, with classmates and friends?

Boy, 13 years old: Um no not (...) in the first months I met with my friend, we could do something but when it got weirder, we couldn't do anything and so I was always at home. (G_F37_ISCED2/ ISCED3_MF)

The extent to which pupil compensate this lack of personal contact by communication via phone or social media differs. While some report that they have met outside with friends or have phoned each other, others report that they have had no contact with their classmates, for instance, because they have no mobile phone.

However, there are single children who report that class cohesion was strengthened by Corona and that they, as a class, grew together more.

Experience of home-schooling

Due to a lack of guidelines and regulations, there was a wide variation in how schools organized home-schooling. While some schools offered online-home-schooling, others only worked with home

works and worksheets. At the same time, they varied in the structure and amount of tasks, which the pupils had to work on. The experience of home-schooling during Corona depended on several aspects. On the one hand, it seemed to be very important which framework conditions were given by the school, but also in the home environment, on the other hand, it was crucial how well the children were able to structure their learning and themselves. For the children, this is evidenced by the fact that some children reported that they enjoyed learning on their own, organizing themselves, while others missed the structure, experienced working independently at home as difficult and felt overwhelmed.

Boy, 11 years old: Yes, we have now free, I also love [to have] free, but not so much, not so long. (...) I love to work in school, not at home (...) In school I practice even better. Yes, many to work. (...) At home, I love to have free time. Is a little hard now. (...) When I do homework like that, I don't have so much time to play. (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

Girl, 18 years old: In the beginning I was a bit happy because we didn't have school. But then it became very difficult to do all the tasks and to hand in everything. It was very stressful and I couldn't do it anymore. So I didn't want to continue school. But then, school started again. So we still have assignments, but thank God less than we did then. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

Girl, 15 years old: Well, for me it didn't change that much. I was always at home before Corona, now I am always at home. Only before Corona I went to school, now I don't go anymore. But yeah, so it's mhm, if there is no school, it's hard for us to do tasks. When there was a teacher telling us, it was better than now because we have to do the assignments now alone from internet. But in school it was better than now. And now the: so before I always thought it would be better if I was always at home, if I could do the tasks at home and now I say it would be better if I go to school. Now I'm always bored at home, I always want to go out with my girlfriend, but I can't anymore. It is very boring now. (G_F37_ISCED2 / ISCED3_MF)

Girl, 16 years old: So Corona. Personally, I don't think it's so bad that we work from home. In fact, I think it's very good because I can manage my time better, I'm just a person who can work better late than during the day. During the day I'm still tired and I can't work so well. I would like to do something else than school. And then I can just decide when I want to work. But still I manage to do the material that I was asked to do. But I have to say, there were difficulties with some things. I just had to, I didn't know so well about things and in other classes you can't do that so well, I think, with {online} classes, that's why I find the option with alternating classes the best. Because you also have one week just the subjects, all / the subjects still have. you can get there just the subjects first explained and then have the work assignments for the next day. Yes. I think that way the time is used more efficiently. Than in class. Yes, maybe not, you learn less at home, but still I think it's better at home, because I don't have to talk so much with other people and I can work on my own. So I prefer to work independently than in groups. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

This was especially true for newcomers, who were not familiar with normal school life, those pupils, who are still learning German and have not sufficient language competencies, and those who just transitioned from one school to another (e.g., from primary to secondary school).

I: And how was your first day, your first online lesson?

Girl, 17 years old: Oh, it was a kind of scary, because like it was a new country for me, a new school and new people. So I was a kind of scared, but it went ok.

I: What happened? Did they talk to you?

Girl, 17 years old: Yes, my teacher introduced me to the course and people said hi and I was like hi, you know. (G_I45_ISCED3_F)

I: How was it in general during Corona for you?

Girl, 16 years old: (...) in this Corona time, she only came to Germany a few months ago before this Corona time and therefore the school was not open and she had to stay at home. That's why she thinks my German skills not very good because she didn't go to school for so long. (...) (G_I46_ISCED3_F)

These students emphasize their need for face-to-face interactions as well as more structured support respectively more easy accessible information:

Girl, 15 years old: //No. It's like so our L2- teacher said I can ask her if I have a question but it's not like how do you say? Face to face? So, you understand better when we are together but now when I have a question she writes an email and tells but I don't understand that either. So that's why when something in task I don't understand, I ask my L2- teacher, she tells but I don't understand that either. It would be better if it was oral. So, in: also: the most difficult now is also history. I have to read such a book what, write something after. Small bullet points is the most difficult thing for me. I have to do bullet points, I don't know how to do that. YES, but in math or the other subjects, for example math, chemistry um they are not difficult than before, they are the same, but the other ones where I don't understand are more difficult now. So school now is more difficult. (G_F37_ISCED2 / ISCED3_MF)

Girl, 16 years old: Now it is Corona and I don't go to school right now and for one year I didn't go, so I don't know anything. I missed online, there was no one told me. So, I didn't expect my life to turn around like this. (...) So at the first lockdown what we should do without teaching us the lessons or we didn't had videoconferences or anything like that. They just put on the school website what we should do, but without an explanation and we had to do that. But how am I supposed to do something that I never learned? And they just don't think about that. Like German students can do it, but I was also like a new student. Because mostly I was in L2- class so I didn't do a lot of regular class work. When I was in grade seven I started joining the regular classes and that changed a lot. And then I went into eighth grade. For a month I went to normal classes again and couldn't understand anything and it was all really messed up. I didn't get anything, I didn't understand teachers and no one cared about it. No one asked 'are you doing ok with the work' or 'how you are feeling' or anything like that. No one asked and no one cared. So, it was really hard, but at this lockdown we have a few video conferences, but still it is not enough. Because they give a lot of work, but they don't explain anything and I don't know how they expect us to do something that we never learned before. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

Other children reported that they were bored, spending increased time on distractions such as watching television or playing video games.

Girl, 9 years old: I didn't even need two hours [to work on my tasks], it usually took me half an hour or three quarters of an hour, and I also played a lot of games during that time and watched TV, because what are you supposed to do? When you have school, you're at school almost the whole day and when you're sitting at home in the children's room, you don't know, (...) you only really think about watching TV or something when you have a TV. And that was just the case with me, we spent a lot of time on our Nintendo. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 16 years old: I am kind of addicted to my phone, because there is nothing else I can do. And there is also Corona so there is nothing I can do except stay at home and play with my phone and I have nothing to push me to do other stuff. I don't feel motivated enough to do anything and my phone is the only thing I do during the day. I only play with my phone and nothing else. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

One difficulty with online home-schooling was the lack of appropriate devices or problems with connection stability.

Girl, 10 years old: And what was stupid, was that the internet always didn't work so well when we were on the phone and that we only half understood our teacher. Yes. We also have a student from Russia, with whom we once had a telephone conference, and it worked better than with our teacher. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years old: it's just not really fun online and I never really feel like taking part somehow. I always think to myself, oh, today is Saturday again, so I have to sit in front of the iPad for three hours. You don't really feel like it because / and if you know that today is Saturday, I can go there, then it's somehow more fun, because online, it's already been the case that the Internet was down. And then it knocked me out and then I had to go back in. That was stupid. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

I: So you were able to study well at home? Did you have peace and quiet and the necessary utensils, for example the laptop and everything? Girl, 16 years old: 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. So if I had my own room now, this option with alternating classes would be just perfect. (...) I just had all the stuff. I have a laptop, a printer, and that should actually be enough. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Finally, the experience of online-schooling was greatly influenced by teacher's competencies to adapt to digital learning.

Girl, 11 years old: I find it a bit boring. But that is probably also more difficult to make the lessons lively, because she [the teacher] has now made it in the form of video conferencing. (...) And with video conferencing you get tired quickly, I think, especially in a subject that you already know relatively well, it's a bit boring. And I think the teachers are a bit stressed because at the end of the sixth grade we have to pass the evaluation exam (...) And now, of course, because of Corona, it's not so easy to learn and that's why I think the teachers are a bit stressed. Especially in the languages, (...) we are just, well, if I were to put it that way, we are not really up to the level of being able to understand it. And that's why it's so hard now. And I think with the teacher it's important to work a lot at the beginning, otherwise we'll be standing there next year and only understand half of it. Um yes, that's a bit stupid with the video conferences, that's something different than when you see each other in real life. (G_I36_ISCED1_F)

Support during the pandemic

A large proportion of the children experienced the support of teachers as helpful, for example the possibility of clarifying questions by telephone or via email. However, there could be more opportunities to get support.

Girl, 18 years old: We have L2-. But it's not every week. But in every two weeks we have two hours of lessons. Our L2- teacher, she always controls, for example, if we wrote a text or if we made a presentation (...) now we couldn't because of Corona quarantine and so on. Our current L2- teacher is good. But with my L2- teacher we couldn't do any lessons at all. (...) But now, because of this alternating instruction, we have many free periods and we can, for example, now I have lessons in the third and fourth period on Monday, for example [which can be used for instructions by the L2-teacher]. (...) I think that's better. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

I: Mhm, I understand, ok. And is there anyone besides the L2- teacher, maybe outside of school that you can ask for help?

Girl, 15 years old: Well, um. Outside of school, I had a friend. She's going to high school now. She's the same age now, but she's going to 11th grade in high school. She used to tell me something before, but now we have no contact. But it would be better if I had contact with her. That's all I have except my L2- teacher. (G_F37_ISCED2ISCED3_MF)

The children seldom refer explicitly to their parents as source of support during the pandemic, although the interviews reflect that, independent on the Corona situation, most pupils perceive their parents as supportive in school matters.

Some of the children reported of special programs established during the pandemic to reach children with special support needs (e.g., children with immigrant backgrounds, families in social risk situations). In the following interview, a girl talked positively about the “Corona school” (she was supported by her sister who translated):

Sister: When she (Girl, 16 years old) wants to ask something, she asks her Turkish friends and she has a German, like big sister, she goes to University and she helps with geography. From the Corona school, it is from that time, due to Corona, yes.

I: How did you find them?

Girl (16 years old): Answer in Turkish (translation by sister)

Sister: I had a zoom this morning and she just help me everything I don't know or understand and she helps with geography and name 1 [my sister] understand geography very well with her help.

I: Nice. Where did you guys meet the student?

Girl (16 years old): Answer in Turkish (translation by sister)

Sister: It's a volunteer program for this time, it's called Corona School, so we know about this program through our friends and they said yes, our kids don't go to school and so there is an organization for student volunteers, female students, that helps others with school (G_I46_ISCED3_F)

An older girl who also participated in this project, criticizes it, because she did not want to be seen as a project, but is looking for social exchange at eye level:

Girl, 16 years old: Yes, there was a social project, it's called corona school. We signed up for that because we needed extra help with school with online school. And they send: they made us like an online conference with university students becoming teachers. And I learned with two teachers. The first teacher was a twenty-year-old boy: a man and he only taught me for one time and then he just left. And then the second one, I am still learning with her, she is a girl. She tries to help me with physics and math, but she looks at me like I am a project. Because Corona school is a social project for university students and if they join it's like better for them. So they look at me like I am a project for them, they don't really care also if I did it or not, if I understand it or not, because I am just a project in their eyes so they just (indistinct) and leave me. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

3. Intercultural relations at school

Intercultural relations in school are part of all relations in school. The following remarks thus build organically on the findings presented so far. They are factually inseparable, but in this chapter, we want to focus directly on interculturality. We will present it on the basis of central aspects.

Intercultural relations

Children report different experiences and degrees of exclusion and bullying due to intercultural differences. At the same time, it can be seen in the interviews that children show different experiences and also a very differentiated view. First a blatant experience:

Girl, 15 years old: So before I didn't have racism. I was Turkish and the others were also Turkish. I didn't understand, but when I came to Germany, there was so much racism and I was so shocked. How can they be like that? I am also a human being and they are also a human being, but because of my hair colour and because of my skin colour they say 'you are bad, you are stupid'. (G_F37_ISCED2/ ISCED3_MF)

Language and a lack of linguistic skills can have a separating effect, but the same language can also bring people together. Visual perception, i.e., appearance (colour of skin; supposed racial characteristics) also works in both directions.

Girl, 16 years old: Because I look different from them. I don't have blue eyes or blond hair. I have brown eyes and brown hair and my skin colour is a little bit darker and they are a lot of whiter than me. And they: they can see it from my face that I am not German. And I: I don't think it's a bad thing not to be German, because we are all from the same earth, we are all in the same planet and I don't think that we should divide into race like 'oh you are German, you are the better one. Oh you are Turkish, you are the worse one'. It's just: it doesn't seem ok to me that we do it like that. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

Experienced diversity leads to many children feeling accepted and well-integrated. A Turkish girl says that she feels very connected to her classmates and enjoys being with them a lot. Besides school, she also has other friends, for example in the Turkish community or in the neighbourhood. For a friendship, she doesn't care if children speak the same language as her or if they have the same interests (G_F24_ISCED1_F).

Also, in relation to the teachers, it doesn't matter to the students whether a teacher has a migration background or not:

I: Do you know where the English teacher comes from? Is she from another country or is she from Germany?

Girl, 10 years: Comes from Germany, I think, yes.

I: Do you know if any of the other teachers come from another country?

Girl, 10 years: *No idea.*

I: Does it matter to you or would you wish for?

Girl, 10 years: Actually, it doesn't matter.

I: Okay, the main thing is that they are nice or what is important?

B: *Yes, nice.* (G_I33_ISCED1_F)

A Turkish girl according to the migrant background of her friends referred to the potential of diversity when mentioning that there are 25 children in her after school care.

Girl, 9 years old: My friend (...) comes from Iran and the two others come from Germany.

I: And is that different somehow, or does it not matter?

Girl, 9 years old: It doesn't matter. ... There are two from my class who go to after-school care. A white girl, a boy, I don't know where he comes from and one comes from Iraq.

I: And do you think it's good that they are so different?

Girl, 9 years old: *Yes, good and we are twenty-five children.* (G_F27_ISCED1 ISCED2_FF)

In the case of closer contact, other, not so obvious factors are added that cause exclusion or also integration. These include origin, nationality, beliefs (religion, ideologies) habitus (culture). These intersections correspond to those of intersectionality. It is important to note that none of the characteristics must separate or exclude, nor do they always exclude. This is due to a variety of conditions: school climate, rules, attention from classmates, teachers and parents.

Negative experiences ignited by habitus (clothing, behaviour) are reported by Muslim girls who would otherwise not experience discrimination (the girl says if she changed her clothes):

I: So may I ask why you wear the headscarf?

Girl, 17 years old: Because in our religion so/ (...) I was (...) thinking about (...) not wearing it for a short time because I was doing very badly at school and I just wanted to [be] (...) a normal girl. (...)

I: Are you the only one at school who wears a headscarf?

Girl, 17 years old: My sister still wears it. And there's only one left, I think. I don't know if she's still at school, but yes. At the most there are three of us. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

In an overall perspective and with regard to the mentioned cross-cutting nature of the topic of interculturality, for the interviewed children plurality is good and unproblematic. [This is a meaningful precondition to hybrid integration, as mentioned above.](#)

However, as shown children also reported experiences of discrimination or bullying because of their migrant background. Although those experiences are quite individual and thus not readily generalizable, the “visibility” of migrant background according to clothing/ outfit, colour of skin, hair, eyes or the capability to communicate in German in such cases plays a role. Regardless to the fact that for instance poor capabilities in German in general lead to challenges in social participation and integration, language related discriminating experiences were reported from children with a non-European origin. In turn, language capabilities do not play a role, when children report discriminating experiences according to their outfit, what makes them identifiable as migrants or Muslims or just as others. Accordingly, and when language capability is one factors among others, experiences of discrimination or, in a reversed perspective, discriminating behaviour against others seemingly correlates with some kind of perceived or imputed cultural difference or distance. This indicate stigmatization and exclusion independently from the place of birth or the time spent in Germany or in other words: According to practices or experiences of discrimination and racism, it doesn't matter if a child was born in Germany and grew up here, if the child can be to somewhat identified as “other”, for instance because a girl wears a headscarf due to her religious orientation or simply because of the colour of skin. This includes as well that for instance Arabic refugees more likely experience discrimination than children, who migrated for instance from western European countries to Germany. On the other hand, affected children also reported support und help in dealing with discriminating experiences by peers and/ or teachers.

When discrimination is mentioned, Germans and foreigners are equally involved; apparently, however, girls rarely discriminate against boys, but boys discriminate against both, and girls increasingly discriminate against girls only. A Turkish boy says to this:

Boy, 11 years old: There are more boys, but there are no girls, that insulted me. And they also come to Germany, there are also foreigners in there that insulted me. Yes. (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

Peer networks

The peer group is the place of direct engagement with interculturality in school. This is where it is decided whether a child feels integrated or not. The degree of integration is influenced by various factors, which in turn correspond with each other.

Common interests are important to many children. Then large circles of friends also develop. Here, gender can play a stronger role than culture, for example in football, cycling or being creative; then it is usually not mentioned whether someone has a migration background or not.

Girl, 10 years old: I have a best friend who comes to me very often and I also come to her very often. And we have a unicycle club. Because we ride unicycles, (...) And then everyone started riding unicycles. (...). And then we just kept riding unicycles together, kept practising and got better and better. (...) And then I have [a girlfriend]. I often play with her, often during breaks and so on. They all play football and they all ride unicycles. And she also plays football very well. And yes. (...) And then I have my friends in the neighbourhoods. (...) And they are all my friends. (G_I33_ISCED1_F)

Agency

The children's agency or self-efficacy can be seen not only in their personal charisma but also in observable things: on the one hand, in the networking in school and peer group (as was just made clear with the unicycle club), and on the other hand, in what the person does and creates in school and everyday life.

When we take all the mentioned interviews in account, then it is clear that understanding the sometimes hidden backgrounds are an essential factor in self-efficacy. A ten-year-old girl reports how she now understands her own experiences of discrimination during primary school better. An anti-racism programme at her new school has helped. Here children learn to understand the context of racism and at the same time they are encouraged to take a courageous stance for understanding and intercultural cooperation. This has a lasting effect on the school climate:

Girl, 10 years old: So in this situation I have to say quite honestly, it started from second grade. And I wasn't aware of it then, I didn't really know that it could be a racist prejudice and I thought it wasn't serious, they just wanted to annoy me. (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

Later she continues:

Girl, 10 years: Of course, that wasn't nice [at the old school], but ... if I say [at the new school] that I have a migration background, then I know that I am accepted there because there are actually almost only people without racist prejudices there and there are almost no racists anymore. (G_I35_ISCED1_F)

And a Turkish girl tells how it has learned and now reacts openly:

Girl, 15 years old: There is only my class who are racists. The whole school, they are the worst. All the racists are in my class and the school is not so racist. I thought when we first came to Germany, the Germans are so bad, the Germans are so bad because of my class. But when I was with them: when I met nice Germans, I thought, oh they are not so bad, why the others, why do I have such a class. Now I like Germans. Only disrespectful people I don't like. They are not only Germans, they exist in the whole world. Now I know that, but before I didn't know that, but now I know that. They are disrespectful people. It's better

if YOU say something then. When the disrespectful people come to you, it is better if you say something about it. If you don't say anything about it, it's worse. And I was like this before, I couldn't say anything, but not anymore. And now they can't say anything to me. My mother says they do what they see from their parents, so that's not their [fault]. (G_F37_ISCED2/ ISCED3_MF)

Hybrid integration

Integration at school is described from different sides. It is important to be accepted personally. If there is good integration in the family of origin, then the children are definitely open to the children and teachers of the school. It is often said that it is good to have more German children in the class.

Girl, 12 years old: We are twenty-one children and they are all German.

I: And what do you think about that? Would you like to see more children from abroad?

Girl, 12 years old: *No. (...) We are good like this now.* (G_F27_ISCED1/ ISCED2_FF)

A sixteen-year-old Iranian girl reports an interesting form of hybrid integration. It is a consequence of the family's hybrid way of life brought to the children by the teachers. The child has arrived in Germany and is well integrated in the eyes of the teachers, but the parents are seen as not yet competent partners. This is often due to actual or often only suspected language deficits on the part of the parents. The daughter experiences herself in conversation with the teacher as "being like the parents of myself:

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_F)

Furthermore, students reported different experiences of social belonging, mutual activities or, in the case of migrant children, of support. However, migrant children also reported experiences of segregation, bullying and racism too. For what concerns hybrid integration, these data highlight general preconditions concerning social togetherness and the experience of acceptance and social belonging regardless to the individual cultural background on the one hand. On the other and related to social climate in general and to bullying, racism and conflicting on the other, the importance of providing opportunities to discuss cultural differences beyond stereotyping and stigmatizing and thus to provide opportunities of building hybrid identities and fostering hybrid integration by teachers are highlighted. [These are meaningful and essential starting points which not only confirms the relevance of promoting spaces for negotiating and dialogue within educational environment, but also how children are requesting them as elements which might affects their daily wellbeing within schools and in case of migrant children their hybrid integration.](#)

4. Identity and belonging

People's identity is developed in their close social environment. Here, what is experienced, heard, told and felt belong closely together. As we have just shown, something like hybrid integration often happens with children from a migrant background. They are integrated into their families, because

there they find security, recognition and resonance for their experiences. In their families, they are included in rituals and narratives that fundamentally shape them. At school and in peers, on the other hand, they come into contact with German cultures. These differ considerably from each other (school in Hamburg and a rural school in Saxony), but no matter what this looks like in concrete terms, it challenges the children to develop personally. To what extent this leads to a hybrid identity, or the previous identity becomes largely stable and predominant, or a new identity is quickly formed by assimilation, must be considered in each individual case. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that it leads to personal developments in any case. Some aspects of this could be worked out in the interviews; they will now be presented.

Identity

The children feel strongly connected to their family; they tell them about everyday life at school, but they distinguish quite precisely to whom they can and cannot say something. This is obviously strongly related to cultural expectations (e.g. about marriage topics only with the mother), or they consider whether they want to burden parents with certain things (bullying).

Girl, 10 years: They say that [about marriage] only to their mothers, some don't say that at all. I: Okay. Do you talk to your parents about everything that happens at school?

Girl, 9 years: *Yes.*

Girl, 10 years: *Yes.* (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

And at the same time, peers from one's own culture of origin often exert a decisive influence on finding one's identity and on belonging.

Girl, 16 years old: Well, I would like to add that I also get along better with people who have the same culture as me. I have a friend who I'm very close to and she's coming to visit, she's from Turkey / her parents are from Turkey and we have a lot in common in the household. So the food, for example, or the celebrations we have, the way it's traditional, so when we're at home / but there are also German students I get along with. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

Hybridity

For children with a migration background, the hybrid identity is first and foremost determined by important, concrete and different reference persons: On the one hand through parents and often more through grandparents, on the other hand through teachers and classmates. In younger children, the first determination/line is shown by the challenges of everyday communication with grandparents, in the other line by the challenges of everyday communication with peers.

Hybrid identity is perceived sensitively and especially mutually by the children. For example, it can be seen there as an unresolved, dynamic state. A Turkish girl describes her friend, who probably comes from the Czech Republic, as "something in between".

I: And your best friend?

Girl, 9 years old: (...) she comes from the Czech Republic (...) yes. Maybe not from the Czech Republic, I don't know exactly, she's actually also a foreigner, but also not. Because she's been [here] for five years and I don't know exactly anymore, I think she's something in between. (G_I25_ISCED1_F)

Belonging

Belonging is closely related to identity. Belonging itself is characterised by a sense of security and self-evidence. Children find this, for example, in everyday activities in the family and in familiar places:

Boy, 11 years old: Yes, when I [am] in the big garden I have a bike and ... such a kickboard. Sometimes we go there in the big garden with my family [and] my friend's family ... make dinner. We have a table ... [And our] balcony I like ... because it's so good. We have a ... sofa on our balcony. We have a table, a green table. Where we play cards together then, our family. (G_I32_ISCED1_M)

School is an important factor of belonging. So security and a sense of well-being can be found at school. Both helps a lot with integration. A Turkish boy who started school in Turkey and then came to Germany in the first grade says:

I: And what was it like when you went to school here in Germany for the first day?

Boy, 11 years old: I was a bit afraid of what it would be like. I didn't know how it would go.

I: And how did it turn out?

Boy, 11 years old: *It turned out well, I always had fun. Yes.* (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

If children are not recognised at school and included in everyday communication, then it leads to exactly the opposite: school does not offer belonging and thus identity is made more difficult or prevented.

Girl, 17 years old: So as a school, as an education or something, it's quite good. But how I feel in it is not so extreme, so good, yes. At the beginning it was even worse for me. So I felt somehow that everyone was looking at me. (...) well, is there anything, I don't feel like I belong there so. (G_I44_ISCED3_F, pos. 4) And further: So really the classmates were so fast and I always felt like I couldn't contribute anything good. So then group work and I always felt like such a zero person. (G_I44_ISCED3_F)

It is interesting that German as a second Language classes [L2- classes] can offer integration, although the school as a whole is not able to do this:

I: And how is it between you students in L2-? Girl, 17 years old: People, there are people like me. A lot of immigrants. And so we feel connected, because we are all immigrants in Germany and we are learning the same stuff and we are trying to learn the same language so we all understand each other. But in my normal classroom they all speak German and I am the immigrant one, so they don't understand how I feel among them. I: How do you communicate with the other students, with the Germans in your class? Girl, 17 years old: I don't. I don't speak at all. (G_147_ISCED3_F)

Language

In the families, the language of origin is often spoken if both parents come from the same language area. Otherwise, German is the family language, especially if only the father has migrated. In that case the children learn the father's language like a foreign language, but with great eagerness, because they want to speak with the father's family of origin or share a language with the father.

Girl, 10 years: So I like learning languages. It's just difficult, but I like it. And I want to learn French too. Then when I go to Africa, I can't talk to my grandma [father is from Senegal]. And I think that's stupid too, because I'm always standing around thinking: What

is she saying? And I have no idea what I should do now. I just don't understand anything and that's stupid for me. (G_I33_ISCED1_FF)

Girl, 9 years: Yes, my father speaks Russian with me and I always go to the Russian school on Saturdays and so does my brother now (...). And there we always have Russian writing and grammar. Literature and mathematics. (G_F30_ISCED1_FF)

Mostly German is spoken in the peer group if at least one child is present who does not belong to the same language of origin; only if everyone speaks the same mother tongue is this language of origin sometimes, but not always, spoken.

Girl, 9 years: We always speak German. [And] I have other Turkish friends there who also live very close to us (...) Well, I speak German if they don't address me for conversation [in Turkish]

I: And what's about you? When you speak [alone with a Turkish friend], do you speak German or Turkish?

Girl, 10 years: *Turkish*. (G_F24_ISCED1_FF)

The peer group is also the place where children learn colloquial and special languages. Peers are thus a central complement to school as a place of learning.

Girl, 16 years old: I remember that I didn't know many words, many words that are not used at school. On the way to the place where we were going, on a class trip, I talked to a friend and she taught me words that are more part of a girl's everyday life, for example, pimples, pores or something. So I was taught something like that (laughs) by the pupils. (G_I43_ISCED3_F)

At school, language behaviour is sometimes regulated; the aim is to improve German skills and that no one is excluded from common communication:

I: Do you speak German throughout the school? Girl, 8 years old: Yes. (...) We shouldn't speak anything but German because the others don't understand. I: And in which language do you speak when you talk to each other?

Girl, 9 years: German. I: Do you speak German in the entire school?

Girl, 8 years: Yes. (...) I: And do you think it's good to do it that way? (...)

Girl, 8 years: *Yes*. (G_I34_ISCED1_F)

One Turkish boy even thinks it's good if there are more German children in the class, because then German is spoken more and better:

Boy, 11 years old: No, I always wanted there to be more Germans. (...) Well, I don't know, it's better for me. (...) I speak even more with Germans. With foreigners I don't speak so much. (...) Even in my free time. With Germans I speak German, with foreigners not so much. (G_I28_ISCED1_M)

Transnationality

Language and belonging are also thought of globally. Children also learn languages to keep in touch with their friends or to prepare for their future. There are apparently no limits to this, neither linguistically nor nationally.

To keep in touch with friends a nine-year-old girl says: and she [the friend] has now gone to Japan, (...) Then I am sad, so now I want to learn Japanese. Because then I can talk to her. (G_F27_ISCED1 ISCED2_FF)

And as part of life planning a 17-year-old girl tells: I want to learn Korean because I love their languages and their culture. (...) maybe I can live there or I can come back. It is nothing fixed right now. (G_I45_ISCED3_F)

Finally, it is said that a lack of language ability prevents belonging, especially when children are not very self-confident:

Girl, 18 years old: So I usually can't make so much connection with native speakers because I don't feel so comfortable when I/ so, that I make a mistake or, I don't know, I understand sometimes quite not so/ little so completely. And that's why, or, I don't know, my speaking or my speeches might sound a bit boring to them and that's why I don't want to speak so much with native speakers. (G_I40_ISCED3_F)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Summary of all results

A total of 79 participants between the ages of 5 and 20 took part in the interviews. It should be emphasised that the majority of the pupils interviewed were children who were themselves born in another country and migrated to Germany. Based on the analysis of the interviews, the following conclusions can be made. The focus is on the topics: German as a teaching language, the assessment of teachers from the children's perspective, school as a social space and (not) experiencing opportunities of participation.

German as a teaching language

The interviews with the children make clear how strongly education in school is tied to language, and thus also confirm the view of the professionals, who endorsed the need to find alternative approaches and methods to support the togetherness and participation of children with migrant background. For example, some of the children interviewed reported that they found it difficult to follow what was going on in class and to keep up. On the one hand, this is the case when teachers choose frontal teaching and less activating methods, but it can also play a role in group discussions between the children, for example, when the children feel they cannot contribute due to their lack of language skills. This is also tied to the usage of technical language, which is required in various subjects, which the children often still lack, and which is not promoted in L2 lessons to the extent that would be necessary, as some children complained. The children are very motivated, want to take part and participate, but are virtually slowed down by their lack of language skills and the large amount of language bound.

In this context, the extent to which language-boundness affects learning and inclusiveness depends very much on the teachers and their support. There are differences here in how actively teachers approach children, offer their support and help, but children acknowledge teacher who seek an active dialogue with them, ensure that they have understood and are able to follow their lessons. A special role is played by the L2 lessons, which are intended to help the children learn the language and be integrated into regular classes as quickly as possible. This is ambivalent, because, on the one hand, children experience the L2 classes as a protective space in which they can learn German and receive support, but on the other hand, they cannot participate in subjects such as biology, math or chemistry. Accordingly, the children understand very well how important it is to learn German quickly and to be able to participate and exchange in particular classes. The motivation of the children should be seen as a potential, which must be used much more by the institution school and the teachers.

Also for the more informal relationships with peers and friendships between the children, language skills seem to play a greater role with increasing age, at least from the perspective of the children with a migration background. Some of these report that they are quieter in classes and engage less in exchanges, especially with native speakers. Sometimes, then, friendships of children with a migration background who share the lack of language tend to form. On the other hand, it is evident that children find a common language. For example, they talk to each other in German when children with and without a migration background exchange information. Additionally they have a considerable influence on language acquisition, for example, by acting as translators, summarizing and communicating tasks in class, or teaching each other everyday terms and language.

Teacher assessment from the children's perspective

In summary, it can be seen that both the pupils and the pre-school children rate the role of the teachers as important. Teachers have a significant influence on how children experience everyday life in school or day care. They play an important role especially for children with a migration background, because they might need special attention or support to a certain extent. Children with a migration background do not demand special treatment from teachers. They do, however, want sensitivity to possible language barriers and comprehension problems. It is interesting to note that all age groups (ISCED0 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.

School as a social space

Institutional educational contexts are important social spaces, especially for children and young people with a migration background, as they can offer them security and opportunities for social contact and social learning. This applies to both schools and day care centers. From the point of view of children with a migration background, day care centers as well as schools offer the opportunity to get together with peers and to make friends. Students also emphasize the importance of school as a linguistic and cultural learning environment and in this context usually highlight the positive learning climate in schools. Nevertheless, individual students report experiences of aggressive behaviour, bullying and racism, which have a decidedly negative impact on their self-perception and their perception of school. Teachers in particular have the responsibility to notice and intervene in such behaviour, when in the interviews became clear that the affected students need the support of teachers, hope for it, but do not always receive it. Therefore, there is a need for structural changes respectively further training of teachers. In general, the design of school as a social and thus inclusive space must be taken into account, as important bridges to social integration and social participation are created within this framework (Sime & Fox 2015).

(Not) Experiencing opportunities of participation

Participation plays an important role for the children interviewed in all pedagogical contexts, day care centres, schools and after school care as well. The children perceive the given opportunities very precisely and use them just as much as they criticize them and formulate ideas for improving participation opportunities. According to this, participation is described as limited in two ways, especially in school contexts. On the one hand, its content is limited to topics that do not significantly affect the core of the school order, i.e., for example, it refers to the organization of lessons, seating

arrangements, etc. or those, which are defined by adults. On the other hand, institutional forms of participation in school dominate, although these are also judged critically in terms of their effects. Nevertheless, students describe examples of successful participation too, i.e. participation that is perceived as substantial. Here, the attitude and personality of the teachers obviously play a key role. The results show that participation is of great importance in educational institutions and that it should be systematically enabled and promoted. In this respect, teachers have a central position, as they are the ones who can provide corresponding experiences or create the necessary framework conditions for children's substantial participation. This is not only with regard to forms and topics of participation, but also with regard to the conditions of successful participation, for example concerning the linguistic competences of children with a migrant background (see also 5.3).

Summary of the situation of migrant children in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic

Overall, the picture of the impact and coping with the Corona pandemic among the children is quite diverse. In general, the majority of children experienced restrictions on their own daily lives. In particular, wearing masks in and out of class, contact restrictions, and a reduction in classes (e.g., number of subjects, amount of learning) were perceived as major challenges. In addition, most pupils were disappointed about cancelled field trips and school excursions, which are otherwise a considerable part of social school life. Although the negative consequences of the pandemic predominate, there are nevertheless also children who report positive consequences, for instance, on social cohesion within the class.

Overall, successful coping with the pandemic is highly dependent on the extent to which schools manage to provide a structure for learning and appropriate support from teachers, or whether children are able to structure themselves and to build up a support network. This is evident, for example, in the amount of self-study material that needs to be offered in line with pupils' competencies, so as to be neither too overwhelming nor too underwhelming. Many students reported that they were able to draw on the support of teachers and parents in coping with the pandemic, although there were also differences between students and teachers in this regard. In isolated cases, reference was made to special support programs such as the "Corona School", which were, however, experienced as ambivalent.

For newcomers in particular, the pandemic posed a challenge; they emphasized their need for face-to-face interactions and personal exchange, for example in the context of L2- classes. Finally, the experience of online schooling depended strongly on whether access to appropriate devices was available - or not, and how competent teachers were in adapting to the new digital format.

Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research

The empirical results of the qualitative study with children, but also of the study with professionals, make it clear that the representation of children's agency corresponds very strongly with the social and institutional conditions in kindergarten and school. In this regard, the findings on the possibilities and limits of children's participation are of particular interest. According to Baraldi and Iervese, agency can be understood as "a specific form of active participation [by children] that promotes unpredictable social change and thus shows children's abilities as possibilities for achieving functionalities, i.e. for achieving ways of acting." (Baraldi, Iervese 2015: 46) Participation conceptualized this way means showing "agency [which] means showing the capacity of choices of action to open up different possibilities of action, so that a particular course of action is one among

different possibilities." (Baraldi 2014: 73) This highlights children's participation as a serious possibility to influence and change social situations and the social conditions of their lives.

If agency shows in active participation and active participation in turn means to have a choice and thus to have substantial influence on communication, activities and circumstances in educational contexts as in school, children's participation according to their reports and their evaluations is quite limited. In their descriptions, it became clear that the given possibilities of participation were often not only limited to institutionalized forms. Moreover, both with regard to those formal possibilities and with regard to other forms of participation in daily life in school, results show that children's participation was usually limited to the choice between options given by adults. Sometimes it was reported that the adults even in the contexts, which explicitly are foreseen for their participation, ignored the voice of the children. The older children in particular are very critical of the possibilities and limits of participation, especially with regard to formalized practices, and attest that the school has in some ways fallen out of time. They are also cautious, if not sceptical, about the prospects for a substantial improvement of participation opportunities for children in schools.

However, the results from the qualitative study with educational professionals on the other hand pointed out that teachers report for themselves to be aware on participating children and try to enhance opportunities of children's participations. Against this background, it is the question on which understandings children respectively teachers and educators refer when they speak about participation. In this context, the results seem to point on two things. Firstly, it becomes apparent that contexts and objects of participation are understood and interpreted differently by children and professionals. When in an interview a teacher emphasizes that she could not imagine presenting and defining rules in front of a class, i.e. without an exchange with the pupils, then in a certain way the object, framework and scope of exchange and participation are defined.

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.
(G_T6_F)

However, it is not clear to what extent the children associate this with a form of participation and interpret and accept the teacher's "offer" accordingly. Secondly, this points to the fact that participation and thus agency in a fundamental sense are obviously defined specifically from different points of view. The differences in this regard should be investigated in depth, because it cannot be assumed that one of the sides involved has, as it were, made false statements. Rather, it must be a matter of identifying the differences, analysing them with regard to their conditions of causation and thus making them a starting point for constructive reflection and change.

Finally, with regard to the participation of children at school, structural factors become visible which exist to a certain extent beyond formalized participation opportunities and can limit, if not prevent, effective participation of children. For children with a migration background, language barriers are the main obstacle to be mentioned in this regard. Especially in formalized practices, effective participation is linked to linguistic competences that children with migration experiences sometimes do not yet have. Similar difficulties occur regarding their participation for instance regarding group work during lessons or peer relations at school. The pedagogical problem of children's participation is thus twofold, in that the necessary - linguistic - preconditions must first be created in the children

concerned, which school as an institution also presupposes in its pupils. It is true that individual teachers in the interviews address the need to actively and consciously involve children and families with a migration background in the existing opportunities for participation. On the other hand, findings on the language-bound nature of purely classroom-based participation suggest that no pronounced sensitivity can be assumed at this point. In this respect, the results on participation point in two directions: on the one hand, the need for a closer examination and thus possibly irritation of different perspectives on participation among children and professionals. On the other hand, it will be important to develop a migration-sensitive perspective that, with a view to participation, agency and thus integration, opens up possibilities to actively involve children with a migration background in school based on their competences. This in turn would mean not only actively involving these children in the social life of the school, but also adjusting social life towards these children in the sense of a necessarily institutional practice. Regarding Baraldi, this would lead to a change of social conditions by migrant children, which is firstly induced by a conscious dealing with their needs and potentials, and secondly and accordingly emphasizes particular opportunities of their participation on an aware institutional basis.

Recommendations arising from the interviews with children regarding their functioning in the school environment

In general, it can be said that integration possibilities at the institutions surveyed are generally good, but that there is also a clear need for action in some aspects. This refers to real participation, the ability to regulate conflicts at schools and the expansion of parental work. Here are some concrete suggestions; these were either obtained directly from the interview material (i.e. they can all be found in the report) or they were obtained through interpretation. In the latter case, this was done on the one hand in comparison with the interviews with the professionals, and on the other hand in the reflection of the results with theoretical implications.

Interesting suggestions for improving participation and taking personal responsibility are:

- Weekly role reversal (teacher - pupil) so that both (!) see the difficulties of the other side.
- Continuously shape the quality of the relationship by acting in a lively way that also allows for conflicts, but always developing new commonalities through joint action and play. This applies to peers as well as to teachers.
- School must be lively, creative and people-oriented.

Racism must be recognised (see, understand, act) and civil courage (also for climate protection) must be promoted (school, teachers, all pupils).

Concrete proposals:

- Re-address the language-bound nature of the subjects.
- Train teachers in how to deal with bullying.
- English as a third language or more use of language mediators
- Promote friendships between children with and without MGH
- Strengthening identity, regardless of language skills

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CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Italy

1. Methodology

Focus groups (FGs) with students were conducted from May 2020 until June 2021 in the three areas involved in the project: Modena, Genova and Reggio Emilia. Due to the pandemic, researchers agreed with teachers about how to conduct the FGs during the periods in which schools were closed, as well as navigating the different regulations in place in the various schools. For this reason, 6 FGs were conducted face-to-face, with both researcher and recorder in the classroom, 27 FGs were conducted remotely in two ways: (1) with the researcher on a digital platform and students in the classroom; (2) with all participants on a digital platform in different virtual locations. When the FGs were conducted with the researcher connected remotely and children in the classroom, children were asked to get closer to the computer when they had something to say in order to avoid any audio difficulties as the result of poor connection or due to children wearing the masks. In some cases, the teacher repeated the students' contributions for the researchers.

The schools and classes that took part in the FGs were the same ones that participated in the activities, pre post-test, and FGs in WP6 of the project, with the exception of five classes involved during the lockdown (March-May 2020) which were not able to implement the activities in the 2020/2021 school year. Teachers, students, and parents were happy with the FGs. Children especially repeatedly said that they appreciated the FGs since they could express their opinions. However, it was very difficult to obtain parental consent remotely for the five classes involved during the lockdown in Spring 2020, both due to forgetfulness and technical problems. With this background in mind, hard copies of parental consent were collected during the 2020/2021 school year.

A total of 24 schools/educational centres and 33 classes/groups were involved in the FGs. The children involved ranged from ISCED0 to ISCED3: 6 groups were in ISCED0, 9 in ISCED1, 11 belonged to ISCED2 and 7 to ISCED 3. The FGs mixed groups of males and females, except for 5 classes/groups: three classes in a technical institute were made up of girls only; two classes of another technical institute included only boys; a group of unaccompanied foreign minors taking a literacy course were also just boys. Except for the group of unaccompanied foreign minors composed exclusively of migrant children, children's nationalities were very heterogeneous in all classes. The schools/educational institutions that participated are located partly in 3 towns in Northern Italy and partly in three surrounding villages.

Table 1: Focus groups

Focus group number	Number of boys	Number of girls	Other	ages	Location
1	8	8		5-6	Modena
2	6	7		5-6	Modena
3	6	6		5-6	Modena

4	5	7		5-6	Modena
5	8	9		5-6	Reggio Emilia
6	5	7		5-6	Reggio Emilia
7	6	8		5-6	Genova
8	9	10		9-10	Modena
9	7	12		9-10	Modena
10	9	11		9-10	Modena
11	9	10		9-10	Genova
12	7	9		9-10	Genova
13	8	9		9-10	Genova
14	8	10		9-10	Genova
15	8	7		9-10	Genova
16	6	8		12-13	Modena
17	8	8		12-13	Modena
18	8	10		12-13	Modena
19	8	9		12-13	Modena
20	5	7	2	12-13	Genova
21	7	8	1	12-13	Genova
22	5	8	2	12-13	Genova
23	7	8		12-13	Genova
24	9	7		12-13	Genova
25	9	10		12-13	Reggio Emilia
26	10	9		12-13	Reggio Emilia
27	-	17		15-16	Modena

28	-	15		15-16	Modena
29	-	16		15-16	Modena
30	12	-		15-16	Modena
31	11	-		15-16	Modena
32	11	-		15-16	Modena
33	9	4		15-16	Modena
Total: 33	234	274	5		

The FGs were conducted in Italian, given the participants' proficiency in the language. The atmosphere was relaxed and informal and there were no questions that the participants found difficult or disturbing.

2. School as a lived space

Ideal school

Concerning what their ideal school should look like, children provided answers that can be grouped around five basic factors.

The first factor is in line with what the teachers said, i.e., being in favour of an increased number of extracurricular activities within the school. ISCED 2 and 3 students in particular demonstrated a certain idealized image of American schools, taking that model as an example to argue that it would be nice to have more extracurricular activities such as sports and music.

I like American schools because there is a day in the American school where all the school's students can bring their instruments and let the others hear them playing" (IT_F8_CH_B).

M1: Like some more activities, like in American schools there is the option of doing activities after the lessons like music, dance, etc.

M2: exactly

[...]

M1: things like theatre music and dance, for me, I would do them instantly [...] because they are things that attract me

(IT_F5_CH_B)

M1: there are so many extracurricular activities, so much more

Int: so you think you would like to do things outside the regular subjects?

Some: yes [...] they have a basketball team, they have more sports classes. (IT_F9_CH_G)

Children also mentioned other activities help with socialization, such as eating in a cafeteria and having dances: "then you eat at school" "the dances" (IT_F9_CH_G). These activities can also be

done outside school but they are more highly valued if they take place in school: “obviously after school if we want to go and do sports we can, but I think they mean that it would be nice at school to have a school team, for example, basketball, soccer” (IT_F9_CH_B).

The second factor is radical change in the way lessons are carried out: “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 machines, the school should be revolutionized” (IT_F8_CH_B).

In particular, children asked for more computers and new technologies such as tablets to be used, replacing books, and video games or applications to support learning. Many children also mentioned wanting to have more computers at school or laptops to carry around with them. These tools would also relieve the weight of books they carry on their shoulders and would have positive effects on both education and the environment. They claimed that this idea has been around for years, it is not something that has been caused by the pandemic.

Another way to describe this change is “to learn while having fun”: “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). For children in an lower class of primary school the ideal school is one where you can “only play”, “only write” and paint, but also study numbers. Playing for a long time outside in the garden was also mentioned. A girl described her ideal school as one where you “always play outside with unicorns and do pretend cooking” (IT_F15_CH_G). However, one student in ISCED 2 highlighted that school shouldn’t be too much fun either: “if we always have a laugh and joke around, I feel it is not good, it’s too much even” (IT_F21_CH_G).

Children also argued that it would be necessary to increase the number of workshops, subjects and activities, tailored towards the labour market, “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) and learning in a new relaxing way.

In my opinion another thing they should do in school is to invent a new subject, that is art and music put together so we can relax during art time by listening to music while drawing. [...] You could schedule it on a Friday so that when we are more tired, at least we could do this hour so we can relax. (IT_F27_CH_B)

Several children also suggested meeting more experts from certain sporting fields, especially related to physical education. This was common among ISCED 2 and 3 children, who expressed the idea that school can offer more opportunities based on children’s interests.

In general, this new school is a school “which understands students’ needs better, which not only focusses on teaching, but also on spending time together [...] teachers and students should help each other more and talk”. (IT_F10_CH_G)

Some children claimed there should be more lessons but also narratives and experiences told by experts with other native languages: “T1: he [the student who has just spoken] would like some subjects in a foreign language, as happens already in high schools” (IT_F8_CH_B); “doing more workshops and also meeting new people to tell us their stories would be very nice” (IT_F29_CH_G). Moreover, more time should be devoted to personal narratives and feelings “and then have half an hour to talk about feelings, about how you feel” (IT_F28_CH_G)

Every day we would change professors in order to get to know more people and to become more adaptable. This is something that makes you better anyway, and maybe every now and we could then have foreigners come and tell their stories or something like that. (IT_F29_CH_G)

The third factor is an approach that increases students' personal autonomy and responsibility, more like the university model, allowing more freedom of choice regarding attendance, and following only a few subjects at a time as well as having less homework in order to have more free time.

As I think they have done in Sweden, they dedicate a day to a subject, for example they dedicate a single day to mathematics [...] even the homework maybe done with a teacher [...] this study has shown that family conflicts have been greatly reduced and in school because the children were more relaxed, they had more free time, and above all they did better in school. (IT_F8_CH_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).

Interestingly, a student proposed a reduction in student autonomy, with the adoption of guards or surveillance cameras to increase children's participation:

M1: Some guards watching who goes out and who comes in, or surveillance cameras, at least to watch over pupils

Int: Would you participate more if you were being watched?

M1: Maybe. (IT_F29_CH_B)

Connected to this, less pressure regarding assessments was also suggested, something highlighted especially by ISCED2 and ISCED3 students.

No tests, no homework. (IT_F6_CH_B)

Less stress regarding tests and homework [...] maybe a bit of evaluation but not an excessive amount (IT_F6_CH_B) less stress, because it happens that on some days we have a lot of tests in one day and that is a bit tiring. Evaluations, yes, but moderate ones, not so that you might have three tests in one day. (IT_F6_CH_G)

For me the ideal school would be one hour, without questions, only explanations. (IT_F7_CH_B)

Not having tests and maybe watching more videos on YouTube or even seeing more movies, and never scoring less than a six in tests. (IT_F7_CH_B).

The fourth factor is improvement of school spaces and school architecture, such as bigger, safer, more colourful, original schools, with lockers to leave books in, newer gyms, a bigger library and a bigger computer room, as well as blackboards with squares in the classrooms.

M1: Like decorating more the classrooms because they are all white and grey.

Int: But to do it yourselves or to have someone do it for you?

M1: No even us I mean it would be nice. (IT_F23_CH_B)

I would like it to be like American schools, separate desks, [...] soccer field, basketball court, swimming pool, large gym, lockers, [...] also the design. I would fix the gymnasium a bit by exchanging old for new equipment, and by fixing the roof and the floor, because it always floods when it rains. In the space in front where there is a car park, I would enlarge the space for the children and that small square of land is where I would plant some plants,

and I would not have the car park or, if I had to put it somewhere, I would put it in a place a bit further away from the place where the children play. (IT_F33_CH_B)

Children also suggested changes in school organization, i.e., the kind of school subjects and the number of hours dedicate to each subject, (less Italian literature and more physical education such as swimming lessons). Children also described their desired changes in terms of school hours, i.e., starting later and in short fewer hours and days, a longer breaktime, more use of outdoor spaces and trips.

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)

To have a longer breaktime so as not to accumulate all this stress. (IT_F7_CH_B)

Having trips that is a more relaxing and more interesting way to learn because, for example, when you are in class you have to stay focused and sit still. (IT_F29_CH_G)

It would be nice if there were more practical lessons, not only in science but also in other things such as, even in other subjects, and going on more trips, always educational ones, but going on more trips. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Remove a few hours of Italian, but maybe add an hour of physical education with a specific coach or a month with a volleyball coach, another with soccer, another with basketball. [...] the lessons must be both educational and involve teaching but should also be light. Then, after that, maybe a few classes could be done outside when spring comes. Like, once a week, maths and Italian could all be done with music playing, and art could involve making drawings outside of the things we observe. (IT_F22_CH_B)

It was felt that this would also help them in their learning activities: "I would like to do the classes outdoors because I think you can relax more, and you can understand things better". (IT_F29_CH_G)

Then I would like to have lessons outdoors, for example even when we do science [...] if for example we go to the courtyard if there were plants in the courtyard, we could take them and I don't know, analyse them [...] my ideal school would be outdoors. (IT_F31_CH_B)

The fifth factor is better relationships: "that people do not judge others and that they are kind" (IT_F18_CH_G). Several ISCED2 students spoke of the absence of dialogue between students and teachers.

I believe that in the end an ideal school is one in which there is also dialogue between the teachers and students so that if there are problems one can talk without fear, because there shouldn't be a barrier. It should be possible in these three years to have respect for the teachers but to still have a dialogue. (IT_F21_CH_B)

Real school

Some respondents claimed that they like their school, mostly because they get along well with their classmates and teachers: "I genuinely like my school a lot and I got on very well with my classmates and teachers" (IT_F9_CH_G). ISCED2 children (in three schools) also said that they like the subjects, how subjects are taught, and the communal spaces in school.

I like the building, I get along well with all the teachers, some more and some less, but I always get along very well, and I like the subjects, I don't have any problems with any subject, (?) and I get on well with my classmates. (IT_F2_CH_G)

M1: It's nice, also with the teachers, I'm happy, [...] yes, I enjoy the education.

Int: So the subjects are taught well.

M1: Yes.

Int: Do you get on well with your classmates?

M1: Yes. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Children find some subjects interesting because of personal tastes or experiences.

I like science, mathematics, but not that much, and art, too, not that much, because I love to draw, but then I hate painting, and I love to do things like having breaktime and gym. (IT_F33_CH_G)

At school I usually like breaktime, I also like science as a subject because I really like to discover new things about how the universe works, then for the rest, I also quite like when we go to the canteen because I can talk with my friends. (IT_F33_CH_B)

My favourite subjects are science and religion. Science because I'm interested in it and religion because, since my mom is a catechist, she talks to me about everything because she has to teach it, so while she studies it, I listen to it too and I'm interested in it, and what I also like to do is breaktime and reading. (IT_F33_CH_G)

Children especially appreciate all the school activities that enable personal expression.

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)

The activities that I like most in school are the art activities when we make free drawings, or a drawing about how we experienced a certain situation, because they are drawings in which we can really express ourselves. (IT_F29_CH_G)

ISCED0 children appreciate activities that allow personal expression, socialization and creativity, like drawing, playing with friends, making buildings with blocks and singing.

M1: I like to paint and draw.

Int: Do you G also like to draw and paint?

F1: Yes.

M2: I like to paint.

T1: J likes to paint too.

M1: I like to sing. (IT_F16_CH_GB)

Children also enjoy the opportunity of being physical, like going into the garden or playing in the gym.

Int: When you are in kindergarten, is there a place you like best? [...]

M: Going outside into the garden. (IT_F16_CH_B)

M2: I like to play gym.

M3: I also like to play gym.

F1: I also like to play gym, being a ballet dancer. (IT_F16_CH_GB)

Other children stressed that they like everything about school.

M1: I like going to school.

T1: You like everything about school.

F1: Me too.

M1: Yes. (IT_F16_CH_GB)

Several children greatly appreciated activities that are creative, such as creating short movies, things that are new and different from the educational routine, such as swapping books, when teachers give students the opportunity and time to explore topics they are interested in. One child in Genova expressed how much he appreciated the school library since it is not very common to have such a good library in primary schools: “I like everything about the school but the thing I really like the most is the library because not all schools have a library” (IT_F31_CH_B). Group collaboration was also considered interesting and helpful by most interviewees.

I think one of the coolest activities we’ve done was the short movie, when we made the short movie and we won too. For me personally it was a lot of fun to do that because we would meet in the afternoon and maybe someone would give up something to be with the whole class to make up new stories or shoot parts. So, for me personally it was also very nice to experience the feeling of winning. (IT_F21_CH_G)

Group collaboration was considered to be important, both because it reinforces relationships among peers, and because it permits students to help each other, limiting the pressure of performance at the level of the individual.

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)

In general, children really enjoy those activities that allow them to socialize with each other, such as eating in the canteen, taking part in extracurricular workshops and going on school trips. Several children said that their favourite moment at school is the breaktime, during which they can chat and get to know each other better. One girl in a primary school mentioned the interaction she had with her classmates in the first year as being a very positive memory.

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)

Also relating to changes caused by the pandemic, children talked of the importance of class trips because they allow them to learn in a fun and interactive way, “I like the educational trips so much, I wish there were more [...] not because it is a way to skip school, but a way to learn more” (IT_F29_CH_B).

School trips have always been a way of comparing what we have done in class and, in addition to being a way of comparing with school subjects, it is also a method of making comparisons between us students. And, in fact, this year I think there should have been a trip that was supposed to be the best but it couldn’t happen, but I believe that trips are the best way to compare things (IT_F21_CH_G).

I don’t feel very good at school [...] it’s not so much the lessons, it’s the fact that I feel trapped inside the structure of it, that is, I don’t feel very free to learn inside the various structures, whether they are beautiful or not, I like to learn outdoors and I love trips for this reason. I like to learn by visiting places, but from what I can see, even without the Covid

factor, there aren't many trips [...] if I have to learn the history of the Romans, why don't you take me to Rome? I think I learn more if I can see the actual places than if I see things in a book. (IT_F5_CH_B)

Many children also identified several negative aspects of their school, however. First, "real school" is frequently described as being boring and repetitive, particularly for some subjects.

F1: The lessons are almost always the same in the sense that the way of doing them never changes, I don't know how to explain it.

F2: The method.

F1: The method, yes, and then you get bored using the same method, I think that if a better way of teaching or different methods were found it would be more interesting. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Some children suggested, and wished, that their teachers would make more effort to help them appreciate subjects: "there are some subjects that are quite boring for many of us and so maybe it would be good if those teachers found a way of helping us like it" (IT_F22_CH_G). This strategy would require more games, interactive activities, more use of the interactive whiteboard, and a greater level of involvement from the teacher.

Often the lessons are boring for us because we already don't like the subject. And then, if the teachers just follow the book, we get even more bored. If they said it in their own words instead it would be easier for us to understand. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Second, "real school" is considered by some children as being too theoretical, whereas, as emerged during conversations about the "ideal school", they would prefer experimenting with knowledge on a more practical level: "I agree with [a classmate who suggested more practice], in our school we do more theory than practical hours" (IT_F22_CH_G).

Mainly ISCED1 and ISCED2 students criticized the spaces both inside and outside the school, pointing out the lack of a garden and therefore the lack of opportunity to access outdoor spaces during the breaktime, as well as pointing out the degradation or poor maintenance of outdoor spaces.

In front, where there is just the slide and the parking lots, there is an area that is always muddy, and that area of land, in my opinion, should also be changed because it is land that, with water, becomes pure mud, mud, mud. (IT_F33_CH_G)

The other areas mentioned were indoor spaces such as classrooms, the entrance of the school, gym, bathrooms and canteen, that are often considered hard to use or unsafe: "maybe just from the point of view of space, maybe a little bigger classrooms because we are a little cramped" (IT_F23_CH_B), "the bathrooms are really disgusting, then the walls, they are all full of cracks and there is a risk of them collapsing" (IT_F23_CH_B).

I don't like the canteen because there's too much noise and sometimes it's a bit dirty [...] then another thing I don't like is the locker rooms and maybe the layout of the gym because it's close to the cafeteria and maybe when you come out of the canteen, and someone is doing gymnastics, you smell the sweat a bit. (IT_F33_G)

In an ISCED2 FG, a child mentioned teachers' preferences about students as a negative element: "the negative things are teacher preferences, although not all teachers have preferences" (IT_F23_CH_B). Finally, ISCED3 children and unaccompanied migrant minors pointed out problems in terms of timetables and organization, such as turning off the WIFI at a certain time, and the reduced number

of activities available due to the pandemic: “organization could be improved a bit, maybe even the structure of school hours, to be honest some things are a bit inconvenient so the organization could be improved” (IT_F2_CH_G).

The main activities about which children expressed dissatisfaction are homework and the anxiety connected to it.

I can't say that the activities I like the most are written tests, but they are doing some homework about our opinions about personal things [...] because you don't always have to be anxious about homework, but you have to study, understand, and then at the end you have to see if you really have understood. (IT_F29_CH_G)

Another aspect bothering students and creating anxiety is the lack of freedom to express their needs to teachers.

One thing that I would happily change at school is the ability of students to always be free to disagree with teachers and that they are not afraid to tell them perhaps, “I don't agree with the amount of homework you give us or when you give us a test” or anything else, because in my opinion students feel intimidated in doing this and this is not right [...] in my opinion every now and then someone has avoided saying what he/she thought for fear of punishment. (IT_F11_CH_G)

Waking up early is an aspect of “real school” that is widely considered to be especially stressful. This will also be highlighted below, when considering the effects of online learning during the pandemic.

Finally, specific school subjects cause anxiety and frustration.

I don't like geography and geometry at all because I can't understand them. (IT_F33_CH_B)

In terms of subjects, I didn't like geometry very much especially because you have to remember everything, I'm not very good at it, and then, more or less, gymnastics, because I'm terrible at it. (IT_F33_CH_B)

After 30 minutes of explanation, you don't understand anything anymore. (IT_F9_CH_B)

F1: Our maths teacher is very good, she explains things very well, only we struggle.

F2: We can't understand her [...]

F1: If you can't understand one thing then you go on to another thing and then you add things and you end up not understanding anything anymore. (IT_F9_CH_G)

Lessons are too long, an explanation of more than an hour kills me, and I can't follow anymore. (IT_F5_CH_B)

Affective aspects and relationships within schools

Particularly respondents in the lower school grades claimed that support for those with problems in the classroom is widespread: “there is always someone to help if someone needs it” (IT_F33_CH_G), “I help when a person can't draw a dancer as I can draw a dancer [...] and I also help them write words if they can't write” (IT_F15_CH_G).

Overall children spoke of having good experiences with helping each other and that school taught them to work on relationships.

We have had many arguments about certain topics, but we have also always helped each other for lots and lots of tasks such as when some people were not able to enter a site

because you have to log in with a password to gain access to the tasks or something else, like Calendar, where we tried to help them gain access. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Help is primarily based on the personal bond that children have built over time, one that will last for several years.

In our class most of us have already known each other since kindergarten, so we were already very close, and since we will be together for two more years, I already feel that we have a bond and that we can help each other. (IT_F29_CH_G)

Asking for, and providing, help is related both to school and personal problems and can be given individually or collectively, sometimes with teachers' support.

Maybe when someone has finished doing what the teachers set us in class, then we ask if we can help others to finish it. (IT_F33_CH_G)

I, for example, have A.'s number and both of us often can't understand things so we call each other and try to get them done. (IT_F33_CH_B)

There is a girl in our class who is not present today who has (?) and when she is not well there are some girls in the class, including myself, who take her to another classroom and we stay with her to give her comfort. We help her get through this difficult time also with the help of other teachers. (IT_F8_CH_G)

In contrast, older students point to divisions in the classroom due to the existence of separate groups of friends.

In our class there are many small groups, that is, the class is divided into many small groups, I am not saying that some groups do not help others, but there are some groups that close themselves off and do not want to be helped, and then maybe they complain. If no one opens up, they cannot expect others to open up to them. (IT_F2_CH_G)

Some children also claimed that helping classmates is only done for the benefit of the helpers: "there is little cooperation [...] they help only when they need it" (IT_F1_CH_G). Some children with a migrant background not only observed being helped, but sometimes also being judged by their peers.

M1: If someone makes a mistake, they all insult him or make fun of him.

T1: There are some moments in which you have helped each other but lots of them think that if they make fun of him they'll make the others laugh.

M1: But maybe they do it just to joke. But it also depends on the person because someone could understand the situation. (IT_F8_CH_B)

In one ISCED2 FG, one student with a migration background (M2) said he was unhappy with the relationships with his classmates. He explicitly said that he often does not receive any help from them and that if he needs something, he goes straight to teachers to ask for help. During this event, the teacher intervened to bring the other pupils into the discussion. During this discussion, it became clear that the child had previously felt isolated and one of his classmates admitted that no one had helped him at the beginning. However, this classmate said that they had recently started being more considerate about his wellbeing. One girl highlighted how, not only had they helped M2, but he had also helped them on several occasions.

Let's say that we are a class that doesn't fight very much [...] but we always suggest helping people when needed. For example, also with M2, we helped him, but M2 helped us too [...] for me this is nice because we all need each other, we can't do everything alone. (IT_F22_CH_G)

In another ISCED3 FG, a student spoke of a there being a lack of equality among classmates, since some feel superior to others. He added that a change is needed: “someone may feel superior to someone else. In my opinion this should be eliminated let’s say” (IT_F4_CH_B).

According to several children, participation depends primarily on their own will and/or interest.

Because maybe they are more willing to learn and to follow [...] maybe I would like to participate more but the idea of my brain being fixed on one thing the whole time bothers me. (IT_F29_CH_G)

It varies because everyone responds more frequently when there are certain subjects.

Int: ah, I understand, so you are quite divided because you have preferences and you succeed [to participate more] in those [subjects].

F: Yes. (IT_F33_CH_G)

However, children with migrant backgrounds spoke of the fear of making mistakes and of being judged by their peers and teachers therefore also influencing their participation.

Some classmates participate more either because they are less shy, or simply because maybe by being less shy they are not ashamed to make mistakes and maybe instead other people are ashamed to make mistakes and so they think that if they make mistakes other people will target them so those who are less shy have their say. (IT_F29_CH_G)

That is, I would like to participate more, but I am afraid of making mistakes, and I’m also afraid (?) 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)

Some students confirmed that non-Italian children are less active because they fear being wrong more than the other students.

In my opinion, let’s say foreign people, participate (less) or someone who has greater difficulties in a subject avoids asking questions. For example, maybe when someone hasn’t understood something he remains silent and then afterwards when he has to do homework, he can’t do anything [...] almost everybody speaks quite good Italian. But I’ve noticed that some foreigners, especially when they first arrive, greet the teacher and then don’t say anything during the lesson [...] they are either ashamed or afraid of making mistakes. (IT_F21_CH_B)

Some students claimed that it was not possible for everyone to participate in school. For example, those who fear most to be judged are usually less participative: “In my opinion, there are some children who do not participate because either, as my partner said, they feel insecure or ashamed” (IT_F31_CH_G). For other students this depends on the subjects and topics, for others it depends on individuals: 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).

Conflict at school

Disagreements seem to be quite frequent, especially for ISCED1 children. In ISCED0 FGs, arguments were considered to be negative.

Int: What is it that you don’t like at school?

F1: I [don’t like it] when someone disagrees with me [...]

M1: When someone makes me angry. (IT_F13_CH_GB)

In other ISCED FGs, some said that conflicts are positive and normal even within good relationships: “I mean, I often quarrel with A, even now, and we have known each other since the first grade, but we are friends, that is [...] quarrels are normal between friends” (IT_F9_CH_G). Moreover, conflicts provide good opportunities to get to know classmates better and consolidate relationships with them: “in these three years there have been so many negative things, but at the same time fun things, it’s something that has also helped us to make our relationships closer” (IT_F21_CH_G).

Other students think that getting to know each other decreases the number of arguments that occur because you know how to deal with others.

In the first grade we were always fighting because we didn’t know each other” (IT_F2_CH_G).

If we know each other, we know what others don’t like and what we don’t like, for example, I don’t like to be criticized. If you get along with someone it is much easier to tell him what you think. (IT_F9_CH_B)

Conflict management can be based on avoidance strategies, which also stem from the knowledge of others.

I think that everyone has to deal with these things, in fact, I have a slightly “aggressive” character, I defend my opinions, but there are people more stubborn than me so then I let it go and I avoid being this way. (IT_F29_CH_G)

On the other hand, we have conflict management strategies that consist of the use of irony “sometimes I make people laugh after I have a fight and then I ask if we can play together, and we can make up and she laughs and then she says yes” (IT_F30_CH_G).

When C and I were not friends, we had a fight, when we were fighting, first we didn’t talk to each other, then I would go to C and C would talk to her friends and she would make me laugh, so I said C let’s make up and she said yes, so we played together all day. (IT_F30_CH_G)

The use of dialogue or asking teachers’ help are recurrent themes when children are not able to fix a situation by themselves.

If it becomes too much of a problem, we can ask the teacher or our parents, otherwise we can do it ourselves. (IT_F31_CH_B)

I often joke about it, but when it is a quarrel about something serious then I either tell the teachers about it, because I don’t want to make trouble, or I talk about it normally, but if it’s a quarrel, for example, when we play cards and someone cheats, then I joke about it. (IT_F33_CH_G)

M1: When I quarrel 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 quarrel without insulting each other. (IT_F28_CH_B)

Interestingly, irony is used by children only in low-intensity conflicts, while it is likely to cause problems when used by teachers in high-intensity conflicts.

M1: We used to usually talk to the teacher too, we used to talk to you about fights, and I remember a particular fight when D and I had an argument because D said that I was trampling on M’s books and then you were joking, that is, you were making us laugh, and I said “I don’t want to joke when I am talking about these things” and you were very angry.

T1: Me?

M1: Yes, because I made you angry, I was mortified because you wanted a written apology. [...] We consult with the teacher, we talk to her, we try to understand the situation, we try to make up, I often didn't make up but sometimes I did. (IT_F28_CH_B)

In situations of conflict, teachers are considered an important reference point if they do their best to find the time, outside school hours, to give space to dialogue on topics related to interpersonal relationships. This is especially a widespread opinion among ISCED2 children: “compared to other professor who think more maybe about the theory of a subject, she also has the time to confront for these things and let's say that's a huge help” (IT_F11_CH_G).

A minority of students however, also referred to conflicts which involve students and teachers.

In my class, there weren't that many arguments between students but, more than anything else, there were often arguments between the student and the teacher [...] in these instances classmates were a bit worried about getting in the middle of the argument because it was with a teacher, so they are a bit more afraid of arguments between students and a teacher [...] the teacher talked about it alone with the student and in the end it was resolved. (IT_F10_CH_G)

Social trust

When challenging situations arise, most children felt able to seek support or help from people they trust, such as classmates, class representative, or teachers.

I personally like to speak about it, or I talk about it with my teachers or with my classmates. (IT_F8_CH_B)

I don't talk about it with anyone, but perhaps we make the corrections and the teachers advise us what to study more and what to study less. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Friends are also frequently mentioned as providing support during challenging situations: “I also trust a friend of mine, who doesn't live here in G but in V, so when I have problems I call her and tell her about it” (IT_F33_CH_G) “with my best friend” (IT_F2_CH_G).

Parents are also mentioned as providing support.

I talk to my parents if something isn't working for me, if it doesn't seem right to me. (IT_F8_CH_G)

F1: With parents it depends on what kind of relationship you have.

F2: Exactly, mainly with the parents. (IT_F2_CH_G)

I tell my mum or C because I really trust them and I tell them about it. (IT_F33_CH_G)

If there is something I don't like, I talk about it with the teachers, with my classmates, and with my parents. (IT_F8_CH_G)

M: I got a bad grade today, and I'm going to talk to my parents about it.

Int: And they will help you?

M: Yes of course. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Finally, children consider the support siblings and wider family members can provide.

I also often tell my sister because she gives me advice anyway; I mean I get on well with her. (IT_F33_CH_G)

M1: If it's at school - to my friend A. who was my first friend, and outside school to my aunt who is in Tunis.

T1: And so, you talk to her anyway, you can talk to her and tell her despite the distance?

M1: I talk to her every day. (IT_F33_CH_B)

This last example, that of a child with a migrant background, shows that many children differentiate between contexts of problems and the interlocutors they turn to for help. If they know that one parent is particularly skilled in that topic, they ask that parent; otherwise, they ask their teacher(s). Unaccompanied minors claimed that they relied on educators regarding problems concerning the community, whereas if problems concern personal relationships with other they would solve these by themselves. One child, on the other hand, talked about school problems at home and vice versa.

F1: More than my relatives, my friends, also because if there are family problems, I don't talk to them, I talk to my friends.

Int: And if they are school problems?

F1: [...] if they are school problems, I usually talk about them, I don't know, if I'm angry with one of my friends I try to talk to this friend of mine, otherwise with my other friends or with my parents. (IT_F23_CH_G)

We can also observe that parents and teachers, the latter especially among the ISCED0 children, are turned to for important issues, those which might make the child very uncomfortable.

If I have a problem, I try to solve it myself, but if the problem worsens, I ask the teachers for help because they are adults and they know how to solve the situation. (IT_F24_CH_B)

It depends on what problem I have; it is not the case that if I dislike the teacher I go to my mother, it depends on the seriousness of the problem that you have. (IT_F6_CH_G)

It depends, if the quarrel carries on for a long time maybe I talk about it a little bit because if that person starts to become heavy, if he/she insults you, if he/she always goes against you, of course I tell my parents. If not, if they are normal things, just among children, I probably won't. (IT_F33_CH_G)

Some children highlighted their autonomy regarding making choices and taking action in dealing with problematic situations: they say they prefer to resolve difficult situations on their own, either by talking to those involved or by keeping it to themselves. These children feel that peers, parents or teachers are not always able to help them to deal with problematic situations. They also pointed out that they are responsible for these situations and are the main agents of change in such cases.

I would usually tell some of my friends, always them, I am not one who tells so much. (IT_F33_CH_B)

Yes, but if you don't manage to feel better even if they help you, you can sort things out alone, that is, in the sense you help yourself one your own. (IT_F2_CH_G)

If there is something that I don't like, I either go to the people concerned and tell them face to face, or I keep it to myself, because it doesn't make sense to go and talk to other people without asking them to stop. (IT_F8_CH_B)

F1: I think that even if you get a bad grade, you can't make a big deal out of it so you have to do everything yourself, you can't ask others for help.

F2: Exactly, if you get a bad grade, you can't go to the teacher and ask him/her to change the grade, that's the grade you've got now and you have to accept it, so you have to make an effort and make up for it, maybe a friend or a parent can help you study and so on, but

you have to do it on your own, so it's not useful to count on parents or friends. Then outside of school, if you have problems they can help you, but at school I don't think there is much point. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Some children, including a child with a migrant background, underlined their concern about not being able to open up to other people, either because they do not dare to do so, or because they are not able to find teachers who are interested in their problems. They recount that although teachers do take care of them, they often do not communicate effectively with them, saying they want to help only in order to make a good impression without actually doing anything.

I don't have the courage to tell anyone, I keep it inside. (IT_F8_CH_B)

Sometimes there is this friend of mine who isn't doing well, and the teacher doesn't help him, and she [the teacher] doesn't care about it. (IT_F8_CH_B)

It depends on who you find because a lot of people say yes, yes, I'll help you, or perhaps even the teachers say yes, I'll give you support, I'm here, and then maybe nothing changes, so it always depends on who you find, maybe you find a teacher who takes action and really helps you, but if you find one who doesn't care and says those things just to make a good impression, it's no good. (IT_F2_CH_G)

M1: You have to find the right ones, those who understand you, that is, they know how to speak to you, they are good.

F1: Exactly, maybe we have something, I don't know, that's wrong.

M1: They are interested.

F1: Exactly, and so we can talk to them easily and they won't take it out on us afterwards. (IT_F6_CH_GB)

The role of parents

The role of parents relates to trust and personal autonomy. As we have seen on page 14 many children rely on parents and other family members who can help and give advice when there are serious problems and they cannot cope them alone. However, other children, mainly in ISCED2 and ICSED3 FGs, pointed out that parental support is sometimes ineffective, unnecessary, or even counterproductive.

Int: Are parents able to help you if you have a problem at school, if you talk to them about it?

F1: Yes.

F2: But no!

F3: But it depends (??)

F2: But they don't care! (IT_F6_CH_G)

For most children, challenges are personal matters that concern only them, and their choices as well as knowing how to manage these situations, is something they must learn by themselves.

I almost never do, because if I get into heated arguments, I don't tell my parents because I think it must be a personal thing that one has with the person, if they give me advice not to stay with this person, which I think is wrong, you have to decide. I can fight even with a close friend. (IT_F33_CH_B)

I almost never find myself in this situation because I always try to do it by myself, and I almost always succeed, because I want to learn to cope (?) so that I know how to manage situations. (IT_F33_CH_G)

I never tell my parents when I quarrel because I'm afraid that they might take action, maybe by calling the parents of these people, or maybe these people start making fun of me even more, or to make the situation worse so I prefer to fix things by myself instead of asking someone for help. (IT_F29_CH_G)

Peer relationships

Classroom friendships are highly differentiated. Those in male-only classes and the group of unaccompanied minors complained about a lack of females, and female-only classes claimed to have more arguments than either male-only or mixed classes.

In one ISCED0 FG, the idea of not having a friend to play or hold hands with was viewed as a sad situation: “[I don't like it] when no one plays with me” (IT_F13_CH_G) and “I don't agree when no one holds hands with me” (IT_F13_CH_G).

Some children claimed that they are friends with all their classmates, although that trust is greater with some of them: “I have friends in the whole class, the whole class is my friend, but there are people I trust more, they give me this sense that when I am in trouble they will always be there to help me” (IT_F29_CH_G). Other children claimed that many classmates are only superficial acquaintances with only a few being true friends with whom they can open up:

Int: Do you feel you have many friends in the class?

M1: 50/50.

F1: It depends in what sense you mean “friends” because maybe you mean friends in a certain way or you mean people I get along with that I can just have a conversation with. (IT_F6_CH_GB)

Other children believe that there are mainly very closed groups in their class, from which, as we have seen in page 10, there is a tendency to be excluded and they find it hard to ask for help.

According to other children, groups can be divided by gender, although personal preferences, interests and knowledge can mitigate this division.

F1: There are two groups, males and females [...]

F1: Actually, if you look at me, I'm great with the males.

T1: She said she prefers to stay with the boys, she feels better being with a group of the boys, but compared to the sixth grade two years ago, their way of being together in the class has changed a lot and there are no more groups as clearly divided as there were in previous years. (IT_F9_CH_G)

M1: I believe it is not that there are groups, but males obviously prefer to be with other males because perhaps they talk about subjects that the females don't care about, but maybe if a female comes to speak with the males she is often singled out. (laughter)

T1: Because she is a tomboy yes (noise)

F1: Yes, it's true.

M1: It's not that we reject her but (?) people prefer to be with those who have the same interests and who like to talk about the same things, which are often different between males and females. (IT_F9_CH_GB)

Interests and getting to know each other also mitigate group divisions, although during the breaktime, when there is often little time, people prefer to talk about their interests in small groups.

Having only those ten minutes in which you can speak, maybe you use those ten minutes to talk to someone to whom you have to say something that you can't during the lesson (IT_F9_CH_G)

In many classes there are children who are considered to be popular because many like or admire them: "T1: for most of the girls, S if I understand correctly" (IT_F9_CH_B). In some cases, it was pointed out no one is liked by everyone: "In my opinion there is no one who is liked by everyone," (IT_F6_CH_G). Popularity is not always considered positive because sometimes it also can be gained for negative aspects.

There is a difference between being popular and being the soul of the party (?) (you are flashier) in that case not always being popular is a positive thing. (IT_F9_CH_G)

I think popularity also comes from negative things, for example most popular people are not popular for positive things, that is, most people are not known for positive things, so in my opinion if you have to be known for bad things you might as well not be known. (IT_F9_CH_G)

The activities that respondents like doing with their peers are mainly talking and thinking about things together, expressing their ideas, engaging with each other, collaborating and interacting with their peers. These are all important preconditions to hybrid integration.

F1: Communicate.

F2: Talk.

F3: I personally like to do this activity where we all talk and nobody (?)

F4: This [activity].

F5: This [activity]. (IT_F3_CH_G)

F1: It's fun not only when we go out, but also when we are in class because we are able to express our own ideas, we try to confront each other.

M1: To interact.

F1: That's right to interact and do something together [...] both outside and inside school, not only during breaktime because even during lessons we try to talk to each other to do something together not only among ourselves but also with the teachers, or when we do activities outside in the school courtyard we try to collaborate when we do group work. (IT_F23_CH_GB)

In some classes children also see each other outside school, sometimes altogether but more often in small groups to play together, "it is not only males who go out but also females, or all together, everyone together is almost impossible, but most of them still manage to see each other or just go out together". (IT_F23_CH_G)

M1: As a class we are very close, I mean we all go out [...] yes, yes also outside school, it happened for a school project that we went out, also with the teachers.

Int: But beyond the school project, what do you do together in the afternoon or when you see each other?

M1: We don't go out all together, but sometimes we go and play football.

Int: But only among boys?

M1: Sometimes also between females, also with females. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Some children in other classes only see each other outside school and others only with one or two classmates, "with one or two people at the most". (IT_F6_CH_G)

Int: Do you ever see each other to go out together outside the school?

F1: No.

M1: Yes, I do go out with someone.

Int: But not with others? Do you only see each other in class?

F1: Yes, but if I see them somewhere, I go to them and exchange a few. (IT_F6_CH_GB)

Regarding decision-making, respondents often differentiated between undertaking instructional activities given by teachers and activities undertaken when they are alone, such as during breaktime. In the case of the former, most children reported that decisions are only taken by teachers while others said that it depends on the topic: “in some situations that concern us or some projects we can decide, in other situations maybe not, because they are matters concerning the teachers” (IT_F32_CH_G). Some children claimed that they should be more involved in decision-making: “these are things that concern us too, so we should decide too” (IT_F32_CH_G). However, some also reported exercising their agency by trusting teachers, coming to them with problems or deciding on the arrangement of desks. Interestingly, most of these students’ actions are accompanied or supported by teachers, who grant requests or promote children’s choices.

Because often when a teacher says “let’s do this topic”, I trust her because she makes us do things with a certain level of precision, she makes us do them in the right order and maybe even at the right level of difficulty so I think it’s better to listen to what the teacher decides to do” (IT_F1_CH_G).

During this last period, especially because we are very close the exams, and there may be lots of tests and tasks, then we try and talk about it with one of the teachers and they take our proposals into consideration. (IT_F23_CH_G)

M1: For example, we chose the arrangement of the desks, that is, we made the arrangement by trying to satisfy everyone and we succeeded.

Int: But from whom did the idea come?

M1: From the teacher, from the coordinator.

Int: And are you satisfied?

M1: Yes, we were all satisfied, some more, some less, but...

Int: But did you come to a decision purely by yourselves or together with the teachers?

M1: No, just us. (IT_F23_CH_B)

In the second case, children claimed that they exercise agency more systematically. Some said that they all decide together following a discussion. It might be the case that teachers are also involved in these discussions.

Most of the time we try to find something that can suit everyone, or at least almost everyone, then there are those who are satisfied and those who are less satisfied but, yes, that is, we help if there is an opportunity to do so. (IT_F23_CH_G)

Sometimes when we have to make important decisions first, we consult with the class or even the teachers who are there at the time, and usually we all choose together, there is not one person who decides for everyone. (IT_F22_CH_G)

In other FGs, children said that there is a leader who usually corresponds to the “strongest” person in the group. Being “strong” is associated with being able to take decisions for the whole group: “whoever is “strongest” decides” (IT_F22_CH_B).

M1: the one who dominates nearly all the situations in the classroom in my opinion is A (migrant) [...] possibly B (representative).

M2: in my opinion it isn't anyone". (IT_F6_CH_B)

Other children clarified that leadership is not about imposing decisions, but being able to propose and offer more ideas and solutions: "maybe, as M2 said, there is someone who makes more decisions, but he/she doesn't say "I said this, so now do this", he/she proposes the idea and then the others either say they agree or we don't agree" (IT_F22_CH_G).

For some children, both collective decisions and leadership may be achieved depending on the choice they need to make: "well, it depends on the situation, I mean there are situations in which decisions are made by groups and perhaps other situations in which there are one or more leaders" (IT_F26_CH_G). Some children also specified that the person in the role of leader changes depending on the topic or situation.

If a classmate gets picked on, an important factor is proximity to the classmate: "it depends on the classmate (IT_F9_CH_G) "if she is my best friend then I'll tell him/her (tell something to the offender), if she is M then no" (IT_F9_CH_G) "if I don't know the person well, I won't tell him/her". The main strategies used are to stay close to the classmate try to relativize the problem, or to use irony and downplay the problem.

I didn't have time to do anything, but as soon as they were done talking, I went to the person who had been offended and I told her not to worry about it. (IT_F9_CH_G)

When these things happen, I usually tend to go there (?) I try and change the subject or take it as a joke so it doesn't get worse. (IT_F9_CH_B)

I was with a friend of mine, another person he knew arrives, he slaps him on the cheek and then the other person who was my friend tries to defend himself and starts - I didn't know whether it was a joke or not, but he slapped him back when an adult passed by. I don't remember whether it was a parent or not. He sees only my friend and gets angry the with my friend and so I also would get angry but I tried to let it go [...] that is, I told the adult that other boy started the fight, but he had seen my friend and so... (IT_F9_CH_B)

Educational aspirations

School achievements

Differences between an ideal school and the real school concerned elements relating to assessments. For example, some students claimed that there would be less strict, kinder teachers in their ideal school, especially in ISCED1 and ISCED2 FGs: "the teachers, a little gentler, I mean they don't have to be so rigid (they could listen to us a bit more and have more moments of dialogue with us)" (IT_F11_CH_B).

When talking about the real school, some ISCED3 students highlighted that fear surrounding evaluation compromises their entire relationship with school: "For example, also from the point of view of the oral tests, one enters the classroom terrified of being interrogated, and so the desire to go to school disappears" (IT_F4_CH_B).

More generally, however, children are divided about assessment. On the one hand, many claimed that grades are useful because they allow children to understand the level of knowledge they have acquired, acting as a reward where, on the one hand, enough effort has been made to acquire the

required skills and as an encouragement and, on the other, where more effort is needed to acquire them.

F1: 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.

M1: 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)

Conversely, several others claimed that the system of grades is a bad one since, due to the way it is standardized, it does not correspond to the complexity of individual competence.

[evaluations] serve to establish the idea of a standard, so obviously the standards are all different and clearly the importance of grades changes from person to person. (IT_F29_CH_G)

In my opinion, grades are not necessary because they do not express what a person can do, someone can get bad grades in school but outside of school he/she can do many things. (IT_F9_CH_B)

I don't think you should link grades with someone's intelligence because you can study as much as you want but it's possible, for example, not be intelligent at school but you can perhaps be so in other areas or it can be the opposite, but maybe you don't want to study at school. (IT_F6_CH_G)

The system of evaluation is also described as being inadequate because it doesn't take into account children's predispositions: "it also bothers me a little that the practical grade also exists because it is a matter of predisposition if you know how to do drawings well no?" (IT_F9_CH_B) "we should look at other things besides the grades" (IT_F5_CH_B). Some children also perceive the risk of those children who have more communication problems being more disadvantaged.

T1: If I understand correctly, she is saying that grades can also be useless in certain contexts when it is not possible to express yourself and you cannot make yourself understood. (IT_F9_CH_G)

Grades are not that important because they don't represent your knowledge because although you might have understood something, when you are there you might not remember it because you became anxious. It should be enough that you have really understood, the grade doesn't count for anything maybe for the teachers it is useful to evaluate whether you have understood something but it is not necessarily the case that you deserve that grade. (IT_F29_CH_B)

A number of ISCED2 students in particular said that marks are useless, and that their only effect is to change a student's mood, either by making them very happy or very sad. Nevertheless, the system of evaluation also raised contrasting opinions among ISCED2 students.

It is important but has no purpose (IT_F22_CH_B).

Commitment should not be evaluated through a grade, I mean [...] it should not be the most important judgment (IT_F22_CH_B).

In my opinion it is useful, it is true that it is not us, but it helps us to understand how much we have studied, if the way we have studied is good. But I don't think it's that useful for the ISCED2 third year exam because ultimately I can leave with a 5 but I know that I've been committed for all the 3 years (IT_F22_CH_G).

Some students mention how this ambivalence has emerged particularly in the last months, since the pandemic has affected the way school is experienced.

Opinions about the system of evaluation were more polarized amongst ISCED3 students: some expressed entirely negative opinions, while others said that it is a good system since you are evaluated for your engagement. According to this last perspective, what is relevant is not the evaluation itself, but the student having the possibility of feeling that he/she has learned something. An interesting discussion was carried out by students in a class in a professional school about their life experiences, what they saw among friends, and what they aspire to.

It's not important to me whether I get a seven or an eight, what matters to me is that I learn things. (IT_F4_CH_B)

You don't need grades to be able to work, grades don't earn you money, what matters is that you know how to work, you know how to use machines, the grade doesn't count, it has nothing to do with it. (IT_F4_CH_B)

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 of showing their skills, but not with the lessons I decide, but with what they decide. (IT_F4_CH_B)

Because of the school's professional background, students were particularly focussed on integrating school expectations and labour market requirements in terms of developing manual capabilities, developing an educational pathway and harnessing evaluation acquired within school.

One student also highlighted the differences existing between Italian and non-Italian students regarding evaluation. Differences of evaluation can involve either the language skills of newly arrived children or the possible bias in the evaluation of those with a migrant background in general.

Because M2 is also a foreigner, so he has more difficulty in speaking or understanding certain difficult topics, he is therefore evaluated in a different way, because M2's seven is our nine and F3's seven means you did a good job, but you could have done much better (IT_F22_CH_G).

M1: even if I got a nine I am not that happy because I always think that the teachers have preferences because I am a foreigner, so I always doubt [...]

T1: because he is a foreigner, he always doubts whether the teachers will treat him like the others. So an Italian gets a ten, but because he is a foreigner he gets a 9 even though he may have made some mistake. (IT_F8_CH_B)

In general, children feel extremely judged by both teachers and parents.

The teachers say that they are only grades, but if they were really only grades, they wouldn't give them. (IT_F8_CH_B)

If I try hard and get, like, just a six, it's okay with me, but my parents don't like it. (IT_F8_CH_G)

Grades are very important for my parents. If I get less than an eight they get angry, but for me grades are both important yet not very important, I mean, if I try hard and get a seven it's okay with me. (IT_F8_CH_G)

In my opinion, grades are of no use at all during this last period, especially because if you get a bad grade, in addition to the disappointment, you also have the fact that when you get home, you can hear your mother screaming in an incredible way. (IT_F7_CH_B)

Grades also create distorted expectations in teachers, something also related to trust.

In my opinion it is necessary to give the right weight to the grades because in the world of work we are not evaluated with a four or a five, or even with a ten, but there might be some teachers who see a student always getting good grades and expects him to continue getting good grades, if he gets some insufficient grades he might think that, I don't know, that he is no longer any good, (?) that the student is good and smart and maybe the other who gets fives and fours is not smart. (IT_F9_CH_G)

In my opinion, in general, some professors 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)

Students in several primary schools prefer being evaluated in a more descriptive way rather than numerically, since it allows what was done well and what needs to be improved to be analysed more easily: “numerical grades don't assess how you worked [...] I like more detailed grades, in the sense of how you worked, whether you worked well or badly” (IT_F31_CH_G). Some children also suggested the possibility of spending more time with teachers to overcome problems.

I think it would be better to give grades not as a number, but through the teacher explaining what you did wrong and what you did well [...] for the whole class to have some time with the teacher based on what is statistically considered difficult overall, to have time to improve a certain thing the students get wrong. (IT_F29_CH_B)

Some children, however, expressed a preference for being evaluated numerically. In primary schools, where the grade system has recently been replaced with a more descriptive evaluation system, some children seemed to regret numeric or alphabetic evaluation, while others were satisfied with the new type of evaluation.

I find myself sometimes doing even better because, for example, there is no correspondence between the grades “ten” and “advanced”, but I feel that at least “advanced” explains the method behind how you did it, instead if you get an “intermediate” or a “basic”, it explains the mistakes you made and the steps you have to do to improve. (IT_F24_CH_B)

In any case, most children claimed that they are satisfied with their evaluations, either because they have made an effort and got good results, or because they have acknowledged that they did not make enough effort and have therefore got poor results.

M: I am very satisfied with my grades, I put effort into the various subjects but especially my favourite ones

Int: Which are?

M: English, mathematics, and art. (IT_F19_CH_B)

Sometimes I feel like doing it and sometimes I don't, when I don't feel like doing it, I do it just to do it, and I receive the grade I deserve so I don't complain either. (IT_F1_CH_B)

However, several children admitted some disappointment at not seeing their efforts being recognized.

F1: I worked very hard on something in a certain subject, and there were people who had maybe worked less but got a better result than me [...] I was disappointed, I didn't expect it

Int: Has this happened to any of you?

F2: Yes, a bit to everyone. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Some children said that they see some differences in grades particularly between boys and girls.

M1: I think some of the teachers are prejudiced, for example some students are (?) and instead others [teachers are] a bit less [prejudiced], I mean, they think that one student doesn't study therefore he doesn't study [...] sometimes also because he/she is male or female.

T1: According to you, do the teachers see females or males as being better?

M1: Sometimes the males.

T1: Sometimes the males? Do they see them as being better?

M1: Yes. (IT_F8_CH_B)

M1: Especially the teachers [...] because sometimes they always think they are right, and a bit of feminism [...] the teacher, if we males talk, they immediately give us a written report [as a punishment], if females do the same they can talk as much as they want and they don't punish them, and if I can say one thing, one of our classmates once threw a pencil eraser out of the classroom, she slapped me and one of my classmates and kicked another someone else, and the teacher didn't say anything to them. M2: she gave her a round of applause M1: yes, exactly, and instead to us males, if we'd also throw a pen, it's all hell is let loose immediately. (IT_F25_CH_B)

Some also speak of the existence of a kind of stigma being attached to certain students: on the one hand, students being judged to be doing or performing well and, on the other, those being judged to be doing less well. According to some, these are labels that also tend to affect future evaluations: "I feel more favouritism is shown towards those who do better in school, because the other day I said everything and I got one lower grade than the best student in the class but he did not say anything" (IT_F25_CH_B)

I once copied a test from a classmate of mine, it was the same, she did the test, she made a screen shot and sent it to me, I got seven and a half and she got eight [...] maybe because I get mixed up and she doesn't. (IT_F6_CH_B)

Some children also mentioned that evaluations are affected by teachers who feel sympathy towards certain children and that it can affect evaluations, meaning that certain children whose teachers have high expectations of them in school, in turn lead to positive outcomes for those children (the so-called Pygmalion effect).

Like last year, there was a teacher who didn't like some of us but did like others. (IT_F6_CH_B)

In my opinion, teachers have preferences, they have a lot of preferences due to behaviour, I mean everyone is different, but there are certain teachers who prefer a certain person to another. (IT_F6_CH_G)

Education and professional plans

According to children, the primary purpose of school is to provide opportunities for their future, particularly job opportunities.

By learning in school you can surely get a better job than a part time job at McDonald's? (IT_F19_CH_B)

F1: in the end, if we must be realistic, I mean, without school, you won't find a job that pays well, you go to school and then you create your own future, what you want to do when you grow up.

M1: It's to give you a base. (IT_F6_CH_G)

The second most often cited purpose of school by children is that of enabling them to make friends, learning how to relate to people they do not know, including adults, learning respect, education, and how to be part of society.

M1: Also, to learn how to be part of society.

F1: [...] to learn how to relate to people, perhaps people you don't know. (IT_F9_CH_GB)

Firstly to learn, then to have a good job in life, to socialize, and live independently of one's parents, to know how to behave and face the world and maybe, if you are facing danger in life, never to give up. (IT_F25_CH_G)

In my opinion, school is not only to learn subjects such as mathematics, Italian and all that, it's also to educate, to teach respect, and to find a future place in the world and a well-paid job. (IT_F19_CH_G)

The third purpose is seen to be gaining the ability to think independently.

To arrive at an independence in the sense that, through school, you can have your own views, you know how to express yourself in a convincing way, you know how to articulate your thoughts. (IT_F8_CH_B)

To learn in order to make new friends, and to develop your own opinions because if you are aware of what you know, you can develop your own opinion. (IT_F9_CH_G)

The school is an important base because it matures us and helps us to become adults, it teaches us many things that maybe we did not know. (IT_F8_CH_B)

Several children, however, underlined a certain mistrust about the usefulness of certain subjects.

M1: According to me, some subjects at school are useless, for example, music and history and history of art, epics.

F1: Because if you have to work when you grow up, what good is music for working?

M1: To answer my mates there is a job that is called being a musician. (IT_F25_CH_GB)

In my opinion school is important because it teaches us how to live, it teaches us many useful things, but then some things are not useful, for example, I don't know, knowing how a plant cell is made, for a person who doesn't want to practise medicine, what's the use? [...] for example, studying Greek and Latin, what's the use to me? They are dead languages that nobody speaks. (IT_F8_CH_G)

Some children also believe that school is not necessary for finding employment, to guarantee an income, or to solve daily problems in the short term: "school is important, for example, to learn how to write, speak and read, but in my opinion in life you can find a job without school" (IT_F8_CH_B).

School is important for learning the basics but going forward school doesn't help you to save money, to take out a mortgage, to be able to pay the rent (?) it doesn't help you to open a bank account, it's important only up to a certain point. But it is always thanks to the school that you can find a job, for example, I want to do medicine. (IT_F8_CH_B)

Some children suggested variation in terms of curriculum, one developed according to interests and what the children want to do in the future.

M1: Maybe if the school changed from the sixth grade onwards, you would say what you want to do when you grow up, and the things that don't fit become useless, maybe if you want to be a doctor you can study medicine a little bit.

T1: According to you, you have to choose before the eighth grade.

M1: Eh

T1: Already in the sixth grade you have to make choices. (IT_F8_CH_B)

Gender

Various views exist regarding the issue of gender and respondents took two different and opposite positions. For some children, gender affects individual approaches to school and relationships, determining predisposition to certain subjects. According to this view, boys and girls differ in terms of commitment, inclinations, preferences, and physique.

In my opinion no one is more gifted than anyone else, but preferences do exist, perhaps males like to do one type of work more than another, and the same goes for females. (IT_F23_CH_B)

M1: In my opinion males are better at doing manual things.

Some students: No.

F1: Yes, and we are better at studying. (IT_F3_CH_B)

In subjects like art, females are better. (IT_F9_CH_B)

In different subjects it depends on who is studying, but in physical education males maybe have a bit more of an advantage. (IT_F25_CH_B)

Some boys said that girls are better at art and physical education, while boys were considered to be better at mathematics. The idea is that one can be predisposed to some fields more positively than to others according to gender.

Males can be especially good at science, because I have often seen more male scientists, there are few females [...] He was talking about physical education, it depends, because in dance they [females] are a bit more flexible, but in soccer they wouldn't even know how to catch a ball [...] they should also be more self-confident and have the courage to speak during the oral tests because some of them are good. They have to find the confidence because, in my opinion, they know things, but they are afraid of saying them and of making mistakes. (IT_F7_CH_B)

In general, boys were described as being lazier, of joking around more, while girls are braver and more inclined to help classmates.

Yes, we males are lazier [...] females are less lazy than we are. (IT_F22_CH_B)

Perhaps there are no differences between boys and girls, but maybe when there is a need to help someone, girls are more likely to be the ones to help others because they are braver. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Interestingly, whenever a position of rigid difference between boys and girls was advocated in FGs, it was often mitigated or relativized by peers through giving examples demonstrating the opposite. The discussion was relevant almost in all classes.

M1: males are better at motor skills [...]

F1: I know a person who can do the splits and he is a male but I can't do the splits. (IT_F25_CH_GB)

F1: Maybe the only thing is gymnastics, because usually- I mean there can also be males who are very good, they [females] are more agile but then there can also be males.

F2: I am part of the group of males in gymnastics because they [teachers] make you do very difficult things, and I can't do them.

Int: So, you feel more male from this point of view? (IT_F33_CH_G)

F1: One thing that is different between boys and girls is that they know how to play soccer although there are some girls who can play. And the other thing is that they don't like the things we play.

T1: What do you play that the boys don't like?

F1: Sometimes in class we play with dolls.

M1: Teacher.

T1: Let's hear M1.

M1: For example, I know a boy who is a male and he likes dolls, it doesn't change anything if a boy likes dolls and a girl likes soccer [...]

F2: In my opinion there is no difference because females sometimes like male things, even females beat other up, it's not that they are saints either. (IT_F28_CH_GB)

F1: According to me, objectively speaking, females are equal to males, what a male can do, a female can do easily, but according to me there are things that females or males are better at doing compared to the other sex.

Int: Like?

M1: Like drawing, the percentage of females who draw better than males [is higher].

Int: The girls who are present find themselves.

M1: Then there are also good males but...

Int: Ok or not good females, girls, do you find yourselves or not?

F2: Personally, I don't know how to draw, I know how to do something else [...]

F3: Genuinely, not because I am not good at drawing, I think I am like other people at drawing, I mean I am not good at it, it's not that I am not able to, but I am not good at it [...]

F1: I think that all males think that females are very good at drawing but in my opinion it's not true because it's not that females only know how to draw, they also know how to do many other things, for example, I'm good at physical education but not at art really, art, I can't do it, I can't draw well [...]

Int: F4 do you like to draw?

F4: no, I'm really bad at it. (IT_F29_CH_GB)

Views about gender difference were not shared by all children. Many, especially in ISCED2 FGs, said that things are much more mixed and complicated.

In my opinion it is a little bit mixed, I mean there girls are not better in one subject or some subjects and boys in others. In my opinion it's a bit mixed. (IT_F21_CH_G)

It doesn't change anything [...] to be good or not good doesn't depend on one's gender but on one's attitude. That is, if one studies, listens in class, then everything is good. (IT_F10_CH_B)

We are different, but in the end how one does at school depends on whether one studies or not. (IT_F7_CH_B)

In my opinion, the fact that girls intervene more in certain subjects is simply prejudiced because each person can get to where they want to get. So if, for example, I study geography and I know my geography that day and maybe I intervene more, maybe a girl has studied more maths and knows more maths, but it doesn't mean that girls are always good at geography or Italian and that boys are always good at maths. Everyone gets where they want to get based on what they do and what they study, or if they do their homework, or if they pay attention in class, they'll get their results. (IT_F21_CH_B)

According to these children, differences depend on the individual and everyone is equal contributing an equal amount of effort, experience, interest, and personal skills.

Everything depends on the person. (IT_F33_CH_G)

This thing between boys and girls should not be there, I mean it is obvious that some people are better suited to doing a certain subject [...] between males and females we are all equal. (IT_F29_CH_G)

In my opinion it is not a matter of sex, if you put your mind to it everyone can do things well. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Int: So, if I understand correctly, it depends more on the person.

M1: Yes, then also on his/her abilities, but also on whether he/she likes the subject or not.

F1: I think that everyone can make it, as M1 said, it is based on the subjects and on the type of person. (IT_F1_CH_GB)

I don't think anything changes because if I try hard it doesn't change anything, if I try hard I get a good grade and if I don't try hard I get a bad grade, I mean it's not that if I'm a girl I don't do well in gymnastics but I do well in art it depends on the person. (IT_F9_CH_G)

In my opinion there is no difference between males and females in terms of subjects because it is only a matter of experience. I could be very good at running but it has nothing to do with the fact that I am a female, it has to do with the fact that I have had experience. (IT_F25_CH_F)

Future of (migrant) children

Concerning the future, many students would like to go abroad although many also expressed the desire to stay in Italy.

A preference for living outside Italy is explained as desire to explore the world or new things. Many children chose places that, in their imagination, are linked to a passion they have or a sport they like: "I would like to live either in Ireland or in New Zealand because I do horseback riding and it is full of pastures there so I like it a lot" (IT_F22_CH_G). A large majority would like to go to the USA (New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Chicago) and some linked this choice to their desire to become athletes (football or basketball) or to become famous in the world of film or other fields. Barcelona was also mentioned as a place where they would like to move, especially for those who wish to become football players. Albania was mentioned by one student without Albanian origin, since "many people criticize it, but I think it's beautiful" (IT_F8_CH_G). Other places that children mentioned include England, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Hawaii, Brazil and South America in general, Dubai, Indonesia, Australia, Russia, Morocco, Germania, Mexico, China.

For one student, experiencing difference and new habits were also a good reason for choosing another country, in her case the USA: "I would like to live in America because it is very different from Italy, and I would like to try new things and a new lifestyle" (IT_F22_CH_G). Several students expressed their wish to keep travelling without choosing a specific place to stay: "so if I had to decide where to

go and live, I wouldn't know where because I like to move around a bit everywhere" (IT_F11_CH_B). Others expressed a preference without any reason: "I would like to live in Australia. Actually, I don't even have a precise reason, I simply like Australia" (IT_F22_CH_B).

However, many children would like to stay in Italy, perhaps moving to a city where there are more job-related opportunities. Others, however, do not feel the need to move anywhere: "I honestly don't know. Right now, I like it here. If I had to choose, I'd say I'd like to live in France" (IT_F22_CH_B).

No direct link was shown between children's future aspirations and having a migration background. Some children with a migration background in two primary schools expressed multiple preferences or indecision in relation to where they would like to live.

I [would like to live] in Pakistan (..), and also in England [...] because my uncle lives in England with his little girl. (IT_F15_CH_G)

F1: I would like to be a doctor because I don't like leaving sick people in that way and then I would like to be an English teacher because (?)

T1: Because in Nigeria they speak English, don't they?

F1: Yes.

Int: And so would you like to stay in Italy or go somewhere else?

F1: To stay in Italy.

Int: To stay in Italy.

F1: But I'm not really sure.

Int: You're not really sure.

F1: No. (IT_F28_CH_G)

All children expressed a variety of desires motivated by personal reasons. The majority dream of a college education followed by a career. However, in some cases, among both migrant and non-migrant children, jobs such as being a truck driver, mechanic and cleaner were also mentioned: in a few cases children specified that this was the job of a single parent.

Professions that are popular with children are doctor, politician, lawyer, businessman, historian, journalist, actress, dancer, designer, singer, writer, truck driver, piano player, judge, paleontologist, reporter, YouTuber, mechanic, firefighter, songwriter, cartoonist, architect, interior designer, video-game creator/designer. One student would like to be a peacekeeper with the United Nations: "I'd like to live anywhere as long as it's something military because my dream has always been to be in the military when I grow up" (IT_F22_CH_B). Others said they would like to study to become teachers, while one girl said she would like to move to Spain and be a beautician.

In ISCED2 FGs, children demonstrated a more transitory condition and changing desires.

I currently have two great passions: music and show business. Up to now, I mean, because I study theatre, but I like those things and until a few months ago I would have said that I wanted to make music professionally and I didn't have any other alternatives. But now I'm starting to be a bit more open to other things. Let's say that I'd like to leave music, I mean I'll keep the option open, but I don't want to give myself just one option because if it goes wrong, I've wasted my life. So right now, I would say that I would like to be involved in shows and entertainment in my life. I want to leave something behind; I want to have a lifestyle that leaves something great for people. When I'm gone, I want to be remembered,

for example, I'd like to do voluntary work, things like that [...] I don't have an idea where I'm going. (IT_F21_CH_G)

As a result of this question several stereotypical expectations towards gender roles were left behind and called into question. While several girls have high professional expectations (to become astrophysicists, scientists, criminologists), the boys said more often that they saw themselves having a family in the future, "I would like to go to a science high school and become a doctor, then I don't want to have a family, but I would like to go to Japan" (IT_F31_CH_G).

F1: I want to have [adopted] children because I really don't want to have husbands.

F2: I would like three of my own but not in ten years.

Int: And would you like a husband or not?

F2: Yes [...]

F3: I would like to have children but without a husband I think, although I'm not sure if I won't change my mind, but I would like to have two children, maybe girls because I'm more used to them but boys would also be.

Int: Can I ask you why you don't see yourself with a husband now?

F3: I don't like the idea because I imagine that for certain things we won't get along so we'll start fighting.

Int: So you prefer to have children because you know that with them you would get along without problems.

F3: Yes. (IT_F33_CH_G)

The youngest, above all, showed precise ideas about their future family, with very different potential structures, i.e., being a single parent, being a single parent of adopted children, as a couple with children: "when I grow up I would like to adopt a child from Philippines because I like them, they are very cute" (IT_F33_CH_B). However, in some FGs, gender differences emerged with regard to future employment.

F1: There are jobs that are mostly done by males, for example being a truck driver, and if a female is one she is criticized because people say she goes in the middle of a road on the motorway with a huge truck which she doesn't have the strength to drive, but it's not said that this is also our problem.

M1: I don't agree because in my opinion there are things that only males can do.

Some students: But what are you saying?

M1: In my opinion, at school there is no difference in terms of gender, but in the job market gender makes a big difference. There are many differences between the sexes, for example a male may not be accepted to do a job even if he has more skills than a woman, an office job, perhaps in a company, there are more women but who have fewer skills than a man would. (IT_F25_CH_GB)

In particular, children highlighted the fact that jobs are sometimes differentiated as a result of cultural construction.

I think that perhaps some jobs are done more often by females and others more by males, but not because females are better at some things and males at others, but because we are used to this way of thinking. (IT_F23_CH_G)

Some jobs are perhaps more suited to men and others to women, but then it depends on whether you enjoy doing that job or not, you can also go and do it, for example, earlier we

were talking with my classmate and we were thinking of the dock worker, perhaps women don't have the physique to do that job, but then again everyone can do what they like if they enjoy doing it. (IT_F23_CH_G)

Some students stressed that females are treated differently at work because of motherhood.

In my opinion, it's not so much in school, but in the workplace, that is, for example, how often do some people make female workers sign a contract illegally saying that if they get pregnant they will lose their job, which in my opinion is not right, or even jobs as caretakers, or in any case jobs that because (?) are considered to be for females, these jobs are passed on to them. (IT_F8_CH_G)

School during the pandemic

When asked about the consequences of the pandemic, children talked about two different aspects of its impact on schooling. The first was online learning and the second was school attendance during the pandemic.

Online learning

The negative aspects of online learning which emerged from the FGs are a lack of freedom and absence of social and emotional relationships during the lockdown periods (the impossibility of getting out, meeting friends, working together). Some children described how they missed their classmates.

It was bad because I didn't talk to anyone, that is, only with my family, but it's bad to be separated from your friends. (IT_F25_CH_B)

It was bad to be away from your classmates because at home you don't do anything but at school you have fun with your classmates. (IT_F25_CH_B)

ISCED3 children emphasized that engaging with friends remotely was very different from having face-to-face interaction, and that even when they were able to see each other physically, it is more challenging because of the restrictions:

F1: Since Covid started, it's been really bad.

Int: But do you keep in touch with your friends remotely?

F1: But it's not the same thing.

F2: I do genuinely, both remotely and at home, I struggle a bit more though. (IT_F2_CH_G)

Some ISCED1 children emphasized a greater need for closeness with close family members only, as well as the need to spend time outside. Contact via mobile phone with friends were frequently described as being sufficient, while those with grandparents were considered sufficient if they live far away, however they were a source of anxiety when children were used to meeting them frequently. This highlights some important ambivalent feelings toward the pandemic which will be discussed further below.

Quarantine has not demoralized me because as I have a big terrace I was able to play football with my friends. I kept in touch with my grandparents the same amount, it has not changed much because, even now, they live very far away so I speak to them only on the phone and in the summer, I was able to go and see them for three months. So the quarantine was not that hard for me, but doing online learning was difficult. (IT_F25_CH_B)

For me Covid did not change that much on the one hand, but on the other hand it did because with Covid when I was in quarantine last year, I always saw my paternal grandmother because she looked after me at home as my parents were not able to be at home when I was doing online learning. Instead, the other side, my maternal grandparents, and also the other part of the family, I could not see them because they were older, and therefore there was more danger that they would catch Covid and die. (IT_F25_CH_B)

Some children felt that the number of conflicts decreased during the pandemic, while others felt that a lack of dialogue led to more arguments: “F1: when we were doing online learning, we argued more often because there was no face-to-face dialogue [...] F2: for everything, questions, homework, but also for our own behaviours” (IT_F3_CH_G).

Online learning was described by the majority of children as being more boring.

I liked my school because you could see your friends and teachers there every day and you didn't have to wait long to see them. (IT_F30_CH_G)

Int: Were you taking classes from home?

M: Eh unfortunately.

Int: Why do you say unfortunately?

M: It bored me. (IT_F25_CH_M).

It's boring to stay home. (IT_F19_CH_B)

It was also harder because of frequent technical issues.

I like the other school because that way we can talk to each other easily, like every time C and I want to talk but every time we struggle to connect. (IT_F28_CH_G)

Int: What was it about online learning that you didn't like?

F: Putting everything you did, your homework on classroom [the software], and because I missed the physical contact. (IT_F19_CH_G)

I like the other school because when we do an online lesson, when the teacher shares the screen she sometimes doesn't see us when we want to speak. (IT_F28_CH_G)

For me the other school was better because here you have to charge your mobile phone and after a while it switches and you have to wait an hour and then when you turn it back on the lesson has ended. (IT_F28_CH_B)

You struggle a bit more in these classes because sometimes you don't hear, with the connection, you struggle a little more. (IT_F19_CH_G)

Online learning was also negatively evaluated because children in lower grade classes lost their autonomy when having the lessons, since they often needed the presence of their parents to assist them in managing the computer due to technical reasons. Furthermore, if parents were out of the house, it could be even more challenging to resolve technical problems.

The fact that some children are not able to access a computer and need the help of a parent is a mess. (IT_F2_CH_G)

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)

However, these views were not shared by all children, since one ISCED2 FGs highlighted how online learning gave children greater autonomy and sense of responsibility.

M1: 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.

Int: So you're saying you're more empowered because it's up to you to decide if you're paying attention or not?

M1: Yes.

Int: You can get out of control somehow so if you're paying attention, it's because you know it's important to pay attention.

M1: Understand when you have to pay attention and when maybe you can relax a little bit [...].

Int: So in your opinion even regular school should give you that option?

M1: Yes, I'd say so, allowing you to be more free. (IT_F29_CH_B)

Finally, children did not like being at the computer for a long time in order to attend lessons, finding it very tiring.

We only have an hour and we can get tired of being in front of the computer all the time. (IT_F28_CH_G)

I like the older school more because here we have to be in front of the computer for a long time. (IT_F28_CH_G)

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)

An important aspect, as highlighted above, is that a high number of children expressed a great deal of ambivalence about the school experience during the lockdown. These children frequently expressed both positive and negative aspects in relation to online learning.

During online learning I didn't like it much but I also liked it a bit. A didn't like it a bit because I only saw my friends virtually yet I liked it because I was in my own home. (IT_F17_CH_B)

In my opinion online learning was both a positive and a negative thing. Positive because I was able to wake up much later, and negative because I couldn't see what was really going on in reality, and I wanted to be with my friends, chatting during the breaktime and playing outside without this online learning. (IT_F26_CH_B)

In my opinion it was great on the one hand, and awful on the other because, I mean, on the one hand it was great because once with the T1 teacher we were there in the online lesson and we talked during the breaktime, we talked, we played we did a lot of things. (IT_F17_CH_G)

ISCED2 students highlighted several positive aspects of online learning, such as the possibility of being more comfortable while participating (getting up later, having breakfast slowly and wearing whatever they wanted). Some children claimed that online learning helped them to manage stress better.

Online learning helped me to manage my stress, I was no longer anxious, which was incredible, but otherwise I was a bit sad, but I was much more relaxed during online learning. (IT_F10_CH_G)

F1: Concerning online learning, when there were questions, I had less anxiety because I was at home and not at school.

Int: Listen but when you got back to school, did the anxiety come back or had you learned to manage it at that point?

F1: No I had learned to manage it. (IT_F10_CH_G)

Some children also mentioned they adopted strategies to have more time for themselves: “I also wanted to tell you that during online learning, you might as well wake up twenty minutes later and say that the computer was (logged in) but that you couldn’t get in” (IT_F11_CH_B). Another strategy was exchanging texts on social media while following the lessons. In general, however, children said that they managed to keep in touch during online learning through video-calls (sometimes three-four hours long) or texts. After the first lockdown, some children said that they had stronger relationships with their friends.

After quarantine we had a closer bond because [...] I could finally see my friends again. (IT_F10_CH_B)

I didn’t like this Covid situation at all, for example when we were taught online, but I think that thanks to the online learning we had much more desire to see each other, and when we returned to school, we were closer. (IT_F19_CH_G)

Some children described these stronger relationships as being a positive aspect of school during the pandemic. ISCED3 children especially, said that this situation helped them to discover which relationships were genuine and which were more superficial.

F1: Even with false friendships, I mean, in a moment of need, even during this pandemic, I happened to test positive for Covid in November, and as a result I really found out who was there for me, I often received messages like “how are you feeling?”, “how do you feel?” “when are you taking the second swab?”, there were people who were worried, and others who didn’t care at all.

F2: That’s right, I had Covid in November, and as a result I understood many people, I understood the people I had by my side, and I also understood the people I didn’t consider to be close friends, but now I consider them to be close because they were there for me at a time that was very difficult for me. (IT_F2_CH_G)

Int: 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)

Among the positive things to come out of lockdown, in one ISCED2 FG, some students described how new activities were organized by teachers specifically to support and guide the students during the first lockdown. Some children highlighted how these activities were unexpected, and that they would appreciate it if they were to continue beyond the emergency situation.

For example, from five to six in the afternoon we do a workshop with a teacher that involves all the third year students, but unfortunately only a few of them participate, and we read the newspapers about this period and how children of our age or a little older are experiencing life during this difficult time. Because, you know, to distance yourself a bit

from your friends at this age and at this time is quite difficult, I mean you need the moral support of your friends because being with them makes you a little bit stronger in yourself. (IT_F22_CH_B)

Other activities that took place before the pandemic were forced to change their format because of the lockdown.

For example, before this situation I used to take a computer class in the afternoon. It was a lot of fun because we practically had to build a robot ourselves and we had to create all the movements. But unfortunately, we had to stop, so we could not continue our project and now we are doing it remotely by creating presentations to explain the history of this robot. But anyway, even though we are far away it's still fun because we can express what we are thinking.

(IT_F22_CH_G)

One child said that one positive aspect of the pandemic was that global lockdowns had reduced gas emissions.

Attending school during a pandemic

A second, important aspect affecting the children that were interviewed was related to attending school during the pandemic. Most children said that the pandemic had had a negative impact on school activities. The initial reaction was to describe the current school as being a sadder place than before the pandemic.

So, the school as I see it, with Covid, really is much sadder, there is a lack of contact with people, I mean, you are always spaced out and close in your desk, and I can't think of many positive aspects [...] it's a bit sad and that's it. (IT_F10_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)

When there was no Coronavirus, I was always much happier, but now I'm always at home and I'm bored. (IT_F13_CH_G)

In one ISCED1 FG, some students openly claimed that they preferred online learning instead of being at school with social distancing. The first reason is the physical separation from peers, more specifically, the personal distance reflected in the way the classroom is organized. Moreover, some ISCED2 children said how difficult it was to get used to this new situation, such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distance: "now I don't like it [...] previously you had a desk mate, you copied in the tests [...] we exchanged snacks this was an important part of things" (IT_F11_CH_G).

Children's difficulties with this new condition are associated with three factors. First, during lessons the fact that desks are separated from each other.

Having the desks spaced out gives me more anxiety [...] because during the lesson you can't talk as much with your classmates and maybe you have less fun too. (IT_F19_CH_G)

In the meantime, the desks are spaced a meter apart my God! (IT_F19_CH_G)

We have desks spaced apart and I used to like being close to others. (IT_F19_CH_B)

Second, during the breaktime, which is done separately by each class: "a school where you can have breaktime all together [...] T1: since we are in a Covid period they can't even meet the kids from the other classes" (IT_F8_CH_B).

Third, when playing, children aren't able to get too close and touch each other.

Int: Does the fact that you can't touch people bother you?

M: Yes, it bothers me. (IT_F19_CH_B)

I also miss physical contact a bit. (IT_F19_CH_G)

If we want to see each other we're still not allowed to hug. (IT_F19_CH_G)

F1: Covid bothers me because we can't be close to each other, and we can't hold hands and we can't even hug.

Int: So you miss the physical contact a bit.

F1: Yes, and because we can't get close to each other to talk. (IT_F19_CH_G)

In one ISCED1 FG, children highlighted how the pandemic meant they were not able to invite their friends home like they used to: "I don't like being away from my friends because they can't come to my place, because they usually come to my place" (IT_F15_CH_G). They also had to change some of their habits such as exchanging picture cards.

The second negative aspect highlighted by children is the use of masks, which is considered very annoying and an impediment to seeing their classmates' faces, above all by the younger students (ISCED0 and ISCED1).

Covid bothers me a lot because you have to wear a mask and it bothers me a lot. (IT_F19_CH_B)

M1: The thing that bothers me the most is the mask, I can never keep it on [...]

Int: But is it the mask that bothers you or is it because you can't see your companions' faces anymore?

M1: Both. (IT_F19_CH_B)

M1: You have to wear a mask or you could get sick.

M2: When there was no [coronavirus], we didn't wear a mask [...]

F1: I don't like masks. (IT_F16_CH_GB)

The third negative aspect, emphasized by the unaccompanied foreign minors, is that they were not able to participate in any activities outside the community, something that is useful for entering the labour market.

3. Intercultural relations at school

The children described their classes as varied from the point of view of national origins. A significant number of children had a migration background in all schools. For the most part, children with a migration background were born in Italy of parents themselves born outside the country. However, there are also several cases of children who have come to Italy at various ages, even very recently. Most frequent countries of origin are Pakistan, Egypt, China, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Kosovo, Moldova, Albania, India, Morocco, Santo Domingo, Russia, Albania, Romania, Ecuador. It was also common to encounter children with families from Southern Italy, who had undertaken internal migration.

In all classes, the different origin is considered a positive element in that it enriches everyone to be in contact with different languages and cultures.

F1: In my opinion, it's the same, I mean, there are no differences.

M1: For me, if there are people from other places, it's nice because you either learn other languages or you learn different customs. (IT_F25_CH_GB)

In my opinion having foreign people in the class, or even in the school, is very nice and useful from my point of view because talking to them you learn a new culture about which you didn't know anything [...]in my class there are many people of this kind and I don't see any differences, I mean maybe the colour of the skin but that's not the problem [...] so in my opinion we are all the same. (IT_F8_CH_B)

At the same time it is considered to be just one element amongst many that characterizes personal diversity, "we are all equal" (IT_F25_CH_B), "I am one of those people who has a foreign parent and an Italian parent, but I don't feel judged if I make a mistake, I feel the same as the others" (IT_F29_CH_G), "In my opinion, it is good to have foreign partners, for example, we know we have them, but I don't pay attention to them because anyway we are all (.) people" (IT_F27_CH_G).

We are fourteen-year-old children who are together in a class and we have different origins but we are still people, so we don't notice this difference. I might like an Albanian boy more than an Italian one, I mean, I don't see any differences between my two best friends who are Greek and Albanian, I don't see any differences. (IT_F9_CH_G)

This view highlights that some children value personal differences more than cultural or national belonging, thus avoiding positioning friends as members of cultural groups. This is a meaningful precondition to hybrid integration. Only in one FG, did some students with a migrant background claim that there were some difficulties because they were teased due to their different origins. According to some children in another FG, having a different background or speaking different languages can be a source of prejudice on the part of teachers.

In my opinion they are not important because we are all equal, but widespread prejudices exist, also in terms of skin colour, or language, simply because you were born in another place in the world, these are not important things, but they can cause a lot of problems in life. Maybe a foreigner will never be able to integrate and, in fact, even at school, it's something that everyone knows about, there are racist teachers, teachers who, despite having a job as a public official, maintain their prejudices although, thank God, at ((name of school)) there are not that many of them. (IT_F8_CH_B)

The question of language at school is controversial. Children claimed that they speak mainly Italian at school.

Int: So you speak Italian and also Arabic?

M1: Yes.

Int: And do you sometimes manage to use Arabic at school, maybe with some of your classmates who also speak Arabic, or do you always speak Italian?

M1: No Tunisian, for example I don't understand Moroccan, I only understand Tunisian.

Int: OK, so at school you always speak Italian.

M1: Yes. (IT_F33_CH_B)

Those with direct experience of migration to Italy emphasized discomfort at not being able to communicate at school, their ability to learn the language quickly and the rejection of their native language.

F1: I was born in Ghana.

Int: OK, how old were you when you came to Italy?

F1: I was seven.

Int: Do you remember that?

F1: Yes.

Int: And how did you experience it?

F1: Bad.

Int: How come?

F: 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" [...]

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

F1: I told the people who treated me like that how I felt.

Int: Ah did you tell your classmates then?

F1: Yes.

Int: And how did it go?

F1: 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 apologized. (IT_F2_CH_G)

M1: For example, I am Italian Tunisian [...] I've lived half here, a little in France and a little in Italy.

Int: So did you arrive in Italy or were you born in Italy?

M1: No, I arrived in Italy.

Int: OK, so you learned Italian. You didn't know it before?

M1: Yes I learned it in a month.

Int: OK, and so you were able to communicate immediately with your friends?

M1: I was small enough. (IT_F33_CH_B)

M1: I was born in Brazil, but I was adopted when I was seven and I came to Italy.

Int: OK, and have you been back to Brazil?

M1: No.

Int: OK, but do you remember Brazilian? I mean you speak it right?

M1: No.

Int: Ah you don't remember.

M1: No at all.

Int: OK, so you only speak Italian and you don't have the opportunity to read.

M1: Because my parents are Italian.

Int: Yes, yes but I was also saying in class.

M1: I have a brother who was also adopted but we speak Italian.(IT_F23_CH_B)

Only few children described they are able to speak their native language, or other languages which are not Italian or English, in the classroom. Only in one FG, children said that they try to speak Chinese and Spanish sometimes.

M1: I was born in Ecuador.

Int: OK, how old were you when you came to Italy?

M1: Ten I think so yes, yes.

Int: Ah OK, that's not so long, and what language do you speak with your parents?

M1: Spanish.

Int: OK, so you speak Spanish at home and do you speak it at school?

M1: Yes sometimes yes.

Int: With whom?

M1: With a classmate.

Int: OK and with the other classmates you speak Italian right?

M1: Yes. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Some children spoke about some mutual help being given amongst those who speak the same language, and also between children who speak Italian and others whose Italian is not yet fluent.

In my opinion it's right to speak more languages in class because there are some who have more difficulties and those who have fewer difficulties, obviously, for example if M10 says it's clear that for him it's better to speak Italian, maybe it's more practical, so it's also easier for him to understand everything for example, but there is, for example, M11 who knows very little Italian and so they gave him photocopies in Chinese. However, when I was with him, I tried to encourage him to speak Italian, not Chinese, when he didn't understand, but all the guys who knew Chinese helped him by explaining it in Chinese. But I think the concept of speaking more than one language in class is right. (IT_F21_CH_B)

In many FGs, children said that the only other language they speak within school is English. One child with a migrant background claimed that he enjoys knowing a language that his classmates do not know: "I like the fact that I know a language that other people don't know and other people always ask me how to say a word in that language and I enjoy explaining it" (IT_F7_CH_B).

Children's perceptions are very different from those of their teachers for what concerns the language spoken at home. Many children said that they speak Italian or a mixture of Italian and their native language at home. However, books, music and television are enjoyed primarily in Italian.

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

M: A mixture.

Int: And between which languages?

M: Tunisian and Italian. (IT_F33_CH_B)

F1: I was born in Moldova.

Int: And how old were you when you came to Italy?

F1: Almost six years old [...]

Int: What language do you speak at home?

F1: I speak Italian because I came here, I learned Italian immediately, then after a while I went to school, so I started speaking Italian immediately, until now.

Int: So you speak Italian with your parents?

F1: Yes, they do too.

Int: Ah, but what about books, TV, what do you listen to, watch, in what language at home?

F1: Always Italian, although I was born there, but I don't know anything, I don't know the language, I don't know the traditions, I don't know anything. (IT_F2_CH_G).

F1: My father was born in Morocco and my mother in France.

Int: What about you?

F1: I was born here.

Int: So how many languages do you speak?

F1: Italian and Moroccan.

Int: And what do you speak at home?

F1: A mixture.

Int: But television, films, books are in what language?

F1: Italian. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Some children have a limited level of competence in their native language meaning that they are helped by their parents when they visit their country of origin.

F1: My father was also born in Italy, but my mother was born in Peru and therefore sometimes we speak in Italian and sometimes Spanish [...]

Int: And when you go there you speak Spanish, so you can understand well what they are saying?

F1: Yes, but I don't understand some very difficult words and then I ask my mother, but the rest I know by myself. (IT_F28_CH_G)

Some other children have only a passive competence in their native language.

F1: I have Albanian parents, but I was born in Naples [...]

Int: And do you sometimes speak Albanian at school or do you only speak Italian?

F1: I don't speak much, but I understand it better than I speak it.

Int: Do you sometimes speak it at home?

F1: No. (IT_F33_CH_G)

F1: I don't speak Filipino very well.

Int: OK, so when you talk to them [parents], how do you do it? Do you manage or do your parents help you?

F1: My parents help me, but I understand what they say, I just can't speak it. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Children with a migrant background are often bilingual and sometimes trilingual.

F1: My father was born in Morocco and my mother in France.

Int: What about you?

F1: I was born here.

Int: So how many languages do you speak?

F1: Italian and Moroccan. (IT_F1_CH_F)

M1: my father is Argentinian, so he speaks Spanish.

Int: So you understand Spanish too?

M1: Yes, yes, the whole of my father's family speaks Spanish, I understand it well. (IT_F22_CH_B)

I was born here in Italy, but my parents are Nigerian and we sometimes speak English but not English English, it's a bit broken let's say so, and we also speak our language that is from Benin. (IT_F2_CH_G)

F1: I'm one of those people who has a foreign parent and the other one is Italian, but I don't feel judged if I make a mistake, I feel the same as the others.

Int: Can I ask you what language you speak at home?

F1: We usually speak Italian, but with my mother we also speak English.

Int: OK, so you know two languages.

F1: Yes.

Int: Or more?

F1: Three, including my grandmother's German.

Int: I see, so you speak three languages. (IT_F29_CH_G)

During one FG, the children were asked by one classmate in what language they think and dream, and in this context multilingualism emerged as being relevant.

So, when I dream at night, I speak in Italian, and when there are parents in my dreams, or I get angry with my parents, I tell them to get lost in Indian [...] but in my mind. (IT_F11_CH_B)

I think in English, and in Italian, for swear words I prefer Italian, it is much more extensive, and then at night when sometimes I speak, I believe [I speak in] Urdu, when I speak in my sleep I believe [I speak in] Urdu [...] and then I dream in Italian. (IT_F11_CH_B)

Not only were children with an international migration background either bilingual or multilingual, children with a background of migration within Italy, from south to north, were too.

So, when I get angry, I always speak Neapolitan, I mean, when I get angry, I always think in Neapolitan or - but when I'm normal it's in Italian, and when I dream, then, if I dream about my relatives, it's in Neapolitan, but if I dream about my friends here instead, it's in Italian. (IT_F11_CH_G)

M2: So sometimes when I think, I think in dialect [of Reggio Emilia] but I speak Italian and [...] sometimes some words in Venetian dialect or suzzarese [a dialect of a place near Reggio Emilia] because my mother comes from S. and my grandmother from Veneto.

T1: So they mix it up a bit?

M2: Yes, I'm a bit of a hybrid, and then when I get angry I sometimes speak Italian but often also Pakistani or Moroccan because in primary school our currency (of exchange)

were Pringles crisps, and a friend of mine asked me if I could give him a few coins and then he would give me a course in Pakistani. (IT_F11_CH_B)

The research demonstrated a sense of richness for those who speak more than one language and feel an affection for multiple places, also inviting the Italian students to stress their multiple spoken languages.

4. Identity and belonging

Children often stated that they either follow the religion of their relatives or that of their country of origin.

Int: What religion do you have in the Philippines?

F1: Catholic.

Int: Is any other religion here in the class that I don't know about? Are you all Catholic?

F2: No I'm Muslim [...]

F3: I'm a Jehovah's Witness. (IT_F1_CH_G)

F1: There are also other religions at school [...]

M1: I don't know if there are other religions, only Christian and Muslim. (IT_F33_CH_GB).

The existence of different religious, and different approaches to religion, emerged during the FGs.

My mother is Christian and my father is Sikh, which is an Indian religion. Previously, perhaps influenced a lot by my mother, I thought I was Christian. But now I prefer to call myself an atheist. [...] I went to both the Christian Church when I was in Ecuador with my grandparents and to Sikh temples. (IT_F22_CH_G)

Traditions of children's country of origin does not seem to be particularly cultivated in Italy however, "Int: at home, do you keep traditions, I don't know, do you celebrate the festivities of your country of origin? M1: no no no" (IT_F23_CH_B).

F1: I came here, I learned Italian right away, then after a while I went to school, so I started speaking Italian right away, until now.

Int: So you speak Italian with your parents?

F1: Yes, they do too.

Int: Ah OK,,but what about books, TV, what do you listen to, watch, in what language at home?

F1: Always Italian, I was actually born there, but I don't know anything, I don't know the language, I don't know the traditions, I don't know anything. (IT_F2_CH_G)

Int: What holidays are there in your family?

F1: I don't know because I don't know much about the Philippines since I was born here in Italy and I don't ask my parents much about the Philippines.

Int: But have you ever been there?

F1: I have, but when I was three years old, so I don't remember it very well. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Several children experienced temporary return trips to their countries of origin. Some also experienced schooling in their parents' country of origin, either because they arrived in Italy after having spent some years in the country where they were born or because they were born in Italy, but

they went back to the parents' country to study there for some years. This is very common among students with a Chinese background. Some of them talked about the changes they had undergone.

I used to live in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, near South Africa, and then we moved here to Italy and I changed primary school, but I don't remember what the school was like there. [...] I was young and we left more or less within a week. I don't remember it being that difficult. (IT_F22_CH_B)

Most children with a migration background were born in Italy, however some of them, both those who were born in Italy and those who were born abroad, experienced journeys of returning temporarily to their families' countries or to other European countries to meet relatives or friends who had migrated there (for example the UK). Children expressed very different feelings towards these trips:

When I went to India, I really missed the whole class and also my friends, I used to cry and say "mum can we go to school?" and she said "no we have to stay inside the room [because of the quarantine due to Covid]". (IT_F15_CH_B)

Int: And do you know Albanian language?

F1: I have all my relatives there.

Int: So you go there often.

F1: Every summer. (IT_F3_CH_G)

M1: I was born in Italy, but my parents are both Moroccan.

Int: But do you go there sometimes?

M1: Of course, every year. (IT_F23_CH_B)

F1: I go there once a year, I'm there for two months during the summer, I like it because every year I meet new people, just a few, but I do meet some, and it's always nice to be remembered, for example I have some friends I haven't seen for a long time, I haven't seen them for a long time because they moved away, but it makes me very happy that, despite everything, we stay in touch

Int: But do you have relatives there?

F1: Yes, in Moldova there's my grandmother, my father's mother and her two sisters, my father's sisters, so yes, with her children and then there are also other uncles and cousins. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Int: So you go to Albania every now and then?

F1: Yes, yes.

Int: And how is it when you come back? Do you tell your friends about Albania or not?

F1: Not always, but mostly what I've seen.

Int: Mh, OK, you, have you ever gone back to Tunisia?

M1: I go there every year. (IT_F33_CH_GB)

F1: I once went to Ecuador for three months to see my family and I loved it because it was the first time I had seen my grandmother, my grandparents and it was my family, so I had a great time.

Int: And when you came back here, did you miss being there, or was it normal to go back and forth?

F1: I missed it, but not that much. (IT_F22_CH_G)

In one case, a child spoke of having travelled to the UK to meet his uncle. This is an example of Italians migrating abroad. In general, however, the majority of children talked about feeling affection for several places. Several children mentioned, not only their country of origin or their parents' country, but also other places in Italy where they have grandparents, friends or where they simply had a nice time in the past.

However, some children said that they never, or almost never, returned to their family's country, either because it is too far or for socio-political reasons.

Int: Do you have relatives there?

F1: Yes, grandparents and uncles.

Int: OK and do you go there sometimes?

F1: No, I haven't gone there yet. (IT_F3_CH_G).

F1: I was born in the Philippines.

Int: OK and do you go back sometimes?

F1: Um no.

Int: You never went back?

F1: I haven't been back for a long time. (IT_F1_CH_G).

I was very young when I went there, I was only one and a half years old so I don't remember anything, and I wanted to go there for my communion but my dad said no because at that time, and now, there is a war so I can't go there. (IT_F29_CH_G)

Sometimes relatives no longer reside in the country of origin or children just do not really like the idea of going back there.

M1: I've been to Russia, more than once [...]

Int: You've been more than once, so...

M1: Yes, yes.

Int: OK, did you like it?

M1: Yes, it's not the best, but yes (IT_F29_CH_B).

F1: I was born in Moldova.

Int: OK and how old were you when you came to Italy?

F1: Almost six years.

Int: But every now and then you go back?

F1: No I went back, but a few years ago, so I don't even have a reason anymore, because there's nobody there anymore anyway.

Int: Ah, OK, are all your relatives here?

F1: They've mostly all gone to other countries. (IT_F2_CH_G)

One student, who had never visited his parent's country, admitted that this fact affects his sense of identity and belonging: "I was born here, my parents were born in Pakistan and I feel more Italian than Pakistani because I have never been there [and so I] feel more Italian" (IT_F11_CH_B).

One thing that almost all children share is that they share very little about their trips to their country of origin in the classroom. This is either due to shyness or because they think that their classmates are not interested. This is something which would require further reflection and actions, since it could represent an obstacle to hybrid integration.

Int: And when you go there do you tell your classmates about it?

M1: No, very little.

Int: Why is that?

M1: Because I'm a bit shy. (IT_F23_CH_B)

Int: And when you come back, for example, do you tell your friends about your experiences in Albania? [...]

F1: If they ask me yes, if they don't ask [no]. (IT_F3_CH_G)

Int: And when you come back from your trips, do you tell anyone about it?

F1: No.

Int: How come?

F1: I don't know.

Int: Do you think your classmates would like to know these things about you?

F1: I think so, I don't know, it depends on them.

Int: Meaning?

F1: I wouldn't have any problem telling them, it depends on whether they're interested or not. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Another reason is that some children still do not speak Italian fluently enough to be able to tell.

Int: Have you told anyone about China, when you lived there? Any of your classmates [...]?

F1: No.

Teach: she had difficulty with the language then, isn't that right? I think she can tell us now. (IT_F1_CH_G)

In one case, the teacher encouraged these stories as a source of enrichment for all, "when anyone goes on a trip, the teacher tells us to tell them, so we kind of understand" (IT_F28_CH_G). As explained above, Chinese children who were born in Italy often return to China to undertake the first part of their school career and then return to Italy around the age of 10-13.

F1: My parents were born in China.

Int: Ah and you?

F1: I was born in Italy but I went to China and then I came back.

Int: How old were you when you came back?

F1: 3 [they will understand later that she means three years ago]

Teac: G, how old were you when you went back to school in Italy? Because you have just started to speak Italian, only since last year, haven't you been to school here in Italy? G [...] did you always go to school in Italy?

F1: Yes.

Teac: How come you didn't know Italian? Did you go back to China afterwards?

F1: I was born in Italy and then I went back to China.

Teac: Ah, you came back three years ago, not when you were three years old, is that right?

F1: I first went to school in China.

Teac: I didn't understand why it is that you speak well now, but that last year you started not understanding Italian. (IT_F1_CH_G)

When it comes to choosing a country to live in when they grow up, perspectives are very varied: factors such as having relatives still living there, having a house, being born or having lived for a long time in that country, all come into play.

F1: I was born in Moldova, but I have to say that even though I was born there, and it's a place I like, it's just that it's undergone a lot of changes, like the way people behave, and they're all leaving, they're coming here to Italy, or they're going to, I don't know, England or Germany or something, and it's become a bit empty, so I think that as I grow up, I don't know what will be left, but if there's a chance, I'd like to go there. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Int: Have you ever been back – maybe on holiday to Nigeria, after coming here?

F1: No.

Int: Would you like to go back?

F1: Yes.

Int: Do you still have many relatives there?

F1: No but we have a house there so.

Int: OK, but do your parents dream of going back there one day or would they like to stay here?

F1: My mother, because I live with my mother, my father is not with us, (I try to tell him to do something) but it's not possible because I'm still a minor so she can't leave me alone, my sister is in London now so she's waiting until I turn 18 to go there.

Int: OK, and if she goes there, when you come of age, would you like to go back there or stay here in Italy?

F: No, I'll try to go to another country to continue my life, things, to work.

Int: Do you already know in which country?

F: An English-speaking country. (IT_F2_CH_G).

If children have been born or have lived in Italy for a long time, their desire is to remain in Italy, where they have built their relationships:

Int: Do you like it there?

F1: Yes.

Int: Would you like to go back there?

F1: Yes.

Int: But to live there or just for a holiday?

F1: Holiday. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Int: Have you been to Morocco?

F1: I've been every year.

Int: And do you like it?

F1: Yes.

Int: Do you like it better there or here?

F1: Here, that is, I wouldn't go to live there.

Int: OK, how come?

F1: I don't know, I think it's habit.

Int: Why, do you have your friends here and your life here?

F1: Exactly. (IT_F1_CH_G)

Finally, some children spoke of sometimes having the possibility of discussing their different origins with their teachers and classmates.

In second or third grade we talked with the maths teacher about the typical foods we ate and if our relatives came from Italy or from other places. (IT_F31_CH_B)

I'm not really Italian, I'm Moroccan but I was born in Italy and almost every week we talk about it a little bit (..) often [...] like yesterday when we talked, since here there are churches while in Morocco we have something else - I forgot. (IT_F27_CH_B).

5. Conclusions

The FGs with children highlighted that they would like several changes to be made in school in order to feel more involved and increase their interest in learning. These changes include the use of new technologies, devices, video games and applications to support their learning. They would also like to put what they learn into practice more often, also through experiences outside school such as going on trips and general extracurricular activities.

This is linked to their desire to have more autonomy and responsibility. If schools were to provide a wider range of both activities and content, they would be able to both make more choices based on their interests, and study certain topics in greater depth with the help of teachers.

Children also proposed several structural changes on an architectural and organizational level. 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.

Dialogue was mentioned several times and on several occasions. It is not just something that children wished to have more of in their school days, but also an aspect by which they assess teaching: teachers who are more willing to create spaces of dialogue among students, and between students and teachers, are recognized by children as being important for their school experience. This aspect is extremely relevant because it resonates with hybrid integration, thus confirming the importance of creating space which can contribute to its enhancement.

For the majority of children assessments highly 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 weight of being evaluated.

Those children who claimed that assessments are not useful argued that evaluation does not correspond to the complexity of personal competence and neither does it consider children's individual predispositions or communication difficulties. While opinions about assessment are more polarized among ISCED3 children, they tend to be more ambivalent among ISCED1 and ISCED2 children. Moreover, some children highlighted how it becomes hard for those who have been categorized as not being “good students”, to change this label.

Being assessed is something which is experienced negatively, both when being assessed by teachers and classmates. This is one aspect that, according to both children with a migration background and those without, prevents the former from participating properly. Since some children with a migrant background are not fluent in Italian, they fear making mistakes and they thus tend to avoid speaking. However, most of the children said that students help each other, and that students who are not fluent in Italian can rely on children who speak Italian fluently to get support.

Arguments and disagreements are frequent for most of the children, especially ISCED0 and ISCED1 children. However, arguing is also evaluated positively because, according to some children, it represents an opportunity to get to know their classmates better and to intensify relationships with them. This is also an important aspect which might represent a resource for hybrid integration. In resolving arguments, irony is considered a good strategy, but when the emotional burden is too heavy, children ask for the help of adults (parents or teachers) who are usually excluded from less serious arguments, especially among ISCED3 students who prefer to be autonomous and take on this responsibility by themselves. Similarly, unaccompanied minors claim that they rely on educators when problems occur concerning the community, whereas they tend to solve problems by themselves if they concern personal issues with other children.

Most children reported that decisions are always taken by teachers, while others said that it depends on the topic. Some children said that they should be more involved in decision-making, while others claimed that they can take decisions when choosing whether to trust teachers or not, to decide whether to go to them with problems or when arranging desks in the classroom. In these situations, students' actions are supported by some teachers, those who promote children's choices. It is, however, during breaktime that children feel more able to fully exercise their agency, either by taking decisions together or identifying a leader.

According to a high number of children, school is important for learning how to relate to people, to learn respect, be educated, and how to be part of society. School should also provide future job opportunities and teach children how to think independently.

Regarding their future, some children would like to stay in Italy, while many others would prefer to go to other countries. The FGs did not highlight any connection between having a migration background and future job aspirations. However, some children with a migration background expressed multiple preferences or indecision about where to live in the future, having to choose between Italy, their parents' country, or other European countries where relatives might live.

The FGs gave voice to a wide range of opinions about gender. On the one hand, some children reproduced stereotypical views of gender roles. From this perspective, gender affects individual approaches to school and relationships, as well as a predisposition to certain subjects. Males and females were also considered to differ in terms of commitment, inclinations, preferences, and

physique; males are described as being lazier and joking around more; females as being braver and more inclined to help classmates. These views, however, were not shared by all children. Many highlighted the complexity of gender definitions, recognizing the social construction of expectations related to gender roles. For these children, differences depend on personal views. Moreover, several girls demonstrated high professional expectations while boys were the ones who spoke more frequently about seeing themselves with a family in the future. However, in some FGs the difference between males and females emerged much more clearly in relation to the issue of work, and some students stressed that females are treated differently at work because of motherhood.

Turning to children's experiences of school during the pandemic, two different aspects were highlighted: online learning during periods of lockdown when schools were closed and attending schools with restrictions being in place to mitigate Covid.

In the first case, lack of freedom and absence of social relationships were mentioned as being significant aspects. However, the need to see friends was more common in ISCED2 and ISCED3 students rather than ISCED1 students. Another negative aspect concerned connection difficulties which made lessons both more boring and harder. Opinions regarding online learning which were characterized by ambivalence concerned autonomy and responsibilities. While some children in ISCED1 FGs felt less autonomous because they needed the intervention of parents to be able to follow lessons, some ISCED2 children felt they had more responsibility when undertaking online learning, because it was easier to skip lessons or to get distracted during them, thus not doing so was very much their choice. Answers revealing ambivalence also concerned arguments: for some, the number of arguments decreased during the pandemic, while others observed an increase in the number of arguments that occurred since there was no face-to-face dialogue.

According to children, online learning also had some positive aspects such as allowing them to be more comfortable while participating in the lessons, managing their time better, learning to manage stress and anxiety better, and discovering things about their interpersonal relationships.

Attending school with pandemic restrictions in place was evaluated by the majority of children as being both a sad state of affairs and being hard, even more so than online learning. Unaccompanied minors especially, reported that they had had to interrupt some important activities which could help them to search for a job.

Finally, children demonstrated different positions regarding cultural differences. While some children noticed classmates with a migration background as having different cultures, traditions and languages, most noticed personal differences and personal stories more, in some cases denying the importance of national origins altogether. This is an important precondition for hybrid integration. In all FGs, a relevant number of participating children had a migration background themselves. Many children with a migration background were born in Italy of parents who were born abroad; these children all speak at least two languages. Most of them said that they frequently watch Italian television and speak in Italian with parents or siblings at home. Some children, however, reported some racist behaviour from classmates or teachers.

For what concerns hybrid integration, the focus groups highlighted several domains which connects children's needs and views with this concept. First, the positive evaluation of those teachers who promote dialogue and dedicate a space to it. Second, the awareness of some children that conflicts

might represent opportunities to improve relationships and mutual knowledge. Strictly link to this a third important point, which emerged both in the discussion on gender and on cultural differences, in which some children highlighted the relevance of personal stories and differences, taking distances from stereotypes and simplifications related to gender or national categories.

These are meaningful starting points which not only confirms the relevance of promoting spaces for dialogue and personal stories within educational environment, but also how children are requesting them as elements which might affects their daily wellbeing within schools.

CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Poland

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1. Methodology

In this report we present the results of WP5 of the CHILD-UP project. It encompasses the qualitative data gathered during interviews (both individual and FGI) with children. We discuss how children talk about their educational environment and how they imagine their ideal school, with particular attention paid to the emotional and relational dimensions, children's educational aspirations, intercultural relations and the impact of COVID-19. Focusing on children's agency and hybrid identity is a novel and timely challenge for Poland as a new country of immigration although many researchers have contributed many important findings on the subject (f.e Januszewska 2015; Markowska -Manista 2021; Markowska-Manista et al. 2020; Popyk 2021 a, 2021 b, Popyk, Buler 2018, Popyk et al. 2019 ; Kościółek 2020).

Four locations were chosen to gather the data for WP5 and these were mostly the continuation of cooperation established in WP4. We conducted fieldwork in a large city (1 million inhabitants), with the majority of subjects being economic migrants from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. In this case, migrant children compose a minority, constituting 2% of students in primary schools. We also conducted interviews in a medium-size city (around 30,000 inhabitants) and also with economic migrants. The other two locations are small towns in the eastern part of Poland, located near centres for foreigners which house refugee families. Refugee children constitute a majority of pupils in one of these two towns and a significant number in schools in the other. These refugee children are mainly from Chechnya and neighbouring post-Soviet republics. These three distinct field sites allowed us to investigate various communities within which migrant children live and the way in which those engaged in direct work with such children respond to this challenge.

The research with children took place in two time periods as a result of the second and third waves of the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland. In October 2020, contacts with schools were established: in part, these were schools we had worked with on the quantitative research, but we also made new ones. We planned research in a large city (Małopolska) and in schools close to a centre for foreigners (south-eastern Poland). We were able to carry out four focus groups with children from the schools close to the centre, but from the end of October the schools were closed and all classes, except for the

youngest pupils, had switched to distance learning. The course of study for the 2020/2021 school year was as follows:

- September 1, 2020 - all students started full-time education;
- from October 24, 2020 to May 16, 2021, primary schools (4-8 ISCED2) switched to remote learning;
- from November 9, 2020, to January 17, 2021 grades 1-3 (ISCED1) of primary schools switched to remote learning;
- from 18 January 2021 to 28 February 2021 - grades 1-3 (ISCED1) of primary schools switched to full-time education;
- from March 1, 2021, the forms of education in grades 1-3 (ISCED1) of primary school in regions varied depending on the intensity of Covid-19;
- from May 3, 2021, grades 1-3 of (ISCED1) primary schools throughout the country returned to full-time education;
- from May 17, 2021 to May 30, 2021, grades 4-8 (ISCED2) of primary school and secondary school students - learning in a hybrid mode;
- from May 31, 2021, students returned to regular classroom education.

Due to the unique nature of conducting research with children, we decided to postpone this part of the project while we carried out online interviews with professionals. As the lockdown and remote learning dragged on, we decided to undertake the research despite the schools being closed and thus obtained permission from the Project Leader to change from group to individual interviews which were the only feasible alternatives for data collection. While this change might have impact on collecting a wider range of collecting opinions and ideas, it allowed to get more insightful perspective of individual stories and gain a more profound understanding of children's perception and experiences. Some of the interviews were conducted online, but with a camera so that researchers and respondents could have eye contact. Once the schools were open, we returned to the research in schools and a significant proportion of the individual interviews and two further group interviews were carried out face-to-face. In summary, the conditions for conducting the research were extremely difficult. We did not have the chance for extended stays at the school, meetings with parents or the selection of classes/groups. With the end of the school year approaching, and with some schools either not wishing to continue cooperation or fearing a breach of the sanitary regime, we also benefited from our contacts with cultural assistants and employees of psychological-pedagogical counselling centres, who cooperated with us and helped us to get access to migrant children. Bearing in mind the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on our research, especially lost research time and limited access to schools, we were also seeking solution to mitigate the limitations we have experienced in collecting children's narrations. As we recognised the importance to address the widespread consequences of the pandemic on children's educational paths and the relevance of qualitative research to understand the diversity of children's experiences, the current pandemic situation as it unfolded in relation to education became an important part of our research. Through a set of questions, we explore how children reacted to the pandemic, what strategies were chosen to deal with the pandemic at the individual and institutional level. Therefore, the adaptation of the research to provide insight to the current situation related to the pandemic can be considered in itself as a mitigation solution. The research was carried out in two schools in the Lublin voivodship and 5 schools in Lesser Poland voivodship. Due to the change from group to individual interviews, 15 FGIs with children were replaced by six FGIs and 27 IDIs were carried out in October 2020 and May-June 2021. All but three of the IDIs were conducted face-to-face, as well as all FGIs were carried out face-to-face. Among the migrant students

participating in the FGIs, there were students from ISCED levels 1 and 2, 14 girls and 10 boys. The refugee children were mainly from Chechnya but also from Tajikistan, and Turkey (Kurdistan). Of the pupils participating in the IDIs, seven were from ISCED 1 and 20 were from ISCED 2. 13 girls and 14 boys participated and they were mainly from Ukraine and Belarus. Detailed information about the interviewees together with their main social characteristics is presented in Table 1. During some of the interviews with children, their parents, siblings and cultural assistants were present. This says a lot about the specifics of fieldwork. The presence of intercultural assistants was due to organisational arrangements. Some of the interviews took place in schools and the presence of an assistant was a formal requirement to ensure the safety of the child. Intercultural assistants also engaged in translation, since not all the children knew Polish well enough to take part in the interview on their own. The presence of family members was mainly related to the organisational aspect - parents brought their children to the interviews. Their knowledge of Polish was sometimes poorer than their children's, so the translation aspect rarely played any role.

Table 1: Research with migrant children

FGI	Date	Area	ISCED	Number of FGI participants	Number and gender of migrant children	Country of origin	Place of residence
1	October 2020	Lubelskie	1 i 2	5	1 boy and 4 girls	Chechnya	rural area
2	October 2021	Lubelskie	1 i 2	5	1 boy and 4 girls	Chechnya	small town
3	October 2020	Lubelskie	1 i 2	5	5 boys	Chechnya	small town
4	October 2020	Lubelskie	1 i 2	5	5 girls	Chechnya	small town
5	June 2021	Lesser Poland	2	10	1 boy, 1 girl		city
6	June 2021	Lesser Poland	2	10	2 boys		city
IDI	Date	Area	ISCED		Gender	Country of origin	Place of residence
1	May-June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Belarus	city

2	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Belarus	city
3	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
4	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Ukraine	city
5	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Belarus	city
6	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Ukraine	city
7	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
8	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		boy	Ukraine	city
9	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Belarus	city
10	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Ukraine	city
11	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
12	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		girl	Ukraine	city
13	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		boy	Ukraine	city

14	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		girl	Ukraine	city
15	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
16	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
17	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Ukraine	city
18	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		girl	Belarus	city
19	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Belarus	city
20	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		boy	Ukraine	city
21	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	1		boy	Ukraine	city
22	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Nigeria	city
23	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Belarus	city
24	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Tajikistan	city
25	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		girl	Chechnya	small town

26	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Turkey	small town
27	May- June 2021	Lesser Poland	2		boy	Tajikistan	small town

Among the methodological reflections, the researchers highlighted to following:

- The length of the questionnaire - it was very long, in the case of the FGI, when the researchers had time limited by the duration of the lesson, it was difficult to see all the issues in depth. In the case of IDIs, children's fatigue was an issue, especially in the case of online interviews;
- The benefits of using visual aids - the researchers used Dixit cards to support conversations about the ideal school and the needs of pupils;
- Children's eagerness to talk, they seemed to have a need to talk about their problems and share their experience. However, due to time limit, it was impossible to deepen all the issues they addressed;
- Children experiencing difficulties in adaptation at schools were reluctant to share their stories and only with the help of cultural assistant we managed to get to know them;
- For some children, especially refugee children, a problem was an insufficient knowledge of the language, they had problems understanding some of the questions and expressing themselves. Younger children, on the other hand, found the questionnaire too difficult in places;
- Parents and intercultural assistants who were present during the interview sometimes actively participated in the conversation by encouraging the children to tell their stories or giving them prompts so that they could provide more detailed recall.
- Despite the difficulties imposed by the epidemic, the proposed methodology incorporated innovative components. The use of digital platforms to conduct interviews with pupils was an advancement in the methodology for conducting research with children, and compensated for the outcomes that could not be obtained in face-to-face interactions.

2. The school as a lived space

In this section, we focus on the perception of the school in two dimensions. Firstly, we show how migrant children perceive Polish schools (also often in relation to their schools in their country of origin), but also what an ideal school would look like, from the infrastructure through the learning process to the school as a social environment and a place for intensive relations.

Real school

Between countries and school systems – a comparison of schools in the country of origin and Poland For some children, the discussion on school brought them back to their counties of origin as they began comparing the schools which they had attended before moving to Poland with their current schools. They talked about the nicer design of the classrooms than in their country of origin or a better approach on the part of the teachers and lessons that activate pupils:

Well, here at school it's a bit different than in Ukraine, because in Ukraine there were only white walls and no such drawings including the subject of the class. Each teacher had a class somewhere, for example if it was chemistry, the chemistry teacher in that class. Now we walk around the classrooms, and in Ukraine we sat in one and the ladies came to us.

Well, maybe we went there a little bit for English, for chemistry, but not always. (PL_I4_CH_G)

There were still a lot of experiments in lessons, for example in chemistry, physics, and in Ukraine we didn't have that. Well, I remember two experiments somewhere, but that's not it either. Because we had this experiment, there was a metal and a magnet, and there was some kind of experiment. Well, we know that metal attracts to a magnet. Then there was another experience with mixtures, we had to separate the mixture from the metal with a magnet and something else, I don't remember. Well, these were obvious. And here there were many such experiments, I don't even remember all of them. (...) And chemistry a little like to learn it, formulas, elements, it is not so difficult anymore. And the teacher tells everything in an understandable way. (PL_I4_CH_G)

Another pupil pointed out the corrupting elements of the school in Ukraine (bribes for honours for a pupil) and appreciated that praise and grades in the Polish school only depend on her:

CH: There was more I wanted [to add] to it because when you go to school, there was a board with pictures of pupils. This board and every year who had the best grades there. I really wanted to get on that board, well everyone in the class probably wanted to.

I: Dreamed about it.

CH And I wanted it too, but you had to get a total of 10, 11, 12 in each subject, a nine wasn't good enough.

CH: But it was even more difficult, because here, if a child knows it, he [gets an award], and if a child in Ukraine knows it, they don't give it to him, unless parents bring something for the teacher. And that's why the child couldn't get the mark, because the parents were supposed to come to the teacher, bring something in a bag, or flowers, or a small envelope. And then the child would already receive such a distinction from the teacher. (PL_I4_CH_G)

One child pointed out that in Belarus a teacher made sure that pupils knew their assignments. As the child explained, the teacher wrote the assignment on the board and the children also had special homework diaries. Now the boy is attending a higher grade class and the responsibility for remembering the tasks has shifted to the pupils, but his remark may indirectly express a longing for more care or concern for his well-being.

CH: There, children at school have a kind of diary where they write down all...

I: Homework.

CH: ...homework that the children need to do. There is no such thing here.

I: Here you can, but you don't have to.

CH: And it's Leo who has such a problem with it.

I: So I take it it was better for you to have it all written down, right?

CH: Yeah. I didn't remember the assignment. (PL_I2_CH_B)

Positive and negative aspects of Polish schools

When we asked migrant children about the good and bad aspects of Polish schools, the most important issue was the attitude of teachers and school staff towards children. Pupils greatly appreciated teachers who tried to ensure that children are fully informed about the requirements for their assignments and the time available for their preparation. To sum up, a key element for a positive perception of the school are teachers. If they conduct interesting lessons, offer help when a pupil does not understand something, and at the same time have an understanding of various difficult emotions

(e.g. a pupil was ashamed to answer in front of the board, standing in front of the whole class), the whole school image was positive:

I: And which such teacher is the coolest? In which subject?

CH: Well, definitely the lady who teaches biology and chemistry, because I think she's the best at talking to children and she's just very understanding.

I: And the Polish teacher?

CH: Well, the Polish teacher is my form teacher, she's ok, but sometimes such situations happen, it's not very nice, but it's ok. (PL_I10_CH_G)

Some of the children show a very enthusiastic attitude towards school, perhaps in comparison to the situation before their arrival or a general satisfaction with life in Poland, but also perhaps trying to guess the researcher's intentions (the interviews were conducted in a school context, usually at school).

I: What do you like best about your lessons?

CH: Everything, everything pleases me. When we learn, when we talk, when we watch videos about the readings. (PL_I16_CH_B)

I: What is uncool, difficult about this school?

CH: Everything is good here. Only thing that's bad is that they smoke here and they're not all vegans. (PL_I13_CH_B)

On the other hand, among the negative aspects - apart from indicating disliked school subjects –there was disorder in the classroom or being snubbed by other pupils:

CH: In class I don't like someone getting in the way or someone running around the class or the lady saying leave it and they do it all the time. That's what I don't like. (PL_I24_CH_B)

Pupils also take badly to oppressive behaviour by teachers, enforcing discipline by shouting instead of explanation:

CH: I don't like it when the teacher(s) shouts and the subject is difficult or incomprehensible, like physics. (PL_F1_CH)

CH: I don't like it when someone shouts in class (...). (PL_F1_CH)

CH: Well, I used to, for example, when I was in 5th grade, there was this bad lady there, for example I had a card and so on, I said that I forgot how to translate words, and she didn't say and shouted. So for example she was in class she repeated one time, then I said to her can you repeat the word, she shouted at me and said she repeated several times and there was really only one.

I: Was that just in relation to you or...?

CH: No, no, to everyone. (PL_I11_CH_B)

Additionally, one pupil indicated that the teacher disregarded the fact that she may not yet understand handwritten Polish words:

I: 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 have to often ask for every word. (PL_F1_CH)

Children are also quick to notice favouritism towards certain pupils and assess this very critically, the more critical the teacher's behaviour becomes hypocritical as he asserts an equal approach to everyone:

CH: And the art teacher favours this A. [name of the student] so much that it's really as if her work doesn't look beautiful, as if it doesn't look ugly. It also seems to me that it's according to taste. Because some of her work is not the most beautiful, I wanted to point out... The best part is that he always says 'I don't favour anyone'. (PL_F5_CH)

Finally, bullying and intolerance from other peers is a problem. For some pupils, this leads to a preference for remote learning, because by staying at home they do not have to face resentment, teasing or exclusion:

I: At school there are people who sometimes either won't tolerate us or will be unkind to us, for no reason sometimes. And at home we're alone, without people like that who annoy me. I'm just alone, without my family who so well... But you know, I'm alone in my room and I'm very comfortable there. (PL_F5_CH)

Ideal school

When asked about the ideal school, migrant pupils basically construct in their imagination a space devoid of the previously mentioned negative aspects. Some pupils would just change the appearance of the school, for a more mood-enhancing one:

CH: I would make it more colourful, you could say, because it's half grey and half orange, so I look at it strangely and I would make it more colourful, blue, red, green, colours like that (...) to make it cheerful, not gloomy, to make even some very cloudy days look cheerful, sunny. (PL_I21_CH_B)

For children, it is also important to have time to meet with friends, so there have been calls for less or no homework and longer breaks. It is also important for the school to be modern, to meet the technological expectations of young people, to have laptops or tablets at their disposal:

CH: Well, everything would be electronic there. There would be no notebooks, it would be all on the computer, on laptops. And there would be long breaks. (PL_I17_CH_B)

Others point to problems that are more serious. An ideal school would be a place where teachers are fair and supportive to the students.

I: And if that was the kind of school you wanted to go to, what might it look like?

CH: I don't know. Well, maybe one where you don't have to write a lot and I don't know, they don't do that homework. And everything. (PL_I5_CH_B)

I: And if you were to imagine your dream school, what would it look like, what kind of school would it be? Let your imagination run free a little bit.

CH: I don't really know.

I: What would it have to be like, what kind of people, what kind of teachers?

CH: Well fair teachers, that's the first thing. (PL_I23_CH_G)

Relationships with teachers and their attitudes are an important element of an ideal school, from the interviews it appears that many changes are needed, since one student, when asked who she would like to have in her school, would not take any of the current teachers: "I would take some people that I really like with me. I wouldn't take any teachers. They are not bad, but I don't think I would take any teacher" (PL_I22_CH_G). Other pupils mentioned one or two people, often an intercultural assistant, which shows how important this figure is for migrant children, a person who connects them to their new environment. However, they would like the teachers to be fair and give up things which according to them are unimportant and very individual, like the way they keep their notebooks.

To sum up, migrant children do not have very high expectations of an ideal school. In an ideal school there would be a good atmosphere, nobody would shout, it would be a good space for learning, the teachers would be supportive and give the children space for their own activities. Children appreciate empowerment and autonomy and migrant children would have their own distinct place - there would be food that includes dishes from their home country or conversations in their languages: “Eating what we want, without pork, Chechen food, or Turkish food. Lessons shorter, 35 minutes each. Good teachers, because [those we have] shout at us. To make everything easy, e.g. maths” (PL_F3_CH).

At the same time, some children were unwilling or unable to say what their dream school would look like, with some declaring that they like the way it is now. One of the pupils considers school as place of escape and would like to stay there permanently. The dreams and proposals for change and the declarations that they like the school and even that they would like to stay there permanently, show the importance of school as a place of integration or exclusion, building or destroying relationships, fostering agency, or pushing them into hierarchical actions: “I like this school. I don't have dreams at all. It would be good to stay in school forever” (PL_F2_CH).

3. The affective and relational dimensions of school

In this section, we will look at children's relationships at school, especially with their peers. We will investigate the factors facilitating and hindering social interactions, such as language proficiency and the school environment. Special attention will be paid to the way conflicts are handled and how children realize their agency in difficult social situations. Finally, we will look at ways to support children, both at school and at home.

Factors hindering/facilitating peer relations

Social contacts play an important role in children's narratives. The intensity and character of peer relations vary considerably depending on the situation of each child, the school context, their family situation, and localisation. Children talked about having many relationships with peers both in school and after school, with Polish children and those speaking their native language. However, we have also encountered cases where migrant children did not have any Polish friends, and only kept in touch with friends (or even just one friend) with whom they could speak Russian/Ukrainian/Belarusian. In the following paragraphs, we will show the various situations of friendship practices.

Language as an important factor in peer relationships

When asked about relations with peers, children often referred to their beginnings in a new place and the challenge of establishing contacts with colleagues given the existence of a language barrier. Most of the children did not speak Polish on arrival and establishing peer relations was difficult. They often mentioned feeling excluded from the class:

Well, at the very beginning, when I just came to the class, I just saw from my perspective, there were these separate groups and I just tried to join one of those and just at the very beginning it was a bit difficult and I felt a bit, I don't know, rejected, because I didn't know the language either and it was just difficult to get along with anyone. (PL_I23_CH_G)

The language barrier causes distance from Polish children and hence many migrant children stick together with others who speak the same language, especially if they attend the same class.

I: What is it like with friends?

CH: Well, now I talk more with my friend who's from Ukraine, because it's easier to talk in Polish, but there are also friends from the dances, and they're more Polish-speaking there. Well, there's a lot of Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians at the dances. (PL_I1_CH_G,)

In some cases, although children did not speak Polish, they were able to make friends with Polish pupils. One of the girls talked about the situation when one of the pupils from the new class just approached her and began a close friendship. This relation helped the migrant girl to settle in the class, learn Polish and establish relations with other children from school:

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

CH: 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 go back to school [after the pandemic], how was it now in May?

CH: 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)

Knowledge of Polish was very helpful for migrant children who had been learning Polish before migrating to Poland. They talked about having an easier start at school and claimed that making new friendships was quite easy.

Sports

One of the factors which helped children integrate with peers was sport, and this was usually mentioned by boys. One of the interviewed children meets regularly with other boys in the neighbourhood to play. He also takes part in tournaments with the school team. This gained him friends, a sense of respect and agency after only one year after arrival in Poland.

CH: Well, everything was fine. The first day I was on the street, well everything was fine. Then in August, when I was playing soccer with my brother and my friend. We played, there were some boys on the field and we played with them and it turned out that one of the boys was from Russia and now he's my friend, so everything was fine. (...) On Sundays or Saturdays I often get together with my classmates and play football.

I: Great, because you all live close by?

CH: Well, yes. We just play either here on the pitch, or on the pitch...there, (...)in the park it is.

I: Were there any events at school, in class, which were not lessons, some competitions, going out somewhere?

CH: Well, for example, on Monday I played... I wasn't in lessons because I played football for the school.

I: Are you on the school football team?

CH: Yeah.

I: In some tournament?

CH: Mhm.

I: And there are some guys from your class there too?

CH: Yes, 2 from my class were and 4 boys from 7th class I think.

I: These are the best ones who play football?

CH: Well, yeah.

I: So I guess you're happy to be on that team?

CH: Mhm. I still have my jersey free of charge. (PL_I7_CH_B)

Proximity to friends

Living in a big city helps to maintain contacts with peers after school since usually all children from school live close to the school, therefore they live close to each other in the same neighbourhood. Children meet after school and spend time together in the neighbourhood.

CH: Well, with Tomek, with Natasza and with Adrian after lessons I always come home, change my clothes, eat, take my phone and a backpack with water, a mask and go there, to the alleys, to my friends. (...) I walk all over the alley. I also tried with my friends there to the shop, we buy something there. (PL_I8_CH_B)

I: And a week ago, I also spoke to CH. Yes, she was here, and she said you were friends.

CH: Yeah.

I: And that you walk a lot.

CH: Yeah.

I: Well, where do you go?

CH: Everywhere.

I: Playground? Some ice cream place?

CH: To the playground and we like to go to such, such places..., I don't know, some strange places. (...)

I: You can do it on your own, you have time, your parents let you?

CH: Yhm. (PL_I6_CH_G)

Cultural differences: between curiosity and hostility

Until recently, Polish society has been very homogenous and children in Poland did not have many relationships with children from other countries, especially at school. Hence, pupils are interested in various aspects of migrant children's lives. Here, a migrant boy relates to a situation when a couple of boys asked him about his religion.

CH: Well, I remember Ms. Marta joining me with other boys who wanted to go to PE. I remember those boys; they were sitting there. I..., well it was very new for me that, well then they came, then after the lesson together to the cloakroom (...) And bit by bit they started asking me what religion I was. Well, I then..., I don't know what they were saying, whether ortho religion, some other, non-Christian. And I think that then, and they say. And it's always they may ask me about this question I identified as baptized..., well, that's Christian. Well then, on and on, no straight, as always, the lesson of the beginning, (...) the first day of school. Well, I don't remember how many days came from the first day of school. The boys asked me what my religion is.

And then I, as soon as I understood what they were talking about, I said that I was from the Orthodox Church. And they asked, they didn't ask....; they didn't ask [anymore] what religion I was.

I: And why did they ask you that?

CH: I don't know, I don't know why, but for sure it was interesting.

I: That they were just curious about it.

CH: Yes.

I: But that, tell me, that was so nice for you? Or not really? Because I don't quite feel like that. Was the question asked in such a nice way? Or was it kind of unkind? How did you feel at the time?

CH: They, well they, as I remember they didn't look, like, (ns - 00:10:08) at me, and they didn't want to do anything. So they asked him normally. (PL_I3_CH_B).

Special interest in religion on the part of children can be surprising. It seems to us that adults (e.g. a religion teacher) might have inspired it or it could have resulted from the fact that the boy does not attend religion classes.³⁴

In other cases, the fact that children come from another country contributed to their marginalization in class.

I: Have you had situations where you or someone else was treated worse?

CH: I don't know if I was, because almost nobody liked me because I'm from another country.

I: Was it like that or is it like that all the time?

CH: I don't know if it's like that all the time now because we are remote, but it was when we were at school.

I: How can you help in such situations?

CH: I don't know, because we're about to finish eighth grade and everyone goes to a different school, so there's no time to do anything anymore. (PL_I9_CH_G)

School environment

We also noticed the importance of a supportive school environment for building relationships between migrant and Polish children. Here, the role of school administration, the sensitivity to migrant children's needs and welcoming attitude from the headteacher of the class were crucial for establishing peer relations.

On the other hand, a lack of commitment to creating good conditions for children significantly hindered their integration. We identified cases where children did not encounter a friendly reception and even experienced discrimination from the headmaster. These children talked about their experiences with difficulty and we can observe their marginalised position and a feeling of alienation in their narratives.

CH: I don't like my classmates.

I: And they're behaving uncoolly?

CH: Yeah.

I: Towards you?

CH: Not now, but there were situations in the past.

³⁴ In Poland 80% of children attend Catholic religion classes and this is a common situation in Poland.

I: They were unkind to you and now it has changed?

CH: And I just don't talk to them.

I: And are they unkind to you, or two other girls?

CH: For me and for my friend from Belarus. (...) I just sit by myself. Sometimes someone sits down with me and I just don't talk in class, they just sit.

I: What do you do during breaks?

CH: I sit behind the bench and do something. (...) And I just don't talk to them.

I: Do you have a friend from Poland?

CH: No.

I: From class?

CH: No. I still have a friend, Jelena.

I: Jelena, she's from the Ukraine too?

CH: Yes. (PL_I6_CH_G)

The lack of acceptance by children took effect in the child's negative attitude towards school. One of the girls we interviewed felt so isolated and spurned by the class that she suffered from school phobia. The stress of going to school was so strong that she was unable to walk into the school building³⁵. As a result, she had to shift to individual learning and it was only later, after the engagement of an intercultural assistant and during a better stage in the pandemic, that the girl started to join her class once a week.

A welcoming reception of a migrant child and engagement from the school administration and teachers also influences the peer relations. A girl from Nigeria received support from teachers both in learning and in contact with other children (by allowing pupils to use internet translators) which led to the establishment of good peer relations

I: How did you get on with colleagues?

CH: At the beginning, I was using flashcards so everybody could understand English (...) and also helping me to translate to the student. And some of them were also trying to communicate with me in English. So it was good.

I: Did you make any friends at school?

CH: Yeah. I made a lot of friends. I have some friends now. So yes.

I: And what are the names of your closest friends?

CH: I'd say Kuba, Ala. Piotr is from another class. Ala is from the same class as I. Ala, Kasia, from also from my class. I think those are like closest to me.

I: Do you spend time with them also after school.

CH: Not really. But recently I was spending time with Kuba after school. Like, for example, go to the park, we sit like under the swing. We talk to each other and then go home.

³⁵ We know about these situations mainly from the intercultural mediators who assisted during the interviews with children and commented on the children's situation during the interview.

I: And, for example, did your colleagues in class help you with learning?

CH: Yes. Ala helped me. She helped me. (PL_I22_CH_G)

Most of the refugee children attend small-scale schools with years of experience in teaching migrant children in small rural communities. They experience school as a welcoming space and view their entire class as friends. In such cases, there are usually a couple of migrant children in one class, sometimes migrant children constitute the larger part of the class. Children from this environment usually did not mention conflict or situation when other pupils would not accept them or marginalise.

I: And how many classmates, friends or classmates, did you have?

CH: I had friends all of them.

I: Who did you get along with best? (...) Was it the entire class?

CH: The entire class. (...). But Zuza was so nice. She was sweet.

I: Jagoda was from Poland?

CH: Yes. From Poland. (...) My classmates helped me a lot. For example, I forgot my scissors at home; they gave me scissors. And so, that's how it was. Yeah.

I: Is that how they helped you? If you forgot something. They did? And if you didn't know something in class, for example?

CH: Yes. They helped me then too. (...) We did not quarrel. (...) I had no other difficult situations. (PL_I25_CH_G)

CH: I like to sit with them [pupils in my class], I like to talk about grades, about papers, that did you do this, did you do homework and they say, well yes we did or will you give your work, I'll do it and I'll give it to you, well yes I will. (...) We help each other. (...) If someone has difficulties with classes or can't read, can't do it, then one person will help them with reading, with doing papers, and talk to you. (PL_I24_CH_B)

I: And do you help each other in class for example?

CH: Yes, everyone helps each other because no one wants to see another person hurt or feel sad. And everyone always helps everyone. (PL_I26_CH_B)

Children's agency in conflict situations

Agency is one of the important sociological concepts today. The dispute over the impact of structure or human agency on social reality and the biographies of individuals is one of the most significant debates happening in the social sciences. Responding to these debates, Margaret Archer (2000) notes that the social self is produced at the interface of structure, culture and causality. The individual, in this view, is not devoid of reflexivity and can influence the shape of their life, as well as his environment. Taking this account as a point of departure in the following section we look at children's agency in school conflicts. We explore their self-reflexivity and capacities to act as well as to express their needs in relations with peers and school staff.

Conflict situations are a part of school life. Children recalled such situations which often arise on the basis on ethnic discrimination. These cases are discussed in the part on the intercultural relations at school. Here, we will discuss the cases of interpersonal conflicts which were not assigned by children as arising from their status as migrant pupils.

Children, usually boys, refer often to violence between peers, which arises in interpersonal conflicts. These are conflicts over the unwanted consequences of their actions (like hitting someone during

play), but also they talked about acts of deliberate aggression. Very often children try to take resolve those conflicts by themselves.

CH: One time I got beaten up. It happened because he made me angry a bit, because he started saying such nasty things to my two friends, so he annoyed me. And I went to the teacher before, and she said, well stop it. And then he still came up and started a pulling my hair. And I hit him. I didn't know where I was hitting him, and I hit him in the stomach. And I kind of knew afterwards that it wasn't special, and everybody forgot about it.

I: Did anyone help you resolve the situation?

CH: No.

I: So did they just all forget?

CH: Yes.

I: Do difficult situations like this happen in your class or at school?

CH: Yes. Again, my friends got into a fight together, only without me anymore, because they were a kind of having fun, only I don't know if they really had fun or fighting. (PL_I12_CH_G)

There are also situations when play takes form of fight, which does not have any conflicts in background and is a form of contact especially between boys

CH: I have this boy at school, Tomek, everyone says we fight and we just play. They don't let us play normally.

I: Why do you think they say that?

CH: Because we are having fun fighting. (PL_I13_CH_B)

A child's agency is mostly realised when children solve a difficult situation or conflict themselves without referring to adults. Addressing peers directly is preferred in interpersonal conflicts; children often mention they do not want to engage teachers in order not to exaggerate the situation and this also strengthens the children's sense of agency.

I: Do you sometimes quarrel with your classmates about something? Are there any problems in class?

CH: Well, once I argued with them. Yes, for 2 days. But then we settled everything. Because we had that time remotely, after all. We had Teams. So I arranged it with Zuzka, my friend, and she arranged everything, and then we agreed. And we just... we just don't go on like that, we don't argue anymore. There was only one time.

I: Do you remember what it was about?

CH: No, I don't remember. It would have been in March or April.

I: Was it just you who quarrelled, or did several people quarrel?

CH: 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)

CH: Well, nothing like that has happened to me, but my other classmate recently had a situation like that, but I don't know... It's just that one friend threw the ball at the other, it's just an argument. And that was it.

I: And what happened then?

CH: And one boy threw the ball to the other one and the other one cried, but then he came and apologised and asked if it was all right, and that he was sorry, and they made up and now everything is ok. (PL_I10_CH_G)

When children feel they can manage by themselves, they do not want to bother the teachers and keep cases of harassment to themselves.

I: Did you tell your headteacher how you had these enemies?

CH: No, I didn't tell her not to tell me, that you have some problems, because you have your problems, a lot of kids have their problems, that's where someone insults them, that Dawid, I just hate him too, I can't hold on. We play with him there. For example, he just comes up and beats me in the back. He just comes up and beats me in the back. (PL_I21_CH_B)

Children feel a sense of agency when they can resolve the conflict with peers who hold hostile attitude towards them and turn from enemies to friends, as with one boy from Ukraine. There were two boys at his school who were hostile towards him because of his ethnicity. However, with time, he made a closer relationship with one boy and finally they became friends.

CH: I only had two, so to speak, opponents. It seems I didn't like them, so there they talked some, there they talked some bad, so to speak.

I: Did they talk about you?

CH: Well, not only about me. Generally they didn't like the fact that I was the first student from Ukraine, and so they showed themselves, that they were so proud of themselves, that they were so cool, and that I was from Ukraine and such a nobody, you could say. And recently I think I had one opponent, so to speak, on my side. I had a lot of friends from the beginning, and now I have a lot, so not even a whole class, maybe even the whole class. And I still have so from this opponent, from the two of them, one.

I: How did it happen that you dragged him to your side?

CH: I don't even know. We just started talking and he started smiling at me somehow and such trivial things, and we become friends. (PL_I21_CH_B)

School and family environment as a source of support for the children

Intercultural assistants

A huge source of support for children are intercultural assistants and this was noticed in children's narratives but also in the whole process of conducting interviews. Some of the interviews were possible only because intercultural assistant was present. There were children who had experienced stress and trauma in school and the intercultural assistant mediated between us and the child, also adding some details and context to child's narrative.

CH: The most fortunate thing is that we have Mr Volodymyr.

I: He is your cultural assistant?

(...)

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

CH's mother: He does everything

CH: Well, everything. Maybe he's like a translator.

Intercultural assistants are both helpful with assignments and the language, but also with any problem that arises at school.

I: But there is also a little bit and Mrs. Bohuslava, there are some people who can help you?

CH: Yes, Mrs Bohuslava helps very well with classes, also with missing tasks.

I: And Mrs Bohuslava is with you in lessons sometimes?

CH: And she is the one who has access to the missing task, to the teachers.

I: And she reminds you that something needs to be done?

CH: Yes. (PL_I2_CH_B)

Intercultural assistants play a crucial role in children's adaptation at schools, since they know exactly the situation of each migrant child, the children's biggest concerns, challenges, and successes. We also noticed that in difficult situations, especially in conflicts with teachers, intercultural assistants stood up for children at the school administration.

Teachers

Children usually turn to the teachers when experiencing conflicts. Especially younger kids, age 10-11, would ask the teacher to help resolving problems, report problematic situations or cases of harassment.

CH: Well, it seems to me that it is best to approach a teacher, or just an older person, and that is the best solution, really. (PL_I10_CH_G)

CH: With the teacher it's with the music teacher, when he sees me in the corridor with such sadness or if I'm just sitting, he'll call me over and ask me what's going on, and what happened. (PL_I27_CH_B)

I: And how do you deal with this problem?

CH: We tell this to the teacher.

I: And what the teacher does about it?

CH: She gives them a warning.

I: In the electronic communicator for parents?

CH: No, she reminds the boys that she can give it.

I: But she doesn't actually give, right?

CH: Yes. (PL_I18_CH_G)

Sometimes, albeit rarely, after children seek support from teachers, they discuss the conflict situation with the entire class during a community meeting.

CH: There was this one situation, the boys always got a phone and when, for example, Kamila wanted to get a phone because she wanted to send something to her mum, then the boys started shouting: "no phone allowed in class" and so the battle started.

I: So how did you tell anyone about it? Did you say that such a war between boys and girls?

CH: Then we told the teacher.

I: And what was her reaction?

CH: Well, we talked about it during the community meeting. (PL_I19_CH_G)

Cooperation between teachers and parents in conflict situations

In cases of harassment, children often turn both to teachers and parents. Parents also visit school in order to support their children. An example of such a situation is when both the teacher and parent were highlighted as sources of support:

I: Your colleagues, or friends, did they quarrel about anything? Nobody, for example, said that, well, why did you come to Poland? Nobody, you've never heard such a bad term, have you?

CH: No, only one girl said that, from another class.

I: What did she say, tell you?

CH: Well, once I asked her if I could take her toy, she said, you can, I pressed something there, she said, don't press it, and why did you come to Poland? I don't understand, I pressed something and she got offended.

I: And what did you say to her, when she said why did you come to Poland?

CH: I didn't say anything to her, like my mum suggested, I just went to my friends, to Taras, to Ilja and to Marek.

I: And you told mum about this?

CH: Yes.

M: And what did mum say then?

CH: Mum said, don't pay attention to it.

I: And to the teacher, did you complain to the teacher?

CH: Yes, because mum said so. She was very sad then.

I: Oh, so the teacher reacted, so that...

CH: Yes, teacher told me that she shouldn't have said that to me.

I: Mum said don't pay attention to it, well don't you think mum, well she should call the teacher too and tell her?

CH: Well, mum already talked to the teacher once. Mum spoke to the PE teacher and the PE teacher said that, well I know she'd already spoken [to the girl – AR] and she said, well, not to..., well no, [that is should have] never happened, so she called the girl's mum and said that.

I: And what did her mum say to that? You know? Did it get to you somewhere?

CH: Well, no.

I: You don't know, right, what they were like. And now you're talking to this girl? Or are you two just avoiding each other like that?

CH: Well I'm talking because she's already said, "I'm sorry I said that". (PL_I20_CH_B)

For many children, their parents are a great support, they trust them and can talk with them about any difficult situation in school.

I: Do you also talk about it with your siblings, what you like at school and what you don't like? Or is it just with your friends?

CH: With my family too, mostly with my mum, whatever happens or doesn't happen at school, I also tell my mum or my brother sometimes, you know what, I scored a goal today in football. And he's happy too, because his brother was like that, like that, that's why it was very good for him too. (...) And for example, would your parents, mum or dad, come to school to help, to solve a school problem?

CH: More like they are, less often, if there was such a problem that my mum or dad had to come to school, only at parents' meeting it was always my mum.

I: So but if you had to, would parents come?

CH: She would come straight away.

I: For example, if there were any problems, would your parents help you to solve them?

CH: Yes. (PL_I26_CH_B)

Children usually ask parents to intervene if they cannot cope by themselves with conflict or when conflict last for a longer period, however the intervention of adults not always seen as a long run solution.

CH: 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)

Siblings

Parents not always can be a source of support usually because their lack of language skills or lack of time. Often it is the older sibling that is more trusted person for children than parents, especially if parents stricter. In such cases, children turn to older siblings with their worries.

I: Can you talk to your parents about school? Are they curious about what's going on with you?

CH: Well, yes, but we not usually talk about school.

I: But if you need to talk to someone, who can you talk to?

CH: Well, Anastasia, my friend.

I: What about an adult?

CH: My sister.

I: Oh, yeah, you can always talk to your sister. And you tell each other how you're doing at school?

CH: Yes. (PL_I5_CH_G)

In another case it was the older brother who came first to Poland and prepared the arrival of the whole family. He speaks Polish very well, has a good job and is well informed about the procedures and living arrangement in Poland.

I: Your brother lives with you?

CH: Well, yes. He just helps his parents a bit more.

I: So when you arrived, everything was ready?

CH: Yeah, yeah. There was already a flat, so that's all right, yeah.

I: And now your brother is helping you too?

CH: Yes.

I: What do you do together?

CH: Well, if I have homework, if I don't understand something, my brother helps.

I: Do you spend your free time together?

CH: Yes, we play football and computer games. And also, for example, when we play computer games and a boy from Poland plays with us and if I say something wrong, he helps me. (...)

I: So he also supports you in Polish?

CH: Yes. (PL_I7_CH_B, Item 99-115)

Educational aspirations

Almost all children discussed their learning experience in a positive way. The school is seen as a space where they can develop their skills, gain knowledge and develop their interests.

I: Why is it worth learning and going to school?

CH: Well, knowledge in different fields, in different subjects, which can discover, let's say someone likes maths or foreign languages and later he/she can decide about his/her profession. (PL_I23_CH_G)

Children referred to a variety of subjects. Most often they talked about the major subjects which dominate the curriculum such as Mathematics and Polish, but they also mentioned Biology, IT classes, Music or Art. However, their experiences with these classes varied. They highly evaluated subjects which they find important and interesting, which are in line with their own interests or in which they are good at. The key factor in shaping children's relations to learning is the teacher. Children trust in a teacher when they sense his/her positive approach to pupils. This is reflected in devoting his/her time to provide clear explanation, creating a possibility to improve the grades and inclusive learning approach. Such features provide a sense of security in children, which develops an intrinsic motivation for learning, boost children's motivation and engagement as well as academic and social competence.

I: What subject do you like best?

CH: English.

I: And why?

CH: Because I get good marks there and we have a nice teacher. (PL_I18_CH_G)

[talking about favourite subject] Math. I don't study for the maths test because I know I'll get a good grade anyway, because I'm probably the best at maths. (PL_I11C)

I think that children learn better if teachers don't give grades. And when children do something wrong, the teacher helps to correct the grade or explains it. Then the kids want to learn. But if the teacher shouts and says that everybody is bad in the subject, then the kids don't want to learn, it's all up to the teacher. But when the teacher helps the child, then grades are not important, the child wants to learn." (PL_FGI4_CH)

The most varied opinions were expressed with respect to the Polish classes. Children who were more proficient in Polish often emphasized that they did not face major challenges in this subject:

I do very well [in Polish]. In an exam or a test, it was always fours or fives. The teacher always praised. I say I'm good at Polish. (PL_I24_CH_B)

Others who have not yet gained proficiency in Polish talked about their difficulties. At the same time, they often believe that if they reach a more advance level of Polish, they would no longer face challenges in this subject. The key factor in building their confidence and a sense of self-efficacy about their achievements was their parents' support. This helped children to accept their gaps in Polish as temporary and to overcome barriers to learning Polish. Children also developed their

intrinsic motivation for learning Polish – as most of them plan to stay in Poland, they would like to communicate fluently in this language.

The children are rather ambitious. Although they care about their grades, it turned out that they are also driven by intrinsic motivation: putting greater value on learning itself and learning for the sake of their own satisfaction.

I: Are these school grades important to you?

CH: Well, they're important to some extent, but I think that knowledge is more important than marks, because sometimes we can get really stressed and write something wrong, miss something, but we still have knowledge. (PL_I10_CH_G)

For those who are in the final class of primary school, grades are especially important as access to secondary school depends on them. For younger children, the grades are necessary to get promoted to the following class. Some children also talked about the importance of grades in order to make their parents proud:

I: And tell me, are school grades important to you?

CH: Very important.

I: Why?

CH: Because if I get a three I want to improve it to a four or a five very quickly.

I: But why do you want to improve? Why?

CH: So that when they give me a certificate, it's always four or five. No threes.

I: But why do you care so much that the certificate has fours and fives?

CH: It's for my dad.

I: So that your dad can see that you have these grades? Is that the most important thing to you?

CH: Yes. When I always get four or five, I always look forward to the lesson being over, I always go to my dad, he's not there, he's at work and I can't wait for him to come. And when he comes, then dad, look what I got. Then my dad, oh, very good, you learnt. (PL_I24_CH_B)

Having supportive parents who appreciate children's grades and encourage them to work affects children's self-esteem and their academic performance. Therefore, it is important to effectively involve parents in their children's education and help them to encourage children to learn. This is especially important in the case of parents from neighbouring countries who are unfamiliar with the Polish grading system and the way they see the grades is different from their true meaning. The problem of unclear grading system was also noted by a migrant girl who admitted that "It seems to be fair but I do not entirely understand it". Therefore, both the parents and the children must not only be informed about the grades but also given a clear explanation of how children's work is evaluated.

In general, children perceived the grading system and grades as just and fair, with only a few children expressing the opposite opinion. Children often boasted about their good grades:

Are you satisfied with your grades?

Yes, because I've only got Z, W, Z, W, Z, D+, Z with a minus, W, because I've got sixes, fives.

So a Z is the highest, right?

W is the highest, which is a six, and Z is a five. D is a four, P is a three, M is a two, and then I don't know. (PL_I12_CH_G)

Having good grades translates into higher self-esteem and helps to develop self-respect:

When I get 5 or even 6, my teacher says: you have written it very well, and that is very pleasant for me. (PL_F2_CH)

The grades are also important as a motivational tool – having lower grades encouraged children to fill in the gap in their knowledge and to achieve high grades. As the participants of the focus group admitted: “we become annoyed when we fail”. (PL_F1_CH)

But the grades help more if a person gets some worse grades and (s)he has to improve, they have to say to themselves, oh, I got such a worse grade, I have to study a bit more and improve more. I rather do that, that's why it helped me a lot. (PL_I26_CH)

Only some children indicated that their educational achievements depended on gender.

Because boys are better at PE and run fast.

Boys have it easier in gym class. What other subjects do they have it easier in?

- In our case in [our] the class they don't, probably they are better only in gym.

And what are girls best at?

- Girls are [better] in almost everything. (OL_I19_CH_D)

A few children admitted that they had experienced unjust grading. Such situations concerned either unequal treatment and the clear preferences of a teacher or a lack of a teacher's consent to improve a grade.

(..) in some situations, with some teachers, if they like someone less, they can even lower a grade sometimes. (PL_I23_CH_G)

(...) it depends on the subject, it depends on the situation (...) but for example in Polish, for example, in maths, for example, in the more important subjects, it happens that they don't grade very fairly, And in the rest of the subjects I think the grades are [just]. (PL_I10_CH_G)

Yes, it [being treated unfair] happened to me more than once, for example, I was half a point short of a better mark and, for example, another person got that half a point for, I don't know, simply underlining something in a sentence and I underlined it too, for example, but [a teacher] simply didn't approve it and said that I didn't deserve the better mark. (PL_I10_CH_G)

Parents and pupils focus on grades as a way of communicating how much knowledge a pupil has gained. They rely on the grading system as an objective way of measuring educational achievement and value good grades highly because they matter for admission to secondary school and even job applications. Since grades are seen as important measure of success, children often felt under pressure from teachers, schools, and parents. The grading system is internalized to the extent that it is barely questioned by pupils and parents. The negative impact on overall educational performance and progress, pupils' health, self of worth and intrinsic motivation was rarely noted by children. Only some of them complained that grades are not the best reflection of a pupil's abilities and knowledge. In their opinion, the grading system provides the illusion of an objective way of assessing children's performance as it does not take into account factors such as stress, anxiety and their academic performance pressure.

Well, (...) they [marks] don't fully reflect our knowledge, because let's say someone may understand something, but one day, let's say he/she didn't repeat something, or he/she forgot it because of stress and just got a mark worse than he thought, than he assumed. (PL_I23_CH_G)

For the majority of children, completing school is important for their future. In the short-term, primary school is a first step for further education, including both secondary school and higher education. In the long-term, education is the basis for getting a good job and establishing a family:

I: Why is it worth learning?

CH: To have a good job, a good family, so that everyone respects them. (PL_I27_CH_B)

Education is perceived as opening up opportunities for children to become whoever they want in the future.

Learning support

Regarding the possibilities for support in a challenging situation for a migrant pupil, the children mentioned all actors involved in school. The most frequently mentioned were parents, close friends and teachers. They are the ones who are perceived to be the most important by the pupils in the school relationship and able to give advice or support (both regarding learning matters and interpersonal challenges).

I: So when you have a problem or something is bothering you, who do you turn to first?

CH: To my mother I can, to Valentina [friend] and to the teacher. Yes. [PL_I2_CH_B]

Highlighting teachers may prove the importance of the school environment and school structures in overcoming barriers faced by pupils. Children appreciate a teacher's openness, flexibility and encouragement to develop a passion for learning and to believe in themselves. Among the strategies developed by teachers, migrant children listed the following: preparing easier tests, additional explanations during tests to better understand instructions or having an opportunity to improve their grades. Yet, children do not expect and do not want teachers to help them out by providing them with a ready-made solution.

In terms of family support, children inform parents about the difficulties and appreciate their help in solving problems. Their interventions led to coming up with feasible and tailor-made solutions for their children. While parents are involved in contacts with school, migrant children also mentioned about their siblings who help them with their homework.

Sporadically, migrant children are supported by volunteers who carry out additional classes (e.g. from Polish) for them or a private tutor for additional, after-school classes. Both types of interventions aim at narrowing the existing knowledge gap between migrant and non-migrant children. It is important, however, to look at this phenomenon from broader context as migrant children are not an exception and they are aware that other children often use the support of a private tutor.

CH: I've just got extra Polish lessons and I'm catching up with the material from the old classes, because, well, in the younger classes I was weaker in Polish and now I'm just catching up with the material from the old classes.

I: Are these lessons taught by a Polish teacher from your class or by someone else?

CH: No, from another school.

I: So what do you think about these extra lessons?

CH: Well, I think these additional lessons have given me a lot and I like the teacher very much, she explains things well and...

I: Whose initiative was it to go for those lessons?

CH: Well, for sure it was my mum's initiative, but it was more mine, because I felt I needed it, because in a year's time when I'll be writing exams I simply won't keep up and I won't have much knowledge. (PL_I10_CH_G)

The above quotation also shows that children do not necessarily look for external support (e.g. of parents) but they can seek out strategies on their own. This can be seen as a sign of their agency: they can identify their needs on their own and define the type of support needed. They can also present their standpoint and arguments to teachers. As one of the girls described (PL_I22_C_G), she decided to talk to the director of the school about her difficulties in Polish and, as a result of her intervention, a cultural assistant was hired to help her during the classes.

Children's agency: the classroom context

Children's opportunities to have their voice heard at schools seem to be limited. Usually it is the teacher who decides what, when and how something will be learned and how to organize classes.

Nonetheless we can refer to situations on the classroom level, showing the diversity of context where children can act and have an influence on their learning environment. First, the children's perspective is acknowledged in the grading process, affecting the children-teacher relation.

I: Well what then, you didn't fight for yourself?

CH: Well, that's when I said to a teacher that it wasn't very fair, that for example my friend had done the same task as me and why did she get more points than me when I should have got the same amount, and you said that it was a bit of a different system of evaluation, because with her it was like a grade neither for minus nor for plus. (PL_I10_CH_G)

As the example above shows, the girl was not afraid to present her standpoint and the teacher provided a space for a dialogue, she was not reluctant to engage and provide additional explanation. Such an approach may enhance children agency and help to build a positive relationship between teacher and pupils.

The second example illustrating the inclusion of children's voices is connected with the collective actions of evaluating children's behaviour and performance. It shows how children can be engaged in an open discussion, express their capacity to act as agents. What seems to be important is that from the girl's perspective, such approach developed a sense of responsibility and agency which she evaluated positively.

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

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

I: What did it look like?

- 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?

CH: I felt good about it. (PL_I9_CH_G)

Educational aspirations and future plans

The findings of our research proves that primary school is often seen as an important step in developing future educational choices. All of the children admitted that they wanted to continue their education, at least up to the point of completing secondary school. Many respondents also talked about going to university. Having such plans in mind, they argued that completing primary school with good grades would increase their chance to be accepted in a good secondary school and later at university. Yet, some children also talked about their 'lost' experiences, passions which they could not develop in Poland due to cultural differences or limited economic resources.

The children also linked educational achievements with the opportunity of getting an interesting job and developing a successful career. Boys most frequently talked about professions related to the IT sector: they would like to create animated films or to become youtubers, bloggers, graphic designers or computer programmers. A few boys talked about careers in engineering, but also in acting or travelling around the world, while one boy stated that he would like to serve in the Ukrainian army.

I would think that I'm an actor, a bit of a very famous actor, and I receive invitations to act in this scene or in these commercials, and in the sense that in the future my brother would say to me, you see, brother, you studied, you succeeded, and you're now such an important, famous actor, and how do you think, well follow your dream, should I also follow my dream? And that would be good for me. (PL_I26_CH_B).

In most cases, their imagined future profession is related to their interests, as in the example below:

I imagine myself a programmer of various things and a robots' builder. I have a lot of Lego and if I had motors and everything like that, I could make a car. (PL_I17_CH_B)

Some boys are also driven by an example, wanting to either follow their family members or their friends into a particular field:

I want to become a doctor because his grandfather was a doctor and when I was born they told him he would be a doctor. He will continue his studies, in 15 years he will still be studying but he will also have a family.(PL_I24_CH_B)

I: Who would you like to be in the future?

CH: Well, I want to be a policeman, but...

I: Why a policeman?

CH: Well, because Kuba's dad is a policeman, and Kuba says, that I want to be a policeman too, and I want to be with him.(PL_I20_CH_B)

Some boys emphasized that it is important to choose a profession which helps to create better and more just societies while for others having high income was one of the main criteria:

A policeman. Because he earns a lot and helps people. (PL_F3_CH)

Border guard - you can earn well like that. My father used to say. (PL_F3_CH)

Girls had more varied ideas about their future careers: from becoming a cook or a confectioner, a dressmaker, a teacher, an artist, a fashion model and a policewoman, a border guard, a traveller, a doctor or an attorney. Their narratives showed that girls are not limited by the cultural models of female careers and want to choose professions in fields still dominated by men.

I would like to make cakes and sell them. Because I bake myself and I like it. (PL_F4_CH)

I: And why that choice, it's terribly difficult, no, to put bones together at all?

CH: Well terribly difficult, but I'm just very interested in biology, I'm doing very well in biology, I just find it interesting. (PL_I10_CH_G)

(...) because there's a lot of work there [working as an attorney], you have to learn a lot, there are a lot of puzzles. PL_F1_CH)

My sister's friend is studying to become a police officer and I want the same. (PL_F1_CH)

I want to work in the Border Guard, because when we went to the Border Guard for interrogations, there were women working there and I liked that. (PL_F1_CH)

It is also important to note that some children (both girls and boys) seemed to have a precise plan for their future:

I: And why [do you think] about medicine?

CH: Well, yes, I want to be a dentist.

I: When you talk about your future, where do you see it?

CH: Here in Krakow, I want to go to a chemistry-biology high school and then, when I pass the exam, it will be clear. (PL_I1_CH_G)

Meanwhile, many children have vague ideas about their future, admitting that “they do not know” or they hesitated before giving the answer.

Children's interests are supported by parents who want them to pursue their passions by signing children up for workshops, extra classes etc. Such involvement of parents may be seen as a form of support, but it can be also a form of subtle pressure to follow particular career paths. Such pressure is reflected in children's narration as their choices are driven by the opinion of an important other who advised them to choose a particular career path.

In addition to education and career aspirations, children also talked about family as a priority in their future life. The role of gender plays an important role here. While family is a part of boys' and girls' future plans – importantly only after completing their education and building well-established career - some of the girls admitted that they have to negotiate their choices. They are expected to get married just after reaching marriageable age – a role that they resist and want to postpone.

Schools during the pandemic

The research was conducted after almost a year and a half of Covid-19 pandemic, when children had already experienced different modes of teaching: from the online teaching in a condition of strict regulation to relatively short periods of regular classes conducted at school (see section on Methodology). During the second school lockdown, in the autumn of 2020, online teaching was no longer seen as an exception or a short episode in pupils' lives but rather a part of their educational path. They had more expectations towards online classes than during the first lockdown in March 2020 and become more critical – and some of them more tired – of online teaching. Overall, pupils claimed that online teaching posed several difficulties. Compared to the online teaching during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, technical and logistic issues were not the most important problem, although some children talked about a lack of proper equipment and lack of knowledge how to use online teaching software. Even if this problem occurred, it had been already solved as children were already equipped with computers or laptops by schools or NGOs. Some children still lacked a

proper working space as they needed to either share it with siblings or change it with other members of the family. However, they usually do not perceive it as a huge problem and had developed and tested solutions which helped them to organize their work.

I: And the place at home?

CH: It was difficult.

I: And how do you solve it?

CH: I sit and my sister, who is 3 years younger than me, sit in the main room. The oldest [sister] sits in the next room. And the youngest [brother] is at school. (PL_I9_CH_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)

An unstable and weak Internet connection was more of a problem. It was mentioned by many children who pointed to problems either on the teacher's side or their own. They talked, among others, about buffering films, being disconnected or having difficulties in hearing what others were saying, all problems which affected the learning process. Children could not fully and actively participate in classes, they missed information related to their homework and they could not understand their teachers.

Unstable connection. It was difficult. Throws off the lesson. (PL_I24_CH_B)

CH: To be honest, there were some [problems], mostly with the Polish teacher, because whenever the internet didn't work properly for us, because a few people at home use the internet and we'd get kicked out of lessons sometimes and come back in after 2 or 3 minutes, she just shouted at us that we were leaving the lesson, that we weren't listening during the lesson, or simply when someone's microphone wasn't working, it got stuck and he spoke up after 5 minutes, because he'd fixed it, she accused us making everything up and that it wasn't how we said, and there were such arguments.

I: And it was on Polish language, and other teachers?

CH: Well, it really depended, but for example the maths teacher was more calm and said: well, you fix it, then you'll tell me when you'll fix it, or well, when you come to class you'll let me know, and so on. The same with the biology teacher, well most teachers are calm. (PL_I10_CH_G)

Participation in classes was also difficult due to children's unwillingness to use webcams. As there was no regulation forcing them to switch them on, almost all decided not to. On the one hand, it gave them some privacy as they did not feel that their homes or family members are monitored. On the other, it also reveals an issue of mistrust between teacher and pupils, a need to control everything by a teacher and false accusations of not being prepared. All these factors can lead to potential conflicts with a teacher.

CH: (...) there was a problem with the camera and with the microphone, I couldn't turn the microphone on. And it wasn't on purpose, [it wasn't that] I didn't learn, right? Well, I just couldn't, I pressed the microphone and it didn't switch on, and, well, it did, and I was talking, and I couldn't be heard.

I: So something was broken, right?

CH: Yes, and everyone said that I did it on purpose, because I wasn't prepared, and I wrote in the chat, what a teacher asked me about, and I answered. (PL_I20_CH_B)

Although the interviewed children did not abuse teacher's confidence, they also reported that it might have been the case that some children only turned on their computers and were not present as they did not even react on chat:

We can have the webcam on. In general, it happens that someone doesn't have such a webcam and he/she didn't turn it on and you couldn't hear him/her at all and when a teacher asked him/her, he/she didn't speak or even wrote in the chat that he/she couldn't hear or couldn't say anything. (PL_I18_CH_G)

The most critical opinions presented by the children concern the negative impact of remote teaching on the quality of classes and the opportunities to learn. Children complained about difficulties in maintaining good contact with teachers: limited possibilities to ask for help and additional explanation, limited possibilities to use audio-visual materials and more engaging teaching methods. It should be emphasized, however, that teachers became more professional in using online teaching software and the situation of not knowing how to use it only happened sporadically.

During remote teaching, it was not easy even for teachers. For example, the geography teacher often writes notes on the blackboard, shows some videos, and she couldn't do it on the remote one, because the videos simply didn't show and it [videos] were delayed. Well, during regular teaching, (...) you can understand more, approach [a teacher], ask. (PL-I4-CH_G)

Exactly when you're trying to learn something it's a bit more difficult. Because when you're with a teacher in one room, you can ask questions and it's just easier.

And here [during remote teaching] you couldn't ask questions. (...) Well you could ask, but it was just perceived a bit differently. (PL_I23_CH_G)

I preferred it in the classroom, it [remote teaching] was a bit strange, and there were moments when I didn't understand what a teacher was explaining, and when I raised my hand, a teacher couldn't pay attention to it because of the noise. (PL_I16_CH_B)

One child also complained about teachers not taking online teaching seriously and even accused them of not being prepared.

At my friend's, the gym teacher always asked the kids to come up with exercises, and he would switch off and do nothing himself. So the teachers also sometimes cheated during those lessons. (PL_I7_CH_B)

Children complained about limited visual contact as webcams had been turned off or the appearance of teacher in a small window, the result of which was a failure to notice their non-verbal signals (such as raising their hand). Moreover, it was not always possible to hear what the teacher was saying.

CH: I like learning from home, but I have problems with it.

I: What kind of problems?

CH: Well, I can't hear [in the online teaching]. (PL_I2_CH_B)

The online teaching hindered also children's educational development. For migrant children, it meant a lack of opportunities to speak Polish. They complained that they could only use it during classes and they did not have many opportunities to practice it in other contexts.

I: How did this online school look from your perspective?

CH: 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)

Further, some children did not keep up to date with their homework and they quickly lagged behind other pupils. Such an approach can be explained by several factors. Children could not easily explain a problem which they did not understand and they frequently did not know what they were supposed to do exactly. They found online teaching an additional barrier in communication, they could not express themselves or provide a proper explanation of a problem:

Well, for sure it is more difficult to focus, it's harder to learn, because if, for example, you don't understand something, it's difficult to explain through online communication. (PL_I10_CH_G)

But it was so idiotic that they wrote in the diary that you had to solve this, solve that, and it was very difficult, because I didn't understand anything from that. And I had to do this. (PL_I19_CH_G)

One of the main challenges was thus a lack of proper support from the teacher's side. Children felt that they were burdened with responsibilities for making up after being absent or for looking for explanations. They rather talked about non-institutional support from their siblings, friends from class and parents or simply used Internet resources. Only a few children in a big city talked about help from teachers, which was usually either requested by a pupil or his/her parents. While the former included support in tasks such as preparing projects, the latter referred to parents' request to adjust the time for an exam to the skills of migrant children. A teacher's support was easier to obtain for children from schools located close to the centre for foreigners as they were supported by a teacher coming to the centre. Such help was rarely offered in big cities:

Actually, it was not so hard, because I have my assistant with me. So like during (ns - 00:10:42) while I would have my computer on with me (...), I would just have my phone on a video call on WhatsApp. So it was easier for me. Like it was easy for me. It was not so hard. (PL_I22_CH_G)

The lack of social interactions was highlighted by many children. The Covid-19 pandemic took away one of the main non-educational functions of school – social life, depriving children of shared activities between lessons.

I missed my classmates. And teachers too. (PL_I24_CH_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)

Spending most of their time on online teaching, with only short breaks to switch between lessons, and isolation from social contacts lowered the children's ability to concentrate, actively participate in lessons and discouraged them from undertaking after-school activities.

CH: Well, what bothered me the most was just laziness, because if you just sit at home, you don't have that much energy to do something and so on, you just sit at the computer for a few hours and you just don't want to do anything and...

I: Do you feel fatigue?

CH: Yes. (PL_I10_CH_G)

This feeling of being tired or sleepy also showed up in the focus group in which we used visual materials. One of the boys chose the image of sheep lingering by a road to illustrate

how fast the lesson was (symbolized by the road), and how sleepy he was during classes (symbolized by the sheep). (PL_F6_CH)



Children also noted some positive aspects of online teaching. They appreciated that they could use the dictionary more easily to check the meaning of words or sentences or in case of not being prepared – they could quickly go through their notes.

I: But on the other hand, you're talking about the fact that you could ask someone to help you and if you miss something, it's easier during the online teaching?

CH: Yes, well, tests, also papers are easier to write at home, that you can translate for example from the phone, you can see somewhere in the textbook, and you can't do it here.

I: Do you use a dictionary during lessons?

CH: Well, I did, when we were writing the tests in September, but a teacher saw that it would take a long time, that I would look up 1 word, more time, and therefore I wouldn't write the test.

I: So you didn't use it in the end?

- Yes. (PL_I1_CH_G)

If you haven't taught something and the teacher says she's going to ask now, you can quickly see something in the notebook and during the offline classes a teacher sees it all. (PL_I4_CH_G)

Children also noted that some teachers put more effort into preparing their lessons. They produced additional resources available to pupils: presentations, short movies, documents with additional information. But it was impossible to do all of the planned activities - e.g. they could not to some experiments on chemistry.

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)

Some children emphasized a relaxing and calm atmosphere during online teaching, which helped them to focus better on the lesson. Others, on the contrary, found online teaching chaotic, noisy and more challenging.

Online teaching also meant time being saved by children – which was also presented as an advantage. Children appreciated the fact that they did not have to travel to school: they just simply got up and were ready for their lessons. Attending lessons was as easy as never before: one could move to the class only by clicking.

For now, it's that you can wake up 5 minutes literally before the lesson, turn on and be already there. You can also sleep sometimes, just during a break let's say. (PL_I23_CH_G)

Extra-curricular activities

The Covid-19 pandemic affected children's after-class activities and leisure time. Throughout the lockdown, the restrictions of social distancing, self-isolation and limited access to public spaces negatively impacted the possibilities to organize extra-curricular activities. During any period of quarantine, schools did not offer any additional activities either offline or online. Some activities were restored when strict regulations were no longer in force. These included, for example, training sessions or one-off contests outside school. As a result, the children's daily practices continued to reflect their daily routine before the pandemic to some extent.

Relation with friends and family

To better understand the relationships between pupils during the pandemic, it is necessary to take a broader context into account. Firstly, the interviews with children in Lesser Poland and in the school located close to the centre for foreigners were done at different times, but in both cases they were conducted after the strict lockdown had ended, when social distancing was loosened. This change of regulations is reflected in the experiences of children: “During the first wave of the pandemic, only at the beginning, we met less often, there were two or three times we managed to meet, and then we met more and more often” (PL_I10_CH_G).

As the regulations related to Covid-19 were more restrictive for children living in the centre for foreigners, their relations with friends were negatively affected to much greater extent than children living in a big city or small communities. During the time of pandemic they suffered from a lack of face-to-face contact: they had only online contact with their friends as they were not allowed to leave the centre.

Both interviews and press reports suggest that at a time when free movement has been restricted due to the pandemic, opportunities to spend time with schoolmates outside of school were heavily modified and narrowed to the closest environment. Due to the pandemic, children could neither go outside with their peers or spend time with them at home. Their social contacts were often limited to only the closest relatives.

I: Did you hang out with your friends during this pandemic, did you go out?

CH: No. (...) I only went out with my family. (PL_I19_CH_B)

Especially children at the ISCED 2 level felt isolated since they spent almost the whole school year (from November to July) at home learning remotely. Moreover, children under 16 were not allowed to be outside by themselves between 8 AM and 4 PM, significantly restricting their freedom of

movement and potential to meet up with friends. Children felt disconnected from their friends and closed in their homes. During the focus interview, one of the girls illustrated this with the image of a person trapped inside a diamond, which symbolized the way she felt during the period of remote teaching (PL_F6_CH).



Other children talked about meeting in small groups or only with their best friend(s) which is also partially substituted by online communication (via videoconferences or chats). A consequence of this may be more frequently spending time with friends from one's own community than outside of it (a large proportion of the interviewees arrived in Poland recently, some during the pandemic, so perhaps relationships with the wider community have not yet been built).

I: What was it like with your colleagues, did you go out?

CH: With..., just met with the Ukrainians.

I: Colleagues, yeah? Did they come to your house? Or did you meet rather in the yard?

CH: Well, they used to come to..., well, to the house, to the yard sometimes.
(PL_I20_CH_B)

I: Yes, but when there was a lock down, when there was a pandemic, did you leave the house to talk to your friends?

CH: We used to meet around the house. (PL_I18_CH_G)

However, there were also more spontaneous, unplanned meetings: children just knew that others would be in the playground and so they went there after their classes. Difficulties with meeting children who lived outside the city is an important factor limiting the social contacts between children.

On the positive side, the Covid-19 pandemic was also a time which saw the development of new friendships:

CH: Well, I came to classes with [name of a teacher] and one day I started discussing the test with Lew. Well, he helped me, I helped him, and [name of the intercultural assistant] thought about it and said, why do not do it... (...) And that's how we became friends.
(PL_I17_CH_B)

Good relations with friends are also important in a context of online teaching. Children mentioned that they could ask for help if they did not understand something during online class, that they exchanged their notes: “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).

However, difficult situations and conflicts occurred. Children did not always respond to the questions posed by other pupils in the online communicator or their responses and joint assessment came too late. Such breakdowns in communication resulted in pupils being unprepared for the classes.

Well, only when I write to them [other pupils], they just don't reply. I write to our whole group, I ask about the assignment, for example, when I wasn't at school, I write what was on the assignment, they don't answer. I come the following day, I say that I don't have an assignment, because they don't answer me, and a teacher say, I don't care. And it's like that all the time, a teacher says to everyone, it doesn't matter to me. For example, when you don't know what the assignment was, she says, I don't care because you had to find out. And what if you write to someone and they don't answer you, what should you do? (PL_I21_CH_B)

4. Intercultural relationships at school

Research on intercultural relationships in school indicates that the term interculturalism itself is defined in different ways, which can make it difficult to understand the dynamics of experiences in school. We assume, following other researchers, that the notion of interculturalism cannot be treated as fixed or permanent; rather, it should highlight the dynamic aspect of different cultures (Hajisoteriou, Karousiou, and Angelides 2020; Januszewska, Markowska-Manista 2017). Making such an assumption leads to the rejection of a normative vision of intercultural relations. Instead, an understanding of interculturalism in school is proposed through concepts such as empathy, interaction, exchange and hybridity. It also draws attention to the three level construction of interculturalism at school: at the macro, meso and micro levels. The first of these includes an education that emphasizes the multiplicity of cultures and transnationalism in a global world and promotes intercultural solidarity. The meso level draws attention to the need to combat social inequalities and to rebuild social ties between different communities with different cultural capital. The micro level, on the other hand, refers to working on prejudice, stereotypes and xenophobia at school (Błaszynska 2008). Taking these considerations as a starting point, in this chapter we look at intercultural relations at school, focusing on selected themes emerging from interviews with students with a migrant background. We will present both peer relations, including conflict situations, and show educational practices at school which highlight interculturalism.

Peer relationships

The school as seen by pupils varies according to their individual experiences. Migrant children at schools in a big city most often describe their school experience through the prism of the homogeneity of the school, broken down by the presence of individual migrant children. They clearly identify their Polish classmates and those from their country of origin or from another country. Sometimes, this vision of the school is perceived as closed and unfriendly for newcomers, something exacerbated by the language barrier. The following quotes clearly indicate that language barriers maintain the homogeneity and closedness of the school and make it difficult for students to develop interactions with others from the school.

I: Well, and tell me, and in the school itself, how many of your classmates do you have who are from the Ukraine, or Belarus, or Vietnam, you know, from where, the UK, or something like that, are there any?

CH: Well, three of them are from Ukraine, four from Poland and everything.

I: Do you like each other? And who do you like more, the Polish or the Ukrainian?

CH: From Ukraine, because they understand me.

I: Oh, you talk to each other, yes. Do you hang out after school, too? Do you do something together?

CH: Yes. (PL_I20_CH_B)

Importantly, however, peer relationships tended to form across this divide. This means that migrant children develop friendships over time with both children with a migrant background and those without. When we look at how pupils talk about school and relationships within the school, homogeneity can be broken down by frequent intercultural interactions.

I: And here you have any colleagues, friends?

CH: Yes, I have Polish friends, Krzys and Dariusz. And I have a colleague, a friend from Ukraine. (PL_I2_CH_B)

At this point it is worth noting the specificity of schools with migrant children. Usually there are several pupils with a migrant background in one school, and only one or two migrant children attend the same classes. Such dispersion means that, in many situations, for newly arrived children, pupils with a migration background attending a particular school become a kind of “guide” to life and relationships in the school, showing the functioning of the building and the rules of the school.

I: And in your lessons, for example, what was helpful to you in the beginning?

CH: That's another one, secondly a friend... Also from Ukraine, she helped me very well. She helped to explain.

[INTERCULTURAL ASSISTANT: She was always helping him so he wouldn't write something down or forget something and she always told him what he needed.

I: And Valentina has been here longer?

CH: A year and a half.

I: So a little longer than you.

CH: Yes. (PL_I2_CH_B)

CH: Maybe if there hadn't been a pandemic, maybe I would have hung out with others, and yes, no, just from Ukraine with a friend.

I: And did she arrive long ago?

CH: She's a sixth grader from the middle.

I: So it was a little earlier, right?

CH: Yes.

I: So she could be a little bit, she's already been through this one herself, too, so she could be a little bit of support for you?

CH: Yes.

I: She knew where what was. And you sat in the pew with her?

CH: Yes.

I: And you sat in the classroom desk with her from the beginning too?

CH: No, from the beginning I sat with my friend and she sat with her brother and then he said he wanted to sit with his friends from Poland and I told our teacher I wanted to sit with her. (PL_I1_CH_G)

Relationships at school also translate into experiences outside of school. Students in a big city most often indicated that they met friends from their country of origin outside of school, slightly less often with students from Poland. However, this theme should be approached with some caution due to the Covid-19 pandemic as indicated in the previous section.

The role of peers from a migrant background also includes helping out in class, translating the teacher's instructions, explaining what has been learnt, explaining misunderstood vocabulary. However, in many situations pupils without migrant background also play a similar role and act as helpers in school and learning. It is worth noting that besides the supportive dimension, such guidance also deepens the interaction between the pupils and strengthens the children's agency and subjectivity. Importantly, however, the role of "helpers" is also played by pupils without migration experience - classmates.

I: And how do you need help because, for example, you were sick and you weren't in class, or...?

CH: I write to my friends to tell them what the subject was in class, what they talked about and then if it wasn't a difficult subject I could understand it myself, if it was difficult I could go to my mum and ask her to understand everything.

I: She explained something too, didn't she?

CH: Yes. (PL_I1_CH_G)

The key factor in building peer relationships most frequently turns out to be the students' common interests. Students mention school-organised projects or activities less frequently in this context, indicating a largely spontaneous dimension to their interactions.

I: And how many colleagues, friends do you have in your class?

CH: All of them.

I: Everyone in the class. And is there anyone who you communicate with better, in general, you communicate best, you have common themes, who is, thinks like you, you can count on? Then how many people is that in the class?

CH: Two.

I: And it's both a boy and a girl, right?

CH: Two boys.

I: Oh, two boys. And who's your best friend? Just them, those two boys?

CH: Yes.

I: And are these boys from Poland or are these boys...

CH: They are from Poland.

I: From Poland, and why are they such best friends?

CH: Because when I was in that class, that sixth grade class I was in, they immediately said come on, let's play something, come on, let's play something, and then tomorrow it was like that too, they helped, they helped everybody. (PL_I24_CH_B)

CH: We mix, but for the most part we spend our time in those groups where we feel most comfortable simply.

I: And what makes you feel comfortable in such groups?

CH: We just feel better in their company maybe.

I: And what else do you have in common.

CH: Interests. (PL_F5_CH)

Because we have such funny people here who are, to put it ugly, stupid sometimes a bit in is but sometimes you can laugh with them. (PL_F5_CH)

It sometimes happens that friendships are formed within the divide outlined at the beginning between children without and with a migrant background. But importantly, for the pupils themselves this is not a problem. They also do not feel bad when their group of friends is given a name that reflects their migration experience, e.g. “internationals” or “Ukrainians”. The creation of peer relationships reveals the agency of children, who emphasise that they stick with those who share their interests or who are close, helpful and funny to them, for example.

CH: Yeah, actually I don't know. We probably have about 4 groups or 3.

I: What causes that? What did they emerge from in the class based on?

CH: One group is boys, half the boys. The other group is three boys and probably the same with girls, I don't know. The so-called internationals, that is Ruslan, Sergey and Oleg also form such a small pack. And they just stick closest to each other.

I: Where did the term internationals even come from?

CH: My mum says so, but I've also heard it before.

CH: It's just an English name.

I: But do you call yourselves that or do they call you that?

CH: Max called it that.

I: You made it up?

CH: No, I didn't invent it, it's worked before. It's just the way they talk at other schools. At least my colleagues say it to their colleagues from abroad.

I: But you have used this term before?

CH: I did.

CH: I used the term Ukrainians. Although I am not from Ukraine.

I: Is it your group you use it like that or to someone else?

CH: Well, to us, yes. Because everyone somehow got used to the fact that it's rather Ukrainians who come to Poland. For example, our art teacher often calls us Ukrainians. I don't find it offensive.

CH: I don't care, honestly.

CH: But you are Ukrainian, so...

CH: But if someone says Russian, for example.

I: Have you been in this class from the beginning?

CH: I moved here in the middle of the year, Roman studied in a Ukrainian school for 2 months, I studied here for a year.

I: So you've only been together in this school here since this year?

CH: No, I've been here since the second year, Ruslan since the first year. (PL_F5_CH)

For some children, language is a barrier to forming relationships with peers. Due to a lack of competence in the language of the host country, children are more likely to form closer relationships with other pupils who speak their language. This allows them to express themselves more widely and talk about a variety of topics. This also shows that it is important for pupils to find a way of communication in which they feel comfortable.

Well, you can't say that I talk to all the girls there, I don't contact them that often, maybe in my class group, there at school I talk something, I talk more with girls who can speak my language. In my class we also have a girl from Belarus, I often contact her, I talk to her. Well, I think she is a very good friend, but for now she is only one who speaks the same language as me. We can talk about various topics, and I don't know everything in Polish yet. (PL_I4_CH_G)

Other students emphasised that speaking freely in a language they know and like is so important to them that they build their relationships transnationally by using available instant messaging and online communication methods. This, too, can be interpreted in terms of children's agency, as they take action themselves to fulfil their affective and social needs. However, this transnational dimension usually occurs outside the strictly school context.

I: Do you have any friends from Belarus or other countries?

CH: I have friends from Russia. I talk to them on Discord.

I: In what language?

CH: In Russian.

I: Do you speak Russian well?

CH: Yes, I know.

I: What does talking to them in Russian like that get you?

CH: I like talking to them because I only speak Russian at home, when I go out I only speak Polish, so I like talking to them because Russian is my favourite language you could say.

I: Do you mainly speak Russian at home?

CH: Yes, we speak Russian. (PL_I19_CH_G)

The experiences of children attending schools located close to centres for foreigners are slightly different. Here, the presence of refugee and migrant children is part of the everyday landscape of the school. In terms of class size, there are far more children with a migrant background, which contributes to a more heterogeneous school picture. The interactions between pupils transcend the “us” and “them” divisions. During focus interviews, children pointed out that their countries of origin are often the focus of attention from their peers.

They would ask and ask for different words, like would be good morning, in Russian or Chechen. (PL_F2_CH)

Once in Polish we had a topic, the teacher told me to talk about my country and religion and one boy from my class said “I want that too”. (PL_F4_CH)

The refugee children often emphasized the good and happy atmosphere at school, even if there are conflicts, they consider them as part of the school experience. Although in the past there were, according to them, situations where they felt isolated from the rest of their peers or treated unfairly at school, today they more often describe school through the prism of positive intercultural interactions. Only a few children pointed out the problem of lack of friends or creating a group of friends only within their own national group (Chechen).

Conflicts

Although the students mentioned the openness of schools to their presence and the friendships formed between peers at school, their stories also show that Polish schools are not free of prejudice. In the interviews, there were situations which mentioned bullying, teasing and harassment. Sometimes children referred to situations when the curiosity of children towards the new migrant pupils took the form of malicious and mean comments. Sometimes the children felt harassed on the grounds of their ethnicity by peers in class.

I: And surely it happened somehow that everything was great in relation to you. Did something maybe hurt you once, someone, something said?

CH: Well, sometimes, well, before, when I just came to this new class, everybody asked me questions, because I had my name written in English and everybody asked me what my real name was and why I had it written like that. And they were just terribly interested in it, well sometimes they laughed a bit, they made some jokes about it, but...

I: But who does it more often, boys or girls?

CH: Well, there was just one girl who laughed at it more, and I think it was the boys who approached it that way.

CH: Why do you think this girl asked where you were from? Did she ask why you came or not?

CH: Well, she didn't ask; I don't even know why she asked, but she just wanted to have a laugh and that was it.

I: And she's Polish, right?

CH: Yes.

I: But what do you think her reasons were?

CH: I don't know, maybe a new person in the class and she wanted to know as much as possible about this person, maybe just a new person. They never had such a person, just from abroad.

I: And do you like her, or are you more like...?

CH: Well, we're not really friends or colleagues, but well yeah, to argue, then no, well it's ok. (PL_I10_CH_G)

The children were very skilled at capturing situations in which their peers displayed verbal violence. Many of them referred to the migrant children's background.

CH: with my classmates I had that problem a little bit. But now everything is fine.

I: Tell me what it was. Tell.

CH: Well, one boy...

I: A Pole.

CH: A Pole, yeah. Oh, he said Ukrainians are shit, well, something like that. Well, it's all right now, so that. (PL_I17_CH_B)

I: Has anyone been treated unkindly at your school because they are from another country?

CH: In my school there was such a thing. I was in the first class, when we played war with the older boy. I hit him on the head with a toy block and he took revenge on me in the second class. (PL_I13_CH_B)

In conflict situations, however, students show a clear proficiency in resolving these situations. Most often they share information about the problem with their parents and teachers. In this way they show that they trust the teaching staff and that they are confident that they will be on their side.

I: Have you had situations where you or someone else was treated worse?

CH: I don't know if I was, because almost nobody liked me, because I'm from another country.

I: Was it like that or is it like that all the time?

CH: I don't know if it's like that all the time now because we're remote, but it was when we were in school.

I: How can you help in these situations?

CH: I don't know, because we're about to finish eighth grade and everyone's going to different schools, so there's no time to do anything anymore.

I: And for your younger siblings or for someone else, what could you do in that situation?

CH: You have to reach out to teachers and say that.

I: You didn't ask?

CH: No.

I: Why?

CH: I told my parents that when something important like that happened.

I: And what did the parents do then?

CH: Once my mom went to my teacher and said there were two girls there teasing me.

I: And they teased you in what way?

CH: I don't know, they just said something to me, I don't remember anymore, it was in that class.

I: And that helped?

CH: Not so much, they keep teasing me, saying something. (PL_I19_CH_G)

Sometimes they also resolve these conflicts on their own by choosing to talk to or cut off contact with the conflicting person, for example.

I: And tell me, try to remember now, because it's been five years since you've been in Poland, have there ever been any disagreements or conflicts between pupils in your class?

CH: That beating?

I: Conflict. It could be some kind of unpleasant conversation or you disagreed with something, not necessarily a beating right away.

CH: No.

I: And the fight came up?

CH: A fight is when someone my best friend accosts, I go and help.

I: Oh, so you're helping him in a fight, right?

CH: Yes.

I: And that happens a lot?

CH: Not often, no, not often.

I: Not often. But you help your best friend, the one from Poland, right?

CH: Yes.

I: But is he the one who gets into some conflicting situations or did that just happen sometimes?

CH: Sometimes it happened, at school there are, well, I saw two boys bad, who accost everybody. And these two boys were accosting my...

I: A colleague, yes?

CH: They accosted my friend, then I went, I said you can't fight, you have to walk together, help each other, and they went away and we went to school.

I: So you didn't fight, but resolved the conflict through conversation, yes?

CH: Yes. (PL_I24_CH_B)

In cases of discrimination from peers on the ethnic grounds, migrant children who have Polish friends turn to them for help.

I: Has there been any situation that has made you feel bad?

CH: I also have friends from the second grade, and I had a bit of a fight with them.

I: Why?

CH: I don't remember how it started, they were the ones who started talking to me.

I: Did they say anything bad?

CH: Well, a bit bad. So, I didn't pay attention to them, I went to my class; it was sad when they said that and that's why I didn't want to make trouble or something.

I: Did it happen often?

CH: It only happened once.

I: In some way, did someone help you with this?

CH: I have a Polish colleague who came up to me and asked why you were so sad, I told him that a pupil from another class had told me such and such so this colleague came up to them and said that nothing unpleasant could be said there, because he doesn't speak Polish. (PL_I27_CH_B)

It is worth noting that students sometimes do not want to share information about the conflict with teachers. They prefer to deal with it on their own. They are afraid that their difficulties will be trivialized, lumped together with other minor situations at school.

I: Did you tell the teacher how you had these enemies?

CH: No, I didn't, I didn't tell her not to tell me that we had any problems, well they have their problems, a lot of kids have their problems, that's where someone insults them, that boy, I just hate him too, I can't hold on. We play tag with him there, for example, he just comes up and beats me in the back. He just comes up and beats me in the back.

I: To other children is he like that too?

CH: Well, to all of them, to some even more is bad. (PL_I21_CH_B)

Intercultural practices

The interviews also asked about different intercultural practices that are implemented in the school. Among other things, students emphasised the importance of situations in which they could tell something about themselves to the whole class. Most often such situations were initiated by teachers. Usually the request to tell something about oneself, about the school one attended before, about one's country of origin, was positively evaluated by the pupils and seen as an opportunity to express oneself and to gain visibility in the class.

At the beginning of the year, when we came to class, the class teacher gathered the class, we sat like that in a circle and talked. They introduced us as new students and asked us to tell them about ourselves, our country, there school that was. We said that in Ukraine there were more subjects at school, I remember this, I told them something about myself, but not that much, I think, it was more interesting about another country. I agree, for example if someone from another country came to our class in Ukraine, we also asked about it. Well, there was one hour. Then, somehow, during the WC, also similar to what you do as a formative hour, we simply talk to the class. Well, now we had career counselling, we don't have it anymore, but it was like that for half a year, in the first semester, that we talked, we said something about ourselves. But everyone said something about themselves, you used to stop us, ask how the language was. Then another new pupil appeared, already this year. The first one was from Belarus, but I don't remember, she told something about herself during the lessons, because everyone understood something about her from the conversation. And the new pupil was already a Pole from another city, I think during the JD lesson. For him, the ladies asked us to tell something about ourselves, because he didn't know we were from Ukraine. (PL_I4_CH_G)

CH: Actually, first I came to this school I met with my classmates and they prepared like... How do you say it? Flashcards. So like cards, so in English for me, 'How are you?' 'How are you?', numbers. So it was like... They were very welcoming to me. So yes. (PL_I22_CH_G)

Few students mentioned that they did not have the opportunity to talk about their country of origin and culture. Sometimes they stressed that nobody was interested in such information. This situation occurred more often in the context of schools where there were more migrant children.

I: And do you tell your classmates anything about Chechnya at school?

CH: No.

I: They're not interested in it at all? They don't ask? And do you remember Chechnya?

CH: Mhm. [contradiction]. (PL_I25_CH_G)

I: And for example, were the children in your class curious about the place you came from when you came here? Did they ask you anything about Belarus?

CH: No. (PL_I5_CH_G)

Although the interviews with teachers (especially those working near the Centre for Foreigners) show that schools often organise various projects and undertake activities aimed at exchanging information about different cultures, from the children's perspective, these events are not particularly important - they are rarely mentioned. They more often talk about situations which in their opinion occur spontaneously between students and/or teaching staff.

In the collected interviews, the use of mother tongue at school also appeared. Students point out that sometimes it is required to use mainly Polish during breaks or at play, which is supposed to make it easier for students to acquire the language. This shows that Polish schools are still closer to an assimilation model than to a hybrid model, one open to linguistic and cultural diversity. It is therefore important to provide the experience of both learning the language of instruction and the opportunity for expression in the language of origin. This does not at all imply a withdrawal of students from integration; on the contrary, with a sense of empowerment and the conviction that they can express their values (also through language) and negotiate their identity and build it towards a hybrid identity, they can be more open with Polish students and teachers.

CH: We came, there they went to one such room at the end of the corridor. There was another girl there from Ukraine as well, who then me and Ilja, my brother still, to speak only Polish, but we couldn't speak Polish. So they tried something. And then they told us that we really only had to speak Polish, or learn it first, even during the breaks they asked us to do this.

I: Teachers?

CH: No, not the teachers, but they did.

I: Who asked?

CH: I don't remember. It wasn't a ban on speaking in your own language, it wasn't a ban at all, it was just advice to make it easier to speak. Well, later we still spoke Russian with that friend, she understood that I didn't know Polish, so she showed me everything here. She showed me the library. (PL_I4_CH_G)

An important practice for shaping the intercultural dimension of education at school is the engagement of intercultural assistants. Most pupils were positive about the presence of such assistants, indicating not only help with language and with understanding a culture new to them, but also a feeling of being “looked after” at school. The latter enabled the pupils to find their way in the Polish school and build up interactions within the class.

So teachers are nice. The school got me an assistant. So it like made the joining this school easier and I am doing perfectly well with everyone else in this school. They are nice to me. Yeah. (PL_I22_CH_G)

CH: The most fortunate thing is that we have Mr. Sergio.

I: He's your cultural assistant?

CH: You could say that.

I: And what does Mr. Sergei do?

CH: We read books with him. To everyone, everyone. (PL_I21_CH_B)

5. Identity and belonging

In the interviews with the children, there were no direct statements indicating a sense of belonging or providing an answer to the identity question: Who am I? It can be indirectly concluded from the statements that the children are hung between two worlds and are in the process of forming a hybrid identity. This is facilitated by the fact that most parents try to maintain communication at home in both the language of origin and the traditions of the country of origin either through cuisine or through religious traditions (e.g. in the case of Muslim children). However, as the process of identity formation takes place during adolescence (10/12-18/20 years), it is difficult to talk about a formed

identity in the case of the children in our study. Rather, we can discuss experiences consisting of behaviours, emotions, or perception of reality that are related to the process of hybrid identity formation. These experiences concern emotions related to the country of origin, language, and family practices.

Emotions related to the country of origin

When children talk about their country of origin, they frequently referred to lost relationships with both family members - grandmothers, grandfathers, but also with friends. Feelings of nostalgia, a sense of loss and missing can be identified in these statements.

I: And do you like living here at all?

CH: Not so much.

I: And what is it that you don't like, that is difficult?

CH: Well, I don't have many friends. And that' all. (PL_I5_CH_B)

I: You said you miss your friends from Ukraine.

CH: Well I miss them, but not all of them, only five people.

I: Tell me something about them...

CH: They were my classmates, three boys, two girls, they are my kind of little family. (PL_I15_CH_B)

CH: I would like to go back to my grandparents, to my grandmother, to visit them, or they would come here. (PL_I27_CH_B)

CH: [I miss] my friends and the fact that I understand everything. And for the twelfth-graders [highest grade in Ukraine].

I: And do you remember when you said that you always walked from morning to evening on the street?

CH: When it was summer vacation, I would go from 6:00 in the morning to 9:00 in the evening playing with everybody. (PL_I17_CH_B)

Children also keep in touch with friends in their home country. Very often they had left there their best friends whom they miss very much. Children maintained relationships through communicators such as Viber, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp. Sometimes children also visit their friends or, when this is not possible, they play computer games together.

M: When you think of the school, this school in Ukraine, what do you recall? Or who?

CH: And also my friend Anastasia.

M: Did she go to class with you?

CH: Yes.

M: Did you share a desk together?

CH: Yes.

M: Do you keep in touch with this Anastasia? Can you write to her somehow, or through some messenger?

CH: Yes, through Instagram. (PL_I6_CH_G)

M: Did you like going to school in Ukraine?

CH, boy, 11 years old, a migrant from Ukraine: Yes, it was very nice. (...)

M: Did you have friends there?

CH: Yes.

M: Do you still remember them?

CH: Mhm. My friends and I played computer games every day.

M: The kind online that you connect to?

CH: Mhm.

M: What do you play?

CH: Well, a game like that, Counter Strike. (...)

M: Do you talk, apart from playing?

CH: Yeah, we talk. I mean, we always talk. (PL_I7_CH_B)

M: Do you have any friends in Belarus?

CH: My friends are Maksim, my second and Staś. They're my good friends.

M: Well, it's nice to have a friend, not a colleague, but a friend of his.

CH: And now I'm writing text messages on the computer. We tell each other things.

M: But when you come [to Belarus], you will probably be able to see each other?

CH: Yes. (PL_I2_CH_B)

In a few cases, the children of economic migrants managed to meet with family and friends during either holiday trips or when friends or family members visited them in Poland. However, this type of activity was significantly limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

CH: Holiday, well we would like to go to grandma and grandpa in Ukraine. But there is a problem, that there is an epidemic. Well there is a problem with them and for sure that we can get infected. (PL_I3_CH_B)

In the case of children from Belarus, conflict and the political situation made it even more difficult to travel, affecting children's opportunities and readiness to return to their home country.

The last but equally important obstacle mentioned by the children was the economic status of the family. As one of the girls admitted: "We don't know [if we will go]. The ticket is a lot. We need tickets, we need money and now it's a bit hard" (PL_I14_CH_G).

On the other hand, when they talked about their country of origin as a place, there were statements indicating fear, or insecurity. Then they talked about Poland as a safe, clean, orderly country, where they would like to stay and plan their future.

CH: Here I like the streets, in Ukraine there were a lot of holes in the road, you couldn't go out there with your bike. Here is more...

I: Bicycle roads.

CH: Lots of it. Still the look of the streets is beautiful, the Old Town is...

I: Reconstructed.

CH: In Ukraine it was old, really old, it was scary to walk there. Well, I really like a lot being here. (PL_I2_CH_B)

I: So if you had to choose, for example, whether here or in Belarus, where would you choose?

CH: In Belarus it's not good now, so...[here].(PL_I16_CH_B)

Children talk about the differences between the two countries largely in aesthetic terms; nevertheless, these statements are largely related to the perception of Poland as a safe place. Direct statements pointing to a greater sense of security in Poland are made by children who have lived in places threatened by war.

CH: I lived in Iran, Iraq and Syria and there was a lot of war. And my dad and my mom thought that our future, there in Turkey will not be so good, because there was so much war, so much noise and so much fear. And they thought where to move to, and they thought of Poland, maybe they thought of Germany first, maybe no Germany, then they thought of Poland. And we went to Georgia, we lived there for two months. And from there we flew to Poland and we already decided that we would stay in Poland, and that's it. And we're not going to move anywhere else. And we'll stay in Poland all our lives. During vacations we'll also go somewhere, but we'll live in Poland till the end. (...) And I'd rather stay in Poland. (PL_I26_CH_B)

Most children talk about Poland as a country where they would like to spend their future, although they often indicate that they will visit their country of origin and people from their family and Poland who are visiting them in Poland during vacations and trips.

I would rather stay in Poland, because Poland is such a nice country, very good, it is not so bad, not so unpleasant, it is a very good country. And I would also prefer to stay here in the future. If my opinion changes in the future, I don't know, but this summer and at this time I'd rather stay in Poland all the time, because I've also learned the language well. And I've already known well how do they celebrate holidays and everything here. (PL_I26_CH_B)

The children only talk about their country of origin in the context of school, more specifically classes where they talked about their language and the city they came from.

We tell our friends how Chechnya looked like, like our house. For example, my house was built by my father together with his brothers. There was a place where we could climb on the roof. It was very cool there, you could see all the stars. (PL_F1_CH)

The statements indicating that children talk about their own experiences with people from their country of origin can be inferred indirectly from statements indicating that children understand each other best with children who speak their language. Some children try to adapt, to integrate into the group, but they do not manage to do so because of language reasons.

I: And tell me, during the break at school, do you speak Russian with your friends or Polish?

CH: In Russian and in Polish, because, well, my classmates don't understand Polish. (PL_I20_CH_B)

I: And why do you stick together, people from abroad?

CH: Language.

I: Is that when you communicate in another language during school?

CH: Sometimes yes.

I: And what is the reason for this?

CH: It's easier and it's just more fun when everyone stares at us and doesn't understand us. Nobody understands us and we talk about whatever we want. (PL_F5_CH)

This theme is further described in the section on peer relations.

Language aspects

As already mentioned, most children do not speak Polish before coming to Poland, which is the greatest barrier at the beginning of their stay in Poland. Children rarely have the chance to prepare for the change of residence by learning Polish before their arrival in Poland. Those whose parents ensured that this took place ended up overcoming the language and culture barrier much faster.

I: Did you know Polish before your arrival, or did you learn it here?

CH: Well, I learned a little bit there, but also in kindergarten I started to learn more Polish when I talked to other people here. (PL_I10_CH_G)

It can be noted that the lack of language proficiency not only manifests itself in educational difficulties but also as a barrier to communication with peers, meaning that children lack a sense of belonging in the peer group. In most cases, children treat language instrumentally, for communication purposes rather than for defining their own identity. Only one child directly referred to language as a tool to develop a hybrid or national Polish identity. This statement indicates that language can be a way to "be Polish" and develop a sense of belonging to a place, which confirms our belief, expressed earlier in this report, that language can be the key to the construction of hybrid identities.

CH: I like, I like Polish language, I like English the most, I like math and biology too.

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

CH: Because I want to learn Polish very well.

I: And why?

CH: 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)

They rather use Polish during classes at school and the language of their parents' origin at home. The moments when children use Polish outside the school context and the language of their parents' origin in the school context are important, as they indicate the voluntary use of these languages by the child. The frequency of use of these languages depends, among other things, on the time of stay in Poland, parents' attitude to learning a new language, and the country of origin of the children.

Many children in our group are from Ukraine. It is worth mentioning that children attending schools in Ukraine and Belarus are often bilingual. Depending on the region, Ukrainian children may speak Russian at home and Ukrainian at school or vice versa. In the case of children from Belarus, they usually speak Russian and sometimes Belarusian additionally at home. However, children emphasize that Ukrainian and Belarusian languages are similar to Polish, so they acquire them quite quickly. This is rather true for pupils who do not experience any developmental or learning difficulties.

We speak Russian in the family. At school and wherever we meet people we speak Polish. And in 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)

The length of stay in Poland is also important. The longer the time of stay in Poland, the safer children feel in communicating in Polish, and also, in the school environment itself. Children who have been in Poland for a shorter period of time, for example one year, often still experience difficulties.

CH: Yes, I installed such an application on my phone where this, Polish letters, alphabet, I learned it, then I learned numbers through a translator, then words, because I had extra Polish classes.

CH: And do you sometimes have any difficulties with expressing yourself?

I: Well, I have difficulties with difficult words. With writing well and very well, I understand very well.

I: And at home, what language do you speak when you come home from school, from work, your parents?

CH: In Russian. (PL_I11_CH_B)

Most of the children participating in the study, regardless of their country of origin or type of migration (voluntary or forced), tend to speak their parents' language at home, and the Polish language mainly features at school and in contact with their Polish peers. The shorter the period that the family has been in Poland, the more motivated they sometimes are to learn Polish. If parents have the resources to support their children and actively motivate them to learn Polish, then at home the family undertakes joint practices to acquire Polish. Often during the language learning stage children watch movies and read Polish books.

My father often said we watched some videos about Polish language to learn more and thanks to that I know a lot already. For example grammar, how to use the word "to be" I learned thanks to those videos and now I know it well, I've learned it for life. Well, everyone helped each other. (PL_I4_CH_G)

However, in many homes, even though parents try to speak their language of origin to their child, for example, one of the children stops speaking the language of origin of his/her parents because he/she is so immersed in the new culture. This often happens to younger siblings who were either born in Poland or came to Poland at a young age.

CH: I speak Polish with their sister, sometimes Polish with mom and dad, and brother in his own language [Tajik]. Well, but my sister only speaks Russian, Polish, not our language.

I: And you don't speak Tajik?

CH: No, she speaks Polish and Russian. She was born in Tajikistan and we came here, and she was very small. And then she went to kindergarten. (PL_I24_CH_B)

The use of the language of origin at home not only to communicate with parents but also to spend leisure time watching movies often appears in the statements of children from schools attached to refugee centres, most often from Chechnya, who speak Russian or Chechen at home. Often the children support their parents by acting as interpreters in these families.

CH: At home we speak Chechen and Russian and Polish when we need to explain something to parents. (PL_F4_CH)

CH: I watch videos in Polish to understand something and for the rest I watch them in Russian. (PL_F4_CH)

Over time, the children develop a kind of flexibility, a fluency in multiple languages, which may be a manifestation of hybrid identity development. Language is a tool for moving between social contexts and also, over time, when the family feels secure, a variety of practices and the free use of multiple languages is observed. Through a language lens, we can also follow the process of negotiating identity, presenting one's ethnicity or, conversely, efforts to blend into a community or peer group.

I: And what language do you speak at home?

CH: It depends, because for example with my dad we speak more Polish, with my mom I speak Ukrainian and with my brother it depends, but more often Polish. Depending on the need and the situation. (PL_I10_CH_G)

Family practices

Children talk about ways they spend time together with their parents. These include watching TV, playing games, eating meals, spending vacations together, doing religious practices or learning Polish together. Some of them say that they watch Polish films and YouTube videos together to learn the language or watch films in their native language to have a good time, as described in the section above. Chechen children from schools located next to the centres for foreigners, but also some Ukrainian children from schools in big cities say that cooking and eating together is a way to keep their parents' culture of origin at home. However, it is usually a combination of Polish cuisine (tomato soup, borscht) and the cuisine of their parents' origin (gałuszki, manty, pielmieni, varienniki) (PL_F3_CH).

I: And tell me what dishes you eat most often at home. Are these dishes Chechen, or are they Polish? Because you have lived in Poland for a long time.

CH: Oh, yes. A lot of Chechen food is cooked by my mother using Polish products. Well, of course we eat Polish products because it would be difficult to import Chechen products to Poland. But this is rather...All these are Chechen dishes. (PL_I25_CH_G)

Another food-related activity is the celebration of religious holidays in Muslim families, which is an important part of maintaining the culture of the parents' country of origin.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Summary of all results

The study examines the experiences of two distinct groups of migrant children which reflect influxes of people coming to Poland and are an important and valuable cognitive exemplification of issues relating to their education and adaptation. All the children were born outside Poland and, together with their families, went through a complex process of adaptation at school and in society.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, the following conclusions can be ventured. The focus is on the following topics: language acquisition and school achievements, the school as a lived social space: peer relations, conflicts, identity and belonging, and the Covid-19 pandemic in the eyes of children. Theoretical reflections based on the research are presented along with some recommendations.

Language acquisition: Polish as a language of instruction

Research shows the importance of the language as a cultural capital for children's successes at school, their further educational plans and integration at school. It also plays a significant role outside the educational context as it shapes social interactions with their peers. The level of proficiency in Polish among children varies. The children of economic migrants, usually originating from Ukraine and Belarus, speak Polish much better than the children of refugees from Muslim countries. Geographical proximity and cultural affinity facilitate language learning, understanding and communication at school. While most of the children did not speak Polish before their migration to Poland, those whose mother tongue belongs to the same language group or whose parents supported in the process of language learning, have more advance command of Polish. Yet, most of the interviewed children have some problems with the Polish language, especially concerning writing, applying grammar rules, and with producing fluent speech. This happens even though children attended additional, remedial Polish language classes that migrant children are entitled to, they also used help provided by intercultural assistants employed at school, or in a centre for foreigners or by volunteers. Over time, the children have become bilingual and they have not abandoned the use of their native language. In situations when they encounter limitations in their use of Polish language, they substitute missing word(s) with Russian, Chechen, or Ukrainian, and even English ones. In general, children indicate that migration contributes to their multilingualism (at various levels), which, in the future, will not only be an asset on the labour market, but for their families, and also for learning about the world and engaging in a multicultural dialogue (e.g. one of the refugee students knows five languages: Russian, Turkish, Kurdish, Polish, and English).

School achievement and education plans

Despite a few individual successes, the refugee children are a disadvantaged group as concerns the further stages of their education, especially because of the peripheral location of the centre where they are located. This situation does not limit their educational aspirations and some boys mentioned dreams of becoming doctors, actors or policemen. Refugeeism, trauma, and uncertainties about the future of their parents exert an adverse impact on their educational aspirations. This is especially the case with girls, who often talked about the expectation of getting married early, even though they do not express their satisfaction with cultural norms in the country of their origin in that respect and talked about a desire to pursue their education. The boys, in turn, mentioned getting a job quickly and earning money. Refugee children live in large families, where they have several siblings (5 to 6), and this is a factor which means that they need to provide care for their younger siblings and help them with learning. Therefore, the educational chances of children depend on their Polish language skills, the educational aspirations of their parents and themselves, the economic capital of their families, the consequences of their refugee fate and cultural norms relating to gender.

Children arriving from Ukraine or Belarus are extremely ambitious and nearly all of them wish to go to universities and study prestigious disciplines such as: medicine, computer science, or biology. Children from Ukraine most often indicate that mathematics is their favourite subject as it poses no difficulties for them at school.

In a significantly emotional manner, the children described how they assess their teachers and the support provided by them, understanding their difficulties in acquiring knowledge, or failures to meet school obligations, especially during the pandemic. In principle, the first days or months of their stay

in the new school shaped their attitude towards teachers. Most of the children positively assessed their teachers, quoting their kindness, the attractiveness of lessons and their merit-related content. They would seldom describe cases of a teacher displaying reluctance towards a migrant child, public disapproval of visible linguistic difficulties, or giving unfair grades for homework, tests, or short quizzes. Children talked about being afraid of speaking up in public and a fear of being laughed at and receiving low grades.

Real school – ideal school

School is not only seen as a learning institution, one focused on carrying out educational activities, but it also constitutes an important interactive space. A positive image of Polish schools also emerges in contrast to schools in the children's countries of origin. Most of the children perceive them as welcoming and supportive places, and they would not change much about them. They accepted the school as it was, and those who made any remarks would point to the absence of choice at the canteen, too many children in the classroom, and the fact that grey colours predominate in the school building. Refugee children would also appreciate more peace and quiet at school, and expressed a desire for teachers to not shout at them during lessons. The presence of silence in the educational process is significant, especially in a time of ubiquitous noise and increasing hyperactivity of children and adolescents. Primarily, for children, an ideal school is one with fair, helpful teachers who can be trusted.

Peer relations and the school environment

Based on narratives by many migrant children it appears that a classroom is an affective structure, one in which sympathies and antipathies were strongly manifested. The intensity and character of peer relations vary depending on the situation of each child, the school context, the family situation, and location. Together with teachers, students repeatedly perform complex emotional work to become accepted in the classroom and establish bonds with their peers. The school principal and teachers often sought to effectively solve the problems faced by migrant students using intercultural assistants. The role of the school administration, the sensitivity to migrant children's needs and their situation and a welcoming attitude from the form room teacher were crucial for establishing peer relations. Most of the children we interviewed did not speak Polish on arrival and therefore establishing peer relations was difficult. Nonetheless, a majority of the children pointed out to having Polish friends who had displayed kindness and friendship towards them, and also that they had received help in the case of a specific need. Based on the statements made by boys from Ukraine, it appears that establishing peer relations was easier when there were also other migrant children in the class. They highlighted vertical bonds among migrant students within the space of the entire school particularly strongly. 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. A few students highlighted being badly treated by their peers, the use of hate speech - 'why did you come here', 'you Ruskie', 'this is Poland here', and the use of physical violence. A few students mentioned a lack of relationships with Polish peers (e.g. sitting alone at their desks, it was hard for them to ask for peers to send them homework when they were absent from school). Others pointed out that they had not been invited to a schoolmate's house to a birthday party. With time, however, those relations improved in most cases, and the interpersonal attractiveness of migrant students increased. In children's narratives several elements

were identified which helped them to integrate with their peers. Boys would play football together or their favourite online games, while girls would walk, talk, or browse favourite websites with classmates.

Polish schools are ceasing to be a nationally homogeneous institution and face numerous challenges regarding the equal treatment of students, work on multicultural education at school, and engagement in dialogue with migrant students. It is a social fact that alongside the old divisions which exist in Polish schools, including gender, social class, or place of residence, new dimensions are appearing such as ethnic group, nationality, religion, or migrant legal/social status. Considering intersectionality, Polish schools seem to be an increasingly complex construct and affective structure. Research shows that children also keep in touch with friends in their home country. In this respect, online tools are very useful, especially communicators like Messenger, Telegram, Viber, or Skype, and children sometimes also play computer games together with friends from their country of origin.

Conflict and disagreements in school spaces

As already mentioned, migrant children mentioned violence at school several times, including fights (among boys), and hostile attitudes of peers towards them. However, what is significant for students is that they tried to resolve conflicts themselves without engaging either teachers or their parents. Therefore, children's agency was mostly realised when they managed to solve a difficult situation or conflict by themselves. Nonetheless, there were some situations presented which had to be resolved by teachers in collaboration with parents. In the case of two boys from refugee families who engaged in school fights, their fathers were asked to intervene. Such interventions by fathers occur rarely since children ask their mothers for help more often. In the case of the children from Ukraine and Belarus who were persecuted on the basis of their nationality, their mothers made a successful intervention which forced teachers to solve a problematic situation. Apart from parents, older siblings were also very often a trusted person for children.

Identity and the sense of belonging

Statements made by children rather unambiguously highlighted that they are characterised by a gradually forming hybrid identity which is a complex construct resulting from a mixture of cultures, an impact of the receiving country's culture on their patterns of behaviour, its rules of social life concerning both a private and public sphere. As the children participating in the study are still in the process of identity formation, which is a developmental task for adolescents and emerging adults, we discussed experiences which indicate the development of a hybrid identity in the group of respondents. On one hand, the examined students clearly identify themselves with their country of origin, knowing who they are: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Chechens, or Kurds, and, on the other, they affirmed their life in Poland, which had improved the living conditions of their families, or as a safety shelter in the case of war and political persecutions in the country of origin of their parents. They like Poland, like learning at Polish schools and enriching their knowledge of the Polish language. Most of the examined students wish to live, continue their learning, and ultimately work in Poland, apart from a handful of students from Chechnya, who want to return to the homeland of their parents. They have a vivid memory of their place of origin and refer to original experiences from their childhood, school, peer relations, and primarily, relations with their family. Their memories of their country of origin are cherished in traditions passed on by their parents, online relations with members of their families and their friends and colleagues who had been left behind. Refugee children are socialised

in accordance with the rules of Muslim religion and those rules are not challenged in their statements at all. Their parents, who strongly control all spheres of their lives, are authority figures for them. While almost all the children use the language of their country of origin at home, which is mainly Russian (being a demonstrative indicator of how strong Russia's colonial impact has been on forming the core of Ukrainian and Belarusian culture), or the Chechen and Russian languages in the case of refugee children. Children 'from behind Poland's eastern border' watch Russian television, read Russian books, and use the Russian Internet and play Russian online games. A majority of them do not attend religion classes and are not engaged in Orthodox religious practices at home. Culinary customs characteristic for their culture are maintained, although they are also open to Polish food habits. 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. They talk at least once a week with grandparents with whom they maintain bonds, and planning holiday trips to see them are particularly warmly mentioned by migrant children. 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 (Slany, Strzemecka 2018).

Theoretical implications and reflections arising from the research

Considering the results of our research, we believe that a concept of agency, rights and participation in communication, developed by Claudio Baraldi and his associates, is of particular importance and significance in explaining the agency of migrant children and their intercultural communication (Baraldi 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2018). The CHILD-UP project actually "recognises children's agency as children's active participation enhanced through the availability of choices of action, which subsequently enhance alternative actions, and therefore change in the interaction" (Baraldi 2014a). While children's active participation can happen at any time in communication, the achievement of agency needs the promotion of a child's active participation in relation to choice and construction of meaning". Being of key significance, the concept of a child-centred approach places the importance of children in the centre and is further appreciated by a child-friendly approach, which is defined as an "accessible, age appropriate, speedy, diligent adapter to and focused on the needs and right of the child, respecting the rights of the child including the rights to due process, to participate in and to understand the proceedings, to respect for private and family life and to integrity and dignity." (Promoting ...2019). Migrant children's agency may be analysed in terms of various dimensions and within socio-cultural contexts, institutional and legal considerations, and in terms of experiences relating to the integration of migrants, including children and their formation in the educational system.

As we emphasise, there are migrant children in every school in large cities and smaller towns, especially in places where Centres for Foreigners are located. In such towns, certain classes are made up of only refugee children. In a large city, the number of migrant children differs from class to class; there are usually 2-3 students present. Although these are small numbers, they nevertheless bring about changes in the structure of a class and the occurrence of important processes due to their ethnic and national, cultural, religious, and language context.

The concept of children's agency allows the discovery of various forms of activities which also enhance children's agency, finding differences and similarities among the countries participating in

the Child UP project. Such an approach also allows attention to be focused on both the organized and informal activities of children, their participation in the life of their school, peers, and family. Undoubtedly, organized tasks and activities may be indicated that are pursued by schools which aim at supporting and empowering migrant children (additional Polish language classes, teachers working with children on a one-to-one basis, support provided by intercultural assistants, the employment of a Polish language teacher in centres for refugees). Schools are also often supported in those tasks by non-governmental organisations, the role of which in children's integration appears to be unprecedented. We discovered that children's agency is most evident in their efforts to learn Polish, in establishing peer relations and especially in the way children resolve conflict situations, including violence and bullying. In the future, special attention should be paid to the activities of informal circles composed of migrant children functioning within the school's formal structures (e.g. involving Ukrainian or Chechen children). Research shows that those children are especially active during lessons (which was also proven during lesson observations conducted within WP6). There are many cautious signs about prospects for a substantial improvement of participation opportunities for children in schools. The adoption of the presented concept shows which activities should be enhanced, developed, and followed in order to improve the quality of life of migrant children, and what aspects should be enhanced in order for the migrant pupils to feel important when expressing their opinions. 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.

The results of our research allow us to stress the importance of the framework of intersectionality that has been highlighted in the CHILD UP project. Alongside gender, social class, and place of residence, new dimensions have appeared in Polish schools including: ethnicity, nationality, religion, country of immigration, and refugeeism. The educational achievements of children, their progress in learning, educational ambitions, and their identity are explicitly correlated with the migrant status of the children's parents. Children of economic migrants cope better at school and have high aspirations in comparison with refugee children. Different forms of agency (knowledge of the Polish language and its continuous improvement, preference for specific school subjects, having friends, trust in teachers and parents) depend on those dimensions, and which must be investigated further within a perspective of influences of the informal dimensions of the life of migrants.

As concerns refugee children, gender sensitive approaches turned out to be of extreme importance. Refugee girls feel obliged to follow the principles of Muslim religion and accept norms related to gender-driven roles. Only a few of them have high educational aspirations, since they know that they are expected to get married quite early (which is also seen in a statement made by a female teacher). They are thinking of returning to Chechnya where marriages have already been arranged for them. Girls from Ukraine and Belarus are very ambitious, dreaming of studying and pursuing prestigious professions. As regards their future, they are more focused on living in Poland than in their country of origin.

The concepts of hybrid identity are very useful in explaining the identity and sense of belonging of migrant children. Children combine what is important for their cultures of origin with the culture of a country of their migration. They learn Polish, improve their achievements at school, link their lives with Poland, know who they are, and which country they are from. At home, children talk in the language of their parents, and cherish their family relations, bonds with family members in their country of origin, religious (refugees), customary, and culinary traditions. Children are important agents of transnational family and national practices and this is a role which requires much deeper research and analysis. At the same time, at the stage of conducting the research, schools still remained highly homogeneous, and the lack of previous experience of working with migrant students meant that often the natural model of school work was one based primarily on assimilation (rather than integration). Although schools allowed migrant students to express their own identities and needs, they often did so under the rules set by Polish culture.

Summary of the situation of migrant children in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic

Remote learning was a long-lasting experience and involved the significant rearrangement of children's lives and those of their siblings and parents. In the opinion of migrant children, remote learning was assessed differently, having both its advantages and disadvantages.

Children highlighted a break in their direct relations with teachers and certain difficulties in understanding lessons. During traditional forms of learning they were able to ask questions, and the teacher could immediately respond to a child's requests. During distance learning, there were cases of children not doing their homework, which was due to their lack of understanding of lessons and the teacher's orders.

Intercultural assistants offered significant support for children, however, they could only help them with their homework or in transferring essential information in an online mode only. Their limited contacts with Polish peers prevented them from asking for clarifications or obtaining help in doing lessons. Students would indicate that teachers did not require switching cameras on, which provided for anonymisation of the lessons and major leniency towards their merit-based relations with the teacher. The time of remote learning stopped the process of active participation in the lesson, the mandatory use of the Polish language, developing interactions with the teacher and schoolmates. It undoubtedly contributed to children becoming invisible, hiding behind a switched-off camera and being seated in a "home room". The role of the language of the child's country of origin is highlighted and amplified during the pandemic. Thus, further research should be conducted into the impact of the pandemic on children's language skills and their integration process. Furthermore, the invisibility and silence of children are an adverse development brought about by remote learning, the consequences of which would take us much longer to explore than we have space at this time.

The absence of a direct contact with peers from the classroom was very negatively assessed. Some of the children mentioned that they sometimes would make appointments in the playground with their school friends from their country of origin. Nonetheless, a clear majority of the relations were established in a screen-to-screen mode.

Most of the children had their own computer equipment, however, it did not mean that it was high quality hardware, since children would mention failures of cameras, speakers, and on-line connection breaks and the main technical obstacle was the weak internet connection. Technical obstacles were a

serious constraint on full participation in lessons. Some migrant children, especially those from families with multiple children, were provided with computer equipment by the school, or (especially in the case of refugee students) laptops were purchased by the ‘For the Earth’ Association thanks to an online fundraising event organised especially for that purpose. Arranging a space for learning posed a serious challenge for parents and children pointed out that conditions for remote learning were not comfortable because of the modest housing conditions and sharing one room space with 2 or 3 of their siblings.

Among the advantages of the remote learning, children mostly appreciated having more time to sleep and the lack of a need to get up early was an extra bonus afforded by the pandemic.

According to the interviewed teachers and intercultural assistants (see the WP5 report with professionals), the pandemic stopped the process of the integration of foreign children, locking them up in their ‘termite mounds’ or huge blocks of flats/centres, thus translating into worse learning results.

Recommendations

- Paying attention to areas of conflicts between Polish and migrant children within the school and non-school space;
- Drawing the attention of teachers, principals, parents, and intercultural assistants to hostile attitudes towards migrant children;
- Anti-discrimination workshops for children and teachers; Developing training, methods of mediation in the event of conflicts, violence at school, ridicule, and harassment;
- Supporting children’s education across all subjects, with a special focus on Polish language and history aimed at providing additional opportunities for learning based on lived interactions with teacher;
- Fair grading of migrant children’s papers/ test /essays, avoiding bias and favouring Polish children;
- Promoting friendships among children with and without a migration background;
- Recognising the identity of migrant children, their religious and cultural practices;
- Recognising and supporting multiculturalism of Polish school. Promoting hybrid identities and cultures in school.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. Sweden

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1. Introduction: Contextualisation and methodology

The Swedish part of the CHILD-UP project is realised in collaboration with three schools in Malmö, the third largest and the fastest growing city in Sweden. The greater Malmö area has a population of around 750 000 inhabitants, and the city itself, which corresponds with the municipality, has 347 949 inhabitants (2020) (Statistics Sweden). The schools included in the study are located in the municipality of Malmö, which we refer to as Malmö City (*Malmö stad*). In this introductory section we shall briefly say something about migration and schooling in Malmö. This serves to contextualise the three schools that participate in the study. We also present the selection of schools and research participants and discuss implications of it.

Migration, segregation and schooling inequality in Malmö

Malmö is located in southern Sweden, just by the bridge to Copenhagen, Denmark, connecting Sweden with continental Europe. This geographical location has implications for its migration experiences. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when emigration peaked, it was a port of embarkation; contrary, today it is a port of arrival. This is notable in its population. The share of foreign born in the population is 34,6 per cent, compared to 19,7 per cent in the total population. If we include persons born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents, the share of persons with foreign background in Malmö is 47,2 per cent while in Sweden it is 25,9 per cent (Statistics Sweden). In Malmö, people born outside of Sweden origin from 179 different countries and the most common countries of birth are Iraq (11 744), Syria (8 299), Denmark (7 469), Yugoslavia³⁶ (7 407), Poland (6 720), and Bosnia-Hercegovina (6 395). Persons born in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iran reaches around 4 000 persons for each country (Malmö City, Population Statistics on webpage).

Of interest to this study is the proportion of children with migrant background in schools. In Sweden, the CHILD-UP selection criteria of children, corresponds with grade 5 (ISCED1) and 8 (ISCED2) in compulsory school, and the second year in upper secondary school (ISCED3), hence students aged 12, 15 and 18 years. Preschool (ISCED0) is not included in the Swedish part. As table 1 below illustrates, on average in Malmö City, persons with migrant background in these ages outnumber persons with Swedish background.

³⁶ The registration of country of birth as registered at the time of immigration, hence this refers to persons who immigrated before the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Table 1: Persons aged 12, 15 and 18 years with migrant and Swedish background in Malmö City (December 2020)

	12 years	15 years	18 years
Migrant background*	2 002 (51%)	1 847 (54%)	1 722 (54%)
Swedish background**	1 915 (49%)	1 550 (46%)	1 438 (46%)
Total	3 917 (100%)	3 397 (100%)	3 160 (100%)

*Migrant background includes persons who are foreign born and persons born in Sweden with two foreign born parents

**Swedish background includes persons born in Sweden with at least one parent born in Sweden

Source: Statistics Sweden, Population Statistics

Malmö is not only a city marked by a diverse population, it is also a city of social inequalities and segregation. In fact, compared to the national average, as well as the two larger cities in the country (Stockholm and Gothenburg), Malmö is characterised by large numbers of poor households compared to wealthy households (measured as purchase power per household unit). At the bottom line, this means that Malmö, by national standards, is a comparatively poor city (Salonen & Grander 2019). Further to this, it is also characterised by spatial segregation between poor and wealthy, and between persons with migrant and Swedish background, with a considerable overlap of migration background and poverty in the eastern parts of the city, and of Swedish background and wealth in the western parts of the city. This also overlaps with how different types of housing (home-ownership and tenancy) are distributed (Salonen & Grander 2019). Of relevance for the CHILD-UP study is that, overall, compulsory schools recruit their students from the surrounding housing areas, while in upper secondary schools the recruitment of students is instead to be considered in relation to which study programs they offer. In the next section we describe and discuss some implications of this.

Collaboration with three schools

The Swedish part of the CHILD-UP project builds on collaboration with three schools, two compulsory schools and one upper secondary school. We collaborate with the same schools and collect data from basically the same students across all three empirical work packages (WP4–6). The two compulsory schools (school_1 and school_2) have classes from pre-school class (‘grade 0’) to ninth grade, 450–500 students, and they are located in areas with high levels of poverty and large shares of persons with migrant backgrounds in the population. They mostly recruit their students from the surrounding area. The upper secondary school (school_3) is located in central Malmö and have students from across Malmö who have applied and been accepted into the school. It has around 1 000 students and around 80 per cent study a theoretical program, 10 per cent a vocational program and another 10 per cent an introduction program³⁷. Table 2 below shows the share of students according to gender, migrant and Swedish background and parents’ educational background in the selected schools compared to the Malmö and national average.

³⁷ An introduction program is a program for students who are not eligible to enter a national program, and it aims at supporting students to enter a national program.

Table 2: Share of students according to gender, migrant background and parents' educational background in the selected schools, Malmö and Sweden (October 2019)

	Share of female students	Share of students with migrant background*	Share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education
School_1	47	87	29
School_2	52	77	43
All compulsory schools in Malmö	49	52	59
All compulsory schools in Sweden	49	26	60
School_3	40	56	50
All upper secondary schools in Malmö	49	51	51
All upper secondary schools in Sweden	47	31	52

*Migrant background includes foreign born persons and persons born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents Source: Skolverket, Skolblad 2019/2020

While schools in Malmö, both compulsory and upper secondary schools, on average match the national average regarding the share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education, the share of students with migrant background is higher in Malmö than in Sweden on average. While the share of students with migrant background in school_3 is close to the Malmö average, in school_1 and school_2 this share is much higher, reaching 87 and 77 per cent respectively. In addition, in school_1 and school_2, the share of students with parents with post-upper secondary school education is comparatively low. In school_1 as low as half of the city and national average. This illustrates how the segregation of socioeconomic and migration-background in the city overlap, as discussed above.

It goes without saying, that this composition of the population, i.e. the share of people with migrant and Swedish backgrounds, in the city and in the selected schools, impacts on how 'integration' is understood and approached, including how it is 'talked about'. Moreover, while 13 per cent in school_1, and 23 per cent in School_2 have Swedish background, this does not necessarily indicate that they identify as Swedish, or speak Swedish as their first language (see WP4 report). This

diversity, what some would even refer to as ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2007), has implications for how diversity is perceived and talked about, which is shown in the analysis.

Access and selection

Data collection was overall challenging. First it was challenging to get access to schools, but even with access in the sense that the headmaster approved of participating in the project, it remained challenging to recruit both professionals and students for data collection (see also report for WP4 and WP5 Professionals). The CHILD-UP project involves data collection from students in all three empirical work packages (WP4–6). In the first year of the project, we collected data with a survey (WP4), and the plan was to collect data through focus group interviews (WP5) and through video recording of a classroom activity, pre- and posttests, and focus group interviews (WP6) in the second year. Overall we expected that students would be hesitant about participating, not least in video recording, but also that it would be challenging to collect informed consent from parents of students under the age of 15 years. These anxieties from our side proved to be relevant. In addition, the pandemic added on to these expected challenges. The schools were closed for outsiders (including researchers) and hence we could not come there, and ISCED2 and ISCED3 had online teaching at home in periods. Overall the situation in school became strained and the teachers and other personnel could not prioritise research collaboration, which was understandable.

With the experiences from data collection for WP4, early on in the data collection process for WP5 and WP6, we realised that it would be difficult to return to the students repeatedly for data collection, and that we would need to organise it so that we collected all data we needed once we managed to set up a meeting with the students. Hence, in order to facilitate, but also to speed-up the data collection, we merged data collection from students for WP5 and WP6. This meant that we informed about the data collection for the two work packages (pre- and post tests, video recording and focus group interviews) as one set of data-collection, and organised it so that all parts were conducted in one and the same day.

Data for all three empirical work packages was not only collected from the same three schools³⁸, but largely also from the same students. For data collection for WP5 and WP6 we collaborated with four teachers and their classes and hence, student participants are basically the same for WP5 and WP6. In addition, in two of the schools the student participants for WP5 and WP6 are recruited from the same classes as in WP4. There are however some divergencies. In some cases a student who participated in the video recording could not or did not want to stay for the focus group interview, and in some other cases a student who did not want to participate in the video recording wanted to participate in the focus group interview. This also explains why we have a discrepancy between the number of video recordings and focus group interviews, while we have twelve video recordings, we have only ten focus group interviews (in the application we estimated that we would have twelve of each).

³⁸ At least mainly, see WP5 Professionals report for minor deviations as regards mediators and social workers.

Focus group interviews with children

In total we conducted ten focus group interviews with 15 girls and 15 boys: two focus group interviews in ISCED1, five in ISCED2 and three in ISCED3. In all three schools we first visited the selected classes and presented the project. In two schools these were the same as for WP4, and in one school an introduction class for newly arrived students. This was due to the choice of the school, the school management and the involved teachers. The introduction class is age integrated for students in lower secondary school (ISCED2) and students are typically placed in this class just upon arrival, and then, in a step-wise manner integrated to their mainstream class. At what pace this is done is individual, depending on the student. The focus group interviews were conducted directly after the video recording of each teacher's class activity, except in one case. In this case the focus group interviews were conducted on another day but in the same week as the video recording, and with the same students.

We presented the project orally and the students could ask questions. We also handed out information letter and consent form to all students. Students under the age of 15 years, need parents' consent. We informed about this in the class and handed out parents' information letter and consent form in Swedish and Arabic. In the introduction class, mediators helped in class and parents' information letter and consent form were distributed in native languages to all parents (Arabic, Bengali, Dari, English, Serbian, Tigrinya, Urdu). Students' and parents' consent forms for students under the age of 15 years were collected by the teacher and given to the researcher, or collected directly by the researcher at the time of data collection.

The first three focus interviews were conducted in August 2020, just after the summer vacation. At this point, the schools in Sweden only had minor experiences of lock-downs and this topic is not covered in the interviews. All other focus group interviews were conducted towards the end of May and early June 2021, just before the summer holiday was to begin. At this point questions about experiences of the pandemic had been integrated to our interview guide, and all experiences from the pandemic are drawn from these interviews. As the first focus group interviews were conducted in school_3 and all others in School_1 and school_2, this also means that we only have reflections on the pandemic as these were experienced in compulsory school, while the lock-downs were much more extensive in upper secondary school.

Table 3: Overview of number of focus group interviews and number of children divided by school

Focus Group Interviews	Number of participants (girls)
SWE_F1_ISCED3	3 (1)
SWE_F2_ISCED3	3 (1)
SWE_F3_ISCED3	3 (2)
SWE_F4_ISCED2	3 (0)
SWE_F5_ISCED2	3 (1)
SWE_F6_ISCED1	3 (1)
SWE_F7_ISCED2	3 (2)
SWE_F8_ISCED1	3 (3)
SWE_F9_ISCED2	2 (2)
SWE_F10_ISCED2	4 (2)
Total	30 (15)

All focus group interviews were conducted in the schools and during school time. They lasted between 20 minutes and 50 minutes. Nine were conducted in Swedish and one in English, and all were recorded and transcribed. In the analysis presented below, we found that some interview excerpts were relevant in relation to more than one analytical theme. In order to provide empirical illustrations rich in their nuances, we have on some occasions included the same quotations more than once.

2. School as a lived space

In this section, the participating students' ideal school will first be described, thereafter positive as well as negative aspects of their real school will be described. We also expand on students' view of good and not so good activities in school.

Ideal school – real school

The students' talk about their ideal school coincides to a great extent with how they talk about their real school. In the students' descriptions of an ideal school the teachers are to a high extent in focus. This includes teachers that teach well and have good subject knowledge. Teaching well includes teachers that can explain things in different ways until one understands, "A good teacher... should be able to explain well, as well as be able to explain in a way... even if you do not understand, they should try to explain in different ways until we understand" (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

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). The support is here defined as always answering and not giving up on the students. This approach includes teachers that rephrase or use other languages than Swedish to explain or the mobile phone to translate. As another boy in the same focus group explains when he says “She can try to say it in English or say in simpler words, ... if we don’t understand in English, she can write on her mobile” (SWE_F4_ISCED2).

Another way of supporting is to remind and “push” the students to study:

For example, when we have exams and stuff like that, they nag that we should study, and if we get bad grades in an exam, [they say] that we should take a re-exam as soon as possible, so we do not risk to fail in the subject. So it's good that they're nagging on us to succeed in school. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

So, in the ideal school, teachers “nag” on the students to succeed. However, they should also listen to the students, and regard their opinion in different matters, “They should try to agree with the students and also do what the students want, because it makes your class better” (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

Good relations between students are brought up as another aspect of an ideal school. An ideal school is a school where no one needs to be alone, where everyone have friends and where the students support each other. This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

Girl: Then you want everyone to be friends, and friends is 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)

Girl1: The thing is that this school is very good because there are no groupings, like everyone is friends with everyone. So, groupings are the last thing you find at this school.

Girl2: Yes. Everyone is different.

Girl1: There are, of course, but rarely. Everyone is with everyone. So this school I would say is good for everyone actually. (SWE_F9_ISCED2)

Good relations between students thus means that there are no group boundaries, which is a precondition for hybrid integration. This also concerns the relationships between boys and girls: “And everyone is kind of friends with everyone and no guy thinks it's directly embarrassing to be with someone of the opposite sex” (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

Positive aspects of real school

The positive aspects of the real school, coincides with how the participating students talk about their ideal school. Among the most positive aspect is the support that they get from their teachers: “So, I think it's good ... We have good teachers who stand up and help when you need help” (SWE_F3_ISCED3). That the teachers challenge the students is also regarded as something positive. By challenging, it is meant that the studies are tough in a good way, it helps the students to become better in the different school subjects, which is good for future studies:

I: Challenging in a good way. What do you mean then?

Boy2: 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)

Another positive aspect is the support offered by the school organisation, including such as after school workshops and help with homework:

Girl2: We have teachers who are trained in that subject. Then we also have the extra teachers who are usually in the workshop.

Boy2: Homework help and stuff.

Girl2: Yes.

Interviewer: Does it help anything?

Girl2: It has helped us a lot.

Girl1: We had a national test, there was help with math from half an hour before school, where you could learn extra math if you were a little unsure of yourself. And it helped a lot.

Boy2: They're investing on us.

Girl1: They give us all the opportunities we want. If they see that I need something, they make it available to me. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Students that are new in the country appreciate that they can get support in their mother tongue (this is further elaborated on in section 3.3. Support – study guidance in mother tongue).

Social relations among students in class and/or the whole school is another common aspect brought up related to positive experiences of school (see also the section of affective and relational dimension). The majority of the participants find the relations among the students good, it varies from student to student, but it is generally good. Foremost, this is due to that there are very few group boundaries, instead everyone is with everyone (see ideal school). In one of the interviews, teambuilding was mentioned as a way of achieving positive social relations between students. “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).

Negative aspects of real school

The negative aspects of school are to a large extent connected to the approach of the teachers; the students' motivation is negatively affected by teachers who are bad at explaining, and unpassionate about their work:

Boy2: Some teachers are tired and others more passionate.

Boy1: It affects a lot. For those who are boring, you cannot even listen to. You end up in your world of thought and then you miss what the teacher says, and that leads to a worse grade. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

As the transcript illustrates, the student get unfocused and loose interest, which is also the case when students have to listen to a teacher for a long time “Sometimes when the teacher has a review, and talks about it the whole lesson, it becomes difficult to concentrate. It is interesting in the beginning, but then it gets boring because you have listened for too long” (SWE_F7_ISCED2). The loss of focus

and interest often happens in science and mathematics class, with which the students express that they would need to get more help:

Then, if we are going to talk about the teachers, I think they give the help you need. Although it may be required two teachers when it comes to math for example. Because if you need extra help, you need the teacher sitting next to you explaining. (SWE_F2_ISCED2)

Other negative aspects of real school connected to teachers is that they have different rules:

There is a difference. For example, if he asks a teacher [pointing at one of the boys], "May I quit earlier?" then it can happen that one teacher go in a little aggressively and say, "But you say it all the time". And then there may be another teacher who says, "Okay, if you're kind." It's just that thing that makes a big difference. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Another aspect brought up is related noisy classrooms. Some of the participants are hesitant about the noise, explaining that some might be able to study and learn things with noise in the classroom, while other are not:

Girl1: Sometimes, there's chaos in the classroom, so you can't focus on things.

Girl2: Yeah, kind of study peace sometimes.

Girl1: Yes, really difficult. When a teacher is teaching something, everyone is talking to each other and not listening to the teacher. So, you can't focus. (SWE_F8_ISCED1)

The participating students also bring up negative aspects of their real school related to organisational aspects, such as a constant change of teachers, which the students believe affect their possibilities to get good grades:

Girl 1: And some teachers, that we like very much, they usually quit and then we change all the time.

Girl2: You get used to a teacher and then they change...

Girl3: We have had four, five teachers this [year]. (SWE_F8_ISCED1)

Another organizational aspect is badly organized schedules, with too many or too few lessons in one day:

Girl1: And schedules too, we have a very bad schedule.

I: How does it look?

Boy: You have no lesson on Fridays.

Girl2: Yes, we only have one lesson.

Girl1: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we finish four and we start like eight, it's really tough. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

Students also have opinions about school environment and furniture's. In one of the schools, for example, the students in the ninth grade burnt the lockers down the year before, and the school does not have resources to replace them. In effect, the participating student and their classmates do not have lockers to store their study material and outdoor clothing. They find this very unfair, that they must suffer for what some others did: "Just because the ninth graders broke the lockers, we should not get... just because it was their fault. Then they affect us" (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

Others mentioned furniture. That is, they wish for better chairs since the lessons are long: “So we may have comfortable chairs. We sit on these, okay, all day for an hour and 20 minutes, you get hurt when you sit on the chairs” (SWE_F7_ISCED2).

Best activities

The best school activities mentioned by participating students are related to support with their studies. One such is after school activities. In one of the schools, they have an activity called Stahl, which is very much appreciated:

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).

In another school, the students have support with homework, “We always have homework help after school” (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

Another appreciated activity is the possibility for newly arrived students to use English or their mother tongue in their communication with teachers, and in their studies (this is further elaborated on in section *Support – study guidance in mother tongue* below).

Not so good activities

Some of the students mention that they sometimes get assignments for homework which they have not worked with enough in class. They do not have enough knowledge or skills regarding the content, or how to work with the assignment:

Some assignments, we say, for example, when we have not gone through it in class but still we get it as a homework. How should we write it when we do not know what it is about, or when we do not know how to write? (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

Affective and relational dimensions of school

The affective and relational dimensions repeatedly brought up in our focus group interviews regards social relations among the students, both in class and more generally in school. When asked what they are satisfied with, many refer to a positive social environment in their class and in school:

Between the students, it’s good too. Because I don’t feel that someone who wants to start in this school should feel worried that she or he might be bullied. So, I feel that it is good between the students. (SWE_F3_ISCED3)

The lack of gender boundaries are mentioned as one explanation to the good relations between students:

I: What works well in school then?

Girl1: It’s like every one has a friend to be with. Everyone feels good, I think.

Girl2: Yes, we get on well.

Girl1: Yes. Boys, girls, we’re all together. We are all playing. (SWE_F8_ISCED1)

I: What does the relationship between boys and girls look like ?

Girl1: It’s mixed.

I: Mixed class?

Boy1: That's good.

I: But is the relationship good?

Girl1: We don't distinguish between boys and girls, everyone is together. And when it's group work, we don't separate girls and boys. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Another explanation given to why there are positive relations between students is that they themselves create it:

I: What is it that contributes to the positive relations?

Boy1: I personally think that it is we who contribute to this, rather than the teachers. Because they focus more on the teaching and what happens in the class, but outside the class, it is not the same...

Boy2: They can't do that much.

Boy1: Yes, exactly, you could say that they lose their power outside the class. (SWE_F2_ICSED3)

Friendship at school is for some of the participants related to shared language, that is, close friends are the ones with who you share home language, especially if you are newly arrived in the country (this is further elaborated on in section. *Support – study guidance in mother tongue* below).

However, even if the students experience positive social relations in their school, they agree on that the relations are not positive for all students. Some students are bullied and without friends at school:

Girl1: But some are also bullied at school just because they have a functional variation or something.

I: But ... so you mean that here are some who are left out or are bullied?

Boy: Yes. Often you do not know who it really is. Sometimes you see them when they are on their own, you think yes, but maybe it's only once? Then you don't notice when you see them alone. So you don't notice it because now it is common for that person to be by their own, and you do not think about it immediately. (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

One example of being exposed to bullying is if you are interested in same-sex relations:

Boy1: Boys who like boys and girls who like girls, I think they would be bullied. There is certainly someone who is, but I don't think they dare to come out.

Girl1: But, I had accepted it but I had not ...

Girl2: Wanted to see it in front of you

Girl1: Or I would not have liked it but I would not have had any problems with it, but I would not have supported it (SWE_F7_ISCED2).

Participating students also talk about conflicts based on that someone is talking about someone else in a nasty or impolite way, or if someone "thinks they are special". If not dealt with, this can have negative effects on the social relations at school, for example between boys and girls:

Girl: If, for example, he quarrels with me, he has a whole group of boys, and I have a whole group of girls behind me, and then it becomes a group and a group. //... // And I think then it gets worse and worse because it gets bigger.

Boy: Yes. And then yes, it can also lead to a big, I would say war between girls and boys, that can destroy our whole sense of community. (SWE_F6_ISCED2)

In the class referred to above, the students explain that there used to be a lot of conflicts between girls and boys, but that this is no longer the case: “But now in our class, now everyone supports each other” (SWE_F6_ISCED2). When we ask what made the relationships better, one answer is that they themselves contributed to this: “In our class, we usually take care of it ourselves, so that it does not get bigger. So, if I quarrel with him, our class usually talks together and ‘do you know what happened?’” (SWE_F6_ISCED2).

Another example of how students themselves resolve conflicts, is to leave private problems and disagreements outside the classroom:

Girl1: We are more like, when it comes to tasks, even if we have quarrelled, when it comes to tasks, we work efficiently.

Boy1: We do not think that private things should be confused with the studies.

Girl1: When we're in class, we forget what's going on outside.

(SWE_F10_ISCED2)

One way of not getting into conflicts is to work on the social relations. This means, for example, to be able to talk about what they like or dislike about each other and to hang out with each other: “Maybe hang out a little more. Maybe a little more talk about ourselves and stuff like this” (SWE_F6_G_ISCED2).

Teachers and other significant others that the students trust are seen as important when it comes to resolving conflicts. The ones that listen to everyone involved in the conflict are appreciated, as this quotation illustrates:

There is a teacher [name of the teacher], s/he usually helps us a lot because s/he does not take it overly seriously if... //... // S/he helps both [parties], s/he does not shout at anyone. S/he asks both, and talks with all together about what has happened, trying to solve it.
(SWE_F6_G_ISCED2)

Affective and relational dimensions of school also involve relations between students and teachers. Students' good relations with their teachers emerge as a strong theme, that is, that they can talk to them and that they get listened to. These are both important elements in promoting conditions of hybrid integration:

I think it works well, especially after we have been here three years. You know the teachers better and you feel, yes, you can talk to them a little more. But, before, for example, the first year, it was not the same, you did not have such good contact with the t.
(SWE_F3_ISCED3)

Boy: They are patient with everybody, and they are good teachers.

I: Do you mean like, they have a kind of relationship, teachers and students?

Girl: Like friends.

I: More like friends?

Girl: Yeah, more friends.

Boy: Yeah, yeah. You can talk to them. (SWE_F5_ISCED2)

Boy: They show that they understand you and that they listen.

I: Is it that they care, that they are interested in you?

Girl: Yes. (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

However, as has been shown above (see section Negative aspects of real school), there are also negative aspects connected to the relational dimensions between teachers and students.

Further, various significant others are mentioned as sources that the students can turn to if they need help or support. The student counsellor is one such support person, and the student coordinators another. In one school the student coordinator seems to be much appreciated because s/he is a person that the students can talk to about their different problems:

Boys 2: He is responsible for the problems of the student. He is a friend with everyone.

Boy1: He just comes around, only like “What's up? Everything good?”, ask everything.

Boy2: Yeah, he is everywhere.

Boy1: And he gave his number to everyone.

Boy2: To call.

Boy1: Anything, just call me. (SWE_F5_ISCED2)

I: Is there anyone you can turn to?

Girl1: The counsellor, or we do not have a real counsellor but so far when I have talked to her she is quite kind. But you can also turn to [name of student coordinator]

Boy: Any teacher.

Girl2: Well, [name of student coordinator] is like that too, you can talk to her about things. (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

The student coordinators check who is in school and follow-up on the students, for example, who are not present in class or online during the pandemic. They also help the students when they get in conflicts with each: “We have [name of two student coordinators]. They are always in place, in case of trouble, so they know about it immediately. And they have always been the ones who manage to solve the problems between the students”. (SWE_F9_ISCED2).

In our focus group interviews, the parents seem to be absent as regards schoolwork support. One explanation given is that some of them have not studied in the Swedish school system: “I prefer to do everything here and not so much at home. Because if I take help from my parents for example, they have not studied here in Sweden, so it will be difficult” (SWE_F3_ISCED3). Some of the participants mention that they get help from their siblings: “My mother can almost speak Swedish, but when we do not understand [schoolwork] we ask my brother or we translate” (SWE_F4_ISCED2) and “I always ask my brother about math, because he’s good at math. So, I ask him when I have a math problem or something. I will ask him, and he will tell me how to do it” (SWE_F5_ISCED2).

The students mention that they talk about school with their parents and that their parents are positive about their school. Their parents also encourage them to study:

I: Your parents, do they usually help you with schoolwork?

Boy1: Mom and Dad don’t go to school. They cannot help me. But they have said that you must study. If you want to play [computer games], you have to study.

Boy1: “He says that my mother and father have said the same thing, that homework is good”. (translation from other student Boy2)

Boy1: All mothers and fathers need that their children can speak Swedish, and that then they get a good job and a good life. (SWE_F4_ISCED2)

Educational aspirations

When the participants are asked about the support for learning and schoolwork, their first-hand choice is to turn to the teachers and other support structures offered at school, then schoolmates/friends and lastly siblings/parents:

Study guidance in their mother tongue is an appreciated support that the newly arrived students receive at school:

I: Do you have anything else [than the teachers, that help you]?

Boy: Yes, study guidance.

I: How does it work?

Boy: When we have news we go to study guidance, or not just news. We have a sample. We'll go to her and she's explaining and she's translating questions. Then we will answer words and she says to write like that. Then we will read and practice. (SWE_F4_ISCED2)

During the lessons it is mainly Swedish that is used, but the teacher also helps in English. The students also help each other in different languages, especially if there is a newcomer who does not speak or understand Swedish:

Boy: In most cases they [the teachers] speak Swedish but sometimes they can speak English.

I: But you also help?

Boy: Yes, I usually help him [pointing at his friend] with English and Swedish. (SWE_F1_ISCED3)

I: Do you help each other with schoolwork in the lessons?

R1: Yes, when we are together. He does not understand [pointing at boy]. He asks, we help. (SWE_F4_ISCED2)

Various digital support tools, including Google and snapchat with friends, are also referred to as tools for support with schoolwork.

Student participation

Students' opportunities to have influence in school seem to differ depending on whether they have opinions related to structural or classroom levels. On a structural level, the schools have a student council, but some of the students find it difficult to get their voices heard at this level. As illustrated in the quotation below, there seems to be better possibilities to influence on classroom level:

I: Do you experience that certain things that you bring up ... how is it received?

Boy: I was in the class council last year together with another student from my class, and it's like this that she [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 it's not always....

I: As something happens.

Boy: Yes, exactly.

I: But did you experience that sometimes something happened?

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)

In one of the interviews, the students were explaining that they have experiences of growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high levels of criminality. This, they say, is a good experience in their future work as police officers. When asked if the school and the teachers are including such experiences in their teaching or in the school structure, one of the participants says that this is not the case: “Not in a specific way that I have noticed. Maybe they take it as an example. But no” (SWE_F2_ISCED3).

Imagined future

The majority of the participating students from the compulsory schools are planning to continue their studies at upper secondary school. The ninth graders have applied for programs focusing for example social and natural science, childcare, economics and business/accounting and hotel and tourism. In ten years, they think that they have families and careers such as running own businesses, working as a lawyer or psychologist, working with young children, with video editing (for example TikTok), computer engineering and at the municipality “since there seems to be many different jobs” (SWE_F4_ISCED2).

The students from upper secondary school are planning to get into higher education in programs such as preschool teacher, police officer, social worker, IT engineer, architect, dentist, entrepreneurs and stock trading. However, some of the participating students only have vague ideas of their future studies and work. This concerns especially those in compulsory school:

Girl1: I do not know yet. No one kind of knows.

Girl2: Mostly get jobs and stuff, but...

Girl1: And like not becoming homeless. And maybe get money. (SWE_F8_ISCED1)

From what I know in our class, there are very many who are very insecure about what to do after high school. Like everyone has applied for something, but I do not really know what everyone wants to be after high school. It is still unclear to very many. (SWE_F9_ISCED2)

School during the pandemic

The students in ISCED1 have (until now) no experience of online home schooling because the schools have remained open for them during the pandemic (spring 2020 – June 2021). The students in ISCED2 had online studies from home during the last week of the autumn semester and the beginning of the spring semester 2021. Thereafter, they were in school one third of the time and from the second part of the spring term 2021 that have been taught in schools. The students in ISCED3 had online studies from home during the last part of the spring semester 2020, the last part of the autumn semester 2020 and the major part of spring semester 2021.

It is only in the interviews conducted in May and June 2021, that we asked explicitly about experiences about online schooling from home and the pandemic more generally. In their responses, many describe negative aspects of online teaching. One is that it is challenging due to that they did not receive much support and therefore had to manage the learning alone at home:

Boy1: We barely got help during corona.

Boy2: Yes, we kind of had to manages by ourselves.

I: What help do you get when it comes to difficulties?

Boy1: Google. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

Girl: If you want to actually study, you have to do it yourself. Because the teachers wouldn't nag on you about that so much. They would kind of just tell you, "do this page and you can go".

I: But did you get help and support?

Girl: Yeah, obviously, if you needed help, you had a question, stuff like that.

I: So, if you could choose, to be in school or have online teaching?

Girl: I don't know. Probably still in school, because the online was like, we had to do it. The school had to go online. But you didn't really learn anything for this couple of weeks. I learned nothing other than Swedish in those classes. (SWE_F5_ISCED2)

Girl: It was like a shock to us.

Boy: Because we're just getting started.

Girl: We did not even know how to use the material we had received.

Boy: It was the first time, they just said: "Click this link and go in". (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Further, some students perceive the teaching as unprofessional and unplanned:

No, it was unprofessional, I will explain. The thing is that the first week we would have distance, it was a bit ... and I understand of course that it is a bit new and that it cannot be perfect, although for example the math was unplanned. Many had difficulties with math. So we had to contact the teacher via email. And next week we came back to school and then next week we had distance again. So it just got complicated. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

Some students talk about online teaching and not being in school as boring. Boring to be at home, not seeing classmates.

Boy1: Boring. Difficult.

Boy2: It was fun the first few days.

Boy1: Yes, first it was fun, then it got a little boring.

Boy2: But after a while it just got boring.

Boy1: Yes, boring. (SWE_F2_ISCED3)

The situation also put pressure on family relations:

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

Girl2: Even some parents thought it was hard to see their children just sitting at home.

Girl1: They saw how tired they were.

Girl2: Yes, because it takes a lot of energy, because you have to be awake all the time and look at the screen. While here at school you can ask the teacher "Can I go and get some fresh air?" if necessary.

Boy1: "Can I take a break or something?" (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

However, there were participants who thought that the online teaching was good for them, since they could work better from home, without the distractions in the classroom:

Girl1: Yes, because you got more peace of mind and work peace, and it was just nicer to be home I think.

I: Better to concentrate on ...

Girl1: Yes. Then when you got an assignment, I always did it right away, but now it takes a while before I do it when I'm at school. (SWE_F7_ISCED2)

Other experiences of the pandemic are the loss of social activities such as not being able to meet with friends, missing out on excursions and the big celebration party that is the tradition when finishing compulsory school (ninth grade). One of the girls says "It has affected that we do not have the big party that you usually have in the ninth grade." (SWE_CH9_ISCED2)

We have had distance teaching, and it is good, but at the same time boring, because you want to meet your friends and that is when you focus better on the lessons. On my own part, I usually fall asleep during the distance lessons, but here [in class] my friends do not let me sleep. (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

The loss of social activities was in some cases resolved by the students meeting outdoors in the neighbourhood:

Girl1: We also tried to get each other out of the house.

I: You tried to go out?

Boy2: Yes, you're home all the time.

Girl1: When we had sports you had to do group work. We all tried to get each other out.

Boy2: Yes, we went out here and played football.

Girl1: We made big groups and played football and we were out, it was sunny and... we did different stuff (SWE_F10_ISCED2)

3. Intercultural relations at school

Experiences of schooling in different countries

The newly arrived focus group participants (SWE_F4_ISCED2) perceive their school as a good school and say that their teachers that support and help them make it a good school. Similarly, the ISCED2 students (SWE_F7_ISCED2) say that some teachers and their peers make their school a good school.

During the focus group interview with newly arrived students (SWE_F5_ISCED2) they compared their current school with the schools they had attended before moving to Sweden, which is schools located in Iraq, Kosovo and London. They believe that the school in Sweden differs from the others when it comes to freedom, learning activities and digital tools:

Boy1: Yeah, there is no ... There is a lot of points. But when it comes to teaching, the level of education, it's higher in Iraq. Because what they are studying now, we studied before year [?? 0:02:45] and have something like that. But the ...

I: Activities, are they the same?

Boy1: No, we didn't have a lot of activity, we just like, studying, studying, studying.

I: Okay, so you have a math book and then you do tasks?

Boy1: Study, finish it, go to the next one. Finish it, go. That's it.

Boy2: Yeah, same.

Boy1: We don't have these ... a lot of activities we're seeing now. Especially with the laptops and these things.

Boy2: Yeah. We didn't have all of this that we have here now. The education, it's not bad, but it's ... they wake up with a negativity. It's like they don't like sometimes to teach you.

I: Here in Sweden?

Boy1: No, no, Kosovo.

Girl: Yeah, and they're just like ... comparing it to London, it's just like ... Not everything was different, but there the teachers were always around you. And the schools that I went to, it was like ... you had to wear uniforms, and you had to stand in straight lines, and stuff like that. While here, it's more free. And yeah, [inaudible 0:04:48].

Boy1: Way more free.

Compared to the education in Sweden it seems like the students come from an instrumental perspective on teaching and learning. Whereas, the teaching and learning they experience in Sweden seem to be more activity based or based on interaction among the teacher and the students which enable another type of student agency. The students' opinions on their learning in the different countries differ. The Girl thinks that she has less teaching in Sweden compared to London, whereas Boy2 thinks he learns more in Sweden even if it is more "strict" in Kosovo (SWE_F5_ISCED2):

Girl: Yeah, yeah, it's alright. Just comparing it to London, it's just less strict. And it's just like school ... like, work, they teach you less than when I was in schools in London.

Girl: Like, in London it's really strict. Comparing, education is higher than here.

More "strict" in Kosovo, but did not learn as much as in Sweden. One reason is digital tools.

I: Yeah, it was the same that you two ...

Boy2: No, I mean like, for the learning, it's like, we ... for me, it might look that you learn more in my country, but it's not real. Because it's just that we didn't have laptops. We worked with books more. And it looked that you learned more, but no. For me, no. I learn more here.

The students think there is a larger difference when it comes to learning in their new school compared to their old schools. This they relate to the activities they do in class (SWE_F5_ISCED2), which seem to be more interactive compared to do certain tasks in a textbook:

I: Okay. Is it a different way of learning here?

Boy2: Yeah, a lot of diff...

I: What would you say, the biggest difference?

Boy1: The activities.

Boy2: Yeah. Even in the class.

Boy1: Like, now, when I wanted to learn Swedish, I have the Veckans Nyhet, [The Weekly News] I have the ...

Boys2: There's a lot of difference.

Boy1: Yeah, home and consumer studies even is helping. So this [inaudible 0:10:02]. But in our country, for me, it was like “no, this book”, [inaudible 0:10:08]. So ... [home and consumer studies help learn Swedish]

Boy2: It's like, here it's more fun. Even if they give you a task to do. In my home country, it will be like “go to 20 page, and finish until 40, and give it to me”. That's all.

Boy2: But here, you do it with a bit of activity, a bit of like ... a joke that ... there. And it will ... you won't even know that the time was gone by. So it's more fun.

I: Okay. Do you agree, or do you ...?

Girl: Yeah, I guess. It's just more independent here, for me. Like, yeah. It's just ... they don't ... It's just more independent. You have to rely on yourself to study and do more.

In the classes the students attend (SWE_F5_ISCED2), students with different gender, language and religious backgrounds are included, which was not the case in for example Iraq. The newly arrived students seem to appreciate this:

Boy1: Different. There is a lot of points that differ from here. We had way more problems than here. I don't know what to say exactly, but ...

Boy2: Because you were separated?

Boy1: Yeah, that's a big point.

I: You were separated? How do you mean?

Boy1: Males and females. Even sometimes like, if I had a Christian friend, he maybe go to another school, because he can't stay in this ... there is a lot of points [?? 0:06:41] that differs.

The role of language in relations with friends and classmates

On questions about how language affects the students' relationships their answers slightly differ between the interviews. For example, students in upper secondary class (SWE_F1_ISCED3) seem to think that language matters, but students' common interests like for example going to the gym, the military and food, seem to matter even more:

Boy: Yes, so that you... We say, those who like going to the gym in their spare time, they usually hang out with each other. Those who ... Like the military, they are usually in a group and discuss it all the time For example, just because in our class we have a group where those who are most interested in the uniform profession usually hang out with each other, and then there are a couple of girl groups, like [name of girl] here, they like to eat. And then... Yes, so it is...

Girl: Yes. So, then, for example, it is those who speak Arabic who usually talk to each other and people with other backgrounds usually hang out, but like that... It is usually not based on which language you speak who you hang out with, but it is based on what you are doing during the break.

In contrast to the students in upper secondary school, the newly arrived students (SWE_F4_ISCED2) seem to think that language matters when it comes to peer relations and friendship. They say that they have many friends, but the closest friends, the “real friends” are the ones who they share home language with:

Boy: We have many friends.

Boy: We have many friends in the school. Like the boy with [not audible 0:08:46] orange sweater. He is also my friend. Because the four of us speak the same language. We are friends.

I: And then you are more ... Are you friends with those who speak the same language or are you friends with others?

Boy: No, there are also those who go on [not audible 0:09:02], they know me. same thing buddy. But not a real friend. Like a real friend in the homeland.

Further, they (SWE_F4_ISCED2) believe that most students have friends at the school, but give an example of a boy who does not. They think it is because his home language is Japanese and that no one else speak Japanese, so he cannot communicate with anyone since he does not speak Swedish yet. Also, the newly arrived students in another focus group interview (SWE_F5_ISCED2) talk about language as important when it comes to friendship. They relate it to the possibility to communicate with each other. One boy gives himself as an example. When he started introduction class he could not communicate with his classmates and did not not make friends with anyone until another boy with whom he can communicate with in English arrived:

Boy1: No, this is also different, because we don't have the language.... if I know someone who can speak English, I could communicate with them [?? 0:11:58]. Because first thing, you want to make a friend, you need to communicate. You need a language. So ... Before [name of boy2] came ... because I came, and after two weeks, [name of boy2] came. So before, it was like I had a communication with some of my ... In the class. But when [name of friend] came, it was like we got out to shop, we chatted all the time. Like, we had it fine. [?? 0:12:30]

I: Yeah. When it comes ... You mentioned it. The ... not to say importance, but what role does language have when it comes to being friends?

Boy2: It has a lot.

However, Boy2 adds that you can also make friends with people who you do not share home language, but you would have to find a way to communicate:

Boy2: It's not that it matters a lot, but you can't communicate freely if you can't ... for example, me and him, we can communicate freely in English. If he knows only Arabic, we would be like learning hand sign, or something. We ... Yeah, that too. But you can also have friends that ... they don't know really good English, but you can still communicate a bit with them.

The students (SWE_F8_ISCED1) also believe that language matters when it comes to friendship. Sometimes low Swedish language proficiency can impact negatively on access to friends:

Those I kind of know or... yes, some... they do not have friends because they do not know the language, which I think is mean. We do not go to the same class and I cannot always be with them if I want to, so it's mean when you are not friends with them just because they do not know the language. You can help them learn and... so teach them and stuff, so that... yes ...

This is rejected by the student (SWE_F8_ISCED1), who tries to counteract such situations by inviting classmates to social situations: "And always try to notice people who are alone, try to invite them so you can be with a [not audible] so that it will be so good". The importance of being able to communicate to make friends is also evident in one of the interviews. One student says that students

who do not know the language, Swedish implied, but share home language become friends, but if they do not share home language English may work since many students know some English (SWE_F8_ISCED1).

Support – study guidance in mother tongue

During the interviews (SWE_F4_ISCED2 and SWE_F5_ISCED2) with the newly arrived students study guidance in mother tongue was brought up as an appreciated support for their school work. The students (SWE_F4_ISCED2) say that their study guidance in mother tongue help them to translate and explains texts, which help them perform on the tests. According to the students (SWE_F5_ISCED2) their mother tongue teacher (same as study guidance counsellor/teacher) is mostly available, and they can always ask her questions and she will help if she can:

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 [?? 0:21:53].

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.

The newly arrived students also achieve another type of support in their mother tongue than the support directly provided by the study guidance in mother tongue teacher or mother tongue teacher. For example, in mathematics they receive lists of concepts which are translated into their mother tongues (SWE_F5_ISCED2):

Boy1: Yeah. Even the math teacher gave me a whole, how to say, document.

Boy2: Yeah, same.

Boy1: With the translations to my mother tongue, from Swedish to my mother tongue, for the math things. Like, the ...

I: The concepts and ... yeah.

Boy1: Yeah, the concepts and rules, all of this.

I: So then you can do the math, yeah?

Boy1: In my mother language.

Boy2: Yeah, same.

I: Yeah, same with you? Do you also have that, translations?

Girl: Yeah.

Communication

Mainly Swedish is used during class

When asked about language use in school the students in the different focus groups answered similarly even if they attend different schools and grades. Three named languages were mentioned as being used or languages that are commonly used in the schools, namely, Swedish, Arabic and English. In class Swedish is mainly used according to all focus groups. That is, ordinary teaching, is basically only in Swedish. One focus group participant explain that while they are never instructed by the teacher to use their home languages in class, Arabic is talked about as a language that is commonly

used in the school since there are many Arabic speaking students in the school (SWE_F8_ISCED1). English seems mainly to be used when interlocutors do not know Swedish and do not share home language, that is when English is the only shared language. This is unpacked and exemplified in the following excerpts:

When asked about language use during class, focus group interviews in ISCED3 answers (SWE_F1_ISCED3):

I: - Is it always only in Swedish or are different languages used in those teaching situations?

Boy1: - No, it's only Swedish.

Boy2: - it's just Swedish.

Girl: - it's just Swedish.

The teachers speak mainly Swedish with the students (with the exception of the study guidance and mother tongue teachers, and a mathematics teacher who also use Arabic when teaching newly arrived students mathematics). However, if a student does not understand, the teachers and the students sometimes use English. However, when the students do that to help their classmates, they may be told to speak Swedish by their teacher so they develop their Swedish language skills (SWE_F1_ISCED3):

Boy1: For example, in first year when we just started, then he [referring to a classmate] could speak less Swedish than he can now. So, I know that our teacher took that into account. So he helped him with words and sentences and stuff. No one teased him or laughed at him, they just tried to help.

Boy2: He goes to my class, and I see that everyone thinks and takes that into account. So they do as [name of teacher] a little, they help and adapt some studies to him, and then it gets better.

Girl: It has happened, though [??] it was kind of a long time ago, in one. But then the teacher says. They want us not to use a language other than Swedish so that we can develop in the language

In another focus group interview, the participants have teachers who use English to communicate with them since they are newly arrived students who do not master the Swedish language yet. Moreover, they have a mathematics teacher who sometimes communicate in Arabic with them and greet them in their home language:

Boy1: Yeah, and for me, like ... [name of teacher], when he ... the math teacher.

Boy2: Yeah, they speak also Arabic.

Boy1: They speak also Arabic. When he come, like, he could say hi to [name of Boy2] in Albanian [?? 0:25:42].

Boy2: Yeah, he always greets me in Albanian. It's like, "how are you, what do you do?" also (SWE_F5_ISCED2)

Use language differently depending on who you are communicating with

From the interviews it emerges that the students use their language repertoires differently depending on who they are communicating with. For example, the students seem to use mainly Swedish with teachers and their home languages with friends whom they share home language, mainly during breaks and in the canteen. This is exemplified with the following transcript (SWE_F3_ISCED3):

Boy: It depends on us, and who you talk to [??]. So if you talk to [name of the teacher], then you speak Swedish [??] your mother tongue he will not understand.

Interviewer: No.

Boy: But if you talk to your friends, then it's clear that you use [?? 0:10:40] other languages.

Girl 2: Yes.

Also, in school work, for example in group work and if everyone in the group share the home language, group interview participants explain that they may use their home language to communicate (SWE_F9_ISCED2). In another focus group interview it also emerges that they use their language repertoires differently depending on who they are communicating with. They give an example of how they in class use what they call “ghetto Swedish” with each other, whereas they do not use that type of language in situations like the focus group interview for instance (SWE_F7_ISCED2):

Girl1: But when we say for example you come into our Swedish lesson, then we do not speak Swedish... or not Swedish lesson, just if we say for example math lesson, we speak Swedish Swedish we speak ... says the man and stuff and ... There will be mixed ghetto languages so [laughs].

I: But if you are going to explain a math problem to someone?

Girl1: Then I would have done it in Swedish.

Girl2: “Man, check here ... [laughs] Do so man”.

Girl1: Yes, exactly [laughs]. It's ghetto Swedish so it will be ... Yes, as she said, it will be such Swedish.

Boy: It depends on whom.

Girl2: Yes.

Girl1: talk to [not audible 0:21:01].

I: How do you mean depends on who?

Boy: I'm not talking like this right now in this interview but maybe I talked like that with [name of girl2].

Home languages used in different situations

As presented in a previous section, the students say that it is mostly Swedish and Arabic that are used for communication in school, but mainly Swedish during class. However, how the students use their home languages, that is in what kind of situations, also emerged in the interviews. These situations are presented in this section. For example, students use their home languages when they do not want someone to understand what they are saying:

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)

And another student (SWE_F3_ISCED3) says “I feel that I mostly speak Swedish, but sometimes if no one should understand [laughs], then...” Another type of situation when students use their home languages in school is when explaining something in class to another student who does not understand (Swedish), which is exemplified in the following quotes:

Like if for example... That is, the teacher says something, then kind of, one of us don't understand for example. Then I can say "but it is so", that is, by saying the word in Arabic, you understand "yes, yes, like that". (Girl, SWE_F3_ISCED3)

And there is also always a kind of... if she kind of... it was a new girl who started and they spoke the same language but she could not speak Swedish, and if she did not know a word or something she helped her to translate it in class. (SWE_F8_ISCED1)

However, sometimes the newly arrived students do not share any language with the teachers and the classmates, such a situation is brought up by the focus group interview with students from the introduction class. They give an example of a Vietnamese boy, who they care for and try to help by communicating with by using body language and Swedish (SWE_F9_ISCED2):

Boy 2: We have a newly arrived who comes from Vietnam, and he has class with us every time it is math, sports and...

Girl2: Maths.

Boy 2: Yes. And then during the math class... We have no other Vietnamese in our class, and it is difficult to communicate with him. For example, me, [name of class mate] and [name of class mate], we usually take him in with open arms and help him with some tasks if he does not understand and he can work in our small group or something like that.

I: Do you speak English then or is it body language?

Boy1: It's more body language and Swedish.

A third situation when students say they use their home languages can be related to feelings of belonging. That is sharing home language may mean sharing backgrounds and thus enables for feelings of belonging. This is illustrated in the following quotes from the focus group with three boys (SWE_F2_ISCED3):

Boy1: Because he has... 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.

Boy2: Exactly. It is so. 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.

Girl: You have something in common.

I: Yes, do you have it automatically then?

Girl: No, it depends. I'm not talking to every single Arab I see here.

Another type of situation when students use their home languages that emerges in one of the interviews, is that home languages is used when teasing another student: "[laughs] When you tease each other it is Arabic but when you talk to teachers it is Swedish" (SWE_F7_ISCED2).

Mixing languages

As evident from transcripts in the previous sections the students use their language repertoires in different ways and in different situations. However, the students also say that they often mix languages. This means that they mix languages within a situation, they code-switch. That is, students may for example mostly communicate in Swedish but some words or sentences they may say in for example Arabic. This is evident when a boy says: "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). When one of the focus group with newly arrived students are asked what

languages they speak with their friends one girls says “Just mixed” (SWE_F5_ISCED2) are. However, the two boys say they speak mainly English with each other since they do not share home language. The use of different language repertoires would deserve further attention, in order to reflect on how also the adoption of different languages can have an important impact on the enhancement of conditions of hybrid integration

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In this conclusive discussion we highlight the main results of the analysis of school as a lived space and intercultural relations in school. We also formulate some recommendations for the strengthening of children’s agency in school.

School as a lived space

Ideal school and real school

The students’ talk about their real school, coincides to a great extent with how they talk about their ideal school. To a large extent the students seem to be content with their school. In relation to their perceptions of their ideal and real school the role of teachers are in focus, both in relation to educational and social aspects. The students think of teachers’ subject knowledge as important as well as their ability to explain so that the students can understand the content. According to the students the teachers shall not only give educational support they should also challenge them in their learning.

Although the students are mainly positive about their schools and teachers, some negative aspects are brought up. For example, the students do not appreciate constant teacher turnovers which they think affect their grades, or when teachers have different norms and rules in the classroom. They also do not appreciate noisy and rowdy classroom environments and long teacher monologues, i.e. when they have to listen to their teachers lecturing for a long time.

In the ideal and real school the students highlight the possibilities to receive educational support outside the mainstream lessons. This includes, for example, homework support after school arranged by the school or local organisations.

When it comes to social relations between students, the students refer to a positive environment in their classes and more generally in their schools. The positive social relations between the students seem to be related to that boys and girls interact with each other, both in school work and social arenas in school and are not separated in gender specific groups. In contrast to this, some students say that bullying sometimes occurs.

Affective and relational dimensions of school

The students say that they have good relations with both teachers and other significant professionals, for example student coordinators. The student coordinators are perceived as persons that are always there, and that can support and help them in different ways.

Student participation

Students’ opportunities to have influence in school seem to differ depending on whether it is related to more structural or classroom levels. On a structural level, the schools have a student council, but

some of the students find it difficult to get their voices heard at this level. Whereas, at a classroom level they perceive that they have a greater influence.

Imagined futures

Many of the participating students from the compulsory schools are planning to continue their studies at upper secondary school. For example, they want to attend programs in social and natural science, childcare, economics and business/accounting and hotel and tourism. In ten years, they think that they have families and working careers such as running own businesses, working as a lawyer or psychologist, working with young children, with video editing, computer engineering and at the municipality. The students in upper secondary school are planning to get into higher education in programs such as preschool teacher, police officer, social worker, IT engineer, architect, dentist, entrepreneurs and stock trading. However, some of the participating students only have vague ideas of their future studies and work. Especially those in compulsory school.

School during the pandemic

The students' experiences of online schooling from home during the pandemic are mostly expressed in negative terms. For example, the students say that they had to manage their learning on their own at home since they did not receive enough of educational support. They also perceived the online teaching as unprofessional and unplanned. Further, many students thought it was boring not being in school and seeing classmates. Online schooling from home also seems to put pressure on the students' family relations. In contrast to the negative aspects one of the participating students thought of online schooling from home as positive since she could work better from home when there were no distractions from the classmates.

Intercultural relations at school

Experiences of schooling in different countries

In one of the interviews (SWE_F5_ISCED2) with the newly arrived students the students compare their current school with the schools they had attended before moving to Sweden, which are schools located in Iraq, Kosovo and London. They believe that the school in Sweden differs from the others when it comes to freedom, learning activities and digital tools. It seems like the students' prior schooling departs from an instrumental perspective on teaching and learning. Whereas the teaching and learning the students experience in Sweden seem to be more activity based or based on interaction among the teacher and the students. This may have consequences for what kind of agency the students may act.

The role of language in relations with friends and classmates

Language seems to affect the students' relationships with each other. However, their answers slightly differ. Students in upper secondary class (SWE_F1_ISCED3) seem to think that language matters, but students' common interests they believe matter even more when it comes to friendship. However, the newly arrived students (SWE_F4_ISCED2) seem to think that language matters since they think that you have to share home language to become close friends. The ability to communicate in some way or another seem to be of importance to make friends according to the students.

Support – study guidance in mother tongue

The newly arrived students talk about study guidance in mother tongue as an appreciated support for their schoolwork. The study guidance tutor helps them to translate and explains texts so that the students can continue their learning.

I: How would you rate the help you receive?

Boy: Our teacher.

Girl2: Well, the teacher. Yes.

Boy: And then kind of friends.

Girl1: First of all, you think about school. We come here to learn, to get help, so the first thing that comes to mind is the teachers and the school. Then, as he said, classmates and friends. Then the last thing you think of is family. (SWE_F3_ISCED3)

Communication

When it comes to language use in school three named languages were mentioned as commonly used in the schools, namely, Swedish, Arabic and English. In class, Swedish is mainly used according to all focus groups. That is, ordinary teaching, is basically only in Swedish. Arabic is talked about as a language that is commonly used in the school since there are many Arabic speaking students in the school. English seems mainly to be used when interlocutors do not know Swedish and do not share home language, that is when English is the only shared language.

The students use their language repertoires differently depending on who they are communicating with. The students seem to use mainly Swedish with teachers, and their home languages with friends whom they share home language, mainly during breaks and in the canteen. In school work, for example in group work and if everyone in the group share the home language, they may use their home language to communicate. According to one focus group, in class they use what they call “ghetto Swedish” when communicating with each other, whereas they do not use that type of language in conversations with other who are not their friends and classmates. Further, the students seem to use their home languages for different reasons such as when they do not want someone to understand what they are talking about, when explaining something in class to another student who does not understand (Swedish), and to create a sense of belonging. That is, sharing home language may mean sharing backgrounds and thus enables for feelings of belonging. In summary, the students use their language repertoires in different ways in different situations. However, it does not seem to be either or, that only one language is used, the students also often mix languages. This means that they mix languages within a situation, they code-switch and/or translanguange.

Recommendations

Through the focus groups, three different professions emerged as particularly important to the students. The students’ teachers, student coordinators and study guidance tutors (and mother tongue teachers) seem to play important roles for the students’ schooling. Thus, it seems reasonable to highlight this when making recommendations. One recommendation is that teachers focus on both educational and social support and not solely on one of them. 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. Student coordinators focus on the students’ well-being and may be a great social support to the students and their schooling and thus another recommendation is that schools employ student coordinators. Study guidance in mother tongue tutors do not only

translate texts and tasks, they may also have other resources that they may use when tutoring. This includes for example knowledge about the students' prior and current educational systems and pedagogical practices, and a developed linguistic awareness about differences and similarities between Swedish and the mother tongue. Thus, a third recommendation is to strengthen study guidance in mother tongue for students who need it and to reflect on how the possibility to choose what language to use for self-expression has an important impact on the promotion of conditions of hybrid integration.

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CHILD-UP WP5 local report - children's perspectives. UK

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1. Introduction and Methodological notes

The CHILD-UP research aims to compare different sociocultural settings, in seven countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden and United Kingdom). CHILD-UP works with children from 5 to 16 years old. CHILD-UP was designed as a two-parts research. The first part consisted of (1) a background research on migrant children's conditions of integration in the seven countries involved in the fieldwork, and (2) a survey regarding the local schools, protection services, educational and mediation agencies and families. This initial stage of the research was completed before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second part of the research was scheduled in the months when all participating countries were hit by the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first time in many decades, children across Europe, and globally, were removed from their primary contexts of socialisation in a public health scramble to contain the pandemic, primarily through extended lockdowns, which included the closure of all schools in most countries. The second part of the CHILD-UP research includes (1) interviews and focus groups with professionals (teachers, social workers and mediators) and children, and (2) observation and evaluation of dialogic practices in schools, based on the use of videorecording, audio-recording, questionnaires and focus groups.

The CHILD-UP consortium's reaction to the impossibility to undertake the planned research activities during the second half of the school year 2019/2020 was to shift the research activities to the school year 2020/21. In the English settings of the CHILD-UP research, the management of the pandemic continued to disrupt educational establishments well into the school year; nevertheless, it was possible to deliver all planned interviews and focus groups, including focus groups with children.

This report engages with the voices of children in English primary schools, promoted by focus groups centred around children's experiences in schools. Children's experiences are explored, according to the design of CHILD-UP research, with regard to schools as learning spaces, children's aspirations, peer-relationships and cooperation with parents, gender and intercultural dimension of social relationships.

However, an essential part of the focus groups with children concerns experiences of learning and social relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unforeseen when the research was designed, the pandemic and the impact of its management on children's experiences could not be neglected if the voices of children and what matters for children were to be taken seriously.

It is believed that this report, as well as the other national reports produced for the CHILD-UP research, offers an important opportunity to tune-in with the voices of children. Focus groups were an opportunity for children to share their perspective on their experiences of education during the pandemic. Focus groups enabled children to (i) share their views on the current situation with the

researcher and their classmates (ii) to hear how their peers felt and had reacted to a shared experience. Children were able to gain insight into the experiences of peers and the impact of COVID-19, and its management driven by public health considerations, on them, gauging commonalities and differences.

This report presents the results of the analysis of 25 focus groups with primary school children in Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 groups (age 8 to 11). Notwithstanding the challenges of COVID-19, including the preservation of children and researchers' health, the number of focus groups fully met the expectations of the project. Focus groups took place between December 2020 and May 2021 in the participating schools. Two schools are located in the Greater London Borough of Barnet (North-West), one school in the Greater London Borough of Merton (South-West) and one school in the Greater London Borough of Bromley (South East). The catchment area of the school in Bromley includes some parts of Kent.

Focus groups were planned for the autumn term 2020-2021. However, the schools were closed for several weeks due to local outbreaks of Covid-19. When the schools re-opened in December 2020 in the proximity of the Christmas holidays, it was possible to deliver some of the planned focus groups. A second national lockdown in January 2021 resulted in the closure of all schools until March 2021. The remaining focus groups took place after the Easter holidays, between April and May 2021.

Although it is difficult to quantify the participants in the focus group, due to the need to involve all children, required as non-negotiable by schools, it is safe to estimate an average of 20 to 25 children for each focus group, for a conservative estimate of about 500 children. Of course, active participation was not the same for all children. The researchers observed that active participation in the focus groups involved, on average, about half of the group.

<u>Focus Group ID</u>	<u>Gender³⁹</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Participants (approx.)</u>	<u>Location</u>
F1 SF1	F:49; M:51	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F2 SF2	F:49; M:51	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F3 SF3	F:49; M:51	8-9	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F4 SF4	F:49; M:51	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F5 SF5	F:49; M:51	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F6 SF6	F:49; M:51	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon

³⁹ Whole-classroom engagement made it impossible to count participants by gender. It was possible however to retrieve the distribution by gender related to the schools, which is shown in the table

F7 WC1	F:52; M:48	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F8 WC2	F:52; M:48	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F9 FM1	F:53; M:47	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F10 FM2	F:53; M:47	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F11 FM3	F:53; M:47	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F12 FM4	F:53; M:47	8-9	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F13 FM5	F:53; M:47	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F14 FM6	F:53; M:47	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Finchley
F15 SF7	F:49; M:51	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Hendon
F16 WC3	F:52; M:48	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F17 WC4	F:52; M:48	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F18 WC5	F:52; M:48	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F19 WC6	F:52; M:48	8-9	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Merton
F20 BR1	F:50; M:50	8-9	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley
F21 BR2	F:50; M:50	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley
F22 BR3	F :50; M:50	9-10	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley
F23 BR4	F:50; M:50	8-9	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley
F24 BR5	F:50; M:50	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley
F25 BR6	F:50; M:50	10-11	Whole classroom FG: 20/25	Bromley

All 25 focus groups were conducted face-to-face, with both researcher and recorder in the school playground, where it was possible to maintain social distancing as prescribed by current legislation at the time of the interviews. As for many other contexts of the CHILD-UP research, the schools and groups that participated in all other research activities were the ones involved in the focus groups. As a general comment regarding participants' feedback on their participation in the focus groups, it appeared that children were happy with the experience, which was considered as a good opportunity to share their opinions on aspects and contexts that matters to their lives, such as education. Also, as anticipated earlier in the introductory notes, the focus groups offered children the change to share stories and feelings on the impact of the pandemic on their everyday lives.

Four schools and 25 groups were thus involved in the focus groups. In line with the planned research activities in the English contexts, all 25 groups were from primary school, ISCED 1. The groupgroups were mixed in terms of gender and migrant background. It was not possible to measure the exact balance between gender but, based in data from questionnaires distributed to the same grup of children, it is possible to indicate an even, 50%-50% balance. Also regarding the migration background, it is not possible to provide an exact measurement. According to the English legislation, since 2018 ‘Schools must no longer request information about migration background from parents, or retain the data within their system’. Based on data provided by children via the questionnaires, it can be assumed that, as characteristic of state primary schools in Greater London, children’s nationalities were very heterogeneous in all groups. All focus groups developed smoothly without any participant showing signs of discomfort throughout the interviews.

2. Schools as the context of children’s lived experiences

The school I’d like

The first topic introduced by the focus groups was aimed to promote children’s view on what an ideal school should look like, both in terms of spatial arrangements and curricular activities. Before presenting the results, supported by some exemplary excerpts that represent the main narratives and ideas that emerged from the focus group interviews, it is important to remind that all participating children were primary school children. Whilst securing uniformity in the data, this demographic trait may explain why participants from English settings generally offered a less critical and problematic view of their school experiences, if compared with older participants (ISCED 2 students, or even ISCED 3 students) in other national settings of the CHILD-UP research.

The most common trait of the ideal school is a well-furnished playground. This is not chiefly related to more opportunities for play and fun; rather, better playgrounds would offer more opportunities for socialisation. Opportunities for socialisation in the playground mean opportunities for socialising in a context strucutred by expectations of personal expression rather than expectations of role performances. A context where expectations concern personal expression positions all participants as legitimate authors of knowledge about themselves and their world, which is conducive to processes of hybrid integration. It should be noted that children were aware of the limitations imposed by emergency public health measures to socialisation. The display of such awareness during the focus group interviews will be discussed in a dedicated section of the report (section 7). For the time being, it is fair to emphasize that children were able and keen to project the ‘school they’d like’ in a post-pandemic future.

A recurring theme in the focus groups was that better and larger playground could foster more rewarding activities with the involvement of more children, allowing socialisation across age groups and classes.

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_SF1)

F1: Stuff to play proper football and proper footballs outside because this is how people make friends.

M1: A big place where there are places where people can like run but also chill, have a rest or a quite chat. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: If the outside is too tiny children will get bored sooner or later because it's always the same.

Researcher: So more space to play.

M1: And to have a chat. (UK_F23_BR4)

Several children shared the idea that a better-balanced school-life would help their well-being, allowing a more enjoyable time when sports, hobbies or simply playing and attending social events are undertaken.

M1: Not too much work to do at home for school, just some because if it's too much it's like school at home.

Researcher: And this is a problem?

M1: It so stresses me out. (UK_F11_FM3)

F1: Sometimes I cannot enjoy my friends because I think about school. I need real free time without stress.

F2: I am so nervous at home that my parents I think they are scared on me, I snap, I am frustrated, too much work at home I cannot relax. (UK_F7_WC1)

No substantial critiques to the curriculum were advanced, differently from what could be observed in national other settings of the research, particularly among older children. Rather, children in the English settings asked for an improvement in the quantity and quality of IT resources, aligning with this regard to the wishes of participants in other national settings of the research. Some children suggested that possible deficits in the available IT resources could be filled with children's own laptop or tablets, if they were eventually allowed in the classrooms.

M1: Definitely tablets for everyone instead of paper.

F1: So no one would learn how to write.

M1: I can write on my tablet like on paper, you can learn too.

M2: Life needs computer they need to be in schools. (UK_F8_WC2)

M1: I was thinking the other day at home why they do not let us bring our stuff our laptop at school so the school does not need to buy them.

Int: Why don't they, do you reckon?

M2: Because they think we're going to play with them.

M1: As if we have time to play (laughs) I honestly am shocked they do not let us use our computer.

M2: we used them anyway at home so we use them to do school work anyway. (UK_F23_BR4)

Curricular innovation proposed by some participants concerns the delivery of subjects, rather than the contents of subjects. Children across the 25 focus groups shared that learning is 'more fun' but also more effective when notions are presented through examples, or experienced first-hand through practical activities. The use of workshops instead of ordinary frontal lessons, was advocated, as well as the role of external 'experts' who can share their knowledge in the context of real-life experiences and examples. Although never explicitly mentioned, the idea of 'learning by doing' seems to represent an ideal learning situation for children. 'Learning by doing' is a form of learning where personal expression is supported. Also, it is a form of learning where personal contributions are

expected, particularly regarding children's access to the role of authors of knowledge. Thus, children seem to claim access to the role of authors of knowledge. As thoroughly explained in the final research report, children's access to the role of authors of knowledge is a prime example of agency. When knowledge concerns personal and cultural identities, migrant children's agency makes interactions the social context for the possible negotiation of hybrid identities. Probably due to the younger age of primary school children, the plea for a practice-based learning did not extend to employability or preparedness for the job market.

F1: So I have seen this thing on TV where an old man was going to a school in Russia with a bear to teach what bears do and how they are.

Researcher: They touched the bear.

F1: They did touch and stroke its fur.

Researcher: And do you think they learn more than reading stuff in a book do you reckon?

F1: Definitely they have literally touch the bear, you cannot do that in a book.

F2: I'd be scared.

Researcher: So scary and exciting.

F1: Definitely exciting. (UK_F13_FM5)

M1: Like on Tik Tok they show how they do say a forward roll with no hand they talk through, but they actually show it, this is learning.

Researcher: Like from experience?

M1: Yes.

Researcher: And would you like that to happen here in your school?

F1: Actually it happened there was that lady showing the Yoga exercises to relax and putting us in the right place as we were trying.

Researcher: Did you like it?

F1: Awkward first time but I learn while doing the position.

M2: for example the father of my grandfather never went to school not a single day my dad told me but he knew everything, literally all things because I had lots of experience so he was learning from life and I like I did like that (UK_F25_BR5)

Probably, the most common demand for innovation that emerged from the focus groups in English primary school does not concern neither the renovation of space and resources nor the innovation of curricula or pedagogical methodologies. Rather, the change advocated by children concerns their participation in their own education, towards a more person-centered approach, based on active participation and possibility of bringing personal experiences and knowledges in the classroom. Once more, children claim a position of authors of knowledge. What children seek in their education, first and foremost the possibility to share their knowledge about themselves and their social worlds, is also a condition of hybrid integration.

First, during focus groups children shared how the possibility to share personal stories and memories can be positive both for learning and peer-relationships.

M1: The best thing ever I like better is when we talk about what we have done with our friends and with the family?

Researcher: Why that?

M1: It feels nice to hear stories about places and to know what we do.

Researcher: so you learn about them?

M1: You hear new things. (UK_F10_FM2)

F1: When Mr. [teacher, name removed] asked us about our holidays this was the best time for me to hear some many stories.

F2: I liked it too.

Researcher: To know about what your friends did?

F1: It is more hear about them.

Researcher: Knowing more about them?

F1: Yes. (UK_F3_SF3)

Second, children expressed the wish for more time and spaces where they can share personal stories as well as listening to other children's stories, without judgement or pressure. Sharing stories is recognised, even by the relatively young participants to the focus groups as children in English school, as a resource for learning about classmates, for instance to know about new places, family habits, cultural traditions. M1: I like hearing stories for example stories of holidays to see the family so I hear about places I do not know.

Researcher: So you learn.

M1: Yes but sometimes I know the places but I did not know that for instance him his family is from there. (UK_F6_SF6)

Third, but related to the previous two points, many children converge in advocating a more person-centred style of teaching. The ideal teacher is a teacher, yes, but also a friend who is interested in children's lives. The occasions when teachers do tune-in with children's personal expression are remembered by children as a booster for trust and self-confidence.

M1: 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.

Researcher: Like proud?

M1: Yes. (UK_F13_FM5)

F1: Like when Mrs. [teacher's name removed] when I was chatting with my friend who is not here anymore she's in another school and Mr. S. [teacher's name removed] said 'we are all interested' and I thought 'oh, we should stop' but she said 'we are interested can you speak for everyone?' and I was not sure but I started and she was like 'very interesting, do you have any question for F.?' and I thought 'wow it feels good'.

Researcher: To share your story?

F1: It looked like it was important. (UK_F14_FM6)

Children express with vivid enthusiasm the power of 'seeing something new' about others, learning about differences but also recognising similarities, with a beneficial effect on empathy and friendship in the classroom.

M1: We were talking about hols and he said about seeing family in the farm and the grans I went ‘wow, this is exactly what we did’, it was nice.

M2: Like I did not even know that R. is from Afghanistan as I actually am I think we are more friends now.

M3: Yes. (UK_F9_FM1)

Researcher: So do you think it is nice to know that you may do or like the same things when you’re not at school?

F1: But I did not know before Mr. [teacher’s name removed] asked how the mid term was for us.

Researcher: Would you like more of that?

Many: Yes! (UK_F20_BR1)

Person-centred communication for a more ‘humanised’ learning should include also, according to the participants to the focus groups, teachers sometimes sharing their own personal memories and stories. This would create more trust and affectivity, transforming the classroom in a social environment where children feel safer in expressing their individual persons. Personal expression is not only seen by participants in the focus groups as an alternative resource for learning; personal expression can also benefit peer-relationships, thus children’s well-being. Sharing stories is recognised by the CHILD-UP project as an ideal context for the expression of personal and cultural identities that is essential to the construction of hybrid identities. Hybrid identities is ‘what is integrated’ in hybrid integration.

M1: We had so much fun when Mr. [teacher’s name removed] was telling stories of him going to school and the he did not like it then I like it and the funny stories with his friends.

Researcher: How did it make you feel?

M1: Fun and it looked like me actually.

F1: That teachers are like us were.

Researcher: So you will be like them when you get older?

F1: Maybe. (UK_F16_WC3)

M1: When G. (classmate) was very sad because his grandad passed away, he is not here today and Ms., [teacher’s name removed] told him she was sad when her gran died it was very nice and it made me thing that we are all the same we feel the same.

M2: Less lonely sometimes. (UK_F9_FM1)

The plea for a more personal teaching style is maybe unsurprisingly intertwined with the wish for a less directive and outcomes-driven teaching style. Communication in the classroom should be more respectful of children’s pace, reducing the pressures exercised on them. Interestingly, an idea emerged from the focus groups concerning the need for teachers to trust children’s capacity to pursue their learning a bit more autonomously.

M1: One thing I do not like is that it feels like we are always rushing somewhere, there is always something new so it is sometimes even not possible to enjoy what I’ve learned.

M2: Yes it’s true.

F1: For example I do not need the teacher to tell me everything and go very fast because we are late. I can do with some and then I learn on my own. (UK_F17_WC4)

M1: I get very tired because we go so fast sometimes

Researcher: Is it difficult to keep up?

M1: Sometimes yes I'd need more time to relax so I can take in. (UK_F2_SF2)

More than any other need or interest, it was the importance for young children to have their voices listened, also within the classroom environment, that moulded their imagination of the ideal educational experience. As an analyst's comment, focus groups invite reflection on whether the assumption about young children's limited capacity to participate in communication is justified or, rather, it reflects adults' unpreparedness to listen to children's voices, in the way children express themselves. Reflection and research are invited regarding the promotion of favourable conditions for children to express themselves in their own ways, by creating conditions of intergenerational trust.

The school as it is

Whilst their relatively young age should be considered, it is necessary to emphasize that for children in the English settings of the CHILD-UP research the most important variable of the school experiences is the quality of relationships with peers and teachers. This is exemplified by several excerpts below, across all participating schools.

M1: To me the most important thing is to be with nice people, if not it's not possible to do anything.

M2: Exactly like me I know (laughs). (UK_F4_SF4)

F1: I used to go to another school and I was feeling sick all the time like not sick but I was feeling like sick because I hated the place.

Researcher: What is that you did not like?

F1: I did not like, not many people were nice.

F2: It is so true if you do not like people no place is OK. (UK_F25_BR5)

M1: What I like here it is I feel safe and I think they are not scared of me? (laughs)

M2: We feel comfortable.

Researcher: You find school alright?

M2: Mainly comfortable with my friends, the most important things having friends so do not feel alone at school. (UK_F17_WC4)

F1: Everyone is very nice here, I like that more than anything else.

F2: I have a cousin who goes to a very big and famous school but he always say that he wished he was me because I go to a school with nicer people and teachers. (UK_F21_BR2)

Pedagogically related aspects such as timetabling, spatial arrangements and, always important for children in the English settings, the playground, are often themselves considered with regard to their impact on social relationships.

M1: It'd be good to have more time to catch up with children from other groups like more breaks only for a quick chat, obviously when Covid is over.

M2: Short break like very hour. (UK_F12_FM4)

F1: One year we were in a room we can see outside other kids waking by and say hello if that was a friend like not talking just like smiling, it was nice.

Researcher: To be a bit social during lessons?

F1: It was just nice to see friendly faces sometimes. (UK_F22_BR3)

M1: I remember that video when all people were not sitting but walk around and catch up with other at lunchtime, that would be nice.

Researcher: To socialize?

M1: Yes.

M2: To feel more free to catch up. (UK_F19_WC6)

Clearly related to the pivotal importance of relationships, but also aligned to children's plea for a more person-centered communication, is the assessment of curricula activities. The most appreciated curricular activities seem to be the ones that offer opportunities for personal expression through narratives, arts, or drama. This preference for activities that are intrinsically favourable to children's personal expression is consistent with the preference of children of the same age in other national settings of CHILD-UP. It is reiterated that children's demand for a communication centred on the unique person, rather than the standardised role, is a demand for the form of communication that allows the co-construction hybridisation processes. Maybe less related to personal expression, but nevertheless presented as very important asset for socialisation and interpersonal relationships, is physical education, which is seen by participants as cognate to play.

F1: I feel so free when I do drama but it is not very often really.

Researcher: Why free?

F1: They actually ask us to express how we feel and I like that. (UK_F18_WC5)

M1: I like when we do music because we can choose the music we like and we talk about it why we like it when we listen to it.

M2: What we like. (UK_F5_SF5)

F1: The sense of freedom of being myself, I like sports and PE, it makes me feel free and I forget about my frustrations. (UK_F19_WC6)

A possible expectation for a gender-divide, with females participants more inclines towards personal expression and males more inclined towards physical activities, is not confirmed by data from focus groups; males and females participants appreciate activities that promote personal expression and physical activities in the same measure, as for the two exemplary excerpts below.

F1: My favourite thing is football, I am in the school team, I just love it.

Researcher: Do you? I liked it too.

F1: it's so good to use energies and makes me feel free. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: I am definitely going to take dancing classes.

Researcher: What do you like of it?

M1: I feel more myself when dancing than any other time. (UK_F23_BR4)

Socialisation is presented across all focus group as a defining aspect of school experiences: it has been discussed that socialisation opportunities offered influences the positive assessment of physical activities and the playground; it also influences a positive assessment of all activities to be undertaken as group activities. Not just 'learning by doing', but 'learning by doing together' seems to be the most

satisfying learning experiences for participants in the focus groups. Working in groups combines learning with socializing.

M1: Working as a group is the best thing of school except playing football on the break, you work with other children you communicate. (UK_F1_SF1)

M1: I do like the group study the study groups.

Researcher: Why do you like that?

M1: It is more fun.

Researcher: So is it better because learning is more fun, is it?

M1: And more because there are more ideas which I might have not thought about it. (UK_F16_WC3)

F1: I love when we are asked to solve a problem, I remember being like detectives to solve a crime scene but it was a long time ago and we had to study history of that time to understand the characters and what they wanted, there was like the nephew of the king who wanted to be king.

Researcher: And you investigated as a group or on your own?

F1: This is the best thing, as a group we worked together so we had fun when studying and we had chats and become I think more closer. (UK_F2_FM2)

However, a small minority of children expressed some levels of discomfort with working in groups, if the commitment to work and the personal engagement of the group's members are very different.

M1: I don't agree with groups because I remember we were two myself and P. and we were working for 4 children who were not bothered but it was not here it was somewhere else. (UK_F12_FM4)

For participants in the focus groups, what epitomizes the combination of learning by doing together with sociability and personal expression are surely school trips. During school trips, long travels allow time to get to know each other as persons, rather than fellow pupils, and the discipline seems to be slightly more relaxed. Teachers too, they seem to be more inclined to join communication as unique persons, beyond their ordinary role. School trips are a metaphor for situation where role-based hierarchies are replaced with the positioning of participants as unique persons. It seems that children are well prepared to engage in that person-centred communication where hybrid identities are negotiated, and hybrid integration is co-constructed.

F1: Oh, wow I love trips we have pictures here on the wall of the trip to the Natural Museum it was so great fun, I actually got to know S. and H. on the train we did not know each other well because they are in another group but now we are friends like best friends. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: When I was littler, Mr. B [teacher's name removed] took us to Dean's Farm where we actually milked I think a nanny goat and they were talking us through how it works to make the cheese and while they were talking I had to laugh because J. told me a funny story. (UK_F7_WC1)

F1: Mr. C [teacher's name removed] was like singing on the bus and telling us how they used to wind the teacher up when he and his friend were on a school trip and the stories were actually funny

M1: like we could hear stories that Mr. C. [teacher's name removed] never told us it was fun (UK_F13_FM5)

Unfortunately for the participants, school trips seem to have become a less frequent occurrence, which is ground for children's regret.

F1: Oh wow I love trips we have pictures here on the wall of the trip to the Natural Museum it was so great fun, I actually got to know S. and H. on the train we did not know each other well because they are in another group but now we are friends like best friends.

F2: We haven't had one this year because of Covid and the year before because of Covid but actually I heard we were going to go before Covid somewhere but it did not happen. (UK_F12_FM4)

The negative aspects of everyday life at school are a sort of 'negative reflection' of children's ideas and wishes for an ideal school. Firstly, the playground and other spaces of freer socialisation are sometimes negatively evaluated.

M1: To me the worst thing of all is outside there is not much space and we have to share with little children that are always outside so it is not even fun sometime I would not bother to go outside.

M2: Right, I have not see for instance people from the other groups for ages because we do not even go outside that much. (UK_F20_BR1)

F1: The football pitch is a bit run down and there are people who go there behind the goals to have a chat but it ruins the match. (UK_F23_BR4)

M1: Before Covid the canteen was not nice I think, I know some people in other schools who have a nice canteen where they can go and do activities when they do not eat. I have been back there since Covid. (UK_F15_FM6)

F1: What is missing in this school is a cozy space with cushions and sofa to chill out and have a chat, I remember people telling they have got it in their school, I don't remember where. I hope they will give us one after Covid. (UK_F4_SF4)

Second, the availability of IT resources for learning is considered by some as not fully adequate. This point was addressed, as discussed earlier, with an idea of using personal devices in the classroom; for this reason, the perduring ban on those is criticized by participants.

M1: I just do not get why we are banned from using our tablet. Fine but give us one from school because I had to stand so many time waiting for my turn at the computer because there are not as many as us.

M2: Yes, my brother takes his laptop to lesson at the College so who's right?

F1: People get distracted anyway if they are not interested. (UK_F3_SF3)

Regarding more strictly pedagogical aspects, whilst the curricula are not criticized in themselves, some critical comments are advanced with regard to the delivery of subjects which can be sometimes not interested in the pace of children's learning, imposing an exhausting pace.

M1: I like all subject to be honest, I only wish it was not all so stressful

Researcher: someone told me in another group too fast one cannot enjoy the things he learned

M1: Yes I agree, and also it is more difficult to learn and I am stressed all day. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: I can learn anything not at school but not a school.

Researcher: Is it because it is too difficult or?

M1: No no, difficult it is that we are always catching up, rushing and I had to do homework but at school we were already doing something else.

M2: When it's like that I cannot see the point to be honest. (UK_F11_FM3)

It has been previously discussed how children in the English settings appreciate the idea of 'learning by doing together' through workshops and work-group. Coherently, a perceived rarity of those ways of learning together may feed critical remarks.

M1: I would like more group work, I do not like much studying alone.

Researcher: Maybe they think you can get distracted?

M1: But I am more distracted when I'm alone.

M2: True because for example if I work with a group I do not even think about the phone but I am always playing on it (when I am) on my own. (UK_F17_WC4)

F1: Working together is very nice but there is not much of it to be honest, although we all want it, I believe. (UK_F10_FM2)

A final observation concerns children's critical views of schooling: whilst the possibility of personal expression is apparently the most desired change wished by participants, an expectation of criticism towards the lack of such possibility is however not confirmed by data from focus groups. Only a few children express criticism towards the lack of spaces for personal expression.

M1: I do not like when we have to listen and listen but we cannot speak even if we have things to say.

Researcher: Would you like to speak more in the lessons?

M1: If I have something to say, yes. (UK_F12_FM4)

This apparent inconsistency may be explained with reference to children's socialisation to the structures of the education system: whilst children appreciate spaces of personal expression when provided, and also intensely wish for more, at the same time they do not expect them in the classroom.

M1: Children are supposed to listen and learn because the teacher like Mr. H. [teacher's name removed] know more, they are teacher and they want to educate us.

F1: Like it's nice to have a chat but not when Mr. H. explains something to us. (UK_F7_WC1)

This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the great importance recognised to spaces of socialisation such as they playground, the gym or school trips where, contrary than in the classroom, opportunities for personal-expression and interpersonal communication are expected.

3. Relationships and affectivity at school

As already indicated in the discussion of children's vision of an ideal school experience, social relationships, much more powerfully than the quality of teaching or curricula, seem to shape children's experiences of schooling. Social relationships are important; how did children narrate them in the focus groups?

As a general observation, children across the 25 focus groups in English schools are happy with their social relationships at school, although the picture is not as straightforward as it would appear.

Children present a multifaceted outlook on their social relationships, which confirmed the results emerging from the quantitative research delivered in 2020 (WP 4).

As a reminder of the quantitative research results, the items of the CHILD-UP questionnaire related to children's view of school relationships produced contrasting results. In particular, while an extremely high percentage of children completely agreed with the statement 'I like being together with their classmates', 99%, a much lower percentage of children completely, or at least strongly agreed, with the statement 'I have friends in the classroom', 59,7%. During the focus groups, children shared the construction of a difference between a positive assessment of relationships at school (what was synthesized in the questionnaires by the statement 'I like being together with my classmates') and friendship.

With regards to the assessment of social relationships at school, there is a general convergence towards a positive assessment, as exemplified by the excerpts below.

M1: I like all of them, I have never had a problem.

M2: Yes I like you too.

M3: This is a good school. I like to be here, I feel safe and I met nice people.
(UK_F23_BR4)

F1: This is definitely the best school I have been in, the people are the best.

F2: So easy to make friends from the first day. (UK_F3_SF3)

Good social relationships, 'liking people', however, is not the same as being friends. Whilst the construction of friendship as a qualitatively different form of social relationship might be somehow expected among teenagers or young adults, it was slightly surprising to observe it clearly emerging also from the voices of young children.

M1: I would say we are all friends but not all best friends.

Interviewer: What is the difference?

M1: Friends are like knowing each other and be OK and have fun or a chat, best friend is like you'd give everything for him.

Interviewer: Special friends.

M1: Yes, and there is no many of them. (UK_F25_BR6)

M1: There are so many extracurricular activities, so much more.

Int: So you think you would like to do things outside the regular subjects?

Some: Yes [...] they have a basketball team, they have more sports classes.

(UK_F23_BR4)

Friendship is rare, and it is usually built over time and reinforced with shared experiences outside school such as cultivating shared interests, often related to sports.

M1: I like to be with people at school, I do not like anyone I think but I have friends outside, I am more closer.

Researcher: Like family friends.

M1: Yes and friends I met outside like at tennis or padel.

M2: Mee too, I chat at school but if I have problems I have a friend since we were almost babies. (UK_F6_SF6)

F1: I do have friends at school I feel very close to them. More than any other friend.

Researcher: I have friends I can trust to tell a secret.

F1: Yes, they are like that, I do not tell secrets or problem to many people but I like them, just not like that. (UK_F8_WC2)

Similarly to when children were asked to imagine the ideal school and to assess their current educational experiences, participants did not refer to gender or migration background as important variables that can make a difference both for their representation of friendship and for what they think that others expect from friendships. Children seem to focus on the unique person rather than approaching the ‘other’ through the lenses of cultural essentialism. Of course, this is the approach to interacting with others that makes hybrid integration viable.

Interestingly, this confirms the results of the quantitative research, but also the observations of teachers, as analysed and discussed in another research report pertaining to WP5 (professionals’ perspectives). Teachers pointed to the relatively young age of children to justify the limited influence of gender and other macro-variable. Although further research needs to be undertaken to validate such conclusion, it is interesting to observe that in other national settings of the CHILD-UP research it was the group of older participants in ISCED 2 or ISCED 3 that observed fragmentation in smaller sub-groups.

On an analytical level, it is believed that younger children participating in English focus groups have lower expectations about the intensity of social relationships in the classroom, which may also reduce conflicts and fragmentation.

Regarding the topic of conflict and conflict management, which was a component of the focus group, participants rarely shared stories or opinion concerning disagreements. Rather, the impression of the classroom as harmonious social spaces was proposed to the interviewers.

M1: I am going to be honest I have never fought anyone.

Researcher: Never an argument.

M1: No.

F1: I think we are quiet people in this group, we do not argue. (UK_F11_FM3)

F1: Mrs. F [teacher’s name removed] always says that we are a relaxed bunch.

F2: Because we do not have arguments. (UK_F15_FM6)

When experiences of disagreements were shared, participants were quick in dismissing their relevance and particularly they denied that disagreements had a lasting impact on social relationships.

M1: Like we can have disagreements but they do not matter really, they are fixed, we fix them easy.

M2: We can about it if we disagree.

M3: I have never lost a friend here because of an argument. (UK_F18_WC5)

F1: I am proud of myself and my friends and everyone really because we do not fight, we do not like it but this does mean we always agree, we do not fight over it. (UK_F18_WC5)

Differently from published research, for instance (Baraldi & Iervese, 2010⁴⁰) and in contrast with other national settings of the CHILD-UP research (but in line with recent research in English primary school classrooms in the same local authorities⁴¹) children did not share the idea that conflicts can be expected and even positive when they provide opportunities to know the other better. Getting to know the other seems to be seen by participants in the English focus groups as the outcome of interpersonal communication based on personal expression (section 1 and section 2) and not related to conflict management.

Consequently to the limited discussion around disagreements and conflicts, data from the focus groups only offer minimal information regarding children's experiences of conflict management. Still, it was possible to recognise avoidance strategies. The preference for conflict avoidance shared by children in the UK settings could impact negatively on the viability of hybrid integration. Hybrid integration is based on personal expression, and personal expression may increase the possibility of conflict between different perspectives.

M1: I do not like arguing, nothing comes from it but stress and anger, I do not like that at all.

M2: Me neither so I just walk away and after a while I do not even remember why I walked away so fighting is just stupid. (UK_F14_FM6)

F1: I do not like fights and shouting, it can ruin friendships also old ones where you share a lot with the other person and all of a sudden is all lost so it's better to avoid. (UK_F5_SF5)

As well as the use of teachers as mediators of conflict to solve disagreements.

F1: I remember once a big argument, I am not going to say who but it looked but however Ms. A [teacher's name removed] fix it easily, she got them to speak, those people and shake their hand which was nice.

M1: As Mr. B [teacher's name removed] always says, if there is a problem you can come to me and talk about it but not fight over it. (UK_F11_FM3)

However, in most cases children were firm in claiming the skills to manage conflicts autonomously. This piece of data slightly differs from the results of the previous quantitative research where children indicated that asking peers, parents or teachers for help to manage conflict was a common practice.

M1: I think I can manage it if I disagree with someone, I have always done so and I have done OK. (UK_F9_FM1)

F1: We just talk between us is there is something going on, at school and more so outside when there are always more problems but we talk through.

Researcher: Why more problems?

M1: Because outside there is more freedom, so more problems.

Researcher: So, more freedom means more problems?

⁴⁰ Baraldi, C. & Iervese, V., (2010) Dialogic Mediation in Conflict Resolution Education. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 27 (4): 423-445.

⁴¹ Visit www.sharmed.eu for the research report

M1: Yes.

F2: It can go wrong more easy.

Researcher: So you do not like freedom?

F2: I do. (UK_F24_BR5)

Only a handful of contributions concerned conflicts between teachers and children, systematically fuelled by children's perceptions of unfair practices. However, and differently from conflicts with peers, the rare conflicts with teacher seem to have a more lasting effect on social relationships if they lead children to construct expectations of unequal treatment. This is a marginal but interesting point because it may affect children's well-being; thus, all relevant contributions from the focus groups are reported below.

M1: I am going to be completely honest, I think we had some problem myself and the teacher one year in the past.

F1: Who.

M1: I was little.

Researcher: What sort of problems?

M1: I just thought he was not being fair and picking on me all the time, I became very frustrated.

M2: Me too in another school, I didn't want to go anymore because I was always told off and being wrong even when I was literally doing nothing, I was mad.

F1: Unfairness is the worst thing, it makes me angry. (UK_F10, FM2)

F1: It was when I was at [school's name removed] I had my only fight with someone in a school and it was my teacher because she was accusing me of something and did not believe but she believed others, so unfair. (UK_F11_FM3)

M1: Like my brothers he always come home like depressed and he says that he is not treated well, unfairness so whatever he does that is no good so he says I cannot be bothered anymore and I think I'd be the same.

M2: Yeah, it feels like working for nothing so why bothering at all?

Researcher: Does it happen to you?

M2: No, maybe once I was disappointed and wanted to leave but my parents made my reflect, now it's all good. (UK_F14_FM6)

4. Making decisions

An important aspect of children's experiences at school is decision-making. Making decisions refers to the possibility for children to make a difference in the contexts of their experiences, which has been described as 'agency' in sociological research. Agency refers both to making choices and to the capacity of such choices to change (making a difference) the social context, at least in the sense of the impossibility for others to ignore them.

Based on data from focus groups, agency appears to be limited within ordinary teaching activities. Participants do not have access to decision-making concerning lessons, both about their contents and the methodology of contents delivery.

Teachers are acknowledged as holders of higher epistemic authority, implying that they have the duty, and the right, to transmit knowledge. Thus, it is expected by children that teachers make decisions, without consulting them. Knowledge and commitment to children's learning are mentioned by participants as the foundations of teachers' authority.

M1: Of course it is Mr. H. [teacher's name removed] who makes all decision, it is only normal as he's the teacher.

Researcher: But would you like to have a voice?

M1: Not about teaching.

M2: Exactly, we are children.

M1: Mr. H. wants us to do well and works for that, even during Covid he was working so much so we were not falling behind. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: My parents told me when I was younger, 'just listen to the teacher, he know his job' and I think it makes sense.

F1: I do not want to teach (laughs).

Researcher: But what about making decision, for instance work groups rather than individual as you said earlier you would like better?

F1: Yes but if Ms. A [teacher's name removed] says it's going to be individual like not in groups it's fine, it's for our best. (UK_F23_BR4)

It should be reminded that one of the criticisms, albeit not very frequent, towards the educational experience advanced by children was the limited opportunity for personal expressions. Personal expression is obviously linked with decision-making, therefore a plea for more opportunities of self-expression in the classroom could appear as contrasting with the acceptance of teachers' authority.

This inconsistency is however only apparent: children claim more spaces for personal expression but not within ordinary lessons. For children, spaces for personal expression should be created as separated spaces, diverting time dedicated to ordinary teaching but not mixing the two contexts. This interpretation is suggested by several contributions from children, illustrated by exemplary excerpts below:

M1: I like to chat and I like doing like Arts and say what I like or painting. But when there are subjects like the big ones I like to listen. (UK_F1_SF1)

M1: It is important to listen to pass the exams well.

Researcher: To listen and follow what your teacher, Mr. T. {teacher's name removed] says, you mean?

M1: Yes, because it is good for us. (UK_F20_BR1)

It should be also reminded that children expressed a strong preference for a 'learning by doing' model, through group work. As 'learning by doing' is often associated with a more active role of the learner, it could be thus questioned how such preference can coexist with the acknowledgment of a strong teacher's authority. However, an active role in learning by doing does not necessarily imply access to autonomous decision-making when it comes to the organization of learning activities. An active role can be played within the boundaries designed by teachers' decision-making, as active engagement in activities designed and lead by teachers. Decision-making seems to be related to choices that concern the access to the role of authors of knowledge. This is an important point because

authoring knowledge is a form of agency that make hybridisation processes possible. This is represented by the excerpt below.

M1: Working in group is best, we are so much helped my Mrs. J [teacher's name removed] who tells us what we are supposed to do so we have a guide.

Researcher: Like instruction.

M1: To help us.

M2: So it is easier and nicer to cooperate, we are more chilled. (UK_F5_SF5)

The acknowledgement of teachers' authority and decision-making, which incidentally confirms the results of the previous quantitative research, appears to be based on both confidence and trust. Children are confident in the school as an organisation fit for the purpose of educating; more poignantly in the focus groups, children trust teachers' expertise as well as their personal commitment in children's education.

M1: Teachers want to educate us, they know how to and even if I may not agree with them I trust them and follow them.

F1: It is their job so they should be left to do it.

M2: Because they want us to succeed.

F1: Yes.

M1: Yes. (UK_F2_SF2)

F1: I remember the first day it was last year Mrs. D. [headteacher's name removed] told us we are all together and we want the same thing your success, I still believe it.

Interview: And do you trust teachers too.

F1: Yes, they want the best for us they have been working so hard, they are amazing, just saying. (UK_11_FM3)

The representation of a persistent form of unequal treatment was previously discussed as a reason for teachers-children conflict; unequal treatment might not hinder confidence in schools as organisations but it can damage trust within specific interactions with teachers. Although rare comments refer to withdrawal of trust in teachers, they are illustrated by the excerpt below, as they may hint to problems in the classrooms that otherwise are not explicitly mentioned by participants in the focus groups.

M1: When I went mad because it was so unfair I was spoken tool, it was now many years ago then I stopped being angry but yes, I did not feel comfortable anymore in that school with that teacher as I used to.

Researcher: What do you mean being uncomfortable?

M1: Like being more anxious, not trusting anymore so being scared, I was little to be honest. (UK_F19_WC6)

Further research is advocated to explore whether withdrawal of trust in teachers can affect confidence in the system in the long run, thus creating conditions for marginalization, as suggested by sociological theory (e.g. Luhmann, 1988; Baraldi & Corsi, 2017)⁴².

Still, decision-making is not alien to children's experiences at school. Decision-making is experienced outside of instructional activities, in the playground. The possibility to make decisions that are autonomous and consequential, thus displaying a situation of agency, is another aspect that, at least for some children, makes the playground a crucial social space in their educational experiences.

Researcher: What is the best thing when you catch up outside then?

F1: Every time we do something different.

Researcher: Who gets to choose what?

F1: We do together. (UK_F1_SF1)

M1: Someone can come and say 'look what I've seen on YouTube', or Tik Tok or whatever and if it is cool and we can do it we do it during break.

M2: Yes but we do not video it, we do not have phones.

M3: So we have to make things up sometimes, which is also fun. (UK_F8_WC2)

The playground emerges from the analysis of focus groups as a pivotal space for several important reasons: it is a space for recreation, it is a space for developing social relationships; it is a space for personal expression; it is a space for the exercise of agency.

5. Aspirations

The aspiration to achieve is inextricably linked to the experience of assessment. The awareness of being assessed based on educational performances is vividly represented by many children's contributions across all 25 focus groups in English primary schools.

'Doing well' at school is different from 'being well' at school. Several children share the idea that 'liking classmates' and enjoying going to school can be related to positive social relationships, regardless of academic success. Not doing well at school can coexist with a positive experience of schooling, when social relationships are good.

M1: Now I am going to be honest I am not doing that well but yes I do like school I would chose to come even if I could not come because I like my friends better than staying home.

M2: Me too, I think I can do better but I enjoy school because of him (laughs) and the other friends. (UK_F25_BR6)

F1: If I do not like people, I cannot enjoy studying but I like here. (UK_F12_FM4)

⁴² Luhmann, N. 2000. 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives'. In: Gambetta, Diego (ed.) *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, pp. 94-107. Oxford: Department of Sociology, University of Oxford. Baraldi, C. & Corsi, G. 2017. *Luhmann: education as social system*. London: Springer.

M1: I think there are two things and the best one may not like school because he does not like people or does not have any friend, this can happen.

Researcher: Does it happen to someone you know?

M1: Yes sort of, you do not need to be good at school to have friends at school and this to me is the most important thing to be honest. (UK_F7_WC1)

Most participants accept the legitimacy of teachers' role as evaluator of their academic performances, which is related to their authority based on children's trust in expertise. A relatively frequent comment concerns the importance of teachers' commitment to justify marking and to explain how to improve in the future. Marks are seen as useful only if they serve as the foundation of learning and academic progress.

M1: I am so always stressed because of marks and now we have had mock sits and exams but I think it is fair to say that what Mrs. Y [teacher's name removed] tells us to do to do better to me it always makes sense and does helps me.

F1: Yes, it's the same for me.

M2: As we were saying she knows her job. (UK_F6_SF6)

F1: They told us that marks need not to be feared but we need to reflect on them and the suggestion how to get better I think it is always good. (UK_F24_BR5)

However, legitimacy of teachers as evaluators does not imply that how specific teachers in specific classroom environments embody that role will be necessarily always accepted by children. Acceptance of assessment depends not only on confidence in the system and not only on trust in teachers' expertise; it also demands personal trust in teachers' motivations. The implications of the observation on inequality are thus wide-ranging: observation of inequalities can invite withdrawing personal trust in teachers' motivations, therefore affecting trust in specific interactions, including interactions dedicated to assessment.

F1: 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.

Researcher: You could not trust him.

F1: No I could not and I did not believe him so it was pointless, really. (UK_F13_FM3)

Shifting from children's ideas on the formative function of assessment to children's description of actual assessment practices, the most interesting aspect is that when there is no trust on assessment, its formative value is not recognised, irrespectively of the effort that an untrusted teachers may invest in developmental feedback.

F1: All the advice and stuff I do not trust because he [the teacher] was unfair so I did not trust him. (UK_F13_FM5)

M1: My problem is that if there are differences and someone is given more of everything I just do not trust if I am told 'I am here to help' whatever you do whatever the activities and the work you want me to do, whatever. (UK_F7_WC1)

Participants in the focus groups seldom referred to differences in academic performances to be related to gender, or migration background. The two excerpts below are the only ones where a link, anyway quite loose, is proposed between gender and academic performances. In this way, children's contributions seem to confirm the views of teachers on the limited relevance of gender and migration background on children's approach to learning in school. It is important to emphasize that what is

presented here is the perspective of young primary school children, who do not see gender and migration background as variable that influence decisively attitudes towards schooling. Of course, children's views should not replace sociological research on the structural determinants of education performances; however, the focus groups were interested in listening the voices of children, to collect their perspectives.

M1: I think that girls are quieter when the teacher talks in the classroom and maybe argue a bit more.

F1: I do not think so yes girls are more better at school. (UK_F23_BR4)

F1: Surely the boys are more agitated, most of them and get told off and sent to detention more, actually it's just them. (UK_F24_BR5)

However, a slightly more robust reference to academic problems related to migration background could be appreciated when children with migrant background shared their experiences of newly-arrived, particularly if the school year was already underway. Again, this confirms teachers' contributions, as discussed in a previous CHILD-UP research report.

F1: There was a girl when she arrived it was very late like after Easter mid term and she could not speak very well and it was a bit awkward to being with. It was difficult to chat but not for long then she learned.

Researcher: Are you still friend?

F1: I think so but she went to another school the year after that. (UK_F13_FM5)

In particular, when children refer to initial difficulties in their school experience, this concerns linguistic adaptation. The struggle in understanding peers and teacher is remembered by some as reason for discomfort. However, even when initial difficulties are mentioned, they are always presented as short-lived and not relevant in the present. It seems that linguistic adaptation should not be a challenge for the access of migrant children to the role of authors of knowledge. Access to the role of authors of knowledge, when such knowledge concerns themselves and their social worlds, is key for the negotiation of hybrid identities.

M1: I myself was struggling because I was very little and I was supposed to be with my cousin here but he stayed with our grans longer and joined me when the year had started and before that it was not easy because I did not know anyone I had just arrived I could not speak or understand well but my dad who was here already he taught me well. (UK_F4_SF4)

M1: I was literally scared because I did not understand anything and I have to take 2 buses and sometimes a train and I was 8 with no English to be honest. The school was a scary place.

Researcher: How did you manage then?

M1: 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 though 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_BR5)

Children are acutely aware of the importance of doing well at school for their future. The meaning of 'future' in the context of the focus groups seems to refer to progression throughout the stages of education. Doing well at school is recognised as key to access better educational opportunities.

However, this is true for the older participants, who were about to embark in the final primary school exams at the time of the focus groups.

M1: Definitely I am so obsessed now with the Sat's [name of the final primary school exams in England] I think they will be like before Covid so which I like.

Researcher: Why obsessed?

M1: Because I want to go to a good school because it is easier then to go to the best Uni. (UK_F3_SF3)

F1: It is important for us all really to take this year seriously, the next one, because the exam are very important.

Researcher: Why are they so important?

F1: Obviously because I want to choose my secondary.

Researcher: Which school you would like?

F1: A good one with many subjects like drama and arts and music.

M1: Yes because there are school where you only do few subjects and you cannot really do what you like if you do not like them ones.

F1: I think you are not prepared well. (UK_F12_FM4)

Among younger children, who were still relatively away from exams when they took part in the focus groups, 'academic future' is a concept represented much more loosely.

M1: It is important to try our best to be ready for the next year and each year the same until the exams and the big school. (UK_F25_BR6)

F1: Like my sister who is in secondary in B. [town name removed] she was studying but not much and she did not like the school and the teacher and not even the other kids there and now she does 'not like the secondary either because it is no good, it is important to study when you are young so you go to a good school. (UK_F11_FM3)

Probably due to the younger age of participants, the importance of academic achievement is not related to a better positioning in the job market by participants in English focus groups.

An interesting piece of data is that no differences associated to gender or migration background could be observed as a determining factor in children's reflections on the importance of academic achievement for their future. Again, this aligns with teachers' representations of children's aspirations. Jobs that are allegedly slightly less than realistic are very frequently imagined by participants in the focus group. Consideration for their young age should be paid, it is suggested.

F1: I am going to be a baller and I know already it will be with Crystal Palace.

Interviewer: So you play for them already?

F1: I am registered for the summer camp.

Interviewer: So you are going to impress Crystal Palace.

F1: Yes, or another. (UK_F20_BR1)

M1: I cannot wait to be old enough to go to Britain's got talent, because I am going to be a musician.

Researcher: Wow, do you play an instrument?

M1: Actually I am a singer, I sing at the Church and everywhere I can really. (UK_F14_FM4)

M1: He's so good to be fair.

Interviewer: We were talking about videogames, like Fortnite.

M2: Actually I am good I am going to be a professional player.

Interviewer: Wow.

M2: Yes I think I can.

Interviewer: So to get paid to play.

M2: It is not easy but I can. (UK_F12_FM4)

Very few participants referred to the intention of embarking in the same professions of their parents. This piece of data is possibly surprising; however, it is not possible to ascertain whether the professions mentioned by children were their parents' professions or not. An example of explicit reference to continuing the family's trade are offered below. It is however emphasized that it represents a somehow rare contribution.

M1: I will be a builder.

F1: Me too.

Interviewer: Very interesting.

M1: She won't.

F1: I will it is my dad's company he told I can.

M2: [to the researcher] Actually she is his [M1] sister.

M1: Yes.

Interviewer: So you both want to take over your dad's business; but do you actually like to be builders?

F1: I do.

M1: I do and I will. (UK_F8_WC2)

6. Gender

As already mentioned across the report, for instance regarding the meaning of friendship but also with regard to trust in teachers or aspirations, gender is not an influential variable on children's contributions to the focus groups. Also corroborated by teachers' views, a relatively young age has been suggested, as a justification of the very marginal relevance of gender in the English focus groups.

When invited to shift from narrations of experiences to more theoretical reflection on the impact of gender on individuals' attitudes, preferences and behaviours, children generally rejected a prominent role of gender.

Researcher: Do you think that there is a difference between boys and girls, how you look at friendship for instance?

M1: They like small group but that's it and also there a small groups with boys and girls

F1: I think we are pretty much the same. (UK_F21_BR2)

F1: My mum told me that my gran when she was a child like me now she could not play football but only like hockey because football was not for girls there was not even a club you had to go into London.

F2: Now more girls play than boys.

M1: I do not think so.

F1: England ladies got to the world cup final not men.

M1: It does not mean there are more girls playing.

Researcher: Anyway there are plenty.

M1: Yes.

F2: More than boys actually. (UK_F12_FM4)

M1: I think it is the individual, boy or girl, what he likes and wants to do.

Researcher: So there is no difference between boys and girls.

M1: I don't think so.

M2: Maybe when you get older like my brother he does not have girlfriends.

Researcher: So it get more different with age.

M1: Possibly. (UK_F19_WC6)

M1: There are so many extracurricular activities, so much more.

Int: So you think you would like to do things outside the regular subjects?

Some: Yes [...] they have a basketball team, they have more sports classes. (UK_F23_BR4)

Very rare comments, scattered across the focus groups, referred to gender-based preferences in the playground or in terms of hobbies.

M1: Girls are more chatting during breaks, like for instance they sit around that tree and talk, we are more agitated (laughs).

F1: They [boys] shout a lot more they are noisy when we are outside. (UK_F20_BR1)

F1: With drama, everyone like it but some boys always start laughing and they do not take it seriously.

Researcher: Girls do?

F1: More seriously than some boys yes. (UK_F10_FM2)

However, gender was not recognised as a determining variable regarding attitudes to friendship and aspirations.

M1: We are all the same, it's not that boys want to do less than girls, there are individual differences but it depends it is the person. (UK_F6_SF6)

F1: Friends and school are important to everyone, I have girlfriends and boyfriends almost the same.

Researcher: And you?

F2: Yes, yes it's true.

F3: Actually my best friend is a boyfriend my cousin, we see things the same.

M1: I might play more with boys but many times with girls. (UK_F2_SF2)

Some participants, albeit this was not a frequent occurrence, mentioned gender as an intervening variable on behaviour in the classroom, with males associates with slightly less disciplined attitudes. However, these narrations do not appear to be widely shared.

F1: Girls are never sent to detention, boys do.

M1: R.! [girl's name omitted]

F1: But she was special.

Researcher: What happened, is R. here?

M2: No she left in year 2 they moved.

F1: She was very angry and bigger then all boys so she was the only one girl who got detented because she hit another girl.

M2: [to another boy] And you!

M4: Nooooo.

Some: Yeeees [laughter].

F2: But no more girls, we are quieter and do not go mad as much or differently.

M2: Yes some girls they speak all quitter when they're angry. (UK_F22_BR3)

Narrations of gender-based fragmentation of the classroom in smaller groups, at least in the playground could have been expected; however, this expectation was not confirmed by children's narratives, with the partial exception of older participants in the final year of primary school who, in some cases, shared examples of gender-based division, albeit such division are porous.

M1: Sometimes there are big groups of boys and many little groups of girls who chat and do not want anyone else around but it is easy to go there wind them up and they start chasing you, it is fun. (UK_F23_BR4)

F1: Maybe small groups of friends but it is not only girls, it can be boys and girls who are more friend. (UK_F13_FM5)

M1: Not really, boys and girls we play together, not all together but boys and girls.

F1: Him and myself we also go to play football together.

Researcher: So you play for the same club.

F1: For the same team, together.

M1: At our age we play mixed. (UK_F9_FM1)

6. Schooling during the pandemic

When asked about the consequences of the pandemic, children talked about two different aspects of the pandemic's impact on their experience of schooling and personal trajectories. This section of the report is dedicated to discuss children's perspectives regarding: online learning as a challenge for children's agency expressed in interpersonal relationships and dialogic communication; children's efforts to preserve interpersonal relationships; the implication of online learning and social distancing for family relationships; learning to cope with online schooling.

Some reflection will be presented with regard to possible implication of the focus groups' results for policymakers and educationalists.

Online learning and the challenge for children's agency as interpersonal relationships

According to the contributions of the children to the focus groups, the most negative aspect of online learning is the absence of social and emotional relationships during the lockdown periods, for instance the impossibility of getting out, meeting friends, or working together. This makes online schooling less favourable to person-centred communication, hence a less favourable context for the co-

construction of possible process of hybrid integration. The expression of regret for the loss of interpersonal relations shows that school is an important socialization context for children's agency to be expressed as personal expression. Children described how they missed their classmates throughout all focus groups and across countries, as shown in the excerpts below:

M1: Honestly, me, I don't really like online meeting. Because like, I felt like I was stuck in a prison. I have my brother, but like, he's small and he doesn't even understand me. Like I try to play with him, he doesn't understand, he goes and plays with himself and watches tv. I personally don't really like playing by myself, I really like playing with my friends at school, and I feel like I was just prisoned in my own room.

Researcher: Sure. Did you miss your friends?

M1: Yes, I did. (UK_F5_SF5)

F1: Since we were back at school, we get to meet our friends, because when we were at home, we didn't get to meet our friends.

Researcher: Did you miss your friends?

F1: Yeah.

Researcher: What did you miss about them?

F1: They like entertain me and have fun with me. (UK_F1_SF1)

Researcher: So, what do you all think of Covid? What's your response to Covid? Yeah, what do you think of Covid?

M1: 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...

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

M1: Yeah. I was missing my friends because they have always been here for me.

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

M1: Two thumbs down.

Researcher: Oh. Why?

M1: Because like [name removed] said, it makes me separated from my best friends. (UK_F15_SF7)

Children emphasized that engaging with friends remotely felt very different from face-to-face interactions. If they were able to meet in-presence, the encounters were made challenging by public health restrictions, causing negative feelings as expressed in the excerpts below:

F1: It's just so weird not being able to socialise with people. Like since they said you can't be with your family, it was very weird going to like, let's say, Brent Cross, and seeing people like social distancing everywhere. It was really weird to see.

Researcher: It's strange isn't it, not to hug people...

M1: Wearing masks...

Researcher: Yeah, and you can't see the expressions and stuff.

F2: Yeah, that's hard, because when you've got masks on and people are talking, you don't know if they are looking or listening to you, you can't tell what you would normally tell.

M1: Yep. (UK_F17_WC4)

M1: I found it hard since Coronavirus came because there's never been something like this since we've been alive, so since we've never had anything like this, it's hard for us because we don't know what's going on and what's gonna happen.

Researcher: Sure, yeah. No, there's a lot to deal with, isn't there? A lot to deal with. I think we might have come to the end now. Yeah, what were you going to say?

F1: I think, there might be some children I love talking to. But then Coronavirus ruined everything. It's like, I don't get to get a get fresh air, even if I play with one of my favourite games, it doesn't even cheer me up. Even though my parents brought me a new game in the Easter holidays, I started playing on the PS3, but I still upset, I still have the image of before Coronavirus happened.

Researcher: What image? What do you mean?

F1: Like an image of playing with my friends, an image like that. And sometimes I just go away and stay in my dreams for five minutes, and then I just close my game and throw the controller. And my parents...

Researcher: It makes you feel a bit angry?

F1: It makes me feel a bit angry. (UK_F20_BR1)

Most children described online learning as very boring because it offered very limited opportunities for interpersonal interaction. As exemplified by the excerpt below, data suggest that the limitations of online learning are connected by children to the impossibility of the personal expressions that are only allowed by interpersonal, in-presence, interactions. Again, online learning and teaching is presented as a social situation where the expression of the unique person is more difficult. If agency is understood, as the CHILD-UP project suggests, as authorship of knowledge about oneself and the world, online schooling can be considered a less favourable context for children's agency: knowledge about oneself and the world does not find spaces to be expressed. Consequently, the co-construction of hybrid integration becomes more difficult.

M1: It's like weird when you get up every day knowing you don't have to get ready for school, you just have to go on your computer. Doing online school was really boring because you couldn't see your friends. You had social distance. You had to wear a mask.

F1: I got really distracted at home. At school, you can't really get distracted.

Researcher: What distracted you, then?

F1: Mostly my family and, like, they are just sitting in the background. My family is at school, basically.

Researcher: Yeah, that's a good way to say it, they are at school with you. Is it making you feel like you don't have any space from your family?

F1: Kind of, yeah. (UK_F4_SF4)

F1: When I did online school, it's like, everyone was talking to me. It's like watching paint dry was more interesting than online school. Online school was so boring.

F2: I do prefer school, 100%, because like, there aren't any friends around to like joke and stuff. It was really boring.

F3: I have two older brothers but they are old so I have literally no-one to talk to.

Researcher: Oh right. So, yeah, it's tricky.

M1: I was having an online meeting, and I was unmuting asking Mr [teacher] a question, and my brother said 'you're not on a meeting, I'm telling Mum.'

Researcher: So you had to deal with all of that while you were trying to learn at the same time?

M1: I would get distracted...

Researcher: And then you'd forget about it? Getting distracted is hard.

F2: The thing is, I'm the youngest child and I have a room with my sister and it's very annoying. It's so annoying because my sister, she would always distract me from what I'm doing, she's like 'come and do this' or 'do that'. (UK_F24_BR5)

Working to maintain interpersonal relationships

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned disruptions to socialisation and experience of agency as personal expression, data suggest that children-maintained connections during the periods of online schooling, both in breaks within lessons and outside, using video-calls (sometimes hours long) or texts:

Researcher: It's nice to have friends, yeah, when you're feeling a bit. Did you stay in contact with each other? During Covid.

M1: I've got their phone numbers.

Researcher: Oh so you could ring each other up and things?

M2: During Covid, my friend [name removed], he used to do video calls all through home schooling.

Researcher: Ah, so you were calling each other through home schooling stuff?

M2: Ah my friend [name removed] who is in reception always made friends with [name removed].

Researcher: So you've got all connections and links?

F1: Yeah. And we've arranged one play date so far, and we've been calling each other, he's been calling me on the iPad on my laptop and on my Mum's phone, and sometimes we arrange for a playdate, but we can't. I miss being home a little bit, because I like to be home a little bit as I got to have a little rest. (UK_F2_SF2)

Researcher: Covid is tricky. Did it impact on you when you were at home when you didn't come to school? How did you feel about that?

F1: Nothing really changed, except for the fact that we had online school, because every time I go back from school, I will always like video chat my friends and stuff anyway, so...(UK_F10_FM2)

Online learning and social distancing for family relationships

For the first time in most of the children's lives, spaces shared with other members of the family and inter-generationally became the context of schooling. Online learning brought changes in family relationships, as suggested by data from the focus groups.

Online learning was negatively evaluated by younger children who felt to be losing their autonomy as they often needed their parents to assist them in the use of the computer. Losing autonomy was coupled with the difficulty in using the computer without help when parents were not in the house due to working commitments. Participants converge in describing the family and the unusual sharedness of spaces during online learning as both the source of necessary support, albeit often not available and an obstacle to learning.

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_24_BR5)

Researcher: And what was it, was it easier to learn at home or was it harder?

M1: It was hard.

Researcher: Why?

M1: Because it was, like, usually we have a plan at the school, like a timetable. But at home, we don't know which one and because it's a lot more harder.

F1: I think it was hard to study because I had to do it all on my own, because I have a little sibling and my parents are helping him more because he's only in reception.

Researcher: So you had to do a lot more stuff on your own? And what was hard about that? What didn't you like?

M2: Well, like [M1] said, I didn't have a timetable or a structure to follow.

Researcher: I see. And was there lots going on at home? Was it noisy and busy and stuff?

M2: Yes but we didn't have much family time either.

Researcher: Oh ok. How come?

M1: Because we had to work to end, we, there was lots and lots and lots of homework and things... (UK_F10_FM2)

Researcher: Is this when you were online?

F1: Yeah. And then I didn't get that much help. I have a little brother in year 1. Like, he's fine, it's just that he needs my mum to help him most of the time, and my dad, he can't help me either. Most of the time he's in a different country in the Netherlands, or he might be working from home being too busy.

Researcher: Oh wow. And I guess that's hard when people are in different countries.

F1: Yeah. And I have to work all by myself, and my mum can only help me a little bit. And then, during English, they make it ten times harder than at school and I have to manage to do it all on my own. (UK_F6_SF6)

Besides the intersection between family relationships and online learning, several primary school children emphasized a need to spend time with relatives they could not see during lockdowns. Virtual meetings with relatives, particularly with grandparents were considered enough by children who live far away from them; on the contrary, separation was a source of anxiety for children who were used to meet relatives more frequently.

M1: Coronavirus isn't only separating us from our friends but from our family. I have a cousin and they have loads of cousins and the last time I have seen any of them has been around two years now.

M2: I had cousins sometimes a few times a year, like one or three times a year they would come, like, because we have a celebration called Eid, it's the 31st day of Ramadan, that means for how long we've been fasting, fasting means we have to eat breakfast at 4 o'clock at dawn and then we can't eat or drink all day until 9 o'clock. And my cousins were supposed to come but only like a few came.

Researcher: Is that because of Covid?

M2: Yeah because they have cousins that come all the way up for it, and I have a few cousins who live a few doors down, and they came, and the year before Covid ruined everything for me, because the day before the 30th day of Ramadan, you can choose presents, and then you're meant to wrap it up and yeah, your parents wrap it up for you after you go to the toy shop and choose what you want to buy, and then it's Eid, and it's similar to like Christmas, instead your cousins buy things for you and you have no idea what it is. Two years ago, we got a fun game where there's this fishing game called 'gone fishing'. And then it ruined everything...

M3: Like [M2] pointed out, Eid last year was very disappointing last year because I didn't get to see my cousins. I was supposed to see my cousins last year too, but I have a feeling this year, Eid will be even better because we get to go to the toy shops and to get to go to the part. Eid this year is actually tomorrow. (UK_F1_SF1)

Learning to cope with online schooling

Children acknowledge that new learning activities were organized by teachers specifically to support learning and interpersonal relations during the first lockdown and online schooling. Across the two national settings, children expressed appreciations for such these activities that were both unexpected and positive.

Researcher: And how did you all cope with online lessons? How did that work?

M1: Honestly, when the first wave struck, I was like 'hmmm yay, I get to do a bit of relaxing.' But then online work hit me like a truck. Because I was just thinking, I'm gonna be honest, I wasn't expecting it, I was just like 'I'm gonna sit around, maybe look at some stuff once in a while, do some work, do some spelling, keep myself educated.' But they'd already planned it.

Researcher: Oh wow. And was it planned well?

Many child.: Yeah.

Researcher: And what sort of stuff did you do?

F1: Our teacher Mr [name removed], what he used to do was, he would record his lessons, he worked extra hard, he told us all about it, how he had to work after school to record the lessons and during his lunch break, he had to record the lesson for the afternoon.

Researcher: Oh wow. A lot of preparation. (UK_F20_BR1)

M1: We were very thankful because all of our home learning books were filled with work and it was so fun. We got to draw. We got to, when we did Maths, personally I loved Maths and English because, on the documents, we could do English and then submit it onto something called Google Classroom, and if we wanted to, we could post it on the stream, and people could read it if they want.

Researcher: Oh, so you could read each other's work? That's really clever.

M1: And if, during school, if we needed help, Mr [name removed] would always help, we just would send a message and Mr [name removed] checks the stream and answer questions. (UK_F13_FM5)

The voices of children in English schools become one in suggesting that the experience of online learning and the experience of re-establishing classroom interactions under public health measures impacted, and largely still impacts, on their opportunities of exercising agency in interpersonal interactions. The nature and importance of structures of expectations become relevant when they are disappointed (Luhmann, 1995). Children's disappointment for the social limitations imposed by lockdowns and children's disappointment for the conditions of classroom interactions in times of social distancing indicate that for children, interpersonal interactions are a primary source of dialogic

communication and personal expression in schools. This should not suggest that for children learning is a marginal aspect of schooling: children have shared mature preoccupations for the impact of online schooling on their learning. However, learning without socialisation, where dialogic interpersonal interactions in the classroom are a core aspect of such socialisation, simply does not work for children.

An important implication for policymakers and education professionals should be the need for reflecting on the variegated aims of schooling as face to face teaching resumes. Our results suggest that it would be mistaken to focus exclusively on filling possible deficits of learning and performances. ‘Catching up’ is important but the voices of the participants to the focus groups invite to give due importance to the dialogic foundation of children’s motivation to participate in teaching and learning. Across the focus groups, children expressed great appreciation of the opportunity provided to re-establish interpersonal dialogue in school contexts where otherwise there was an insistent focus on ‘catching up’.

An observation that invites further research is that differences connected to cultural background did not emerge in the focus groups, notwithstanding the conditions of super-diversity connoting schools participating in the research. The difficulties of interpersonal interactions, and the strategies to preserve them, were similar for all children, across cultural backgrounds and national contexts.

7. Intercultural dimension of school experiences

Schools in the Greater London Area, and in particular in the Boroughs where the participating schools are located, have been characterized by the multiplicity of national backgrounds of children for several decades. It would not be possible to list the countries of origin of the children participating in the focus groups, because it would amount to many dozens.

Notwithstanding such rich variety of national backgrounds, migrant background or cultural background are neither determining variables for children’s contributions in the focus groups, nor they are mentioned by children as important for their experiences at school.

Nevertheless, when prompted to share their thoughts on cultural differences all participants in the focus groups expressed a positive assessment of the intercultural communication. Rather than cultural diversity, it is personal diversity, the uniqueness of each person, to orientate children’s approach to social relationships. Expectation of culturally-connotated participation is secondary to expectations of personal expressions. It has been extensively discussed in previous sections that using the unique person as a reference for communication is favourable for the co-construction of hybridisation processes. In line with the results of the quantitative research and with the views of teachers, children in the English focus groups value personal differences more than cultural or national identities. This can explain further the importance for children to access spaces favourable to personal expression.

M1: I have friends from so many countries I just cannot say how many.

F1: Like for instance before Covid I used to go with so like a K. [child’s name removed] birthday and there was food from her mum’s and dad’s country and I think little cousins who did not speak English because they were just on holiday to see her].

Researcher: Did you enjoy the party?

F1: Yes I go every years not the last one. (UK_F1_SF1)

F1: I have no problems to talk with anyone.

M1: Not with bad people.

F1: No but bad can be anyone from any culture.

M1: It is the person not the country.

Researcher: Do you agree?

Some: Yes! (UK_F20_BR1)

M1: At football we are all the same and also if there are parents waiting to pick up I know some are from many countries but I've heard them they all speak English like with other parents and with me so I think there are no problems.

F1: I think when I hear something bad has happened like because of racism those one are people with problems. (UK_F18_WC5)

F1: Good people are good like here.

Researcher: So you look at the individual person all the times?

F1: Yes, how a person express herself.

M1: Yes. (UK_F7_WC1)

M1: It is not that even if you are my brother, I'd say you are my friend so it is not where a person if from if the person is good and honest yes we can be friend.

F1: When I came for the first time it was a bit late and I did not know anyone and I could not speak so well yes I could but not like normal but I made friends before learning to speak well because I think my friends trust me and I was kind.

F2: Yes she was.

Researcher: So it is the individual person that matters to you.

F1: Yes.

F3: Yes. (UK_F9_FM1)

This aspect is maybe further reinforced by the almost exclusive use of English not also as the the language of instruction but also in the playground, as already indicated by children in the questionnaires distributed for the quantitative phase of the CHILD-UP research. Very few children indicate the use of languages other than English in the playground. Additionally, this seems to happen in very specific circumstances and children affirm to switch to English if needed to accommodate other children joining the group.

M1: When I am with my brother who is in Year 5 we talk in Pashtu and actually is funny because we talk in English when for instance talk about school but sometimes we talk Pashtu when we talk about people in the family.

Researcher: Oh this is very interesting.

M1: Maybe because we always hear those people speak Pashtu so we speak Pashtu about them.

M2: I have never heard you.

M1: Because it is only when it is my brother and I we speak English if we see someone wants to join us

F1: sometimes when I am playing football and in the middle of it I can say something to A. and F. [children's name removed] who are one my cousin and the other one a friend of the family in Greek because it comes like that but it's just a word and that's it and also some others have learned the word so it has become normal [laughs]. (UK_F13_FM5)

The use of English as the only medium of instruction in the classroom is not signalled as a problem in the focus groups. However, a few children shared their difficulties in the early days of their schooling experiences, when they joined the classroom from another country. Nevertheless, such difficulties seem to be easily and quickly overcome. One of the most common forms of support for a rapid integration in the classroom is peer-support. Peer-support is what teachers were referring to in the focus groups with professionals when advancing the metaphor of ‘children as little ambassadors’ who systematically help peers from the same, or from a similar, national or linguistic background. Teachers also mentioned institutional forms of support of children’s integration, which are however rarely mentioned by children in the focus groups.

M1: I arrived after the summer and I had spent so many weeks with my grandparents who do not speak English so I could not learn properly before I came and I was hard the first days to understand what was going on.

Researcher: Oh, and how did you cope?

M1: Because there is a friend in another group and they asked him to introduce me to here and he is very popular and I think people liked me.

Researcher: How did you learn the language then?

M1: I was supposed to have a few hours with a teacher and few new children to catch up but I did not need it for long, I learned fast. (UK_F21_BR2)

F1: My sister came before me because I had to pass an exam which I could not because I was sick unfortunately but when I got to her she definitely helped me with the language so I did not take much time to learn English and I enjoy schools more. (UK_F11_FM3)

M1: He helped me a lot.

Researcher: Oh, so you were very kind to him.

M2: Because we are cousins. Our families come from different towns but the same countries so I helped me and present him to my friends on the first days.

Researcher: And how did it help you?

M1: Oh massively because I did not know anyone, I came too late for the beginning of the year so everyone was knowing each other except me so that helped. (UK_F7_WC1)

Similarly to other national contexts, some children with migrant background have limited knowledge of their ancestral language therefore they need parents’ support to communicate with relatives when they visit their family’s country of origin. It is not rare for children with migrant background to refer to a passive competence, or even to a complete lack of knowledge, in the use of the family’s language.

M1: I do not speak Bulgarian much, I have never learnt it properly so I need my pops to help me when we go to visit family. Actually I speak English there with my cousins they know English better than my Bulgarian to be honest.

F1: Me too, I speak English with my grandma because she is an English teacher in Tunisia and she helps me with my cousins who are little and do not speak English well. (UK_F13_FM5)

F1: Sometimes it is hard with my cousins because we do not communicate well because I have not learnt Spanish very well. We do not speak it much at home we always speak English.

Researcher: So you speak English at home with your parents.

F1: Yes because my mum was born her and does speak English better than Spanish and my dad's family moved here when I was like a toddler.

Researcher: So who lives in Costa Rica.

F1: My cousin because some of my dad's brothers went back at some point. (UK_F25_BR6)

However, it is more common for children with a migrant background to claim competence in the use of two or more languages, although their use may be rare, and exclusively outside of educational activities.

M1: Yes of course no problem I can speak English, Pashtu, and a bit of the Hindi as well because of some friends of the family who speak it and I could learn a few word and I am definitely going to take Spanish next year [in secondary school].

Researcher: Wow, so many languages.

M2: I can speak four!

Researcher: Wow!

M2: Yes, English, Turkish, French, German because my cousins live with their family in a place called Essen in Germany so I can speak German a bit. (UK_F20_BR1)

M1: I can speak Tamil very well I think because I went to school there my first year and it was Tamil and English school.

M2: Me too.

Researcher: And do you speak Tamil often here?

M2: Not really, not even at home. (UK_F9_FM1)

F1: We speak Polish at home but I never speak Polish in school not even with her.

F2: We are cousin because our mums are sister.

Researcher: And you speak English at school even when you play?

F1: If there are others yes but also when we are alone, sometime English is more normal. (UK_F3_SF3)

8. Identity and belonging

When invited by the researcher, children did not show any sign of uneasiness to talk about their religion or other cultural aspects. Children follow the family's religion and often take part to rituals and cults. However, religion is not mentioned by children as a driving force for their ethical stance; rather, a more humanistic and universal concept of 'doing good' is mentioned by children as their main ethical drive.

M1: We go to the Mosque and we just had the Eid celebrations which I love because it is like Christmas.

Researcher: It is important to you to take part?

M1: My family, we meet many friends and relatives.

F1: 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_BR6)

M1: I like my religion but there is good in all religion because I know they all teach to be kind and respectful.

M2: Yes for instance I go to Church every Sunday, he goes to the Mosque on a Friday evening with his cousins but we have the same ideas. (UK_F13_FM5)

F1: Different religions do not mean that there must be a war. There are people who use their religion as an excuse.

Researcher: Do you think so?

F1: Yes, I do..

F2: Yes, my family and I we do not go much to church but I am best friends with her and F. too and they go to church but we trust each other. (UK_F14_FM6)

Most children with a migration background were born in the UK, and often they are third or even fourth generation. It is a common experience for them to travel abroad to meet family members, often in third countries in Europe and beyond. Children's experiences of travelling to meet relatives seem to be mixed, with the main issue being the separation from friends in the UK.

M1: I do not like much when we travel to Cyprus in the summer because it is too hot and I miss my friends.

Researcher: Oh, do you not like the sea and to see your family?

M1: Yes I do but it is so hot sometimes I cannot breathe you have to stay inside all day and I miss my friends because I do not have many there (UK_F1_SF1)

M1: We went to Pakistan last year, no the year before it was before Covid and I did not want to go and I was sad so much that my dad got upset with me.

Researcher: Oh wow, so why so sad?

M1: Because I was missing home but then I settled and I was sad to leave my grans because they are old and now I do not know when I will see them again, luckily they are all OK at the moment. (UK_F13_FM5)

F1: to be honest, I like to go on holiday to Transylvania but I do not need to go.

Researcher: What do you mean?

F1: I am happier at home here, my parents and my brothers I think they are happier than me to go, I do not know why's that (UK_F25_BR6)

However, some children with migrant background affirmed that they had never travelled to the family's country of origin at the moment of the focus group, again sharing somehow mixed feeling about a desire to do so in the future.

M1: I have never been to Sri Lanka.

Researcher: Would you like to go.

M1: Maybe sometimes in the future but my parents have to work a lot and my grans are here so I am not sure I will actually go. (UK_F14_FM6)

F1: I was so excited we were going to Saint Kitts last summer it was going to be my first time but then Covid struck and we could not go.

Researcher: Aw, but you will go soon.

F1: I would love to go but not this summer it's too early because of Covid it's hard. (UK_F15_SF7)

M1: I went to Ukraine when I was a baby so my gran can see me, I have the picture with her but then because of the war all the family is in Germany with my uncle so we go there, I have never been to Ukraine since.

Researcher: Would you like to go?

M1: I do not know anyone there; there are some cousins but they are not close to me I have never met them. They live very far from my gran's old home, they go to Germany, basically we all meet there, this is why I can speak German but not Ukrainian. (UK_F4_SF4)

9. Conclusions

Children's participation in the focus groups denoted a lively engagement across all schools. The possibility for children to make their voices heard was embraced thoroughly regarding all the different topics touched by the interview.

The first topic discussed in the focus groups was the school as an important context of children's lived experiences. The topic was developed across two themes: the school as wished by children and the reality of school. 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.

The interest for social relationships is not alternative to an interest in learning: children consider learning about each other as a valuable form of learning and also as complementary and supportive to a more 'humanized' and more effective academically, form of learning.

Possibilities to cultivate social relationships based on personal expression or, better, the obstacles posed to that, is the main source of critical remarks to the actual school-life that children experience. However, children's assessment of their experiences at school is generally positive from all focus groups.

Social relationships, more than the quality of teaching or curricula, seem to shape children's experiences of schooling. Children present their social relationships along a clear divide between good relationships and being friends, where friendship is constructed as a qualitatively different type of social relationship. Friendship is much less common than companionships for children, who seem to enjoy a vast network of good, albeit less emotionally charged, social relationships. A possibly related lower level of expectations towards most social relationships at school may explain the limited references to conflicts between children.

Conflicts between teachers and children are rarely mentioned too. When they happen, they seem to be based, from the perspective of children, on unfair treatment and inequalities. Such conflictual relationships are rare; nevertheless, when they happen their consequences are wide-ranging, hindering trust in teachers, teaching and assessment.

Beyond issue of trust related to problematic relationships, most children share their confidence in the education system and schools as organisations, as well as their trust in teachers. Trust supports acceptance of teachers' authority and control of educational activities.

Participants to the focus groups, thus, 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.

A very important result confirming the results of the previous quantitative research as well as the perspective of teachers, is that neither gender nor migration background are determining variables in shaping children's voices. It would not do justice to data to indicate any substantial difference related to gender or migration background when children imagine the ideal school, when they assess current educational experiences, when they represent social relationships and their aspirations for the future.

When prompted to share their views and opinions on the intercultural dimension of education, children universally expressed a positive assessment of cultural diversity. Children with migrant background display attachment to religious or other cultural aspects of their background but such traits do not seem to profoundly influence their social experiences or their ethos.

An important insight from the analysis of focus groups is that children seem to claim access to the role of authors of knowledge, which is the form of agency that the CHILD-UP process is more interested in understanding and promote. What children seem seek in their education, first and foremost the possibility to share their knowledge about themselves and their social worlds, Agency as authorship of knowledge, when such knowledge concerns personal and cultural identities can make interactions where knowledge is exchanged the social context for the negotiation of hybrid identities.

Another, related, insight concerns children's demand for a communication centred on the unique person, rather than the standardised role. This is the demand for a form of communication that is essential for hybridisation processes, as understood by the CHILD-UP research. Children seem to focus on the unique person rather than approaching the 'other' through the lenses of cultural essentialism. This approach to interacting with others that makes hybrid integration viable.

A section on children's reflections on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their educational experiences was added to the focus groups and the resulting report. This was imperative if the voices of children had to be taken seriously as the CHILD-UP project is committed to. The sudden and deep transformations brought by the management of the pandemic dramatically affected children's experiences. Focus groups were a unique opportunity to share stories of such experiences during the pandemic. Whilst the effect of lockdowns and online schooling on learning were surely noticed by children, the most important consequences of school closures brought to the fore by children's voices concerned the damage to social relationships. Online learning and teaching is presented as a less favourable contexts for children's agency because knowledge about oneself and the world does not find spaces to be expressed. Consequently, the co-construction of hybrid integration becomes more difficult. Nevertheless, children also shared creativity and determination to react to the effects of the pandemic.

A final consideration concerns the importance of a research such as CHILD-UP for generating knowledge about children's lives but also in terms of generation of knowledge *from* children's lives, based on the promotion of their status as authors of valid knowledge. What emerges from children's voices should guide the researcher's interpretation and interests instead of being forced in the direction of the researcher's expectations and assumptions. With regard to the English branch of the research, the recognition of a marginal importance of gender and migration background for children,

in spite of possible assumptions about their relevance, is a telling example of the celebration of children's status as experts in the never-ending activity of making sense and narrating their lives.