

parents' or grandparents' countries of origin, as well as to other countries in which their family members or friends were living.

Regarding **perceptions of migration**, local children across the countries expressed empathy and understanding of the struggles of newly arrived and long-term migrant children and stated that all children should be treated equally. There is also a widespread support for **cultural and religious pluralism**, for instance migrant children's right to practice and express their religion.

However, there are a few signs of **intercultural conflicts** and of some hostility towards migrants. Some local children pointed out that migrant children should adjust as much as possible to their new country. **Diversity management** in educational settings is therefore an important priority for inclusive learning.

Regarding **language**, many local children found it important to support the newly arrived children linguistically, for instance by translating when sharing the same home language. In some schools, children are not allowed to speak their home languages, which local children with a multilingual background find problematic. Some local children fear that migrant children speak their home language with an intention of excluding others. It is thus recommended to promote translanguaging (including the possibility to practice different languages, mother tongue inclusion, and multilingual teachers) with a special attention to nourishing inclusivity and a sense of community.

Local children have mixed experiences of their **school and teaching environment**. Many children are happy with their school and find teachers supportive. However, some children point out that some teachers are less tolerant towards migrant children or children with migrant background than they are of others. Other factors in experiences of exclusion may be gender and religion.



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD RESEARCH AMONG MIGRANT AND LOCAL CHILDREN IN EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

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Migrant Children and Communities
in a Transforming Europe

Introduction

The MiCREATE research team has conducted research activities with newly arrived, long-term migrant and local children in Slovenia, Denmark, Spain, the United Kingdom, Austria and Poland. In the multi-method research that lasted from September 2019 to September 2021 more than 6,000 children were involved.

Our comparative study has shown that regardless of the social, political and cultural differences between the countries observed on the one hand, and the differences in educational systems and immigration/integration policies on the other, migrant and local children (without first-hand migration experiences) living in different societies in Europe have very similar experiences regarding migration.

Within the research we **focused on children's well-being and overall life satisfaction, not just integration**. Our starting point was that general well-being is positively related to the integration process and that people/things/circumstances/approaches that have a positive impact on children's well-being promote children's sense of belonging, participation and the process of 'becoming a part of' a society. For local children (born in the participating countries) the focus was especially on how they can be involved in more successful inclusion of newly arrived migrant children and on the values, attitudes and opinions they have on this topic.

Migrant Children

Migrant children see the **(extended) family** as the most important factor in their lives, influencing their well-being and overall life satisfaction. The family is perceived as a source of psychosocial support and guidance, a safe refuge, a source of identity and belonging, and a source and support for successful integration. Consequently, school integration interventions targeting only migrant children should focus more on the child's family rather than only on the children.

The second most important factor influencing overall life

satisfaction and well-being of migrant children is **friends and schoolmates**, immediately after establishing some form of friendship relationships, the well-being of migrant children increases. From an integration and well-being perspective, it is also important to have a **local friend**. Consequently, school activities should aim to provide sufficient opportunities to meet with peers, socialise with local children and promote peer socialisation and friendship building (e.g. teamwork, school trips, avoiding or shortening the spatial and psychological separation of migrant children from the rest of the children, etc.).

Learning the language is also a key challenge for newly arrived migrant children in all countries. Language proficiency is closely linked to socialisation, making friends and participating in school life. Migrant children recognise and rate highly the support and encouragement they receive from teachers and classmates in this regard. Long-term migrants have already overcome initial language barriers and they often play an important role for newly arrived migrant children with the same linguistic background, translating and offering different forms of informal support. Finally, the fact that the migrant children have local friends also contributes significantly to the improvement of language acquisition.

What is worrying to some extent, but at the same time reflects the nature of existing integration policies for migrant children and the everyday reality in European schools, is that migrant children perceive their integration as a process in which they have to adapt and learn the main national language and culture. **The burden of becoming part of the host society is on them**. Integration should not be perceived as a sole responsibility of migrant children and their parents, but as a two-way process in which all involved parties must adapt.

Migrant children perceive **migration** into the new society as **'upgrading' and as a positive change** in their lives. Furthermore, they perceive the new societies as offering them better future educational and job opportunities, and

they often see their life in a new country as 'safer', more 'beautiful', more 'democratic' and 'freer'. Migrant children from our sample also stated that they plan to stay in the host country as adults and that they have different and often high expectations regarding education and future work.

The next important factors affecting the integration process are the welcoming and multicultural school ethos and their **teachers/educational staff**. Migrant children, especially younger ones, perceive them as helpful and supportive. However, there are still differences between teachers and between schools. Some newly arrived migrant children still report intolerant, ignorant or insensitive teachers regarding their special position and needs. Therefore, permanent and systematic training for teachers, addressing issues such as interculturality, integration, discrimination, etc., is needed.

On a positive note, many migrant children from our research reported being **happy overall and having a good life**. The feeling of happiness is closely related to having a family, having friends, having supportive teachers and school environment, having supportive classmates and having a religious and/or ethnic community.

Local Children

Local children in our study have experiences of **transnationality**. In the UK, Denmark, Spain, Austria, and Slovenia, many of the local children participating in the project had a migratory background. While they were born in the participating countries, either their parents or grandparents had migrated from other countries. This provided valuable insights into the conditions of inclusion and education of migrant children from the nuanced perspectives of children with similar experiences in their family histories. Only in Poland, the local children did not have migratory experiences in their background. In the other countries, it was obvious that the children had transnational identities, feeling connected to

