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INTEGRATION MAPPING OF REFUGEE
AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

Refugee and migrant children integration Report on intercultural competences and multilingualism

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This report details research on the socio-educational integration of refugee and migrant children carried out as part of the Horizon 2020 research project Integration Mapping of Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (IMMERSE). The report elucidates the key parameters related to intercultural competences and multilingualism. After subject these issues to discussion among the different stakeholders within the three levels of the integration process: micro, meso and macro, four workshops have been organized with children, split by age group (6-9, 10-12, 13-16, 17-18), one with their families, one with professionals of the meso level and interviews with macro level representatives both in Spain and Italy. Results of the analysis of those activities are reported in the present document.

Findings from Italy and Spain

International migrants made up approximately **11% of the total European population** in 2019, or 82.3 million people, 2.8 million of whom are refugees and over 7 million of whom are below the age of 19 (Migration Data Portal, 2019). Recent years have also seen migrants from a much more diverse range of countries of origin making their way to Europe, including countries that had not previously been frequent migrants' destinations. This movement places the successful integration of migrants and refugees into their host countries at the centre of migration policy in Europe. Schools are chief among the social institutions impacted by migrant flows as key sites of integration and support for migrant children.

Research teams in Italy and Spain conducted **qualitative research** focusing on the theme of **Intercultural Competences and Multilingualism** and their relationship with integration through the lens of migrant and refugee children's experiences of education and school in their host countries. For details on IMMERSE complementary research focusing on psycho-social wellbeing and gender, please see the reports compiled by the Irish and Greek research teams (*D1.3 Report on Intercultural Psycho-social Wellbeing*) and the German and Belgian research teams (*D1.4 Report on Gender Issues*) on specific research conducted on those topics.

Spain and Italy have been both traditionally Mediterranean countries of emigration. Recently in the

21st century this trend changed and both countries have become now host countries of immigration, leading to important transformations of their economic and social realities. Currently, **10.69% of the resident population in Spain and 8.7% of the resident population in Italy is foreign born**. The majority of immigrants coming to both countries since the 90s and up to the last decade were largely economic migrants. But the new global context of the last years and the time passed since the first arrivals to these countries have posed new challenges related to the integration of second generation of migrant children and adolescents, and new profiles of migrants such as refugees and unaccompanied minors.

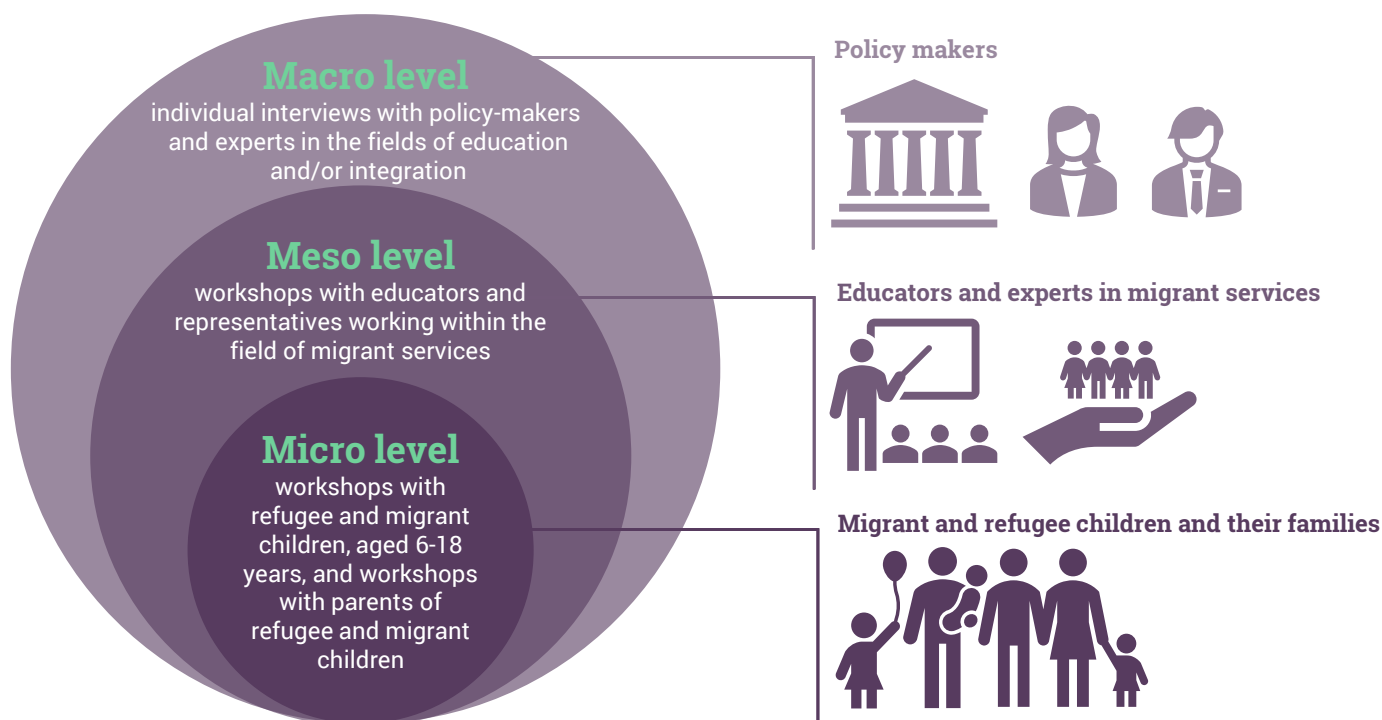
The **inclusion of the voices of refugee and migrant children** is essential to understand their lived experiences and to help **plan appropriate social and educational integration systems**. The co-creation and user-led design of IMMERSE research activities not only gave the stakeholders and children a relevant role as participants, but also allowed them to lead and shape the development of the future content of the indicators for the IMMERSE dashboard of socio-educational integration indicators. In addition to including children and young people as research participants, there was also active involvement of migrant children and youth in the research design and monitoring of IMMERSE's work through the formation of a **Children and Young People's Research Advisory Group (CRAG)**.



Data collection within stakeholders at three levels

The findings of this report are based on qualitative data collection that took place between May and September of 2019.

Participants were key stakeholders in the socio-educational integration of migrant and refugee children at three levels:



The **findings** on integration **from each country** were not only highly **aligned** with each other, but also with the existing research literature. In particular, the importance of **preserving their own cultural features while also incorporating the new traditions, lifestyles, consuming habits etc.** from the host culture were commented by all the stakeholders, including children themselves, as an important factor to develop a sense of belonging to the host culture. Another crucial factor mediating this **feeling of belonging** was the presence of **social bridges** and the **opportunities to develop intercultural competences** that ease the **interaction of children with the host society**.

Intercultural competences that emerge through formal and non-formal training have been related to **improved conflict management**, as well as expectations management. Additionally, other personal skills such as establishing social bridges with native peers or engaging in supportive bonds with the family, teachers and peers have also been pointed out as important skills.

Intercultural competence and multilingualism seemed to **mediate the integration process of the children**, fostering or restricting opportunities to overcome structural barriers to their incorporation as full members of the host society. Among the **negative outcomes of suffering exclusion and unsuccessful integration processes**, the following were identified: isolating within ethnic or linguistic communities, feelings of not belonging to the host society, the perception of negative attitudes in the host society, and distrust towards native people and institutions. Otherwise, **positive outcomes of integration** identified include: having positive relationships with native as well as migrant-background people, an inclusive social climate, an intercultural identity in which they adopt the cultural features of the host society according to their personal values without renouncing to their cultural heritage, the feeling of belonging in the host society and positive expectations towards the future and the school.



Overall findings: seven factors affecting socio-educational integration

In total, there were over **430 child and adult participants** between all countries (143 specifically in Italy and Spain) representing a diverse range of ages, geographic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and personal circumstances, including unaccompanied minors. Findings from these

workshops and interviews pointed to critical **factors affecting socio-educational integration**, and **seven particularly salient themes connected to intercultural competences and multilingualism** were identified:



Attitudes towards migrant people fostering communication and bonding between migrant and refugee children and the people in the host society.



Provision of resources to enhance language learning in formal and non-formal educational environments.



Allocation of students and school segregation that restrict children's opportunities to develop personal skills and competences to cope with the different culture of the host country. This is especially relevant for the refugee children and unaccompanied minors living in centres.



Socialization in the cultural features of the host countries. The stakeholders emphasised how the sooner socialization of the smaller children in the host country took place the easier it was for them to develop a higher feeling of belonging and integration in the host country, and a wider repertoire of intercultural skills.



Family and family culture manifestations as crucial in the experiences of cultural dissonance of the children. Family is also mentioned as a primary context of deployment of intercultural skills that allow the children to minimise the intra-familial conflict.



Social bridges with teachers and classmates as agents of integration and primary sources of cultural capital of the host society.



Political leadership that fosters intercultural educational models that tackle intersectional discrimination and allow flexibly attending individualised needs of the children.

