



immerse

INTEGRATION MAPPING OF REFUGEE
AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS PAPERS ON REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S INTEGRATION

ITALY



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822536

Table of contents

1	Executive summary	2
2	The Italian context	2
3	IMMERSE project: evidence-based considerations and critical issues	4
4	Policy implications and recommendations	7
5	Conclusions	10
6	References	11



National recommendations paper – Italy: The socio-educational integration of migrant-background children in Italy: evidence and policy proposals from the IMMERSE project

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1. Executive summary

The present policy paper summarises and discusses the main results of the IMMERSE research project, with a specific focus on the work undertaken in Italy. The aim is to provide innovative data and recommendations about the socio-educational integration of migrant-background children in schools and other educational environments in the country. In the first part, a brief overview of the Italian migration and integration context will be offered through official data and a brief literature review, along with a mention of the national socio-educational integration policies for refugee and migrant minors. The second part introduces the IMMERSE H2020 project and analyses the research results, stressing critical issues to address and good practices to consider for a better common model of integration. Finally, the last section informs policymakers and the educational sector with specific recommendations.

2. The Italian context

In the last decades, Italy has been highly engaged with migration flows, with consequences on the school system especially. Since the school year 1983/84, the country has experienced a perpetual increase in the number of students with a migration background (MIM, Aug. 2023)¹. In the school year 2021/22², there were 872,360 students without Italian citizenship: 10.6% of all students enrolled in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools³. They come from more than 200 countries⁴, but 67.5% were born in Italy⁵ (ibid.). Recently, with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Italy welcomed 27,506 Ukrainian students from February to June 2022 (MI, 13/06/2022). Moreover, Italy hosts 21,710 unaccompanied migrant minors (UAMs), mostly aged 16 or 17 and coming from Egypt, Ukraine, Tunisia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gambia, and Albania⁶.

1 Except for the s.y. 2020/21, when the total number of students decreased, probably due to Covid-19 pandemics on kindergarten attendance.

2 The Ministry of Education and Merit provides periodic disaggregated data about students based on the citizenship status. However, these official numbers do not include other profiles of migrant children and adolescents, such as refugee, asylum-seeking, or unaccompanied minors.

3 The Italian school system has three levels of education according to age (kindergarten aged 3-6, primary school aged 6-11, I-level secondary school aged 11-13, and II-level secondary school aged 13-18). Students without Italian citizenship represent 11.7% of all students at kindergarten, 12.4% in primary school, 11.2% in I-level secondary school, and 8% in II-level secondary school. 65.5% of students without Italian citizenship attend schools located in the Northern regions, 21.9% in the Central regions and 12.6% in the Southern regions and in the Islands (MIM, Aug. 2023).

4 44.1% of students without Italian citizenship come from Europe, 27.56% from Africa, 20.52% from Asia (MIM, Aug. 2023).

5 From the s.y. 2017/18 to the s.y. 2021/22, the number of children without Italian citizenship but born on the Italian territory went from 531,467 to 588,986, with an increase of more than 57,000 units (+10.8%). In primary schools, almost three out of four foreign students were born in Italy (73.6%); in I-level secondary schools the percentage is 67% and in II level secondary schools it is 48.3% (MIM, Aug. 2023).

6 Data refers up to 31st July 2023. The dataset is available at: <https://analytics.lavoro.gov.it/t/PublicSIM/views/PresenzadeiMinoristranierinonaccompagnatiinItalia/PresenzadeiMinoristranierinonaccompagnatiinItalia?%3Aembed=y&%3Aiid=3&%3Ais-GuestRedirectFromVizportal=y> [Accessed 15 Sept. 2023]. Their rights are established in the Consolidated Act on immigration (Legislative decree n. 286/1998) and the following implementation act (Presidential Decree 394/1999). Moreover, Italy is the only European country that adopted a specific law for the protection of UAMs (Law n. 47/2017). This law and the "Guidelines for the right to education of minors outside their family of origin" (2017) reiterate UAMs' right to education.



In this scenario, the Italian school system has been particularly engaged with the challenge of integration and interculturality. Despite the commitment of schools and many local good practices, the scarcity and inadequacy of organisational, economic, and professional resources limit the efficacy of interventions (Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura/MIUR, 2020). Most migrant-background children have fewer opportunities than their classmates. Differences are evident when considering the attendance level at kindergartens⁷, school drop-out rates and grade repetition, as well as emerging segregation phenomena such as the *white flight*, i.e. the choice of Italian families to enrol their children in central urban areas, thus increasing the concentration of foreign students in suburban schools (Pacchi and Ranci, 2017).

In the school year 2021/22, while 8.1% Italian students were off-track with their education, the figure for non-Italian students reached 25.4% (MIM, Aug. 2023). According to INVALSI⁸ data, at the end of the first cycle of education, the percentage of first-generation immigrants that do not reach the minimum levels of competences in Italian, Maths and English is double (26%) that of the percentage of Italian students or second-generation students (INVALSI, 2023). Moreover, in 2022 the percentage of Early School Leavers⁹ was three times higher among migrant-background youth born abroad (30.1%), compared to those born in Italy but without the Italian citizenship (9.8%) (Istat, 2023). Another alarming fact concerns NEETs¹⁰: the percentage is significantly higher among foreign adolescents and young adults, (28.8%) compared to Italians (18%) (ibid.).

In general, scholastic achievement and integration at school are weakened by linguistic barriers, the fact that migrant-background students are often enrolled in classes not corresponding to their age¹¹, and the absence/insufficiency of cultural mediation services, which affect student learning and school performance, as well as family participation (Santagati and Colussi, 2022). Moreover, the concentration of migrant-background children in specific schools and classes complicates the process of integration¹². Studies show that, especially in primary schools, less experienced and less motivated teachers are assigned to classes with a higher number of students with a migration background (Santagati and Colussi, 2022). The lack/scarcity of school services and extra-curricular, cultural, and social activities, especially in the most disadvantaged areas at risk of educational poverty (Save the Children Italy, 2022a), further limits opportunities for social interactions and cultural contamination. Additionally, economic poverty weighs on children's learning paths, especially among foreign families¹³. The pandemic aggravated even further children's education and integration path, interrupting language courses, learning processes, and extra-curricular activities¹⁴.

7 While 95.1% of Italian children aged 3 to 5 attend kindergarten, only 77.9% of children without Italian citizenship do (MIM, Aug. 2023).

8 INVALSI is the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System in Italy.

9 Those aged 18-24 who abandon their studies or training courses prematurely, without obtaining a high-school diploma.

10 Not in Education, Employment or Training.

11 Although the Italian law requires enrolment in classes corresponding to child age, except in case of a different evaluation by the school board. See the provisions of the Consolidated Act on Immigration (Legislative Decree no. 286/1998), the Ministerial note no. 101 of 8 January 2010, the indications contained in the annual ministerial circulars on registrations and the Guidelines for intercultural orientation (2022).

12 According to the provisions of the Ministry of Education (C.M. n. 2, 8 January 2010, Indications and recommendations for the integration of pupils with non-Italian citizenship), there is a maximum threshold of 30% of pupils with non-Italian citizenship in classes and schools. However, there are upward or downward exemptions, defined together with the Regional School Offices, based on student Italian language skills. In Italy, only 18% of schools are entirely made up of students with Italian citizenship. The majority of schools (74.8%) have a presence of foreign students lower than 30%, while 7.2% have 30% or a higher percentage of foreign students. The number of classes with more than 30% of foreign students has been increasing in recent years (6.8% in s.y. 2021/22, 6.6% in s.y. 2020/21, 6.1% in s.y. 2019/20, 5.9% in s.y. 2018/19, 5.6% in s.y. 2017/18, 5.3% in s.y. 2016/17) (MIM, Aug. 2023).

13 In 2021 families in absolute poverty with only foreign members were 36.2%; mixed families were 30.7%; while families with only Italian members were 8.3% (Istat, 15/06/2022).

14 The pandemic also highlighted the socio-economic deprivation of many children who do not have technological devices, stable Internet connections or suitable spaces for learning (Save the Children Italy, 2021).



Interestingly, citizenship also determines children's school performance, opportunities, study motivation, social relations, and future prospects (Gathmann et al., 202; Avitabile et al., 2014; Felfe et al., 2016; Save the Children Italy, 2023). In Italy, the current law on citizenship (Law n. 91/1992) recognizes the *ius sanguinis* principle and establishes strict criteria for acquiring the status of Italian citizenship¹⁵, consequently limiting the rights and opportunities of migrant children born or growing up in Italy, both at school and outside school.

The Italian Constitution requires schools to be open to everyone¹⁶, in line with arts. 29 and 30 of the CRC. According to the Presidential Decree 394/1999, children have the right to access education, independently of their migration background, legal or administrative status (or those of their parents).

The National observatory for the integration of foreign students and interculture published guidance documents to define integration principles and interventions for the creation of an Italian multicultural school model¹⁷. Moreover, in March 2022 the Ministry of Education and Merit disclosed guidelines for intercultural orientation (Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'interculturalità/MIUR, 2022), underlining in the preamble how sociocultural pluralism in schools and communities represents both a challenge and a great opportunity to rethink the school system and its mandate.

3. The IMMERSE project: evidence-based considerations and critical issues

IMMERSE (*Integration Mapping of Refugee and Migrant children in Schools and other Experiential environments in Europe*) is a Horizon 2020 project, managed by 11 partners from 6 European countries – Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain¹⁸. In the following sections, we discuss the project's main activities and results which led to the formulation of policy recommendations addressed to policymakers and the educational system.

IMMERSE Dashboard of indicators

At European and national level there are existing data sources that establish sets of socio-educative indicators, examining different aspects of integration, but without a common approach. Examples are the Zaragoza indicators, the OECD socio-economic indicators, the PISA socio-educational indicators, and the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). Most frameworks lack a child-centred perspective, applying only to the adult population, and have a limited scope that overlooks, for instance, the ecological factors that influence children growth over time (Bajo Marcos et al., 2023). In Italy, the Ministry of Education and Merit provides periodic disaggregated data about students based on the citizenship status, excluding other profiles of migrant children and adolescents, such as refugee, asylum-seeking, or unaccompanied minors.

In this context, the main contribution of IMMERSE has been to define, from a whole school approach, a brand-new set of indicators (IMMERSE Dashboard) to study the state of the art of the socio-educational integration of migrant-background minors in schools in Italy and Europe, identifying barriers and facilitators that influence the process and determine the creation of more cohesive and inclusive societies.

Through a co-creation method that encompassed dialogue with many relevant stakeholders and listening to and participation of children and adolescents, IMMERSE partners developed a *dashboard* of 30 integration indicators, divided into 14 *outcomes* and 16 *determinants*, in order to capture relevant variables that influence the path and experience of inclusion at the micro (minors and their families), meso (educational centres, educational communities and neighbourhoods) and macro levels (society and institutions). The results of integration (outcomes) are divided into five dimensions: access to rights, language and culture, wellbeing, social connection, and educational achievement. The barriers

¹⁵ Migrant-background children can basically acquire Italian citizenship when they turn 18 by submitting a statement of intent or once their parents obtain citizenship after 10 years of uninterrupted residence on the national territory.

¹⁶ Art. 34 Italian Constitution

¹⁷ For more information, see MIUR (2006) and Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'interculturalità/MIUR (2020, 2015 and 2007),

¹⁸ For more info, visit <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/it/>



and factors facilitating integration (determinants) are instead linked to the areas: leadership politics, school segregation, learning support, mental health services, negative attitudes, school organisation and teachers¹⁹.

This set of indicators allows a comparative overview of the degree of integration experienced by children in different countries, monitoring its evolution over time and identifying areas of future intervention in a given context.

Data collection results for Italy²⁰

In Italy, the quantitative survey involved 8,053 students²¹. Around 58% were non-migrant children, 28% second-generation migrant, and 14% first-generation migrant.

Concerning the dimension of *language and culture*, the majority of migrant-background children in Italy (76%) declare a high competence in Italian. However, 1 out of 4 students (24%) declare a low or medium competence, especially among first-generation migrant children.

Over half of migrant-background children in Italy (52%) do not feel close to their cultures of origin²². The percentage is slightly higher among second-generation (55%), born and grown up in Italy, compared to first-generation children (48%). Nearly one-third of migrant-background children (35%), instead, feel close to both their cultures of origin as well as to other groups of people (e.g. Italians, people living in the same city, peers, etc.), a feeling that increases by age. Although this is a sign of the opportunity for children in Italy to maintain their cultural identity while adopting a new one, this data is below the average (45%) and the lowest value in IMMERSE countries. Nevertheless, a small proportion (13%), especially among first-generation children, feel close to their cultures of origin exclusively, which may suggest difficulties in the integration process.

In terms of child *wellbeing*, the data regarding the sense of belonging in their schools reveals a general disaffection towards the Italian school system, with only around 2 out of 5 migrant-background students feeling a high sense of belonging (37% second generation migrant children; 39% first generation migrant children); non-migrant background peers share a similar feeling (40%). Interestingly, the percentage of migrant-background children feeling a high sense of belonging in their schools (37%) is notably lower than in other IMMERSE countries (average 48%). This feeling dramatically diminishes as they grow: from 67% of small children down to 32% among early adolescents and 23% among middle adolescents. In Italy, migrant-background children are slightly less happy (79%) than native children (83%) and compared to other IMMERSE countries (e.g. Ireland 88%; Greece 84%). One out of 5 children feels not very or not at all happy, a negative condition that notably increases with age (from 11% of small children, to 19% of early adolescents, 28% of middle adolescents and 27% of late adolescents).

Analysing the domain of *social connections*, data show that only 41% of migrant-background children declare a high level of support from friends and peers and 47% receive a high level of support from teachers, data that are well below the average and the lowest results across IMMERSE countries²³ (average: 54% and 58%, respectively). Teachers seem to become less supportive as children grow: the percentage of migrant-background children that perceive high support notably diminishes from 69% of small children, to 46% of early adolescents, and further to 35-38% among middle and late adolescents. Teachers and schools are trusted by almost two-thirds of migrant-background children (63%), although the percentage dramatically diminishes with age: from 91% of small children, to 65% of early adolescents, and further to

¹⁹ The dashboard indicators are available at this link: <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/selection-and-creation-of-dashboard-of-socio-educational-integration-indicators/>

²⁰ Results are based on data received and analysed by 30th June 2023.

²¹ 84.6% are older children (OC; aged 10-17), and 15.4% younger children (YC, aged 7-9). Most children attend secondary school (92.2%), while fewer interviewees attend primary school (6%). Only 1.5% of students affirm that they take courses, but not in a regular secondary school, while only 0.3% are not in any kind of education. Questionnaires were administered in both formal and non-formal education sites (73.2% and 26.8%, respectively).

²² i.e. parent's country of origin, language, or religion.

²³ Data about support from friends and peers and support from teachers shows very small differences between migrant and non-migrant children.



48-47% among middle and late adolescents. 15% of children with a migration background declare clear distrust. This aspect recalls the centrality of the role of teachers in promoting social inclusion and the importance of their initial and in-service education and training (European Commission, 2017).

Additionally, IMMERSE data show that 2 out of 5 migrant-background children in Italy do not attend language or learning support activities (40%), or other extra-curricular activities (42%), either at school or in their neighbourhood. Simultaneously, the percentage of those who take part in these activities notably diminishes with age, suggesting the limited availability, inadequacy of or lack of knowledge about these learning support activities.

Finally, over one third of the migrant-background children in Italy (39%) have been bullied at some point and 42% avoid places for fear of being badly treated, which is similar to non-migrant background children (37% and 39%, respectively) but slightly above the average across IMMERSE countries (38% and 40%, respectively).

Qualitative insights

IMMERSE research also provided some qualitative insights²⁴ to explore the path of inclusion and examine the most important challenges and opportunities that migrant minors experience in Italy. Interviews with migrant-background children – including "new generation" children (i.e. second generation) and UAMs, their families, practitioners, teachers, experts, and policymakers, revealed how legal and citizenship status can influence migrant-background children's vulnerability, access to education and social participation. Not holding Italian citizenship is indeed a key factor, which reduces migrant-background children's sense of belonging and desire to participate in community social life (Istat, 2020; Save the Children Italy, 2023).

Moreover, some critical issues distinguish the school and training paths of young people of foreign origin compared to their native peers, such as, for example, linguistic barriers, delays in access to education, enrolment in classes not corresponding to their age, risk of drop-out and difficulty in peer-to-peer relationships due to prejudice and stigmatisation. Specifically, linguistic barriers are related to the limited implementation of L2 courses – which are also heterogeneously distributed across territories –, migrant-background children's low attendance rate of kindergarten, as well as the absence of effective plurilingual contexts and practices.

In many cases, the adolescents who were interviewed highlighted the absence of an inclusive school climate. Additionally, unavailable psycho-social support services further expose migrant-background children to psychological vulnerability and limit their wellbeing.

Additionally, in line with other research studies (Azzolini, 2011; Romito, 2014; Aktas et al., 2021; Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Santagati and Colussi, 2022), results show that stereotyped and discriminatory representations affect student-teacher relationships and the career guidance advice for students with migration backgrounds.

Regarding UAMs, it is difficult to frame an effective integration process due to their often-short stay and the inadequate educational opportunities offered by the territory. They often access education once the school year has already started. Moreover, they are extensively enrolled in centres for the education of adults (CPIA), rather than the ordinary school system, reducing their chances to socialise with peers²⁵.

The collected interviews revealed the difficulties of the Italian school system which seems to inadequately

²⁴ See IMMERSE (2020) and IMMERSE (2022b).

²⁵ UAMs can access formal education systems, but the linguistic barriers and the non-recognition of their school certificates lead to their frequent enrolment in vocational training and non-formal education, such as Centres for the Education of Adults (CPIA). CPIA offer tailor-made training paths, however limiting social interaction opportunities with same-age peers (Save the Children Italy, 2022). Moreover, studies highlight that the quality of education interventions for UAMs is weakened by their temporary presence in a territory/in a school, the complexity of bureaucratic procedures, a rigid learning offer, the difficulties accessing school during the school year, the lack of adequate learning resources, the inexperience of education staff, as well as the lack of networks among schools, reception facilities, social services, training centres, and employment offices (Santagati and Barzaghi, 2021).

manage the integration process due to limited economic resources for support, and linguistic and extra-curricular activities, as well as fragmented intercultural approaches and inadequately trained teachers. Consequently, families, legal guardians and educators in non-formal education centres play a key role in supporting the learning path of migrant-background children.

The qualitative interviews further stressed the fragmentation of social, housing, sanitary and education services, which exacerbates deprivation and inequalities.

Good practices

Partners identified 60 good practices aiming at inclusive education and social innovation at local, national or EU level, to stimulate ideas and projects for a common model of integration and a more welcoming school for minors with a migration background²⁶. Most case studies aim to guarantee migrant and refugee children's access and completion of formal education, improve children's academic skills and language competences, as well as enhance the relationships with peers, teachers, and institutions. Nearly all of them seek to increase children's sense of belonging and many promote innovation at school through new inclusive approaches, governance models and teaching methods that enhance intercultural education by placing the child, his/her story and identity at the centre. Most projects balance common needs and specific needs, guaranteeing equal but flexible interventions.

Initiatives propose multiple school and extra-curricular activities, aimed not only at minors of migrant origin, but also families, school staff, and the wider community.

The mapped good practices adopt a multi-stakeholder, interdisciplinary approach that includes the collaboration of various professionals with different expertise (pedagogy, education, psychology, cultural mediation, health, law, research, etc.) and heterogeneous networks, involving government and local authorities, NGOs, school communities, universities, and research centres.

Almost all initiatives disseminate their results and methodologies through various communication channels. As a result, most of them have been scaled up or have the potential to be transferred to similar or different contexts.

Projects receive European, governmental, or private funds, which are fundamental to incentivize effective actions and guarantee initiative sustainability over time.

Good practices in Italy

Among the good practices identified in Italy is the project "L'Altroparlante" coordinated by the University for Foreigners of Siena (CLUSS Center) and implemented in six Italian schools located in non-urban contexts characterised by a high presence of students with diverse migration backgrounds. The initiative promotes "translanguaging" which is a multilingual learning-based educational approach that goes beyond the intercultural approach and is integrated across the curriculum. Unlike the traditional approach of the Italian school system that promotes the learning of Italian as a second language (L2) for more effective inclusion, these schools value the linguistic repertoires of students, recognizing their mother tongue as a key factor for inclusion and a democratic tool that offers equal opportunities for participation and expression.

4. Policy implications and recommendations

The results of IMMERSE quantitative and qualitative research activities describe the state of the art of the socio-educational integration process of minors with a migrant background in Italy and Europe, leading to reflections about the necessary intervention policies and actions at institutional and school level. To overcome the extreme heterogeneity of the approaches adopted on Italian territories, it is necessary to encourage the development of a univocal model of inclusion based on a more intentional and systematic

²⁶ This section briefly summarises the results of the analysis available in the publication IMMERSE (2022a). All 60 good practices can be explored in depth on IMMERSE's Online Digital Database <https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/online-digital-database-of-good-practices-and-resources-in-social-integration-of-refugee-and-migrant-children/>



approach, involving all key actors, and inspired by a vision of cultural diversity as a resource that benefits all.

We, therefore, urge the Parliament and Government, in accordance with the EU Institutions

- to adopt a European and national harmonised data collection system based on internationally accepted definitions, multidimensional indicators, and a common, co-creative and child-centred approach, such as the IMMERSE Dashboard of Indicators, to study the state of the art of the socio-educational integration of migrant-background minors in schools and non-formal education environments.
- to adopt a uniform model of integration, that guarantees standardisation as well as flexibility and adherence to local needs, adopting a child-centred approach. This requires the cooperation of all institutions/stakeholders involved in reception and integration and the systematisation of specific measures for distinct target groups expressing differentiated needs. Integration policies must be aligned with social, educational, urban, and economic policies and must be supported by long-term, financially stable funding solutions.

We recommend Parliament

- to reform Law no. 91 of 1992, guaranteeing the right to Italian citizenship for children born in Italy with parents who demonstrate stable legal residence in our country and facilitated paths to acquire Italian citizenship for minors growing up in Italy or who have arrived in Italy through family reunification.

We urge the Government and the Ministry of Education and Merit

- to reactivate the National Observatory for the integration of foreign students and for interculture, established with Ministerial Decree no. 717 of 5 September 2014, in order to guarantee the fulfilment of its consultative and proactive role on school intercultural integration policies and to encourage, also through the allocation of adequate resources, the effective implementation of the Guidelines for intercultural orientation 2022.
- to allocate adequate economic resources and guarantee specialised professionals working in schools with a high presence of pupils with a migrant background, in order to enhance the linguistic and cultural heritage and make multicultural schools attractive. The work of cultural mediators should be guaranteed with stability throughout the whole educational path. In this regard, it is necessary to adopt clear comprehensive legislation to define the profession of the intercultural mediator. Furthermore, schools must be equipped with adequate resources for Italian L2 courses and extra-curricular socialisation activities.

We recommend the Ministry of Education and Merit

- to ensure that, as part of the educational guidance reform envisaged by the PNRR (M4C1 - Reform 1.4) and the related Guidelines issued with Ministerial Decree no. 328 of 22 December 2022, guidance teachers are adequately trained in order to guarantee guidance activities that take into account the interests and talents of students and limit the risk of drop-out and early leaving. Educational guidance should be free from stereotypes and prejudices linked to the migration background, gender, or other conditions.
- to ensure the development of teachers' intercultural competences through both initial teacher education and in-service training. As recommended by the Guidelines for Intercultural Orientation (2022), Universities, while respecting their autonomy, should encourage the presence of intercultural pedagogy and teaching of the Italian language for foreigners. At the same time, as provided for by the Prime Ministerial Decree of 4 August 2023 (GU n.224 of 25-9-2023) which defines the teachers' minimum professional skills, it is necessary to guarantee qualifying academic courses for the initial training of secondary school teachers that promote intercultural teaching approaches and inclusive methodologies.



We recommend schools

- to guarantee full and equal access for all children to inclusive and quality education in the formal education system and the timely enrolment, even during the school year, of students with a migration background – especially UAMs – in classes corresponding to their age, in accordance with the provisions of the Consolidating Act on Immigration (Legislative Decree no. 286/1998), the Ministerial note no. 101 of 8 January 2010, the indications contained in the ministerial circulars on registrations²⁷ and the Guidelines for intercultural orientation (2022). At the same time, schools should guarantee social and geographical heterogeneity when creating class groups.
- to adopt teaching approaches that enhance education inclusiveness, interculturality, linguistic and cultural pluralism, also through the adoption of multilingual textbooks and teaching materials and the organisation of catch-up programmes and accelerated learning opportunities. Interventions should involve the whole educating community.
- to favour an inclusive school climate, which promotes student wellbeing and belonging and protects against instances of discrimination, bullying and exclusion of refugee and migrant children, through dedicated resources. Psycho-social support should be offered in schools to target the specific needs of migrant-background students.

We recommend national and local institutions, schools and the educating community

- to allocate adequate resources, guarantee the systematisation and support the upscaling of good practices at local, national, and European level, to promote a common model of integration, able to balance standardisation and flexibility, and favour the implementation of innovative practices in the field of education and social integration to also avoid school dropouts. Practices should adopt a multidimensional, holistic approach, offering multiple activities and collaborating with extra-school parties, critical public services (health, child protection, social protection, parental labour market support, etc.), interdisciplinary specialised professionals and heterogeneous networks. Projects should apply a child-centred, empowering, and inclusive approach, where migrant children are acknowledged as agents and the whole educating community is actively involved, strengthening opportunities for social participation.
- to safeguard UAMs' right to education by guaranteeing immediate access to formal education, flexible and highly personalised linguistic-educational offers, and professionals specifically trained to welcome UAMs. UAMs should be informed about education and integration opportunities. They should be listened to and their skills should be enhanced through an intercultural and child-centred approach.

We urge local public administrations:

- to ensure that families in difficult socio-economic conditions can effectively access services and curricular and extracurricular activities (e.g. support measures for the purchase of books, canteen and transport services, school trips, sports activities, scholarships, and access to kindergarten), without discrimination based on the citizenship status or registered residence, pursuant to art. 38 of Legislative Decree no. 286/98.

²⁷ The most recent is the Ministerial circular prot. no. 33071 related to enrolment for the s.y. 2023/2024.



Children's recommendations for inclusive schools and societies

To promote their empowerment and enhance their key role in defining their own path of inclusion, children and adolescents were involved in policy consultation activities, in order to formulate a specific proposal through a co-creation method³.

Children and adolescents ask for a more inclusive school based on:

- equal rights and opportunities for all students;
- the innovation of pedagogy, with more supportive, trained teachers – also with a migrant background – and inclusive didactic methods, capable of enhancing students' background (culture, language, etc.), competences, and talents;
- the availability of cultural mediators and materials in different languages to also facilitate the involvement of families and communities;
- intercultural education, as part of the school curriculum, to learn different cultures and enhance the background of each classmate;
- child-friendly spaces and opportunities to socialise with peers during school time and extra school time.

5. Conclusions

With the increasing number of students with migrant backgrounds, in the last decades the Italian school system has been particularly engaged with the challenge of integration and interculturality. The IMMERSE quantitative research results and qualitative studies have made a critical contribution revealing the state of the art of the socio-educational integration path of migrant and refugee children from a multidimensional perspective, stressing the challenges and opportunities that they experience in Italy. Despite the commitment of educational staff and many good practices at local level, the scarcity and inadequacy of organisational, economic, and professional resources weaken the efficacy of interventions, both at school and in the community. Migrant-background children – especially UAMs – strive to access education and other key social services, are exposed to the risk of drop-out, and suffer from discrimination, bullying, and poor social relationships with peers, teachers, and the community. These are factors that negatively affect children's happiness and sense of belonging. IMMERSE data highlight the need for a radical shift in policies and intervention approaches. To encourage the development of a univocal model of inclusion based on a more intentional and systematic approach, existing good practices and guidelines for the integration of migrant-background children need to be effectively implemented. It is necessary to adequately train professionals and enhance innovative didactic methods, involving all key actors through networks and guaranteeing sufficient funds. Starting from the abovementioned policy recommendations, it is paramount that institutions and the education system commit to improving the socio-educational integration of migrant-background children, acknowledging and protecting their fundamental rights.



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