TRANSCENDING EDUCATIONAL BOUNDARIES
Challenges to the educational inclusion of refugees in Europe's 2 Seas area

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Foreword

Migration encompasses challenges for both migrants and the countries that receive them. The first leave behind their known habitat and life as they (try to) enter a new country and build up a new life, whereas the receiving countries encounter an increasing diversity within their society involving people with different habits, values, norms, languages, expectancies, etc. Migration processes accordingly reflect the **meeting of various cultures**: on the one hand *global meets local* in the sense of immigrants from all over the world getting exposed to a new local society and culture, whereas on the other hand *local meets global* in the sense of a host country's citizens and institutions coming into contact with people from across the world having diverse cultural backgrounds.

In light of the extensive challenges accompanying immigration, the European Union (EU) accentuates and supports integrating policies and actions at both the national and regional level in order to foster the social integration of people with a migrant background. This has been Europe's history and should also inform its future. **The main areas in which policies and actions should facilitate the social integration of people with a migrant background are reception, housing, employment, education, and access to basic main services.**[1] **In the present report, we focus on the challenges and opportunities with respect to inclusive education for refugees within Europe's 2 Seas area. The 2 Seas area** covers the coastal regions of England, France, the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) which today face several challenges in realising quality education to refugees and integrating them into mainstream education.[2]

Establishing inclusive education and equal opportunities to be successful in school is not only a challenge regarding refugees, however. Equally youngsters without a refugee status who migrated and those who never migrated themselves but who have an immigration background in their family (*e.g.* second-generation immigrant students, i.e. native-born children with foreign-born parents, or native-born children with one foreign-born parent) take up more disadvantaged positions within European educational systems[3]. It can therefore be stated that people with an immigration background in general, regardless of their legal or generational status, tend to face more educational barriers compared to the indigenous population within Europe's 2 Seas area. This signals the existence of **persistent inequality in education based on ethnic cultural background**. The barriers that hinder immigrants to be successful in education need to be understood and broken if we want to promote their participation as active citizens into the local community, the labour market, and the socio-cultural domain.

Given that distinct migrant groups – distinguished by legal or generational status – could benefit from integration programmes or activities aimed at immigrants with a refugee status[4], the SIREE project perceives refugees as part of the larger group of migrants and not as a distinct group next to migrants (i.e. 'the inclusivist view on migrants').[5] So, when the report refers to '(im)migrants', refugees and asylum seekers should be considered of as being part of that group. When the report specifically mentions 'refugees', this refers to immigrants who were granted a refugee status in a host country.

This report explores the processes of integration of immigrants into education systems of the 2 Seas area. In specific, we focus on **challenges and opportunities at the meso-level of the school organisation, and at the micro-level of individuals and interpersonal relationships in school.** The

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[1] European Union (2018)
[2] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)
[3] OECD (2018)
[4] European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2000)
[5] Carling, J. (2017)

report first sketches a contextual overview on the topic of immigration and ethnic inequality within educational systems of the 2 Seas area. It further seeks to answer the **following research questions**:

- Which challenges and needs at the meso- and micro-level of the school exist with respect to effective integration of immigrant students and parents into education?
- Which opportunities at the meso- and micro-level of the school can promote the educational integration of immigrant students and parents?

The SIREE project covers the whole range of educational levels from preschool to adult education. The abovementioned questions thus relate to these different levels.

The presented overview of the selected challenges and related opportunities at the school level are derived from both an extensive **literature study** and qualitative research data which has been gathered through **interviews and focus groups** with refugee/migrant students and parents, educators, social workers, pre-service teachers, and policymakers across the 2 Seas area.

The **primary goal of the SIREE project's Work Package 1** is to facilitate integration in education through co-creation of actions at school level. Co-creation is realised through the innovative method of learning communities in educational institutions (pre-school up to adult education) across the 2 Seas area in which immigrant students and parents enter into dialogue with the school team and other stakeholders. The aim of the learning communities is to discuss the school setting and to jointly propose, develop, and implement actions in the respective educational institutions to promote the educational integration of immigrant students and parents. This project is innovative for it gives immigrant parents and students a central role in improving the way schools approach diversity issues.

    The aim of this report is to gain insight into challenges and opportunities with regard to immigrant integration in education in the 2 Seas area. This overview is a necessary background report for the facilitators of the SIREE learning communities to understand the issues at play. Moreover, the report offers a whole range of topics, and with that many starting points that can stimulate initial content discussions among the participants of the learning communities.

The main section of the report presents a selected overview of challenges and opportunities for immigrant integration in education and is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on challenges and opportunities specifically related to the education of refugees and asylum-seekers. Subsequently, challenges and opportunities which associate with the educational integration of immigrants irrespective of their legal or generational status are presented. The study departs from a relational perspective on school improvement in which diverse educational role groups and stakeholders influence the educational experience of immigrants. These role groups and stakeholders are teachers, parents, peer students, members and organisational representatives of the local community, and school leaders. The discussed challenges and opportunities for immigrant integration into education are structured across the report in the way how they relate to these distinct role groups and stakeholders.

1 A diversified educational landscape across Europe's 2 Seas area

1.1 Immigration flows

Whereas up to the 1990's migration into Europe was mainly characterized as labour migration, family formation or family reunification, a **diversification** of countries of origin, destination, motives, and flows occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[6] The history of Europe as a migration hub has contributed to a diversified population in terms of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The number of European citizens who never migrated themselves but who have an immigration history in their family going back to (one of) their parents or grandparents is accordingly increasing. This is reflected within the educational system (see Table 1). It is a diversified reality to which European societies and educational systems have to adapt.

Table 1. Insights on the average 15-year-old immigrant student population across the EU in 2015

Percentage of students with an immigrant background across the total student population	**21.49%**
Change in the relative size of the immigrant student population between 2003 and 2015	+6.67%
Share of first-generation immigrant students among students with an immigrant background	**17.74%**
Change in the share of first-generation immigrant students between 2003 and 2015	-2.93%
Share of second-generation immigrant students among students with an immigrant background	**23.78%**
Change in the share of second-generation immigrant students between 2003 and 2015	+4.94%
Share of native students of mixed-heritage among students with an immigrant background	**48.44%**
Change in the share of native students of mixed-heritage between 2003 and 2015	+2.87%
Share of returning foreign-born students (of two native-born parents) among students with an immigrant background	**10.04%**

Source: OECD (2018, p. 47)

Immigration figures published by Eurostat show that the EU had to deal with a total of 2 million non-EU citizens who have immigrated to the area in 2016, of which more than half were aged below 28. In the same year, the EU Member States granted citizenship to almost 1 million persons, which accounts for an increase of 18% compared to 2015. About 87% of these people were citizens of non-EU-member countries. Most of them were born in Africa (30%) and Asia (21%).[7] Family-related migration and migration for employment reasons remain the most important drivers of migration into Europe. These make up about 29% and 23% respectively of the first residence permits issued by EU Member States to third-country nationals (citizens of countries outside of the European Union, except for Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein).[8] **Global processes** have furthermore affected the nature of immigration into the (EU) the last years. The Syrian and Iraq conflicts have, for instance, resulted in a large number of people who seek to build a new life in one of the European Union Member States after having encountered war and conflict in their country of residence/birth. The number of refugees seeking asylum is therefore also increasing. Asylum denotes a form of **international**

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[6] Van Mol, C. & de Valk, H. (2016)
[7] Eurostat (2018a)
[8] King, R. & Lulle, A. (2016)

protection which a country grants on its territory to persons who are unable to seek protection in their country of citizenship and/or residence because they fear prosecution based on religion, race, political affiliation, sexual orientation, etc. This international protection departs from the 1951 Refugee Convention and is based on the principal of *non-refoulement*.[9,10] A total of 650 thousand first-time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the Member States of the EU during 2017, which is a substantial drop in applications compared to 2016 because of a lower number of applicants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, most first-time applicants still came from Syria, while also Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan account for a large share of first-time applicants. Table 2 presents some insights on the first-time applicants across the EU in 2017,[11] indicating the potential impact of refugee flows on Europe's educational systems.

Table 2. Insights on first-time applicants across the EU in 2017

Number of first-time applicants	650.000
Change in the number of first-time applicants compared to 2016	-560.000
Share of minors aged less than 18 years	31%
Share of unaccompanied minors among the minor-aged first-time applicants	13%
Share of males among the age group 0-13 years	52%
Share of males among the age groups 14-17 years and 18-34 years	75%

Source: Eurostat (2018b)

In 2017, the 28 EU Member States granted **protection status** to 538.000 asylum seekers (first instance decisions and final decisions taken in appeal); which constitutes about 0.1% of their total resident population (approximately 511 million). This number also denotes a drop in granted protection statuses by almost one quarter compared to 2016. Further insights on positive asylum decisions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Insights on decisions on asylum applications across the EU in 2017

First instance asylum decisions	
Positive decisions	444.000 (46%)
Granted refugee status	222 000 (23%)
Subsidiary protection status	159 000 (16%)
Stay for humanitarian reasons	63 000 (7%)
Final decisions taken in appeal or review	
Positive decisions	95.200 (36%)
Granted refugee status	49 600 (19%)
Subsidiary protection status	31 100 (12%)
Stay for humanitarian reasons	14 600 (5%)

Source: Eurostat (2018b)

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[9] UNHCR (2018)

[10] More information on the possible outcomes of applying for asylum is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Asylum_decision

[11] Eurostat (2018b)

Important to add to these figures, is that positive asylum decisions often leads to new processes of family-related migration because of following relatives, as generally refugees can apply for reunification with more lenient requirements.[12]

Accordingly, Europe has to adapt to **different types of learners** with an immigration background among its population. On the one hand, to first-generation learners who migrated themselves – for whatever reason (fear of prosecution, family reunion, …) – and, on the other hand, to learners without a migration history themselves but with a migration background in their family. Also the European region under study has become more and more diverse in terms of the cultural backgrounds of its population due to immigration processes. Europe's 2 Seas area has indeed been confronted with a substantial number of immigrants during the last years. In case of non-EU citizens applying for asylum, for example, the 2 Seas area has granted a refugee status to about 35.000 persons in 2017 (cf. Table 4). Further insights regarding the immigration process within the 2 Seas area are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Insights on the nature of immigration within the 2 Seas area

	Number of immigrants born outside the EU Member States in 2016 *(% of total immigrant population)*	Main countries of birth among the foreign/foreign-born population at the beginning of 2017 *(% of the total foreign/foreign-born population of the reporting country)*	Number of former citizens of non-EU countries having acquired the citizen-ship in 2016	Main citizenships and number of non-EU asylum applicants in the reporting country in 2017	Distribution of first instance decisions on (non-EU) asylum applications, 2017
Belgium	55 500 *(44.8%)*	1. Morocco *(11.4%)* 2. France *(9.8%)* 3. Netherlands *(6.9%)* 4. Italy *(6.4%)* 5. Turkey *(5.3%)*	23 100	TOTAL: 14 035 1. Syria (2 625) 2. Afghanistan (995) 3. Palestine (815) 4. Guinea (750) 5. Albania (670)	▪ Rejected: 48% ▪ Refugee status: 40% ▪ Subsidiary Protection: 12% ▪ Humanitarian reasons: /
France	199 900 *(52.9%)*	No detailed information is available	108 200	TOTAL: 91 070 1. Albania (11 395) 2. Afghanistan (6 555) 3. Haiti (5 565) 4. Sudan (4 665) 5. Syria (4 615)	▪ Rejected: 71% ▪ Refugee status: 17% ▪ Subsidiary Protection: 12% ▪ Humanitarian reasons: /
Netherlands	99 800 *(52.8%)*	1. Turkey *(8.9%)* 2. Suriname *(8.4%)* 3. Morocco *(7.9%)* 4. Poland *(5.9%)* 5. Indonesia *(5.7%)*	25 800	TOTAL: 26 050 1. Syria (2 925) 2. Eritrea (1 590) 3. Morocco (980) 4. Algeria (890) 5. Iraq (845)	▪ Rejected: 51% ▪ Refugee status: 18% ▪ Subsidiary Protection: 26% ▪ Humanitarian reasons: 5%
United Kingdom	286 900 *(48.7%)*	1. Poland *(10.0%)* 2. India *(9.2%)* 3. Pakistan *(5.8%)* 4. Ireland *(4.2%)* 5. Romania *(3.4%)*	131 800	TOTAL: 33 310 1. Iraq (3 260) 2. Pakistan (3 125) 3. Iran (3 050) 4. Bangladesh (1 980) 5. Afghanistan (1 915)	▪ Rejected: 69% ▪ Refugee status: 27% ▪ Subsidiary Protection: 1% ▪ Humanitarian reasons: 3%

Sources: Eurostat (2018a,b)

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[12] Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2018)

1.2 Implications for education

In dealing with such a diversified population of children and adults with an immigrant background, the European Union strives to establish cohesive and inclusive societies within its territory. One way to achieve this is through creating educational systems that are non-segregated and responsive to the strengths and needs of diverse learners. European countries and the EU have for long prioritized educational improvement for ethnic minority or migrant-background learners, which became more urgent since the 2015-2016 European 'migration and refugee crisis'.[13]

In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights recognizes **education as a human right**.[14] In his work on that right to education,[15] K. Tomaševski – a former Special Rapporteur on the right to education of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights – outlines the **4 A framework** which sketches that governments play a determining role in making education *available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable* in order to secure the right to education, also for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The 4 A framework is by no means a guide to how governments should treat the right to education under their national law but it does place duties within the educational process on children (e.g. attending compulsory education), parents and educators (e.g. working non-discriminatory). In broad terms, the 4 categories in the framework could be described as follows:

Availability: ensuring that schooling is available for all children/learners, for instance, through establishing or funding schools and in training and employing professional teachers who take up their responsibilities.

Accessibility: making compulsory education accessible and free of charge and choice, while keeping access to post-compulsory education affordable and non-discriminative.

Acceptability: providing available and accessible education that is of good quality. This includes ensuring standards of learning, health, safety, respect for diversity or professional requirements for teachers.

Adaptability: establishing an educational system that is ought to adapt to the children/learners. The educational system has to adapt to the needs of, for example, refugee children.

The **EU policy framework** furthermore advocates several directives with regard to educating refugees and asylum seekers: children of asylum seekers and minors seeking asylum should be granted access to the education system under similar conditions as nationals; adults granted international protection should have access to the general education system, further (re-)training under the same conditions as legally resident third-country nationals; children entering a Member State should be included in education within three months, and minors should be able to access preparatory classes when they need this to facilitate their access to and participation in the education system.[16]

Although somewhat less prevalent across developed countries, **refugee education worldwide** is in a state of crisis.[17] According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 3.7 million children of the six million primary and secondary school-age refugees have no school to go to. Compared to non-refugee children, refugee children are five times more likely not to go to school. Whereas 91% of the children around the world attend primary education, this is only the case for 50% of all refugee children. The enrolment gap even broadens with regard to secondary education: only 22% of refugee adolescents attend lower secondary education compared to 84% of non-refugee adolescents.

Investing in the education of refugee children and adolescents and creating more inclusive education will pay off, however, also across Europe's 2 Seas Area. It not only improves their individual

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[13] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)

[14] European Court of Human Rights (1950)

[15] Tomasevski, K. (2001)

[16] Koehler, C., et al. (2018, p.7-8)

[17] UNHCR (2016)

job prospects, and their confidence and self-esteem, also the hosting societies will reap the benefits of reduced poverty and higher economic growth.[18]

The road towards an inclusive educational system in Europe that embraces and further develops migrants' strengths and adapts to their needs is still long and bumpy, however. A plain reason for this is the finding that, on average, even children in the EU who are native-born but have an immigrant background in their family still take up more disadvantaged positions as compared to students without an immigrant background:[19] students with an immigrant background – particularly first-generation immigrant students – not only underperform academically in reading, mathematics and science, they also report lower levels of wellbeing in terms of their sense of belonging, life satisfaction, and schoolwork-related anxiety.

These boundaries to an inclusive educational system pertain to the immigrant-background population in general, just as other factors such as discrimination do.[20] Refugees and asylum seekers are confronted with the same kind of challenges, but may encounter **additional challenges** because of their particular experiences. Having experienced trauma (war, conflict, loss of accommodation or family, family separation, displacement, …) or living in temporary accommodation are, for instance, specific characteristics to which social and emotional needs of refugees relate which should be addressed in the educational system of the host country in light of providing this group with equal opportunities to learn.[21]

We might accordingly speak of boundaries to inclusion which still surround the educational system in Europe nowadays. Boundaries which people with an immigrant background and newly arrived migrants in particular have to overcome in order to become fully and equally involved and integrated in the educational system. Boundaries that need to be transcended if governments really want to install inclusive education for a diversity of learners in which learners from ethnic minorities in general have equal opportunities to develop their talents and competencies as compared to the indigenous population. In section 4 the report discusses these boundaries, but first it provides some contextual insights on ethnic inequalities in education across the 2 Seas area.

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[18] UNHCR (2016)
[19] OECD (2018)
[20] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)
[21] Arnot, M. & Pinson, H. (2005)

2 Ethnic inequality in education across the 2 Seas area

What does the research indicate and how do policies act in order to foster educational equality for ethnic minorities across the 2 Seas area? In this section we provide a brief general answer to the above question for respectively Belgium (Flanders), France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (England). We take a closer look on how research has traditionally approached the topic in each region and what recent research suggests about ethnic inequality in education for each region. We additionally take a glance at some educational policies that focus on ethnic minority learners and on the integration of refugees in education.

2.1 Belgium (Flanders)

Belgium has a substantial **population of 15-year-old students** who are either foreign-born or who either have at least one foreign-born parent. This group makes up 33.45% of the total 15-year-old student population, compared to an EU-average of 21.49%. Trend-wise, the percentage of native-born students with native-born parents has decreased by 9.44% between 2003 and 2015. Across the EU, this percentage has decreased by 6.67% during the same period. The difference in Belgium in attaining baseline levels of **academic proficiency** between students with an immigrant background and those with a native background is among the largest in Europe. The percentage of first-generation immigrants (foreign-born students with foreign-born parents) compared to the percentage of native students that achieves baseline levels of academic proficiency indicates a gap of 31 percentage points. This gap exceeds the EU-average of 22 percentage points and indicates that first-generation immigrants in particular are at risk in Belgium not to attain academic proficiency.[22] It is accordingly clear that migrant-background children and specifically those who migrated together with their parents hold a particularly vulnerable position within education in Belgium.

    The high level of ethnic inequality in education is not only reflected in test results of the international PISA-study, but equally in findings that students with an immigrant background are overrepresented in the lower esteemed tracks (mainly vocational and technical education) – which relates to an early track selection at the age of twelve--, have a higher chance to retain their grade or to leave school without a qualification, and are underrepresented in higher education. This **structural inequality** already starts at preschool education with lower attendance rates among ethnic minority children and continues through primary, secondary and higher education.[23]

In Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, both **research and policy** has traditionally considered the role of disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and structural school features, such as tracking or ethnic composition, in the development of ethnic inequality in education. The main focus regarding ethnic inequality in educational outcomes has been put, however, on cultural features such as language proficiency, discrimination by peer students or teachers, expectations and aspirations.[24]

    The Flemish government has taken considerable initiatives to improve the position of ethnic minority children in education since the 90's. The 2002-decree on Equal Opportunities in Education, for example, aimed at reducing school segregation, although this has proven to be something difficult to tackle given the freedom of school choice. Besides, and contrary to findings that multilingualism can benefit the educational success of immigrant students, Flemish schools and teachers often emphasize the importance of Dutch proficiency and prohibit children to speak their mother tongue on

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[22] OECD (2018)
[23] Unia (2018)
[24] Van Praag, L., et al. (2018, forthcoming)

the school premises, which often raises tensions between students and teachers.[25] Education is compulsory for all children between six and eighteen in Belgium. Full time nursery education is possible from the age of 2.5 years. Registration for nursery education and (sufficient) attendance is intensively stimulated by the Flemish government. Of all qualifying children in the 2014-2015 school year, more than 98% were registered in nursery education and 96% were reaching the expected attendance rate.[26]

The attention on Dutch proficiency equally is reflected in the **reception policy in education** towards non-Dutch speaking newcomers. For this group, a specific and segregated educational track – Okan (Onthaalklas anderstalige nieuwkomers) – has been installed in lower secondary education whereas reception classes are incorporated within primary education. The focus in Okan is on learning Dutch and on social integration. The reception class takes at least one year before the newcomers can enter regular secondary education. With regard to this transition, newcomers get a follow-up school coach who guides and supports them, and shares her/his expertise with the staff of the regular school. In the 2015-2016 school year, 4112 students were enrolled in the Okan-track of fulltime secondary education, accounting for less than 1% of the total student population enrolled in fulltime secondary education. Also in primary education, less than 1% of the total student population in the 2015-2016 school year were newcomers with another mother tongue. A concern regarding these newcomers, is the higher rate of unauthorized absence from education when compared to regular secondary education. This indicates the precarious situation (e.g. temporary accommodation) in which a lot of these minors find themselves, affecting their educational trajectories.[27]

2.2   France

Compared to Belgium, France has a lower share of foreign-born students and students with at least one foreign-born parent among its total student population. Students with this kind of immigrant background make up 26.26% of the total **15-year-old student population**, a figure that still exceeds the EU-average though. In contrast to most EU-countries, the percentage of native-born students with native-born parents has not changed between 2003 and 2015. France is, however, characteristic for the biggest gap (36 percentage points) across Europe's 2 Seas area in the percentage of first-generation immigrants that achieves baseline levels of **academic proficiency** compared to the percentage of native students that attains baseline academic proficiency.[28] Even more than in the Belgian case, the PISA-findings indicate that first-generation immigrant students are at a higher risk for not achieving satisfactory learning levels compared to native students in France. Besides ethnic inequality in educational achievement, the French system is also characterized by the finding that children of immigrant parents are more likely to be present in the lower tracks of the educational hierarchy and by ethnic school segregation.[29, 30]

Whereas in Flanders a similarity of focus and approach between **research and policy** on ethnic inequalities in education can be discerned (see above), a more distant relationship between both can be deduced in France. According to Ichou and van Zanten (2018, *forthcoming*), France holds a political model of integration in education that has often been perceived as being colour-blind for social reality, promoting assimilation, mainly focussing on the importance of social class disadvantages, and demonstrating limited recognition of linguistic and cultural problems that immigrant children experience. Accordingly, most of French studies on ethnic inequality in education have paid attention to the gap between the official traditional integration model in educational policy and established

[25] Unia (2018)
[26] Vlaamse Overheid (2016)
[27] De Meerleer, S. & Strobbe, D. (2017)
[28] OECD (2018)
[29] Alba, R. & Silberman, R. (2009)
[30] Felouzis, G., et al. (2015)

evidence of ethnic inequalities. The higher number of non-EU immigrants since the 80's and accompanying policy changes – progressively acknowledging ethnic inequalities in education – have however yielded a larger number of studies analysing the topic by exploring a broader range of factors such as educational aspirations, knowledge about school matters, or teachers' professional attitudes.[31] Notwithstanding this growing body of research, Ichou and van Zanten conclude that several research areas on ethnic inequality in education remain understudied in France. An important reason for this is the fact that social class and macro-structural factors continue to be the dominant research paradigms for studying ethnic inequality in French education while research on cultural and interactional dynamics remain limited; for example in the area of explaining why ethnic minority students in France feel discriminated in school.

Education in France is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen.[32] Nursery education is possible from the age of 3 years and under certain conditions even from the age of 2 years.[33] In general, France's **integration policy is centralised** and focusses on assimilation. This gets reflected in the education for newcomers, which is focused on a quick integration of newcomers within regular education. Newly arrived migrant students enter a centralised reception desk and their prior schooling gets assessed. This reception desk is called CASNAV (centre académique pour la scolarisation des enfants allophones nouvellement arrivés et des enfants issus de familles itinérantes et de voyageurs). The Casnavs must contribute at national level, facilitating and creating the conditions for the training of newcomers and non-native speakers. Newcomers gradually enter regular classes while attaining reception classes in which one year of French as a second language is supported. Track selection in secondary education occurs at the age of 15.[34] **Asylum seeking children** can follow education in regular schools or in reception centres. For those who master the French language insufficiently, initiation classes or specialised language training exist that focus on learning French. Also migrants who are in a irregular situation have a right to education when they are younger than 16 years. Asylum seekers who do not have a personal address encounter issues in getting enrolled in education, however. Besides, access to education for asylum seekers aged 16-18 years is difficult as public schools have the freedom not to accept them. There are no training programs for asylum seeking adults. They can only access language courses in reception centres. The organisation of these courses is, however, in the hands of volunteers which affects the availability of the courses.[35]

2.3   The Netherlands

Across the 2 Seas area, the Netherlands has the lowest percentage of **15-year-old students** who are either foreign-born or who have at least one foreign-born parent (20.59%) among its corresponding student population. It is the only country in the 2 Seas area in which the relative presence of these immigrant students remains below the EU-average of 21.49%. Just as in France, the Netherlands has not seen its 15-year-old native student population (native-born and native-born parents) decrease between 2003 and 2015. In light of the gap in baseline **academic proficiency** between native students and first-generation immigrant students, the Dutch-case compares to the Belgian one. Whereas 79% of the native students attains baseline levels of academic proficiency, only 49% of first-generation immigrant students does in the Netherlands. Again, the PISA-findings suggest that also in this 2 Seas region, particularly foreign-born students with foreign-born parents demonstrate the highest risk of not attaining baseline academic proficiency.[36]

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[31] Ichou, M. & van Zanten, A. (2018, forthcoming)

[32] Scholten, P., et al. (2017)

[33] French Ministry of Education (2018)

[34] European Union (2013)

[35] Asylum Information Database (2018)

[36] OECD (2018)

Ethnic inequality in education in the Netherlands is furthermore noticeable through findings that ethnic minority groups are often concentrated in (urban) schools, partly due to the freedom of school choice, have a lower chance to attend higher educational tracks, more often repeat school years or drop out more easily from education.[37] Differences between ethnic groups in educational outcomes are largely explained by ethnic minorities' social background and their knowledge of Dutch.[38]

A close collaboration between **research and policy** regarding ethnic inequality in education is discernible in the Netherlands.[39] Particularly large-scale research projects are funded in light of evaluating policy activities whereas researchers manage to influence policy initiatives and agendas. Policy mainly focuses on cultural assimilation as a way to establish socio-economic and educational equality among ethnic groups. Particularly the underachievement of Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese minority students receives attention across the research programs, with an important focus on the role of family background (e.g. level of education or language knowledge) in explaining educational inequality. Yet, also the role of discrimination (e.g. teacher expectations or the influence of achieved versus ascribed characteristics on school advice), cultural and social capital (e.g. the role of parenting styles or family support), or institutional characteristics of the educational system (e.g. age at making tracking choices or mobility opportunities between tracks) have received attention by researchers in exploring ethnic inequality in Dutch education. Research, on the other hand, should provide a deeper understanding of ethnic inequalities in education by unrolling more in-depth case-studies or ethnographic studies alongside those large-scale quantitative studies that align with educational policy implementation and development.

Fulltime compulsory education exists for children aged between five and sixteen in the Netherlands, although primary education starts at the age of 4. Moreover, young people between 16 and 18 years old are required to attain a qualification that allows them to enter the labour market or higher education.[40] Dutch schools have the responsibility to organise and provide accessible programs for **newcomers** in collaboration with local governments, though supported by a central government agency which funds programs and exchanges best practices.[41] Children who live in asylum centres usually receive education in institutes specifically connected to those centres or in nearby schools. Those living in other forms of accommodation follow education in schools that specifically educate newcomers or schools which have installed separate learning groups for newcomers. Newcomers with another mother tongue enrol in preparatory classes (opvangonderwijs) that focus on basic language skills. In primary schools this is called 'education for newcomers' (nieuwkomersonderwijs) and in secondary education 'international switching classes' (internationale schakelklassen) where students attend intermediate classes before entering regular secondary education. A first track selection occurs at the age of twelve in the Netherlands. On average, it takes up to one and a half year before newcomers enter regular education. The general idea is that it takes three up to four years before newcomers can fully participate in regular education.[42] Thus, like Belgium and France, the Netherlands put a lot of emphasis on developing language skills among newcomers.

2.4   The United Kingdom

In the UK, 28.55% of all **15-year-old students** are foreign-born or at least have one foreign-born parent. Across Europe's 2 Seas area, only the UK and Belgium have experienced a decrease in its percentage of students who are native-born and who have native-born parents. In case of the UK, the percentage

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[37] Gijsberts, M. & Herweijer, L. (2007)
[38] Driessen, G. & Merry, M. (2011)
[39] Stevens, P.A.J., et al. (2018, forthcoming)
[40] Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2017)
[41] Scholten, P., et al. (2017)
[42] Inspectie van het Onderwijs (2016)

of native-born students with native-born parents has dropped from 80.20% to 71.45% between 2003 and 2015. In light of the difference between the percentage first-generation immigrant students and the percentage native students attaining baseline **academic proficiency**, the PISA-study exposes that the UK is top of the class among Europe's 2 Seas area. This gap is only 11 percentage points and is substantially lower than the average EU-gap of 22 percentage points. About 62% of first-generation immigrant students in the UK attain baseline academic proficiency. A figure that strongly exceeds the figures for the other regions in the 2 Seas area and contrasts most sharply with the French case, demonstrates that only about 39% of first-generation immigrant students attain baseline academic proficiency.[43] Although being top of the class in the region under study, first-generation immigrants in the UK are still at risk for attaining unsatisfactory academic standards. This risk might be lower than in the Netherlands, France or Belgium, in the UK too the chances for first-generation immigrants to attain baseline academic proficiency are substantially lower than for native students.

In England, **differences among ethnic groups** are not only perceived in terms of achievement scores. For instance, Black minority students have a higher chance of being identified with special educational needs because of behavioural, emotional or social disorders.[44] Ethnic minority students furthermore get disproportionally excluded from schools, which has been attributed to a policy of stimulating between-school competition and putting pressure on schools and teachers to achieve.[45] Differentiating between distinct ethnic minority groups when assessing their educational progress often sharpens the picture. Longitudinal research shows for instance that Black Caribbean students remain a concern in light of their attainment and study progress while the progress of Indian or Pakistani students exceeds those of White British students.[46]

In contrast to the rather close connection between **research and policy** in the Netherlands or Belgium, research on ethnic inequalities in education in England takes up a more critical position towards (neo-liberal) educational policies which often demonstrate a multicultural facade but are at the same time actually based on principles of assimilation. Just as in Belgium and the Netherlands, large-scale quantitative research studies have been conducted in England in terms of describing ethnic minority students' educational performance over time or schools' effectiveness for minority groups' learning. However, the main research focus has been directed to ethnographic qualitative studies that explore the influence of discriminatory teacher attitudes and behaviours on the educational experiences of ethnic minority students, the role of ethnic minorities' culture in relation to educational outcomes, or the ways in which educational experiences of ethnic minority students affect their pursuit of educational opportunities.[47]

In England, government subsidized early education is offered to 2 to 4-year-old toddlers funded universal early education for 3- and 4-year olds which composes of 15 hours per week.[48] Education is, however, only compulsory between the ages of five and sixteen and no system of tracking is installed. Yet, **it is compulsory to additionally follow a form of education or training after the age of sixteen up to the age of eighteen years**. This does not apply, however, to asylum and refugee children who still live in Initial Accommodation centres.[49] For this group, no dual-programme has been installed providing language and education. As a result, these children don't have access to education and this is mainly attributed to a **decentralised integration system** in which local governments don't take up the needed responsibility to foster the educational integration of asylum seeker and refugee children.

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[43] OECD (2018)

[44] Lindsay, G. & Strand, S. (2016)

[45] Parsons, C. (2008)

[46] Strand, S. (2008)

[47] Stevens, P.A.J., Mau, A. & Crozier, G. (2018, forthcoming)

[48] Lloyd, E. (2015)

[49] see also https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/03/uk-admits-only-20-unaccompanied-child-refugees-in-two-years?utm_source=NEWS&utm_medium=email&utm_content=New+figures+obtained&utm_campaign=HQ_EN_therefugeebrief_external_20181105

Besides, although there is student support for access to higher education for young refugees people aged 16-18, financial barriers remain too high to access higher education, certainly for asylum seekers.[50]

Some comparative figures on inequality in education and on educational policies across the countries of the 2 Seas area are brought together in Table 5.

Table 5. Insights on educational inequalities and educational policy in the 2 Seas area

	Belgium	France	The Nether-lands	United Kingdom	EU
The percentage of 15-year-old native-born students with native-born parents among the total 15-year-old student population*	66.55%	73.74%	79.41%	71.45%	78.51%
The change in the relative size of the native 15-year old student population between 2003-2015*	-9.44%	Non-significant	Non-significant	-8.75%	-6.67%
The percentage of first-generation 15-year old immigrant students that attains baseline academic proficiency*	48.58%	38.68%	48.72%	62.11%	49.82%
The gap in the proportion of first-generation immigrant and native 15-year old students attaining baseline academic proficiency*	31 percentage points	36 percentage points	30 percentage points	11 percentage points	22 percentage points
Age period of compulsory education	6-18	6-16	5-18	5-16	
Age of the first selection into tracks	12	15	12	16	
Separate immersion/reception classes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	
Type of enrolment in mainstream lower secondary education	After reception education	Gradually	After reception education	Directly	

Source: OECD (2018)

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[50] Scholten, P., et al. (2017)

3 Research design

With respect to ethnic inequality in education across Europe's 2 Seas area, we can recapitulate that both research and policy have paid substantial attention to map and explain its occurrence, and that initiatives have been taken to reduce the phenomenon and to install educational systems that are inclusive to learners with a migrant background (regardless of legal or generational migrant status). In spite of these efforts, breaking down the significant influence of one's migrant background on his/her opportunities to succeed in the educational systems of the 2 Seas area remains an important issue that still deserves attention by both researchers and policymakers.

The primary research question that drives the rest of this report is: "*which challenges and opportunities at the meso- and micro-level of the school exist with respect to effective integration of immigrant students and parents into education*? **In the search of actions that promote immigrant integration in education, we thus turn to challenges and opportunities which mainly play at the meso-level of the school organisation, and at the micro-level of individuals and interpersonal relationships in school.** This choice is inspired by the fact that the SIREE project will install learning communities in educational institutions in a next phase.[51] The method of co-creation will inform the learning communities,[52] meaning that immigrant students and parents, as well as different educational stakeholders – teachers, peer students, members and organisational representatives of the local community, and school leaders – will jointly discuss, propose, develop, and implement actions in their respective educational institutions (pre-school up to adult education) in order to promote immigrant integration in education. So, next to the immigrant students and parents themselves, different educational stakeholders will get a role in the project through their desired participation in the learning communities. **The research into the challenges and opportunities for immigrant integration in education will therefore be structured in line with how they relate to these different role groups.** This aligns with a relational perspective on school improvement in which all of these parties play their specific role with respect to students' educational experiences.[53] The structuration of the challenges is thus inspired by the fact that the members of these groups could influence the implementation of actions and make effective change happen in their respective fields of work to benefit immigrant integration in education. **The subsequent parts of the report therefore depart from the following subquestions:**

- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to the organisation of reception education?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to immigrant students?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to teachers?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to parents of school-going-children?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to peer relationships in school?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to members and organisational representatives of the local community?
- Which challenges and opportunities to immigrant integration in education relate to school leadership and policy?

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[51] See Bielaczyc, K. & Collins, A. (1999)
[52] Vandael, K., et al. (2018)
[53] Hedges, L.V. & Schneider, B. (2005); Bryk, A.S. (2010)

Because the SIREE project departs from an inclusivist view on migration, it is also necessary to distinguish between challenges that relate to refugees and asylum seekers in specific, and those which influence the educational integration of immigrants irrespective of their legal or generational status. In section 4, the report first presents challenges and opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers in particular, whereas the subsequent parts discusses those for immigrants in general.

The presented overview of the selected challenges and related opportunities at the school level are derived from both a **literature study** and qualitative research data which has been gathered through **interviews and focus groups** with refugee/migrant students and parents, educators, social workers, pre-service teachers, and policymakers across the 2 Seas area.

The literature study is mainly informed by academic research studies that have been published in international peer-reviewed journals and by policy reports. With respect to the latter, reports from the European Union and its related research institutions, and from national governments or research institutions are included in the literature study.

Between May and August 2018, the research partners conducted interviews and/or focus groups with a variety of stakeholders in the process of immigrant integration in education across their respective regions. The number of interviews and focus groups, and the type of interview respondents and participants to the focus groups are presented in tables 6 and 7.

At the beginning of the interview, respondents were informed about the project goal. Interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission and transcribed shortly after. Respondents were informed that interview data would be handled strictly anonymous, that their research participation is voluntary, and that they could stop the interview or withdraw their consent to participate in the research at any time. All information was treated confidential so that no connection could be made between personal details and what respondents talked about. With respect to the different target groups of respondents (students/parents, educators, policymakers/social partners, pre-service teachers), a distinct semi-structured interview guide was developed to support the interviewers. These were primarily informed by open questions aimed at getting hold on the participants' views on challenges and opportunities to the quality of education for students and parents with a refugee/migrant background. The data was analysed using qualitative data software Maxqda.

Table 6. Number of conducted interviews and focus groups

	Total	Belgium	France	the Nether-lands	United Kingdom
Interviews	34	10	4	10	10
Focus groups	8	3	-	3	2

Table 7. Number and type of interviewed respondents and focus group participants

	Students	Parents	Educators	Policymakers/ social partners	Pre-service teachers
Type of interviewee	5	6	12	11	-
Type of focus group participants	2	1	2	2	1

4 Challenges and opportunities to inclusive educational systems for migrants and refugees

4.1 A complexity of structural barriers

It is clear that in particular first-generation immigrant students in Europe hold a disadvantaged position in education. A lack of motivation or ambition to succeed in the education of the receiving country is, however, not what seems to hinder their successful participation in educational systems.[54] The recent PISA-study demonstrates for instance that a higher share of 15-year old first-generation immigrant students are more **motivated to achieve in education** compared to the native students. In the Netherlands, this gap amounts to 36 percentage points: only 34% of native students indicate a high achievement motivation, compared to 70% of first-generation immigrant students. In Belgium and in France, this gap is 23 and 16 percentage points, respectively. Only for the UK, no significant gap was found. Instead, over 90% of both native and first-generation immigrant students in the UK reported a high achievement motivation. The high motivation of refugees and migrants was confirmed by both educators and parents who were interviewed (see section 4.4).

Some of the teachers and other experts that were interviewed also described that first-generation migrants and refugees often grab the educational opportunities that are presented to them. One teacher, however, remarked the difficulty to temper the high motivations and expectations of these students in light of their realistic perspectives:

> *You want to, well, tell them the truth […] that it is very difficult after the integration course, to proceed to vocational education. Because that is what they have in mind, right: I will be an mechanic. And in many cases that is not possible. And then it is, I think, for us as teachers also important that you know, what are their chances? Because we really want to offer them a perspective, but a realistic perspective. And you notice very often that – they say: "No, but I will work really hard and will study a lot." And I think: but it really won't be possible.*
> (Language teacher Dutch as second language, Adult education, the Netherlands)

The high motivation among first-generation immigrant students to achieve in education associates with a substantial **lower level of life satisfaction** compared to native students.[55] At the same time, a lower level of life satisfaction – here considered as subjective well-being – may hinder students' motivation:

> *But motivation of students is not only dependent on what education can offer you, but also very much, well, how they are feeling (…). And well, and also how they are supported. I noticed that quite often that students in their education are hampered by a number of things. For example, because they are still very busy with processing everything that they have experienced. That does not always have to be traumas, it can also just be loss or sadness. What is also very important and can be all-encompassing, which makes it difficult for students to learn and to be motivated to learn, is that part of the family is not here yet. That family reunion did not yet occur, or that family members are still in a difficult situation in the country of origin.*
> (Team leader responsible for daily organisation and curriculum, Adult education, the Netherlands)

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[54] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)
[55] OECD (2018)

The fact that the high achievement motivation of first-generation students goes hand in hand with a relatively lower academic performance indicates that structural barriers obstruct equal learning opportunities. Schools and policymakers alike would therefore better act upon what hinders first-generation immigrant students in fulfilling their educational aspirations. Furthermore, also second- and third-generation immigrant students perceive and experience barriers to their educational trajectories.[56] Transcending structural barriers which hinder immigrant students' educational success is accordingly a precondition of an educational system that is fully inclusive and supportive of their talents and aspirations.

The interviews with educational staff members, policymakers, and social workers reveal that a **complexity of structural factors** hinders the educational integration of refugees and migrants. In their opinion, successful integration of refugees and migrants in education is in general hindered by factors such as: *the absence of continuous language teaching and support in mainstream and adult education; a staff which in some cases lacks the enthusiasm to and the awareness and knowledge of how to deal with students from diverse ethnic-cultural backgrounds, insufficient individualised teaching support for newcomers, too large class sizes and a maladjusted school infrastructure, inadequate coordination between non-educational institutions and schools in guiding and supporting migrant families, the need for professionalising the school organization and staff, accessible and available didactical methods to teach the target group, mobility issues for parents and students, a lack of information and knowledge about the education system among immigrant learners and parents, cultural differences* … These barriers will al be discussed more into detail across the following sections.

Those involved in educating refugees and migrants generally know to pinpoint those barriers that play in their respective working areas. Yet, unfortunately, the biggest obstacle for schools seems to be having **sufficient and adequate financial resources** at their disposal; as referred to by the next interviewee in discussing what is needed to provide quality education to refugees and migrants:

> *Recognising the challenges for EAL (i.e. English as an Additional Language) pupils in particular, and ensuring that relevant resources are given to this area, whilst recognising that resources are limited.*
> *(Policymaker, Local counsellor, the United Kingdom)*

A French advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities who also has expertise as an educational policymaker for communities discussed the dominance nowadays of the financial perspective on initiatives or projects that aim at improving the integration of newcomers. According to him, the first question that gets raised is "*How much does it cost?",* whereas a human-centred perspective should be at place; a perspective which not necessarily has to go hand in hand with more financial costs in the long run. An interviewed academic researcher from the UK furthermore puts the attention on building in **sustainability** in implementing educational projects in schools given that things too often go back to how they were when funded projects end. With respect to resources and putting attention to the single school itself, the following opinion is interesting as well:

> *It always comes back to resources. How to support teachers in class? That means hiring someone extra to help them, or that you are able to split up classes, or having a Chatterbox in the schools; all of which comes down to resources. I think we have to work more departing from the school itself. That maybe we have to provide more resources to the schools instead of working too overarching.*
> (Social worker, Educational support provider, Flanders)

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[56] Van Praag, L., Stevens, P.A.J. & Van Houtte, M. (2015)

This is also a reason why the SIREE project aims to develop and implement actions at the school level by means of installing learning communities.[57] The report therefore provides an exhaustive overview of relevant factors at the meso (e.g. school organisational policies) and micro level (e.g. teacher qualifications) that are hindering or potentially promoting educational integration of migrants and refugees. It focusses on those kind of challenges of which we believe that **actions developed in co-creation** by different stakeholders of a school and implemented by schools themselves provide opportunities to counteract them. Relevant actions address several aspects of the school experience of immigrant students - from nursery till adult education – as well as for the parents of refugee and migrant children and youth in educational systems. Such actions do not necessarily have to aim at big, straightforward changes, as indicated by a respondent:

> "*I do think that those barriers (i.e. barriers to the educational integration of immigrant students) really are a tangle of barriers. You cannot expect simple answers to that. It is not just about language, it is not just about background, nor just about money. Really. Different small things all together matter. Stuff that might seem obvious to ourselves. Simple things often, like covering books. That is a simple example. It is obvious to us, but several of them just never learned how to do it.*"
> *(Responsible for equal opportunities, Secondary education, Flanders)*

In our search of actions that might help to transcend educational boundaries for refugees and migrant students, we will discuss challenges and opportunities at the meso-level of the school organisation and at the micro-level of individuals as well as interpersonal relationships in school (see Table 8). We depart from the perspective that it is on the level of **the single school** and by means of involving distinct stakeholders that change can be realised to make a difference to the good. Section 4.2 focuses on particular challenges and opportunities with regard to educating refugees and asylum seekers. In the subsequent sections (4.3 – 4.7), challenges and opportunities are discussed which pertain to the integration of immigrant students and parents in education irrespective of their legal or generational status.

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[57] See Bielaczyc, K. & Collins, A. (1999)

Table 8. An overview of selected topics which relate to the educational integration of migrants and/or refugees derived from our own literature study and SIREE qualitative research data

Topics	Challenges	Key elements
Education for refugees and asylum seekers	- *First arrival*	- Delayed access to education - Housing arrangements - Frequent movement - Mobility issues

	- *Reception education*	- Separate classes:
		  o Hinders language learning
		  o Does not prepare enough for future education
		  o Causes age difference
		  o Cooperation between school obstained because of distance and mobility issues
		  o Interaction with students from regular schools is not-selfevident
		- Direct enrolment in secondary education:
		  o Requires specific competencies and materials
		- Need for warm transition
		- Need for tailor-made education
		- Need for opportunities to practice language skills with native youth after school hours
		- Need to organise language classes during holidays
		- Multiple responsibilities
		- Difficulties to assess special needs

	- *Transition from reception to mainstream education*	- Need for information on the education system and opportunities - Prior knowledge connection - Early ability tracking
	- *Enrolment in mainstream education*	- Lack of appropriate language support - Need for individualised language support - Need for additional language support - School delay and dropout
	- *Tertiary education*	- Lack of customised support for illiterate students - Insufficient financial resources and lack of information - Unrealistic expectations - Language requirements at entry - Activating adults to enter the labour market as soon as possible - Age limit of compulsory education

		- Difficulties to validate diplomas
		- Lack of language support
		- Need for opportunities to practice the language
		- Non-linguistic requirements
		- Mobility issues
		- Other responsibilities
		- Barriers to move on to the labour market
		    o Need for internships
		    o Need for coordination
		- Barriers to access higher education

	Individual characteristics	- Educational background - Unfamiliarity with teaching methods - Cultural background - Financial situation - Legal status
	Psychological well-being	- Feeling welcome and safe - Psychological support - Unaccompanied minors
Teacher characteristics	*Teacher-student relationships*	- Trust - Discrimination - Ethnic minority teachers: balance - Exposure and familiarity
	Teacher competencies towards diversity	- Expectations - Stereotypical thinking - Knowledge, understanding, and attitudes
School-parent partnerships	*Common goal*	- Value attached to education

	Parental involvement in education	- Emotional and motivational support
		- Suboptimal involvement (at school, at home)
		    o Language
		    o Unawareness, uncertainty
		    o Trauma, stress
		- Needs of schools
		- Practices supportive of parents
		- Positive relationships
		- Communication
		- Pre-school education

Peer relationships	*Interethnic conflicts and friendships*	- Ethnic discrimination - Ethnic peer victimisation - Positive interethnic relationships
Community collaboration	*With members of migrant communities*	- Support for schools to reach out - Language support in school - Support for migrant families - Bridging role - Training
	With local community members and organizations	- Educational and community integration - Social services, leisure activities - Volunteering and buddy system

		- Role of the public community government - Coordination, communication, & collaboration - Schools as areas for community integration

School policy	- *Diversity*	- Professionalising the organisational structure and staff
		- Enriching perspective at school
		    o Schools as a mirror of society
		    o School vision/mission
		- Increasing negative societal perspective
		- Diverse staff
		    o Reference persons
		    o Balance in roles
		- Training the whole staff
		- Sharing knowledge and experiences
		    o Between staff members
		    o Between schools

	- *Multilingual policy*	- Language of instruction learning - First language supports second language learning - Valuing the home language at school
	- *Desegregated education*	- Support to teach diverse classes - Need of smaller classes - Barrier of early ability tracking - Flexible learning trajectories

	- *Intercultural curriculum*	- Intercultural education
		    o Cultural sensitivity
		    o Needs more attention, but is on the rise
		- Positive learning environment

4.2   Education for refugees and asylum seekers

We will first discuss facets that relate to arrival in the host country, followed by aspects of reception education. Thereafter, we examine enrolment in and transition to mainstream education for different immigrant generations, and particularities of the target groups such as their psychological well-being, educational and cultural background, including gender role expectations, and their financial and legal status.

We would like to reiterate that refugee and asylum-seeking students constitute just a subgroup of **newly arrived migrant students** (i.e. first-generation immigrant students).[58] The discussed aspects of reception education and enrolment in mainstream education therefore do not only apply to refugee or asylum-seeking students. Also for instance, foreign-born children who migrated in light of family reunification may face similar challenges in reception and mainstream education.

4.2.1   First arrival

Providing access to education upon first arrival is a key factor in the process of successfully integrating newly arrived refugees into education.

A key boundary to education for newly arrived refugees is **delayed access to education**. The EU-guideline of making children enter education within three months after arrival is a challenge.[59] At the same time, some immigrant groups are hesitant to start the educational careers of their children after their arrival. A British teacher of students with English as Additional Language remarked that one way to deal with this is to explain to parents and children from the moment they arrive "*not to be frightened and that schools are there to support and help*". Getting newcomers into education as quick as possible after their arrival remains a challenge to overcome, however, as explained by a French advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities:

> *So, optimally, what is needed is that we do not waste time when they arrive. Since in fact, very quickly upon their arrival, they are identified. It should be possible from this moment to put in place the links, the contacts between the people who welcome them, especially those who will give them a special status and the people who will then accompany them in the educational interventions. And often, there is a gap between both which can sometimes last several months or even a year. This time is very detrimental for the young person concerned.*
> (Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

Living in unstable and unfavourable **housing arrangements** without any place to study, such as reception centres can also have a detrimental impact on educational integration. Moreover, newcomers are often reliant on temporary accommodation, whether it is moving between reception centres or between temporary housing arrangements. This hinders local settlement, as mentioned by a local counsellor:

> *Families will start to integrate into a community and have cohesion and then after six months their landlord will want someone else to live in the property (…). If we could give those parents more secure tenure of housing it would help them to build those permanent roots which is more difficult if you will be living in different areas every six months.*
> (Policymaker, Local counsellor, the United Kingdom)

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[58] Some refer to newly arrived immigrant children and youth as the 1.5 generation. For the sake of continuity, we use first generation to refer to both newly arrived immigrant children and adults.
[59] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)

For unaccompanied minors this is even more complicated as they lose the parental guidance of their foster carers when they have to move to another area, as was mentioned by an interviewed teacher. Such movement hinders the role foster carers can play in guiding minors to schools and in helping them settle in society.

Frequent movement also causes school delay and disruptions in the continuity of the school career as has been found among Dutch-based unaccompanied minors.[60] [61] Moreover, school-parents relationships are disrupted, which complicates efforts to establish long-lasting and positive relationships which are vital to children's educational integration (see also section 4.4):

We would had lots of short stay children because that (migrant) community is very transient, so when we worked with them, the housing they were placed in were very short term let. So they could not stay in a place for too long before they were moved out of that area. So we would build that relationships and then lose it quickly.
(Community engagement officer, Responsible for the management of a preschool, the United Kingdom)

Apart from affecting the local and educational integration, frequent and forced mobility can be traumatic experiences especially for those in reception centres as a Dutch director of a language school with over 20 years of experience remarked, aggravating the psychological stress among this group (see 4.2.7).

Access to schools for those in reception centres is also an issue. Especially when schools or reception centres are located in distant, rural areas or when good and affordable public transport services are lacking, mobility issues may arise. The following quote illustrates the impact that this may have on families in reception centres and the education of the children:

We (i.e. primary school offering language classes) are here on the other side of the city, in relation to the reception centre. […] It is three kilometres, so that is a long way […]. People (i.e. living in the reception centre) have a very strong tendency, when it is so far and it also is Ramadan, and you have to get out of bed in the night to eat, then they just do not bring the kids to school because of the distance. […] We have four-year-olds, they are picked up at noon because they are completely tired. So she (i.e. the mother) has to bring her children in the morning, she has to walk with the children. Because she cannot cycle and […] those children either. Then she has to pick up a child at noon, she as to walk back again. And then she has to pick up her children at half past three, so she has to walk eighteen kilometres (i.e. per day).
(Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

For newcomers, as this quote also illustrates, cycling to school – a popular means of transport among native students - is not self-evident. Newcomers are not able to cycle and they often do not have the financial means to purchase a bicycle. Moreover, they are not used to move in this way:

Interviewer: And in the area of X, how accessible are the schools for your children there?
Respondent: Yes, it's not far. My oldest son, this year at ISK, it was difficult. Because he rides his bicycle a long way. And in Syria, we are not used to this kind of transportation. In Syria, we have a school bus. That take them, or with my car, we go with my car to school. When we come here, they find it very difficult to go by bike. Especially when it's raining or it's windy, and it's half an hour or more sometimes for my old son.
(Mother, Syrian background, since 1,5 years in the Netherlands)

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[60] Kromhout and van San (2003)
[61] Werkgroep Kind in azc (2013)

As a result of these mobility issues, parents tend to choose a school, not based on the quality of the school or the teaching methods, but based on the distance. A 45-year-old Turkish father who has been in the Netherlands since one year, for instance, mentioned that he had subscribed his children in the school that according to Google Maps was closest to his house. Moreover, mobility issues may cause absenteeism as an internal supervisor of reception education explained about a father who keeps his children at home because he lacked appropriate transportation:

The father considers it dangerous (i.e. to let the children cycle to school)*, because he says: 'very often the weather is bad and I am afraid that she's blowing over and that accidents will happen.' So he said: 'I don't want her to go to school.'*
(Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

Apart from the weather and unfamiliarity with certain types of transport, cultural issues regarding types of transport may also play a role here, as was explained by the same teacher:

Some girls are really protected in their country of origin, the parents want to keep them around them. And now, all of a sudden, this father has to say to his daughter: "you have to cycle five or six kilometres". Through wind and weather and you can encounter anybody on the road. Because I know a trainee, for example, who comes from Somalia, and she has been in the Netherlands for almost five years. […] And she also said: 'In Somalia girls cannot be outside after six o'clock'. So if you are from that culture and that father thinks: I must protect my daughters and I cannot just take them out of the street, that is of course something that he has to overcome. And nobody can guarantee that nothing happens in the Netherlands, of course. Even though the chance is small.
(Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

One way to overcome mobility issues, could be to organize more accessible transport for newcomers such as the provision of free travel tickets for the bus as was mentioned by a refugee student in the United Kingdom. Also in France, strengthening the mobility of newcomers is essential in the work of social service and educational providers, as explained by a French advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities:

They are not mobile or at a low level. They often tend to stay at home. So, we are going to work on how to set up, with their guides, tools allowing them to go to the museum, to go ... Of course, the museum, the artistic structure or even the cinema, places that all have an educational interest. But the other interest is to be mobile, to use the subway, to use buses, to have points of orientation, etc. To be able to move in the city, to register for example in a sports club if the sports club is located in Lille. They (i.e. the newcomers who get guided) are at this moment in a position to identify which metro line to take to get there.
(Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

4.2.2   Reception education

The core goal of reception education for refugees and asylum seekers is establishing a smooth transition to mainstream education. Two perspectives on **effective language support** are in place.[62] On the one hand, language induction programmes can be installed in separate welcoming or individual

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[62] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)

classes that focus on catching-up, intense language training, and a smooth transition to regular education. On the other hand, second language learning may be promoted by creating linguistically diverse classrooms within mainstream education, whether or not complemented by special language instruction at diverse times.

Separate **immersion or reception classes** are installed in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium (Flanders, only for secondary education). They help refugees to follow regular classes (France) or prepare to follow them (the Netherlands, Flanders). It generally takes one up to two years before students of reception classes join mainstream education. The focus in reception education is mainly on acquiring language skills and getting to know the host society and culture, as explained in the next quote:

> *The initiatives that we develop is first of all to work on the mastery of French. It is essential for these young people and children to work on the mastery of French. And so, we will use tools such as theatrical practices, for example. We will use music, including rap, why not. Things that will speak to young people, which will sometimes seem a little fun but have a real educational interest, and this will gradually allow them to work on both the improvement of pronunciation but also to work with the vocabulary and then the grammar.*
> (Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

In Flanders, these classes are usually installed in mainstream schools, while in the Netherlands and France these are usually installed in specific schools where special arrangements for newly arrived migrants is supported (e.g. trained teaching staff).[63] Reasons to organize separate immersion or reception classes are generally related to the lower costs and the ease of appointing specific language teachers.

From the interviews we learn that there is **satisfaction with separate reception classes**. A refugee parent in The Netherlands mentioned the quality of the teaching material and the teachers, whereas some students in reception education in Flanders expressed to be happy that they were able to learn about the language and culture of their host country, and that it was a place where they could make friends. Parents moreover, are also realistic about the language development of their children. They realise that it takes time to master the language well and that the age of the children also plays a role in this:

> Interviewer*: Do you think there's anything we could do to make the education for your children better?*
> Respondent: *No, really, the school do their best. But it takes time, I think. My older son right now after one year and a half here in Dutch, he is perfect in the language. He can speak with my neighbors, with his teachers. But it takes time. So they are doing their best to simplify the language, the information. But it's a new language. So that takes time.*
> (Mother, Syrian background, since 1,5 years in the Netherlands)

More often than satisfaction with reception education, parents and children expressed their **discontent with separate classes**. Most importantly, they feel that the separation from native students hinders newcomers' host country's language learning. One parent for instance argued:

> *We have been here for three years no wand it is a shame that my children can speak Dutch for only say forty percent. So in my opinion, I believe this (i.e. reception) education is not good. I cannot understand why they go to this school, the students are all refugees. So how can they improve their Dutch? They have to be among Dutch students so they will learn more easily and better.*
> (Father, Syrian background, since 3 years in the Netherlands)

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[63] Koehler, C., et al. (2018); European Union (2013)

Also students expressed the need for more contact with native children to improve their language skills (see also section 4.5):

> Interviewer: But would you also like to, for example, to have more contact with Dutch children?
> Respondent: Yes.
> Interviewer: You would like that?
> Respondent: Yes, I think it is better, because I would speak the Dutch language faster.
> (Male refugee student, Syrian background, 17 years, since 3 years in the Netherlands)

Also a few of the interviewed professionals involved in reception education or education in general expressed that separate immersion classes are not necessarily the best option to have newcomers learn the new language:

> I also think it is not always bad if they (i.e. newcomers) end up in a group with Dutch-speaking children. If children, for example, communicate a lot with these children, with hands and feet and also link language to it, then they can learn a lot; it also goes much faster. I do not know if it is always good to be in a separate group with all the other children who speak other languages.
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

> Speaking they learn much better in mainstream education, because with us they only hear Dutch from teachers the lack of Dutch from their classmates of course. But in mainstream education you only hear Dutch that of course will go a lot faster.
> (Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

Students in reception education in Flanders also remarked that the lack of contact with native students prevents them from learning the local dialect. They argued that in school they only learn school language, meaning the dialect-free version, whereas outside school and in the school yard, people speak the local dialect. They stated that the school language does not bring them a lot in the real world. More generally, the lack of contact with native students prevents newcomers from making native friendships, which makes it difficult to integrate in the host society. As a Turkish father stated:

> It is an obstacle to progress especially in the language, in The Netherlands and other cultural integration problems.
> (Father, Turkish background, since 1 year in the Netherlands)

Parents and students also expressed worries that reception education does not prepare students well enough for **future education**, especially for those who wish to continue to more theoretically oriented levels in regular education which prepare for university. A bright 11-year old student in a reception school in Flanders complained about the lack of a richer vocabulary because in reception education they only learn a basic vocabulary. This may be overcome by particular teaching methods for which more academic vocabulary is used, as was explained by a teacher:

> Our new language method, that…before we used to say: this is a do-word. And we kept op insisting. And now we will sooner mention the technical terms. Even in the language class I use the word 'verb'. So it is important […] certainly in connection with de transition of daily language to academic language, the school language that they need to understand more formal pieces and pieces from world orientation. That transfer is difficult with non-Dutch children and with language weak children
> (Teacher, Reception education, the Netherlands)

Also, because the focus is on language acquisition, more abstract thinking about the world is not covered, which may especially be problematic for older students. Moreover, other subjects are not adequately covered, which impedes with the children's future education, as a Turkish father lamented about the education of his sixteen-year-old daughter:

> *I think, […] children don't need to go to that school (reception education). Especially the small kids don't need to go to a language school in this country. They can start in a normal school with Dutch people, they can learn very fast, speaking Dutch. And they also can make many Dutch friends. From my point of view, especially for school kids, the years which they spend for learning language is a kind of lost time. My daughter was going to a school in Turkey, a very good school […]. And when she came here, she had to leave this school and she is now continuing in a language school for fifteen months. And the teachers intend to send her to do second level of havo (i.e. Higher General Secondary Education) or vwo (pre-university education). […] The second year is for children aged fourteen years old. But she is now sixteen years old so there will be two years difference between her and the other children. And what I think that, this fifteen months in this language school is a kind of lost time for her, because she is just getting only the language courses, very less geography or mathematics or other things.*
> (Father, Turkish background, since 1 year in the Netherlands)

This quote also points to another important concern: that reception education causes an **age difference** between the newcomer and those in regular education. This age difference may affect the student's well-being and language development, as it can be difficult to make new friends as the interpreter explained about the situation of the son of a Syrian interviewee:

> *Maybe I can say one more thing about his youngest who I know very well. He's a bright kid, but as he has to learn Dutch, he's in a class of younger children. So there's an age difference of about two years, three years, which makes him feel uncomfortable. And that's one of the reasons that for him, it's not very easy to make Dutch friends. Because next to the cultural and language difference, there's also an age difference, which is, at this age, very important. […] And what I see, is that he sticks to the friends that he met in (i.e. reception) school […]. So there he made friends and he sticks with them.*
> (Interpreter for 51-year-old Syrian interviewee who has been in the Netherlands for three years, the Netherlands)

Several respondents mentioned that more could be done to realise contact between students in reception education and mainstream education, for instance by organising joint activities, but also by having newcomers follow some classes in mainstream education:

> *Well, we also have to mention things that can be better. The ties with secondary education and vocational education, that is where a lot still can be done. It would be good if schools here for example agree to partially follow classes together or to follow classes of physics, what we do not have here* (i.e. in reception education). *We have many subject; we have biology, economy, geography, all these kind of subjects, but just also good cooperation. And many times the focus is on problems, because we also have students from X and from X and from X and so on, who are not going to be students from the schools we can cooperate with. But I think, well, still I would like to do something with the nearby schools.*
> (Learning path counsellor and teacher, Intake and further education, the Netherlands)

Although cooperation between schools that are geographically proximate is encouraged by different types of respondents, longer distances between schools may hinder cooperation because students'

mobility may be a problem as a school for newcomers in the Netherlands experienced. Moreover, simply putting newcomers and students from regular school together is not self-evident:

> *We once had 40 students and at that moment we were indeed together with a regular school. And it is not just because there is contact that immediately it is very nice. That was a pretty complicated situation where you also were confronted with unfamiliarity from the other group of teachers, but also from the other student groups towards students in reception education. And that too can be complicated and not always very good, or only good. But I think that especially those activities that you organize together, that they can contribute a lot to quality.* (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

Similar experiences were mentioned by students in reception education – aged 11 till 17 years old - in Flanders. These children expressed to feel targeted by both students and teachers from the regular secondary school with which they share the school premises. More concretely, they said that students from regular education call them loud and they feel discriminated against, and that fights between the groups are no exception. According to these students, when teachers of the regular school intervene, they always blame the fights on the newcomers. Both of these examples illustrate that good interaction does not occur when contact is realised but that this contact needs to be managed in order to achieve the intended outcomes.

In England (primary and secondary education) and Flanders (primary education) newcomers enrol directly into mainstream education. This is usually based on their age although in Flanders pupils are sometimes directed to lower classes especially when educational skills lag behind. In addition to mainstream education, students are often offered the chance to receive additional language education or preparatory support parallel to mainstream education, during or after school hours. The provision of this additional support depends on the individual school and is either realised by the school or by external NGOs. When entering mainstream classes, newly arrived students are offered **individualised learning plans**. These individual schemes are viewed as being beneficial in light of informing refugees and asylum seekers about educational opportunities and in making connection to their prior education.[64]

Teaching these students in mainstream education, however, requires particular competencies of teachers since they have to teach students with various language skills in different subjects. From the British interviews we learn that teachers apply different teaching strategies and materials to educate newcomers as good as possible:

> *We have got things now in picture format, we've got word translation, they go out for small step interventions in the afternoon with the teaching assistants in very small groups to start with our basics so we start right from at the early stage of phonics from reception stage level and we start building up as well as full submersion so no child is removed from class during core learning time. So even if they don't write or respond, we know from working with other partners that they absorb so much more in that listening stage and then we take them out to go over small steps.* (Teacher of EAL students, the United Kingdom)

This teacher also mentions another important point: even when students do not fully participate in class they still learn by observing and listening, an argument against separate immersion classes. Nonetheless, teaching newcomers in regular education is not self-evident and constant adaptation and reflection about teaching strategies and materials are essential:

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[64] Ibid.

> *Some interventions didn't work well initially, like if a 14 year old cannot read English and you would go back to phonics which is babyish and patronising. The challenge is how do we move on from that. So a lot of the time I have had to adapt and they have felt more involved and respected.*
> (Teacher of EAL students, the United Kingdom)

Moreover, this teacher also mentioned that children struggle a lot to integrate in school when they have no knowledge about the English language whatsoever. To cope with this, the school has set up a project of Young Language Ambassadors, where students of the school are trained to become buddies for newcomers, providing them with the necessary support.

The European Sirius policy-network on migrant education advocates the option for immediate enrolment within mainstream education while at the same time benefiting introductory classes and language support. This option, however, is easier to achieve within primary education than in secondary schools given that learners are younger and can more easily learn a new language while at the same time requirements are less strict, and the content to be learned less complex. The general rule should be that staying too long within reception classes hinders successful integration within mainstream education.[65]

In the interviews, we also came across a number of needs that apply to the organisation of education for newcomers in general. One of these is the **need for a warm transition**, as mentioned by a student who arrived as a toddler 20 years earlier:

> *When I first came here, I felt that I was thrown to the wolves. In the meantime this has changed. I remember my first day here at school. I was put in a class and I did not understand anything of what was said. I remember being really insecure because there were a few books on my table and there were so many students with different nationalities who I didn't know. In Kosovo there are no people with another skin colour so this was new for me. I really wished I would have had some supervision at that moment or that my mom could have stayed with me a little.*
> (Female refugee student, Higher education, Kosovar background, 20 years in Flanders)

A warm transition may be particularly relevant for students coming from war torn countries or those who on route have experienced traumatic events (see also section 4.2.7), but as the quote of this student illustrates, it can also be relevant for a broader group of especially young newcomers. Whereas schools generally provide moments where toddlers who just enter school-going age can adjust to the new class. with or without their parents-, this may also be relevant for those entering the educational system at an older age. More generally, teachers should be aware that students may pass through an emotionally difficult adjustment phase when they first enter school because they do not understand the language and feel out of place in the classroom, as a Syrian mother explained about the first period of her son:

> *The first period my middle son went to school, he cried every day. He missed his school and his friends in Syria. He told me: 'I don't understand and the teacher is speaking, speaking, speaking and (…) most of the time the teacher just gives me things to play with, an iPad or colour or something and I don't like it; I can do that at home.' So he suffered very much when we came here.*
> (Mother, Syrian background, since 1,5 years in the Netherlands)

This suggests the importance of more individual guidance during the first period. Secondly, the interviews point to a general **need for tailor-made education**, meaning that educational materials and

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[65] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)

the teaching skills should be in line with the needs of students. This includes working individually as much as possible, as an educational mentor at a language centre in The Netherlands suggested. According to this respondent, classroom instructions should be limited to making appointments. It also means being able to adjust to the age of the child, specific methods for illiterate students, and the use of digital learning forms for students who know how to use these. Whereas tailor-made education is essential for newcomers, the necessary learning materials are not always available:

> *For newcomers, well, that isn't a really large target group. So it is not the case the many methods are released, put on the market. Because it is of course not so lucrative to release if for a small target group. That means that for some learning lines (…) we only have learning methods available that are actually for adults. So then you do have the right level, you do have the right structure in the method. This mainly concerns the methods for lower educated and slow learning students. So there is a lot of repetition, there is a very clear structure, there are not too complicated exercises. But then you have the subjects that are more suitable for adults. The pupils are addressed with more formal language, conversations are about colleagues or bringing children to school. And that is of course very unfortunate that that is not available. Actually, you should have suitable methods at all levels of the school that are appealing to the age group and that fit the way the student learns.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

One of the prerequisites for tailor-made education for newcomers is a good intake to direct students to the right levels based on their capacities. As a teacher of a language school in the Netherlands remarked, this includes a thorough intake that provides insights into the educational background of the student, an alphabetization test when there is doubt, which prevents students from ending up in levels that are too ambitious for them.

Third, another need that was often mentioned by respondents was the need for more **opportunities to practice language skills with native youth after school hours**. This was not only the case in regions where contact between newcomers and native students are limited due to separate immersion classes, but also in regions where students immediately enter mainstream education. Suggestions were made to organise leisure activities for a diverse group:

> *After school clubs have always been a massive hit with all children. For example, my children have done choir, Spanish lessons, songs. I personally think there should be an after school club for these immigrants to learn English but not just them to segregate them, there should be* (native) *English children so they are all together, so they all learn the culture, all learn this language and they all understand each other and how to communicate with each other.*
> (Community leader, Responsible for making a bridge between parents and school, the United Kingdom)

Learning the language during after school leisure activities also has the benefit that children associate the language with something positive, as a social worker in Flanders explained about the after school activities they organise for non-native speakers:

> *Because these children only speak Dutch in the context of the school, we try to broader that. We try to offer Dutch also as a play language, because research shows that for these children Dutch usually has a negative connotation, because they find it difficult. School often is more difficult for them because they do not understand everything and we want to give a positive interpretation to the Dutch language, by offering it as play language and leisure language. That is an important goal that we seek to accomplish.*
> (Social worker, Responsible for educational support, Flanders)

To realize such activities there is a need to make sure that newcomers understand the information about the activities. This means different means of communicating by using community members and translations. Schools, however, cannot realize this on their own and need co-operation with other social partners and the municipality:

> *I believe the municipality can also play an important role, for example, they could offer the children of status holders who are residents of the municipality simple subscriptions to a sports club or another club of their choice. This could stimulate contact with Dutch peers.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

Fourth, and this is also something that was mentioned for mainstream education, is the **need to organise language classes during the holidays**. Parents remarked that especially the long summer holiday was problematic because they notice that their children's second language skills deteriorate.

Fifth, the many responsibilities of refugee children may cause absenteeism from school. These children often have to help their parents and other family members who do not speak the language, with administrative issues. Such administrative appointments are usually scheduled during school hours, explained a consultant of a regional office for student affairs in the Netherlands. This is not only the case for appointments of adult family members, also students themselves are invited for appointments during school hours:

> *To provide good education, it is important that the students are present. And I find it an obstacle, apart from quite some health-related absenteeism* (…) *that a clothing bank, for example, invites these students at ten o'clock on Tuesday morning. And then I think, is it not possible to do that differently?* (…) *And the clothing bank, you need to come if not you miss your chance. That is the idea that I have. And it would be nice if they would organize that at another moment for students that have to go to class.*
> (Teacher reception education, Responsible for literacy and start group, the Netherlands)

These experiences suggest the **need to better coordinate appointments and to arrange interpreters** so that these students are not forced to skip school (see also section 4.6). Moreover, because children have to become the interpreters of their parents, there is the chance that power relationships between parents and their children shift and that parents have little control over their parents, especially for instance, if children have to translate about their own learning process. As such, there is **a need for language education for parents to emancipate them** (see also section 4.4), as suggested by learning path counsellor of reception education in the Netherlands).

Finally, it is difficult to assess special needs among newcomers, when they do not yet speak the language:

> *When we are trying to assess a child when we have an external assessor for access requirements in their home language, there aren't necessarily services out there. It is hard to ascertain this in a foreign language. We struggled to get assessment for one of our pupils from Afghanistan to diagnose him with dyslexia. Through a translator you can't really disseminate if they have an learning need. We were more successful with his foster brother from Iraq and Virtual School was able to provide somebody to diagnose a speech impediment.*
> (Teacher responsible for special educational needs, Secondary education, the United Kingdom)

This implies the **need to develop tools to ascertain learning needs** when students have poor home country language skills and the **need to look for external partners who possess this expertise**.

4.2.3 Transition from reception to mainstream education

The transition from reception education to mainstream or regular education is generally considered a key facet of successfully integrating refugees in the receiving countries. As described above, refugee students in the UK enrol directly in mainstream education, in France they enter gradually in mainstream education while starting in preparation classes, whereas in Belgium (for secondary education) and the Netherlands (for primary and secondary education) this enrolment only occurs after students have followed separate immersion classes of one or two years. For primary education, this transition mostly happens within the same school, while for lower secondary education a change of schools might be inevitable.

There is a need to transparently **inform students and parents about the receiving country's education system** and about educational opportunities, as was indicated by different types of respondents in the participating regions. As this respondents mention, this is important for future perspectives because not only do newcomers not know the educational system, there also may be unrealistic expectations:

> *One of the other things, maybe you can do or the government here can do, is to give enough information and a sort of supervision for the children to choose what they are going to study in the future (…) From two years old they begin to choose and they don't know how to choose. And what they are qualified for. So a lot of students, a lot of young men say, I want to be a doctor. But they are not qualified or they don't like to be a doctor, but this is a kind of culture, pressure of the culture.*
> (Father, Syrian background, since 3 years in the Netherlands)

One of the challenges related to informing newcomers is that among educational staff in reception education not all educational opportunities may be known, which can be a consequence of a lack of transparancy within the educational field:

> *The educational field is not very transparent. And I believe that people who have to direct students from reception education, they for example do not know adult education, whereas second chance education for some definitely is a solution. So I think that a lot has to do with unfamiliarity. The Centre of Learning and Work* (CLW) *is known, secondary education is known and even when these people are next to each other or when they share a building, still they do not know how the other is working. That is something really strange.*
> (Employee at House of Learning, Adult education, Flanders)

Together with finding **connection with the level of prior schooling**, providing the necessary and relevant information on the education system fosters the integration into mainstream education because it enables refugees to make informed choices. It is important to assess the refugee student's prior knowledge in general academic skills to facilitate tailor-made education (see section 4.2.2), but also to realise a smooth entrance to mainstream education, to ensure that students end up in the right tracks:

> *We see with students from reception education, that there are teenagers who are not familiar with the educational system, who never have been to school or who find it difficult to understand the concept of 'school'. With those there is a specific need: in one year and learning Dutch and understanding the school system. That is really difficult. This makes it also very difficult to direct people to the right form of education and then the waterfall system is in place. It is often part time education where they end up, but they are not ready for the labour market, they will not find a workplace.* (Policy maker, Responsible for education and work, Flanders)

Information may be provided by local integration centre, reception centre, NGOs that work with refugees, or the schools themselves. For instance, a school for reception education in the Netherlands is developing a leaflet with information and tips about mainstream education. A coordinated system to realise this information provision is advisable though. Practices that support this are meetings between city staff or NGO workers, interpreters and mother-tongue teachers with the refugee's family. Also the establishment of central 'assessment and assignment centre' could help to find the appropriate type of education.[66] Importantly, though, the information should be provided in the mother tongue of the student as was mentioned by an internal supervisor at a Language Expertise Centre in the Netherlands.

The comparative report on refugee education in Europe[67] signals that inclusion in regular classes of primary education is largely unproblematic. Within secondary education, however, the system of **early ability tracking** into hierarchical streams based on students' age and abilities problematizes this goal as it fosters **segregation**. The later and the less selective tracking occurs, the better students' opportunities to enrol in higher secondary education and academic tracks. Even when refugee students have the cognitive and intellectual abilities to follow academic education, they too often are advised to follow vocational education because they lack sufficient language skills. For instance, a bright 11-year-old student in a reception class in Flanders complained that he wanted to continue his education in the academic track but his teachers told him that this is too ambitious for him given his language skills. In some cases in Flanders, students are advised to attend an extra year of language education, however, as a teacher of secondary education who has experience with teaching migrant and refugee students explained, these are usually the language weak students who do not continue to higher levels.

Compared to native students, refugee students are overrepresented in vocational education, special education and part-time secondary education when early tracking exists (*e.g.* Belgium, the Netherlands),[68] yielding lower opportunities to enrol in higher education but higher realistic chances for labour market entry. Students with a migrant background also lag behind when it comes to performance in individual courses and exhibit more school delay and early school dropout.[69] Dropout among this group may be explained by disadvantaged financial situations, orientation below their own age, lack of motivation, school fatigue and because students lack the attitude that school expects from them, as explained by a secondary school teacher and student coach in Flanders. This same teacher suggested that dropout may be prevented when co-teaching is installed to support teaching in classes with a lot of so-called problem students.

Such future perspectives, are likely to demotivate students to succeed and cause a loss of potential:

What I see now, in reception classes of the secondary level, they get one year to follow reception education and that is not enough. Often you see in those reception classes intelligent students, that you think: we should be able to get them into the academic track. But the one year of reception education is not enough to prepare these students for the academic track. They are drowning, even though they have so much talent. They get very demotivated; they are four years behind their peers, that is so frustrating and demotivating…so much potential is getting lost.
(Social worker, Responsible for educational support, Flanders)

As this quote also illustrates, difficulties related to newcomers' educational trajectories are aggravated for older students. Especially for those who turn 18 years old when they finish reception

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[66] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)

[67] Ibid.

[68] Opdenakker and Hermans (2006); Van den Broucke et al. (2016); Vlaamse Overheid (2016)

[69] Van den Broucke et al. (2016)

education it is difficult to find their place in the educational system, since it is impossible to put them with 14-year-olds of the tracks they would be fit for.

There are however different **opportunities** with respect to newcomers' transition into mainstream education. In Flanders, for instance, within schools offering reception education, a follow-up school coach plays an important role in guarding over the students' well-being and in gaining insight into the student's interests and talents. They take students by the hand to explore their future educational perspectives, they make the necessary contacts for the students and they share their expertise with the teachers of the future school. Moreover, they inform parents about the future perspectives of their child and follow-up once students have enrolled in mainstream education.[70] Also, in Flanders, short try-outs are organized (*snuffelstages*) whereby students can visit the future school for one or two weeks. According to a teacher responsible for equal educational opportunities in secondary education in Flanders, these try-outs are successful as they help students orient to mainstream education and facilitate a warm transition between reception and regular education.

Furthermore, to guarantee that students end up in the right educational tracks and to keep them motivated, it could be useful to work with learning lines that effectively prepare students from the beginning for a particular track in regular education. This includes an extended intake of six weeks, where insight is gained about the student's capacities, motivation and study skills, how fast new information is being processed and the language is learned. After that, students are divided in streams that will lead to a particular tracks, which remains fluid as students could change during the time they are in the school and when the need arises.

Another obstacle related to the transition from reception to regular education is the **lack of appropriate language education in regular schools** that could continue language learning from reception education. As a Dutch team leader for special language education of children aged 12 to 18 years argued, the problem is that within regular education the idea prevails that when students have attended reception education, they have had enough language education, whereas it in fact should continue also within regular education. Hence, there is an important task for regular education to continue the learning line of newcomers. One of the reasons why this so far has been insufficient is because the language learning expertise is not present among teachers in regular education:

> *This has just to do with the fact that in regular secondary education there is not always Dutch as second language-expertise; that there aren't enough teachers and manpower available from reception education to supervise this; that sometimes there is a wrong perception within regular education. Like, those students are making the transition, so they are ready for it, they can participate. So that has to do with knowledge and the way of looking at it. Whereas actually in the frame of suitable education, they could very well support the students with individual supervision.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

Hence, in addition to a broader range of competencies that teachers should posses in order to effectively overcome the challenges related to diversity in education (see section 4.3.2), there also is the need for language expertise, for knowledge acquisition among teachers in regular education.

4.2.4   Enrolment in mainstream education

After the transition from reception education, the main obstacle for newcomers to successfully integrate in mainstream education are related to the students' language skills. One of the reasons for

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[70] https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/half-miljoen-euro-voor-7-traumapsychologen

this is the fixation on language – in addition to mathematics – and the problem that students are punished for language errors, as was explained by a secondary school teacher who has experience teaching migrant and refugee students in Flanders. This in turn can be demotivating when language is the reason why students do not succeed in education.

The presence of non-native speakers in regular education does not only directly impact on the student's educational performance and students' well-being. As a Flemish policy maker argued, it may also causes a so-called 'white flight' from schools when more and more non-native speakers are enrolled and concerns arise over the quality of education as teachers have to teach students of with different language skills and those with the least skills will need a lot of attention.

In the interviews different ways in which regular schools can facilitate language support were mentioned. Just as in reception education, in mainstream education too, there is a need for **individualised language support**. This involves working with small classes where there is room for repetition and where the teacher can individually follow and provide support to students:

> *Small classes* (…) *also a lot of repetition. That repetition doesn't happen in a large class, because it is assumed that everybody will understand and participates. "He will participate" is what I often hear. "He will see the it, everybody gets his jacket so he will also do it. We shouldn't pay too much attention to it, that one will learn while doing".*
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

A language policy in school can also include specific adaptations for non-native speaking students. For instance, in a school in Flanders, the workgroup language policy checks exams for difficult language and gives teachers tips on how to best prepare an exam, which includes not to complex questioning and not too many difficult words. Moreover, in their language policy they have included that newcomers who have recently came from reception education can use a dictionary during exams, and they also get extra time and can ask the teachers questions in case they cannot find the right meaning in the dictionary. Other methods include supervision for students with making assignments can be a way of coping with language barriers; write and speak frameworks where students are given structure and a few words when preparing for an oral or written text; and pre-teaching where the teacher sits together with students before the actual class to explain particular concepts.

Additional second language support after school hours and during holidays was also mentioned as an effective way to support language education. These were mentioned especially in the Flemish interviews and include weekly activities where in students' leisure time social partners help students to improve their Dutch language. Since mobility can be an obstacle for students, it is best to organize such activities at the students' schools, or to organize them through other youth and sport organizations in the neighbourhood, as was suggested by a Flemish policy maker responsible for education and work. As a Flemish teacher responsible for equal educational opportunities in a secondary school suggested, language support should include academic language so children can better integrate in school. Language support may also be provided within the school, which according to a teacher responsible for language classes in a primary school in the Netherlands allows students the opportunity to help each other in their mother language:

> *What works really well is that you take the children separately from the class. They do not have the other Dutch children around them, but they have each other* (…) *And what they also do often in my class, when they are telling something and they do not know the word, they ask others in their own language. And this student can usually say the Dutch word. So the student can continue his story.*
> (Teacher, Responsible for language classes in primary education, The Netherlands)

Yet, working on effective language support within mainstream education is not self-evident. An obstacle to provide language support in mainstream education is unfamiliarity with the target groups as explained by a community leader in the United Kingdom:

> *Interviewer: What are the barriers you experience regarding meeting those needs?*
> *Respondent: Ignorance because a lot of people says if they go to the English school they should be able to speak English, but it is not the case. These children should be supported, have interpreters available in the school and maybe have lessons maybe after school or during school so they are told correct English, so that they have the correct way of approaching English, maths and geography, history.*
> (Community leader, Responsible for making a bridge between parents and school, the United Kingdom)

More often, however, education staff and external experts, mentioned the lack of financial, material and professional support, as for instance explained by a French advisor on the matter of newcomers' integration into education when discussing the number of teachers who teach the French language to newcomers who do not master the French language: "*Teachers teaching French Foreign Language, which in my opinion must be more developed, in any case in number, and in specific in some territorial regions.*" A Flemish policy maker responsible for education and work, for instance, pointed to the lack of adapted teaching material, such as pedagogical tools, books, handbooks. The existing materials all focus on the home society's educational language, and accordingly, they are not efficacious for classes that include a large share of non-native speakers. A lack of financial support for school staff to provide language support was most often mentioned. For instance, a policy maker responsible for education and work mentioned how the system that provides support for schools is ineffective because it only provides the extra hours for staff a year later, whereas school contexts are constantly changes in terms of the number of non-native speaking students are enrolled. This suggests that even schools that are willing to take action to support the language education of students are facing obstacles of which the source is outside the control of the school. There is thus an important role for local and national policies to overcome these barriers and to provide the schools with the relevant financial, material and professional support.

Poor language proficiency and the schools' lack of effective language support is by different types of respondents designated as the most important barrier to the educational integration of newcomers and students with a migrant background. Another barrier to educational integration that was mentioned pertains to **early childhood education**. Several respondents pointed out that migrant and refugee parents do not always understand the importance of early childhood education. Literature also points to a lack of trust in the educational system, partly because of misinformation or insufficient information with regard to schooling, and the lack of integration of school and home culture.[71] Specific groups, such as Roma, may send their children to school at a later age because they feel that their child is not ready for school.[72] The case of the Roma is complicated, explained a community engagement officer in the United Kingdom, because of their high degree of mobility, which makes it difficult for schools to build and retain relationships with them. Efforts to reach these specific groups are also complicated by a lack of knowledge and appreciation of the culture of disadvantaged families.[73]

The importance of early childhood education is indicated by longitudinal studies that point out that for children and families the early childhood education has a positive impact on school performance, and on the general social, emotional and physical development. The advantages are even larger for vulnerable and marginalized children.[74] Opportunities to improve early childhood participation includes improving accessibility, developing the necessary competencies among staff to stimulate inclusive early childhood education, and investing in positive parent-school relationships, since involving parents with the development and the learning process of their children is decisive for

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[71] Lazzari, A. & Vandenbroek, M. (2012)
[72] Vettenburg, N. & Walgrave, L. (2009)
[73] Ibid.
[74] Lazzari, A. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2013); Melhuis, E. (2013); Sylva, K. (2016)

children's participation. Improving the relationship between parents and school also improves the positive relationship of children with schools (see section 4.4).[75]

4.2.5   Tertiary education

The more flexible and less regulated path of **adult education** – often organised in collaboration between cities, the private sector, NGOs, and voluntary organisations – is an interesting path to lead refugees and asylum seekers to employment or to tertiary education. They offer language courses, school qualifications, or even (obligatory) integration courses. Obstacles to adult education include a **lack of customised support for illiterate students**, which causes these people to fail their integration courses:

> *We have two methods at the moment within alpha education, that is not so much. And these are based on traditional learning to read and write. So the sounds, the words, the sentences, the texts. And then you read. And that is based, in fact, on Dutch children who have been listening to the language and spoke the language for six years and then start to write. So that method, it doesn't work. Yes, a little, but not enough to reach the required language level.*
> (Principal and teacher of private language office, responsible for organisational, financial and management, the Netherlands)

Newcomers' access to tertiary education is also constrained. Obstacles include **insufficient financial resources and lack of information about educational opportunities.** Information on educational opportunities for adults is often dispersed and there tends to be a bias in information favouring entrance into the vocational labour market.[76] Refugees and migrants do not always have the means to proactively seek such information mainly because of a language barrier, as was explained by a 20-year-old refugee student from Somalia living in Flanders. **The lack of transparency** about educational opportunities is a broader problem and also includes for instance lack of information about the duration of the trajectories and alternatives:

> *Normally it takes them one year to do logistics and there are those who want to go to the care sector. And then instead of one year logistics in a care institution they need to do two years. And when you are already doing two years of logistic and by that time they are already 20 or 22 and then they need to start those care studies and logistics and you are nothing, or not much. That are those kind of trajectories that you know that when you start these they will take around 5 or 6 years and they do not know this right.*
> (Social partner, working with adult education, Flanders)

There is thus a **need for better information provision and orientation to further education** that includes advising students about alternative and **realistic educational possibilities**, supporting their decision-making process for a study program and helping them enrol in the school. A student who had dropped out of higher education due to the language barrier, explained how the guidance by an adult educational centre that helps migrants and refugees with their future orientation helped her find her place again in the educational landscape:

> *I did not even know that second chance education existed and I just by coincidence received an email. So I went to the information meetings and there was a supervisor especially for foreigners. And normally I was waiting one more semester before I would start with second chance education, but that women really helped me to give me the confidence to subscribe.*
> (Female student, Belgian of Moroccan descent, 30-years-old, since 10 years in Flanders)

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[75] Pak, M. & Vandekerckhove, A. (2016)
[76] Ibid.

As this extract illustrates, **information sessions as well as individual supervision** may be particularly useful.

Language requirements at entry for different educational programs including vocational training is another important barrier for refugees and migrants to access tertiary education. For potential students, it is not always clear why particular studies, especially those that are more practically oriented, require a certain language level:

> *That language requirement, I find it very difficult to explain to people, because they are like, I want to learn to become a baker […] Why can I not just observe how you need to bake a bread and why do I need to have language level 1.2 before I can enrol? So for some people, you need to tell them that first they need to do another 3 years of language classes and you hear their dreams shattering, like actually, forget it and they often decide to go work in the factory and then you see often nice talents disappear.*
> (Social partner, working with adult education, Flanders)

As this quote illustrates, language requirements can be a reason for migrants and refugees to drop out of their educational trajectories especially when students consider the trajectories to become too lengthy. Educators are also not always sure about the necessity of language requirements of certain courses and wonder if it will not be possible to learn the language in the workplace, as this social partner continued. Alongside language as an entry requirement, tests that assess the mathematical skills also hinder entry into adult education.

Interviewees mentioned several opportunities to overcome the language barriers at entry for instance by **eliminating language requirements** altogether. Also one interviewee who works for the public employment service of Flanders, mentioned that they had recently started a project that develops **language profiles**, that is, the minimal language proficiency for the workplace of a specific profession. This, however, does not necessarily lead to a smooth entry to the labour market since employers often maintain expectations of high language proficiency:

> *On the other hand we are confronted with the employers, because we have composed a few language profiles for warehouse employees, truck drivers, salesmen, and healthcare. And there we notice that the intake for example, the job interview, is at a very linguistic level and that say that for the job people need a B1 level of the European reference framework, but the job that people have to do is actually on A2 level […] We advise the employers about their intake procedure and tell them that people do not succeed, of course not, but that in the workplace they really only need A2 level. So in that way, we try to accommodate a bit of that to eliminate those language barriers, but sometimes the employer expects an unrealistic language level for certain jobs and that is something we are confronted with.*
> (Employee of public employment service of Flanders)

Another difficulty for adult newcomers to continue their education is the **focus on activating adults to enter the labour market as soon as possible,** as was mentioned by a respondent who works for the Flemish welfare service. Also one of the interviewed refugees in the Netherlands mentioned her inability to continue her education because the welfare services told her: "*there is no way for you to be a student in the near future; you need to find a job*" (Male refugee, Turkish, 45 years old, since 1 year in the Netherlands). Increasingly, policies tend to aim at the short term. In this respect, there is also a preference to have refugees enter the vocational sector after the age of compulsory education. In Flanders, for example, students who previously attended reception education but are over 18 years of age go to the public employment service and are prepared for the labour market or further vocational training.

Also newcomers who **cannot enter compulsory secondary education because of their age** face difficulties in obtaining the right skills and diplomas that grants them to continue their education. In

the Netherlands, for instance, it even hinders attaining a degree of secondary education or being allowed to follow preparation class.[77] Another obstacle relates to **difficulties to validate diplomas from the countries of origin** as well as **not having any diploma from the origin country**.

For those who have enrolled in an educational program, the host country's **language of instruction and a lack of language support** within studies is perceived as an important obstacle to successful educational integration. Just as in reception education and mainstream secondary education, there is a **need for more opportunities to practice the language**, especially for higher educated newcomers and for more advanced learners. Most existing programs target those who have recently started learning the language, whereas still little is done for those with a higher educational background:

> *You have the language work internship, voluntary work and the talking tables. But for the latter the level is a bit low. These are only for people who have just started to learn the language. Currently you do not have anything for the more advanced levels.*
> (Female student, Belgian of Moroccan descent, 30-years-old, since 13 years in Flanders)

Opportunities for higher educated newcomers may be found in online practicing for higher educated newcomers.

Alongside language barriers, newcomers may encounter **non-linguistic requirements of the program**, such as mathematics or difficulties with theoretical aspects of the course, which is particularly detrimental for lower educated newcomers to continue their education. For instance, a program in which non-native speakers could perform their own profession at the workplace while retaining their social services for six months failed because of the theoretical exam, which was offered in Arabic:

> *Project Chance job, that is creating a workplace where people can already go to the workplace for six months while retaining their social services. The employer will receive their income […]. This means that people get a drivers workplace and the boss pays the education, theory and practice. That is a training of seven thousand euro. And somebody is put in the theory training. […] These are six men who went through this and they all failed for the theory. […] They have the practice from their own country, they can drive a truck. So they think, somebody who can already drive a truck, you should continue with that in the Netherlands, that is common. But it comes with a whole system of diplomas so these men, they fail immensely.*
> (Principal and teacher of private language office, responsible for organisational, financial and management, the Netherlands)

Similar to reception education and mainstream education, obstacles to successful educational integration in adult education include **mobility issues** and **other responsibilities**. Newcomers have many issues to attend when they arrive, such as getting an insurance, going to the dentist, finding an integration course, which are all new to them. According to a director of language education for adults, responsible for the organisation, teaching and coaching in the Netherlands, this causes fatigue among newcomers that negatively impacts on their second language development.

A problem that was mentioned by several respondents from adult education was that newcomers tend to give priority to appointments with institutions over attendance in school. One reason for this is the financial penalties with which newcomers are threatened if they fail to attend the appointment which is for instance the case for social welfare institutions. However, teachers and others responsible for adult education also mentioned that newcomers tend to give less value to their language classes and are very loyal towards other institutions:

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[77] Koehler, C. (2017)

If it is about involvement of the students, than a bottleneck is the fact that people are very loyal towards institutions. So when the municipality tells the people: "you have an appointment on Monday morning at 9am", while at that time we are teaching, they will still go to that appointment, because that is the government and the government is to be obeyed. What we need to learn and that is what we are working on, is how people need to deal with appointments and how they need to approach them and that you can say no in case it is not convenient for you. So we are constantly busy with those appointments.
(Director, Language education centre, the Netherlands)

Moreover, priority on the family prevents newcomers from attending classes and from focusing on their studies. This may be because they are financial responsible for their family members and therefore decide to focus on work instead of study. But also in case of crisis situations, for instance, when the student needs to assist a family member with going to the doctor or when a family member falls ill. In fact, many cultures of non-EU newcomers can be regarded as collectivist cultures in which care for family members – both nuclear and extended – holds a more important place than individual development. It is important for schools to keep this in mind and to explore ways of letting newcomers focus on their individual educational pathways while continuing to perform support networks for their family members.

The **transition from adult education to the labour market** is also complicated. In the interviews we observed mainly the language barrier as an obstacle to the labour market. The literature underscores the importance of programs that let adolescent refugees combine vocational education or professional training (including general courses and language training) with **internships** with the aim of acquiring apprenticeship or a vocation after some years. If needed and applicable, non-native speaking adult students should be supported in their professional and language training to facilitate their access to the labour market. This perspective of letting adult students gain more work experience during adult education programs was underscored by some of our interviewees:

Actually we should go more in the direction of internship-experience in our education, for the older students in more practically oriented learning paths. To prepare for work and that is something that we are not focusing on at the moment.
(Team leader, special language school, the Netherlands)

You need to look at the person behind like, what do you want in the future? Of course you cannot do this with everybody. But just like in Amsterdam, with the traineeships. And this you can do at high level, but I think you can also do this at low level. Like, the care sector. And maybe you first distribute food alongside your integration course, so to speak, but you speak with people, you have a task
(Customer support at the municipality, Responsible for support of status holders, the Netherlands)

Actors that provide vocational preparation – vocational schools, adult education schools, employment agencies, and social service organisations – should work together to develop unified measures and a systematic overview of these measures that indicate someone is prepared for a vocation.[78] There is therefore a **need for coordination** between the different actors. As different interviewees of a focus group among social partners working within adult education argued, the lack of financial support renders projects targeting adult students short-lived which impedes collaboration between partners.

Moreover, it is necessary to look very specifically at what people need in their educational program to prepare them for the labour market. A project in Flanders, @level2work, successfully

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[78] Koehler, C. (2017)

guided newcomers to the labour market by screening the modules that these people needed, what was already validated, what they still needed to do and what they can do. Also in another project in Flanders, adult educators prepared newcomers who wanted to start the training forklift by investigating what the training entails and to prepare those who wanted to enrol. According to a project worker, all of those who enrolled, had successfully completed the program.

Fewer newcomers make the transition from secondary to higher education as compared to native students.[79] For entering **higher education**, refugees face barriers related to language requirements, a lack of information, finances, and getting previously obtained diploma's in their country of origin recognised. European countries, however, have increasingly taken action to counter this. France has, for example, opened a support program for Syrian students in Lebanon who wish to study in France. In Flanders, Ghent University has opened up some courses to recognised refugees without strict regulations and preconditions, such as no obligation to proof previous diploma's. A preparation programme has been installed to foster the transition into the university system. Also in Amsterdam bridging classes aim at supporting transition into the university system. Higher education institutions offer free language courses or preparatory programs for refugees and asylum seekers, and demonstrate flexibility in their approach to document requirements. Furthermore, for those who cannot prove previously attained diploma's, tests could be employed to assess refugees' previously acquired knowledge and skills.[80]

4.2.6   Individual characteristics

Individual characteristics of refugee and migrant students and their families can challenge their educational integration within the four regions. In the interviews the following factors were mentioned as impacting on educational success: educational background, cultural and gendered norms and practices, and legal and financial statuses. These will be shortly discussed.

A first barrier relates to the individual's **educational background** which affects parents' relationship to school and to their children (see also section 4.4), as well as the educational skills and opportunities of students. Children who have not received any education in their origin country are usually illiterate, and the lack of a diploma – or the right diploma - from the origin country makes it almost impossible to access higher education. Moreover, students who have not received any or limited education in their origin countries also have not learned the necessary school skills such as "*sitting still, listening to the teacher or waiting*" (Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands).

Also among those who did attend school in their origin countries, challenges may persist, especially when they are accustomed to a different set of school rules for instance when it is permissible to be absent:

> *For example in Slovakia if your child is sick they can stay at home. Here in the UK they go only if it is urgent, then they have to go to school and you just give them a painkiller. If a child has a headache, he still needs to go to school*
> (Liaison for migrant families, Secondary school, the United Kingdom)

In general, not knowing what is expected of the student and the parents in the school setting is problematic, especially at the start. Making expectations explicit would therefore be essential. Moreover, parents and children may be unfamiliar with certain teaching methods of the host country, for instance with regard to the use of digital teaching methods:

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[79] Van den Broucke et al. (2016)
[80] Koehler, C. (2017)

It's very good, It's very good if you compare it to some in Syria, it is very good, for material, for example …, and they use internet, okay, that's good. But in Syria (…) we don't use so much technology, because we want to make the children use their self capacity. But now we are living in world with very fast technology, so this you can't compare. Here is very good and there's a different method (…) for education.
(Father, Syrian background, duration in the Netherlands unknown)

The educational background also impacts on the families' need for support. An interviewed social partner responsible for educational support for newcomers explained the differences she observed among high and low educated refugees. Whereas the first group is more proactive when in need of support and usually require only short-term support, the latter group do more often need long-term support, which as this interviewee argues, is common for lower educated individuals in general:

Actually it is normal when you work with low educated groups of people, then the short-term support is an illusion That is very much stimulated by policy, but it doesn't work. It is not because you did something together, because you showed them, that the subsequent year they will be able to do it themselves. They need a much longer support trajectory.
(Social worker, Responsible for educational support, Flanders)

This illustrates that schools should be aware of the different layers among groups, as those born in the host country – with or without a migration background – may fair worse educationally than for instance newcomers.

The **cultural background** – relating to the norms and practices of the host country – also impose on the educational integration in several ways. This can for instance refer to a different sense of planning and time, which causes frustration among school staff and more importantly negatively impacts on their educational opportunities:

Well I believe that planning and sense of time, well that is typical Flemish, we are very strict with many things and that has good sides, but for people from other countries that is one of the most difficult things. When you say: ' the class is from this time until that time, be on time, you need to stay until the end, you need to submit your tasks in time'. But they think that it won't be that bad, but yes, it is strict! And they think to speak with them and then it will be ok, but well, it is not so simple and they really have difficulties with that (…) You also should not say: 'I go to the class, when I am done with everything else'. No! You need to be here at 8h30, I do think that is a problem and that is were very often things go wrong. When after they want to look for work they also cannot just come to work wherever they please. And that is why they lose a lot of opportunities and they do not make their tasks, they forgot they had an exam.
(Coordinator, Adult education, Flanders)

A Flemish coordinator of adult education suggested to install a culture and language who helps students getting acquainted with the new culture, expectations and preparations for courses and appointments, appropriate behavior, and to help students understand the interpretation of phrases and words. As she argued, "*understanding language is one thing, but the cultural baggage that comes with words is harder to learn*".

Several respondents also pointed to particular obstacles for women and girls within certain cultures. For instance, a British academic expert working on projects that target migrant groups mentioned African female students who came to the United Kingdom to search for better qualifications in the health and social care sectors. In their origin countries they were restricted by their husbands who feared their wives to become higher educated than them, and who therefore also lacked support from their husbands. Moreover, a team leader at a Dutch reception centre, responsible

for the daily organization and curriculum, argued that she noticed that some Arabic girls are not motivated to succeed in their education because their parents' future perspectives for them is not with finding a job, although she made it clear that this observation did not apply to all Arabic girls. Nonetheless, she witnessed that parents treat their daughters in a more traditional way, meaning that they are kept at home more often in comparison to the sons. Also an internal supervisor of a language expertise centre in the Netherlands, among others responsible for the care of students, observed that in certain cultures parents are more protective towards girls, which shows in girls not being allowed to be outside of the house too long and too late.

At the same time, the team leader argued that parents also struggle with their sons who in contrast to the home country, are not corrected by the a wider social network, which can make parents feel that they lose the grip on their sons. At the same time, the freedom that children experience in the host country may also result in them losing grip on their own lives:

> *It is very difficult to realise: I am in a free country, there are different rules here and I need to make my own decisions. Children are busy with these kind of things and that also means that when they come with us, they are not immediately with the right educational mind to focus on achieving a high educational level. They are too busy exploring and researching and processing things.*
> (Team leader responsible for the daily organization and curriculum, Reception centre, the Netherlands)

Because of traditional gender roles, young men may also feel pressured to leave education to earn an income with which they can support their families, as was mentioned by a youth advisor in a refugee council working in a refugee camp in Jordan.

The **financial situation** of refugees and migrants may also hinder participation in the educational systems and affect the well-being of students and parents. For some refugees the move to another country goes hand in hand with a decline in the socio-economic status and related adjustment issues. Especially for refugees who had were used to wealth and luxury in their own country, it can be difficult to adjust to the new financial situation:

> *Taking an income from social services, it is very difficult for us; we are not used to it. In Syria, I had my own work and my husband also had his own work. I also had my own car and he had his own care. But here, I find myself restricted to my house. I don't have a driving license here. My husband got it, but I don't get it, because it is very costly and we don't have work. (…) And also in Syria, I used to do whatever I wanted. Here, our salary is not enough for a family. It is just eating, drinking and living. But in Syria, we used to do anything, buy anything, also for my kids. So that is why, if we work, it will be better for us and for our kids. In Syria, whatever they wanted, I would buy it fort hem. (…) If I find a job, I can put my baby in kindergarten and I can live freely. I don't have to depend, I don't want to depend on my husband.*
> (Mother, Syrian background, since 1,5 years in the Netherlands)

Such dire financial situations also push adults towards low paid and low-skilled work instead of continuing their education while maintaining their social services, even though this diminishes their future perspective on better paid and more fullfilling work, as was explained by an interviewee from the Flemish social welfare institution.

The financial situation of parents can also be an obstacle for children to attend school trips. Although some parents may not understand the importance of these trips, the financial costs of it can also prevent children from attending. As a Flemish policy maker argued, the school has an important role here in communicating with parents about the usefulness of such trips and in finding the necessary financial solutions. Similarly, attending sport clubs can be obstructed by the family's financial situation, whereas these kind of activities are important fort he student's integration:

If you see how expensive leisure activities for children are, that they cannot participate. That is also integration, sport activities. It is crazy the entree fees of sport clubs and sport materials, that is why children from the beginning won't be able to participate in social life. That is something we should focus on, that is where integration starts.
(Social worker, Responsible for educational support, Flanders)

The costs of books and other additional costs for education are a financial burden for adult students when they do not receive a study allowance, as explained a 20-year-old Somalian refugee student who lives in Flanders. Moreover, the regional costs of language education for adults also should be taken into account. For instance, in the Netherlands the costs of one year of language course can go up to €4000 compared to €500 in Belgium. Also a French advisor on education and extracurricular activities who guides newcomers stresses the importance of, in addition to supporting mastery of the French language, supporting families in material aspects so that they can afford basic school supplies that enable them to go to school.

A final obstacle that was mentioned during the interviews is the student's **legal status** may also obstruct their educational career. Unaccompanied minors face particular difficulties when they turn eighteen and they have not obtained a residence permit, which makes it impossible for them to continue their education for the subsequent years, forcing them into a marginalized position in society.[81] Uncertainty about the legal status also affects the student's financial situation, well-being and his or her educational performance. As a teacher of secondary education in Flanders argued the uncertain future imposes negatively on their motivation and ability to study, and health-related absence increases.

The discussion of individual characteristics underscores the importance of seeing the diversity within and among groups of refugee and migrant students and their parents. They should not be treated as a homogenous group that has the same educational needs. As a British academic expert working on projects that target migrant groups arued, it is important to look at the specific group and individuals and to see what their specific issues are.

4.2.7 Psychological wellbeing

Refugees and asylum seekers have particular psychological needs. From the interviews we learn that these individual needs are still insufficiently addressed within educational systems and institutions and that teachers and other educational staff are often struggling how to approach these needs. Yet, one should bear in mind that refugees and asylum seekers are a heterogenous group composed of individuals with different psychological needs and life trajectories. This aspect needs to be kept in mind when teaching and working with refugees.

It is important for newcomers to **feel welcome and safe** within their new school environment. These facets are crucial in the process of their educational integration as it helps them relax and opens their receptiveness for new information. The importance of feeling safe for refugees and asylum seekers is illustrated by the internal supervisor of a language expertise centre:

They have a lot of fears, because they are coming from unsafe situations and that makes it really difficult. Especially with young children who really follow their emotions, they sometimes act strange. We also have children who first attended a regular school and who completely derailed there because of the unsafety really, because nobody understood them and because they didn't understand what the teacher was asking. And they are coming here and well, our

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[81] Ghaeminia, S., Ghorashi, H. & Crul, M. (2017)

colleague speaks Arabic, that already makes a big difference; but we can also tell the children who have been here for a year to explain something to their classmates.
(Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

Schools are therefore advised to pay a lot of attention to make students feel welcome and safe. Several actions can be helpful: give students a small welcoming gift, put up workshops that present habits in school life, let older students guide them the first months (if needed and if possible, preferably someone who speaks the same mother tongue), pair them in the beginning with students from mainstream education who act as guides, and promote cultural exchanges and diversity among all students.[82] Moreover, it is important for teaching staff to be friendly and supportive from the very first moment that students enter a school, as indicated by a coordinator of adult education in Flanders:

It is a kind of culture within our school. I think it is a culture of optimism and that students are really welcome here. I notice it sometimes during the first meeting, the intake; they are coming in, sometimes hesitant and searching and then I think: you are very welcome here, sit down. I think it is also the appearance that we have in our school, despite the rules and the strictness that we also have, that you can be here, it is ok. And I always have that feeling within the school. (…) And I think that works, you radiate that feeling on the people who enter here, whether these are parents, students or other bystanders, they are having a nice feeling here.
(Learning path counsellor, Reception education, the Netherlands)

Teachers also play an important role for students' self-perception and confidence. They can make students feel proud of their cultural heritage and the languages they do speak, instead of focusing on what they cannot do, as was mentioned by a liaison for migrant families in secondary education in the United Kingdom. Moreover, teachers should encourage students and their parents that the children can achieve in school:

Children think from early age 'this is not for me', and that is so important which we can turn with small things. I believe we should encourage them to dream, to believe in themselves, to say that they will be able to do it, try your best. That self-confidence, really letting them believe in themselves from early age, because dream, work, but especially they miss a lot of self-confidence, both parents and children.
(Social worker, Responsible for educational support, Flanders)

Schools may also want to work with images and pictures to create a homely atmosphere as the principal of a private language agency in the Netherlands explained. Presenting **after-school activities**, such as homework clubs, and local **leisure-time activities**, such as sport clubs, – and stimulating and guiding refugees towards participation – is also a path schools could use to stimulate refugees' integration the school environment help them find their place in society.[83] Participating will be more likely when schools initiate these activities as refugee parents and their children perceive the school as a rather safe environment.

Furthermore, **psychological support** in response to the particular situation of refugees and asylum seekers who have psychosocial or emotional needs is essential in light of their wellbeing and school attainment. Refugees often have experienced trauma due to war, conflict, loss of accommodation or family, family separation, displacement, … they have lost their social network, and they may be anxious about an insecure future. Schools should be aware that these particular experiences have an effect on the student's education. For instance, a consultant of a regional office of student affairs in the

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[82] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)
[83] Arnot, M. & Pinson, H. (2005); Pulinx, R. (2014)

Netherlands, mentioned that psychological traumas and emotional problems related to separation from family members is an important reason for absenteeism among refugee students, which may cause students to fall behind at school:

> *The school tries to have a simple conversation, like, yesterday you only came in at 10am, why is that? But yesterday, I found it really difficult to get up when I hadn't slept well because of all the worries after I received a message from Syria that they bombs had been dropped again, or that somebody got injured again. I mean, these are really serious things. And the approach of the school is that it is all really bad and we understand, because they do. But does it help you to not come to school? Because the moment you are not in school and you fall behind and you miss things, you cannot continue and you stagnate your own goal.*
> (Advisor, Responsible for guiding and advising students in their educational career, The Netherlands)

Rather than only working towards the preferred outcomes, it is necessary to tackle the psychological problem, as was also mentioned by a British local counsellor. Hence, in order to meet refugees' psychosocial needs, school systems should fully engage professional therapists into their way of working. Psychological support for refugees, however, is not self-evident, because of accessibility, the need for proactiveness among those in need and cultural norms and values with regard to psychological support:

> *There is a problem because for example the Centre for Psychological Health is not very accessible for non-native speakers. Anyway for other cultures and non-native speakers because you really need to go there with your own request for help. And well, usually you do not have that request for help yourself. From another culture, people also perceive a psychologist or psychiatrist in a certain way. And they have the idea that you only go there when you are crazy. And because of that the alone there is a barrier and it is really difficult to formulate their own request for help whereas sometimes there really is a need for support.*
> (Advisor, Responsible for guiding students in their educational career, The Netherlands)

Other obstacles to psychological support for refugees include austerity which has resulted in a lack of financial resources for schools to adequately cope with traumas and lack of recognition of traumatic experiences among teaching staff as well as, as was mentioned by a British local counsellor. Because teachers often do not know what happened to the child before they arrived in the host country, they struggle to provide the necessary guidance, which can result in a feeling of powerlessness:

> *Children often have passed through so much when they arrive here, but you do not know that, you do not know the luggage of the child. They come from there to here, but how, in what way? What happened? They carry that with them, but they do not always express this, or show this, that is particularly difficult. They often cry a lot, but you do not know why. What do I need to do? Nobody can tell you this. I sometimes find this powerlessness difficult.*
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

The best practice to guarantee directed high level quality support of refugees' emotional and psychosocial needs is to assign a qualified support person at school, and schools could collaborate with agencies that provide psychological support, and that could support school teams and train teachers to recognize trauma and other psychological issues.[84] Hence, it is the school staff that should be aware of signals of trauma and other psychological issues by listening and observing the child, and by talking to the parents. A student of teacher training in Flanders gave the example of a language camp where she was volunteering during the summer. One of the children had run away, because the door had

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[84] Koehler, C. et al. (2018)

been closed at night. By talking to the child they found out that the child had a traumatic experience with being locked up and that the door needed to stay open. Teachers should, however, be made aware that not all refugees carry with them heavy traumas, and as stated in the introduction of this section, that the one-sided image of *the* refugee is incorrect, as was also mentioned by a learning path in a Dutch reception school.

Teachers, however, are not the ones who provide psychological support, other than some extra attention or a conversation with the child and the parent, as was mentioned by the team leader of reception education responsible for the daily organisation and curriculum in the Netherlands. In case of real psychological support, the school should refer the student to professional help. It is thus important that a good and clear referral system is in place to ensure that psychological needs of students do not stand in the way of focussing on their learning needs and structural barriers to social equality at school. [85] Also, specific tools may be applied within classroom to help fellow-students understand what it means to be a refugee:

> *A lot of refugees have been through a lot so I would recommend, understanding displacement, understanding trauma (…) I think dealing with specifics, there is an organisation called Capabuna which writes children's books in Arabic which follow stories of displacement and is written collaboratively with refugees and then illustrated as a children's book. This promotes understanding and discussion of being a refugee as we don't really understand what it is like to be a refugee. So finding those resources so that teachers kind of have toolkits to discuss, at secondary level you can talk about complex social issues but with primary school level this isn't as easy.*
> (Refugee youth advisor, working in a refugee camp in Jordan)

Another opportunity could be to have parents stay in the classroom to give children some time to adjust to the new environment, although it is important to explicate the expectations towards the parents:

> *We have had children for whom things were really difficult. Who for instance had very bad experiences in the school in Syria with bombings and so on. They do not dare to go to school, so we agree with them that the parent can stay in the class. And then it is going well with the child. But then those parents are just going to play with their telephone and they are just listening to songs. Or they are going to get involved with other children who do not follow the rules. And that is of course very bothersome, because of course you do not want that. So it is a bit of balancing; on the one hand you want them to be involved, but on the other hand they should not obstruct the classroom setting.*
> (Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

A group of refugee students that is in need of specific attention and support are **unaccompanied minors**. Compared to those who arrived with their parent(s), these children and adolescents have a higher chance to experience mental health problems, particularly loneliness, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, during the first years after resettlement.[86] Longitudinal research indicates that daily stressors in specific – such as difficulties in making friends, discrimination, lack of money for medical care, food, and insufficient housing – may have a lasting negative effect on their mental health. For these students, school can be a place where they feel safe, but at the same time their worries may be a reason for their absenteeism:

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[85] Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)
[86] Vervliet, M., et al. (2014); Eide, K. & Hjern, A. (2013)

Because they (unaccompanied minors) all indicate that they like to be at school. They like being at school, to be among other people, to not be alone. But it is still difficult to come. In one way or another it is sometimes difficult to make that click, like dude, if you feel annoyed and you are worried or worrying. And you say like, I like it when I'm at school, because then I can concentrate better on other things and I'm not only thinking. Why do you not come? So that is a complicated process.
(Advisor, Regional office for student affairs, The Netherlands)

Signals from schools as well as statistics confirm the relatively high share of problematic absenteeism among unaccompanied minors – as compared to minors with parents – as a consequence of their emotional struggles, in addition to the absence of geographically proximate supportive and motivating parents and financial insecurity.[87] A Belgian study has indicated that absenteeism is particularly problematic among 16 and 17-year-old students. Schools are therefore important settings with regard to their successful long-term adjustment. Activities organized during school holidays may help prevent unaccompanied minors from feeling lonely during these moments, as was mentioned by a coordinator of adult education in Flanders.

Unaccompanied refugee minors are in need of a predictable framework and structure in their daily life, and of trustful and caring relationships – such as with caregivers, substitute parent(s) and other minors. The latter is also important with respect to homework. These students cannot turn to their parents to help them with their homework and tend to rely on an informal network of friends and relatives who speak the host country's language. A place in school where students can make their homework and receive help with it can be especially important for this group of students. A positive signal is that research also indicates that care and education, combined with the drive to create a positive future which unaccompanied minors often expose, are factors that increase their prospects to a successful long-term adjustment.[88]

4.3   Teacher characteristics

4.3.1   Teacher-student relationships

Schools are social systems in which student learning is fostered by positive teacher-student relationships. The importance of these relationships go far beyond teachers' role in transmitting knowledge to children and youngsters by means of pedagogical frameworks that align with the subject matter. Teachers fulfil a central role in a student's network of relationships with adults and are therefore a crucial source of transmitting values, norms, advice, and different forms of support (cognitive, emotional, social) to students, certainly to newcomers; as shown in the following quotes:

I do live on my own. I don't really have someone else over here. So it is good that I can talk to my teachers and ask them questions. I only see my guardian a couple of times a month, but my teachers every day.
(Unaccompanied refugee student, Reception education, Afghan background, 1 year in Flanders)
They are isolated minors, those who do not live in homes are placed in hotels and have no educators. They feel very lonely and neglected by the social workers of Child Protection. They have few adult interlocutors and therefore address themselves naturally to me and the teacher in case of health problems, administration ...
(Teaching assistant, Reception education, France)

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[87] http://www.pharos.nl/documents/doc/factsheet_alleenstaande_minderjarige_vreemdelingen.pdf; http://www.agodi.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/-Rapport_AGODI_OnthaalonderwijsOKAN_2014-2016.pdf
[88] Eide, K. & Hjern, A. (2013)

Teachers might accordingly be viewed as providers of social capital to students given that *"teachers can provide students with emotional support and encouragement, information and guidance about personal or academic decisions, and additional assistance with schoolwork (p. 550)".*[89] As such, teachers play a determining role in creating and maintaining an effective learning environment for students. It is interesting to note at this point that, according to the interviewed educators and policymakers, teachers describe optimal educational involvement of students in terms of students who *achieve, pass exams, make progress, come to school, be on time, feel good, and can be themselves*.

It is necessary to explore in what ways teacher-student relationships may promote or hinder the educational integration of immigrant students. An indicator of the quality of relationships between students and teachers is the level of perceived **trust** among both parties. Trust relationships in educational settings are characterized by the willingness to be vulnerable to another school party based on the confidence that the other party will act with benevolence, reliability, competence, openness, and honesty. The next extract, out of a focus group with newcomer students, demonstrates how some of these facets of trust are important in how students describe a good quality of relationships with teachers.

> *They are friendly to us […] They are often happy too. It are cool teachers, willing to be your big friend […] You can always tell them everything. […] You can also tell them things of your home, or secrets, and even problems. They will always help us when needed, looking for solutions.*
> (11-18 years old migrant students, Reception education, 6 months up to 2 years in Flanders)

Trust between teachers and students is important for educational outcomes as it is conducive for students' learning and social integration in school.[90] Trust might get hampered, however, between teachers and immigrant students given that a shared ethnic identity serves as a basis for trusting relationships.[91] Research has indeed suggested that teachers expose lower levels of trust in students when being enrolled in schools with a substantial share of immigrant and socioeconomic disadvantaged students.[92,93] In these type of schools, (immigrant) students may therefore have less teacher support at their disposal. Besides, given that trust is a reciprocal phenomenon, lower levels of trust in students on behalf of teachers will also lead to lower student trust in teachers; yielding students to reach out less likely to their teachers when encountering educational or personal problems.

The interviews and focus groups with migrant students across reception, secondary, and adult education indicate that, generally, students perceive the relationships with most of their teachers as positive. The **connotations that students give to such trusting relationships** are *feeling supported, feeling welcome, getting helped, being approachable, open to talk, friendly, listening, appreciative, and respectful.* Teachers who expose *extra-role behaviours* and go beyond their minimal job requirements in order to support immigrant students also foster relationships with students. The positive effect of extra-role behaviours get demonstrated by the next extraction stemming from a focus group with migrant students.

> *Miss X is one of the best. I can just go up to Miss X and ask for help. I needed help the other day because I didn't really know how to apply for something. So Miss X called her daughter in for me and she actually offered help. […] Miss X helps a lot, I know other teachers do as well. But Miss X does a lot for us foreign students because she sets up projects, she does other classes*

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[89] Croninger, R.G. & Lee, V.E. (2001)
[90] Van Maele, D., Van Houtte, M. & Forsyth, P.B. (2014)
[91] Kramer, R.M., Brewer, M.B. & Hanna, B.A. (1996)
[92] Van Maele, D., Van Houtte, M. & Forsyth, P.B. (2014)
[93] Dewulf, L., van Braak, J. & Van Houtte, M. (2016)

for us. And if our parents don't speak much English then she does extra classes for them and helps little kids and so on.
(Female migrant student, Secondary education, Lithuanian background, the United Kingdom)

So, overall, immigrant students reported to have positive relationships with their teachers. Across the interviews, also teachers generally take up a positive stand towards their relationships with the immigrant students. A focus group with Dutch educators provides insights on **how teachers try to establish positive and supportive relationships** with migrant students. According to them, it is important *to expose a cheerful character, to use mimicry, to be sound and clear, to respect the students' dignity and identity, and to be consequent when rewarding or punishing*. Teachers lay the base for trust to flourish when they interact with their students on these premises.

Next to trust, **discrimination** may indicate the quality of the relationships between teachers and immigrant students. After all, research shows that students originating from migration frequently perceive ethnic discrimination by their teachers.[94] Being in an asymmetric power relationship eases the possibilities of teachers to treat different groups of students differently. This is something which students with a migrant background sometimes experience in daily school life. A different treatment which they frequently attribute to their own nationality, ethnicity or skin colour. Ethnic discrimination gets for instance reflected in perceptions among ethnic minority students of being treated unfairly in class or being called out less often by teachers because of their ethnic background.

In general, **the interviews and focus groups do not expose clear cases** in which migrant students were actually discriminated by teachers, on the contrary.

I've never really experienced someone telling me I am different to someone else. *I like the fact that there is a lot of equality in this school. They don't discriminate you or judge you for who you are because it is multicultural.*
(Female migrant student, Secondary education, Lithuanian background, the United Kingdom).

This is not to say that no discrimination by teachers is perceived, as indicated by the next example that describes how a refugee student once perceived one of her teachers to discriminate between students:

I do remember a certain teacher teaching sociology in the first year (i.e. of higher education). He had always thought I was a real Belgian, with Belgian roots because I don't look different than the other students. But there were some girls wearing a headscarf in class. He wanted to make a statement in proving that people with a migration background are more likely to quit their studies or to get bad grades. In the aula, he pointed them out – they always sat together – and said "Look, I don't want to lump all of you together, but within two years, you won't be here anymore". The exams were oral and all three of them failed for it, I succeeded. I think his prejudice over those girls interfered with his grading judgment. At the end of the year he wanted to test his own statement, so during class he asked again who of the Muslim girls succeeded for sociology. I waited just a second, but then I raised my hand. He thought I was joking and said "West-Flemish girls are no part of that group". I told him I was born in Kosovo and lived for only 20 years in Belgium. I will never forget his face, cause I proved that the statement he tried to make had been proven wrong because I, as a migrant student, did succeed for his exam. At that point, I realised how lucky I was that I was white, but also how unfair it was for those girls who just look different. So, with respect to those three female students, I really did notice another way of handling students on his behalf.
(Female refugee student, Higher education, Kosovar background, 20 years in Flanders)

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[94] D'hondt, F., et al. (2016)

A **nuance regarding discrimination** within teacher-student relationships, is provided by a Flemish secondary education teacher who has a Moroccan background. In her opinion, teachers too often tend to culturalise typical, rebellious behaviour on behalf of migrant young adolescents, whereas the students themselves often feel discriminated too fast when teachers are just acting in their professional role. According to her, a lot of situations in which migrant students feel discriminated on the one hand, and teachers not understood on the other hand, are the outcome of a 'we against them' story that has just become a vicious circle because of two parties not understanding each other.

> *The students (i.e. with a migrant background) say something and it gets wrongfully interpreted by the teacher, who feels attacked. It often involves something religious. The teachers become angry then, they meet me in the teaching room, I hear them, and then I have to explain that they (i.e. the students) did not meant it that way. But the harm has already been done because the students feel the teacher's frustrations, and the teacher does not get it. And so it becomes a 'we against them' story. There is al lot of ignorance within the teaching staff, but also among the students. It are young people, we may not forget that. They will rebel you anyway. And already quite fast they (i.e. the teachers) speak of radicalisation. Then I say, no, that is just being rebellious, but from the point of view of a Muslim it is called radicalisation then. Typical adolescent behaviour gets culturalised in that way. That is not good. The students feel that also. The teachers have the best interest for the students, but sometimes they just don't know it anymore.*
> (Teacher, Secondary education, Flanders)

Regardless whether discrimination by teachers objectively occurs or not, students with an immigrant background sometimes perceive it to be a reality for themselves while being in school and subsequently adjust their own behaviours and attitudes to these perceptions. In fact, when this occurs, the classic theorem "*if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences* (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572)*"* is at play.[95] Such adaptations can be detrimental for ethnic minority students' own educational careers as perceptions of discrimination by teachers against their own ethnic background associate with less positive school attitudes such a the idea to have less control over their own educational trajectory.[96] Immigrant students who perceive ethnic discrimination by teachers will develop less positive school attitudes and will be less likely to utilize educational resources that teachers could provide them with.

Whereas discrimination or a lack of trust in the relationships with teachers could be a barrier to immigrant students' educational integration in school life, the interviews demonstrate that – in general – **most relationships between teachers and immigrant students are positive**. If a bad relationship gets described, this rather pertains to a one-on-one conflict between a single teacher and student; not to low trust or discrimination in the overall relationships between immigrant students and teachers. Yet, when in some cases immigrant students develop less positive relationships with teachers, the interviews with policymakers and educators reflect that this could mainly get attributed to teachers not understanding or having the competencies regarding how to work with a culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse student population (see also sections 4.3.2 and 4.7.1).

Discrimination and trust are of course only two facets of teacher-student relationships. They can, however, be viewed as basic elements of human relationships which affect students' cognitive and non-cognitive educational outcomes. Schools should therefore **promote the quality of teacher-student relationships** by addressing issues of discrimination and low trust when these occur. After all, students will more likely feel connected to their school and learn better when they perceive their teachers as caring about them, trying to be fair, and praising them.[97] When positive teacher-student

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[95] Thomas, W. & Thomas, D. (1928)
[96] D'hondt, F., et al. (2016)
[97] Hallinan, M.T. (2008)

relationships are in place, students with an immigrant background will feel more valued, respected, and supported by teachers. This will be conducive for their wellbeing and learning at school.

4.3.2   Teacher competencies towards diversity

Today, European teaching staffs are insufficiently prepared and trained to deal with diverse classroom settings,[98] as already emphasised in the previous section. One of the reasons for this, is that they sometimes hold inadequate expectations for migrant students.[99] The interviews indeed underscore that teachers sometimes hold unadjusted **expectations** for immigrant students, as shown in the next interview extracts:

> *So they are dead-beat when they start reception education. And then you see that a teacher gets assigned to reception education and that person starts with, well, "this is chapter one and we have this list of words, and that is the one you have to learn. That is your homework." Well, then of course you find the mere's nest being a teacher because these people are in need of warmth, a lot of attention, a lot of tranquillity in order to just land. And that teacher has just no clue about the whole background story.*
> (Director, Centre for adult language education, the Netherlands)

> *I think sometimes the teachers expect you to know everything even if though you don't understand it. So it's really hard for me to explain to them sometimes without sounding like I'm dumb or stupid, so I just keep it to myself and don't ask for help.*
> (Female migrant student, Secondary education, Lithuanian background, the United Kingdom)

Expectations for migrant students can be maladjusted, but it is more alarming that expectations of teachers regarding students' learning possibilities get lowered when working in a diversified school context. For instance, the higher the share of immigrant students in school, the less teachable a teaching staff perceives the students to be. Teachers collectively demonstrate lower expectations about students' ability to meet educational expectations in these schools than teachers do in 'white' schools.[100] The danger here is in that such expectations become self-fulling prophecies. Teachers, often unconsciously, communicate such lower expectations in the way they give feedback, challenge students, or provide opportunities to participate in class. Students do notice these behaviours, however, and will accordingly adapt their own behaviours in a way that corresponds to the teacher expectations. Lower teacher expectations towards immigrant students are an important reason for the existing achievement gap between immigrant and native students.[101] Effects on immigrant students of lower achievement expectations on behalf of their teachers are noticeable with respect to processes of grade orientation or retention. A recent study shows that, achievement scores being equal, immigrant students more often received a certificate reorienting them to a lower esteemed secondary track whereas native students more often had to repeat their year.[102] Although not often, students sometimes perceive that teachers have lower expectations for students with a migrant background, as becomes clear from the next interview extract.

> *The perception is there (i.e. among teachers) that migrants won't graduate anyway. And therefore they punish them much quicker with a B-certificate (i.e. grade reorientation) or a C-certificate (i.e. grade retention).*
> (Female refugee student, Higher education, Belgian, Kosovar background, 20 years in Flanders)

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[98] Koehler, C., et al. (2018)
[99] Sprietsma, M. (2013)
[100] Van Maele, D. & Van Houtte, M. (2011)
[101] Heckmann, F. (2008)
[102] Unia (2018)

This differential treatment might get explained by **stereotypical thinking** of teachers, as demonstrated in a recent study.[103] Bad achievement scores of native students more often got explained as a one-time underachievement. Grade repetition should accordingly keep them on track to enrol in higher education later on. Besides, native parents were perceived as being supportive to keep their children in the high esteemed track. Grade reorientation for immigrant students with equally bad achievement scores was, on the other hand, explained by being in line with the capacities and talents of the students, by an insufficient mastery of the language, or by an insufficient level of parental support to reach success in repeating the year in the current track. Teachers' focus regarding immigrant students was therefore not on getting them to higher education, as it was for native students, but on not delaying their secondary school career and on just making them qualify to obtain a certificate of secondary education. The arguments provided by teachers for this differential treatment were, however, based on stereotypical thinking about immigrant students and their parents.

Stereotypical thinking about immigrant students pops up throughout some of the conducted interviews. In most cases, these pertain to how teachers from regular education look at and deal with students having a migration background; as described in the next focus group extract:

> Respondent 1: *We also work hard to improve the understanding and knowledge in regular education about our students (i.e. from special language education). And also that not all of them are traumatised students who are in need of much care. Because sometimes we have to make so many efforts in getting these students on the spot they really belong to. It's the image that they (i.e. regular education teachers) hold about the students we have here, yes.*
> Respondent 2: *The image, yes. That can be polished indeed. Sometimes it is a little bit of a one-sided image. It changed throughout the years when I look back, but there is still a lot of progress to make. [...] Also, when our school was growing fast because of a larger number of Syrian students who came to the Netherlands, we used some premises in one of the connected regular schools. [...] So we were there, with a couple of groups of those students, and then you here them (i.e. teachers of the regular school) shout "hey, those students just speak Dutch". And then I think, yes, it are students who are ready to enrol in regular education. But the image, we can still do a lot about that.*
> (R1: Teacher and student guide, Special language school children aged 12-18 years, the Netherlands)
> (R2: Care coordinator and student guide, Special language school children aged 12-18 years, the Netherlands)

An important nuance, though, is that paying attention to stereotypes and expectations of teachers in explaining underachievement of immigrant students is not the same as blaming the teachers for this outcome. Teachers are in general often not acquainted with other cultures and therefore may lack self-confidence and knowledge in dealing with the target audience. Across several interviews, teachers themselves indicate the need to increase their **cultural-sensitivity** towards immigrant students.

> *I do think it is important that we are aware of things like what is going on in that country, politically, socially. We need to be aware of those differences in order to be able to act responsive towards them, understanding how they behave towards us or in general. That unawareness is a shortcoming if you want to deal in a sensitive way with them, also if you want to anticipate on problems.*
> (Teacher, Secondary education, Flanders)

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[103] Ibid.

Teachers may also attribute learning problems among immigrant students to their (unchangeable) cultural background whereas the real underlying issues relate to a disadvantaged socioeconomic position (immigrant parents' occupational status, educational level and/or household poverty).[104] It is accordingly not strange to find that the teaching population, still largely homogeneous, does not feel well enough prepared to teach students with a different cultural and religious background. They lack adequate **knowledge and understanding** about cultural, religious and linguistic diversity and therefore feel ill prepared to work in multicultural and multilinguistic settings.[105] Teachers particularly experience difficulties in addressing controversial topics in class such as having conversations about religious symbols, tensions between science and religion, or radicalisation. This also gets reflected in the interviews with teachers and policymakers. For example, with respect to talking about terrorist attacks in Europe. But even then, understanding the perspective of some immigrant students can be helpful in order to have a good discussion. This gets presented in the next example from a focus group in which a teacher talks about difficulties to discuss radicalisation with the students:

> *Look, these students, they notice that the whole of Europe is in commotion, while in Syria, it happens daily. So, they say like "only so many people, do you know what happens in Syria, Miss?" Then I also say "I do understand you. This is just one attack and the world is in commotion while it happens in your country every day." So, you try to look at things from the students' perspective.*
> (Teacher, Special language school for secondary school aged students, the Netherlands)

Within primary education, teachers attribute the difficulties to discuss matter mainly to the young age of the children, but in secondary education they fear an escalating classroom setting while discussing such matters.[106] Although most primary and secondary school teachers assess themselves as 'rather competent' in dealing with immigrant students, they differ in their **attitudes** towards teaching these students. Both of course work in different school realities given students' age (children versus young adolescents) and the nature of the classes they teach (distinct courses in one single class versus course(s) across distinct classes). This obviously affect their teaching attitudes. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that teaching attitudes are generally more strict and negative among secondary school teachers than among primary school teachers. For instance, secondary school teachers estimate it less achievable to include newcomers with another language or asylum-seeking children in their classroom than primary school teachers do. Newly arrived students with another mother tongue should therefore be regarded as a subgroup of students who deserve special attention. This is underscored by the finding that that one in three primary and secondary school teachers don't feel themselves competent enough to deal with newcomers.[107]

Exposure and familiarity with immigrant students counts as well with respect to teachers' attitudes to work with the target group. Not having been exposed previously to a diverse school population during the teacher preparation programme, might even frighten pre-service teachers to work with refugees and migrants. It could even affect the schools in which they apply for a job in the future, as shown in the next extract from a focus group with Flemish pre-service teachers.

> *I am open to other cultures and languages, I have no problem with all of that, but it scares me in a certain way (i.e. applying for a job in a school with several religions among students). If they would call me, for instance for a job in a school in Brussels, I would have to think about that. I think it mainly scares us because we did have too little experience with it.*
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

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[104] OECD (2018)
[105] Siarova, H. & Tudjman, T. (2018)
[106] Unia (2018)
[107] Ibid.

Teachers are in need of training – and ask for it themselves – in order to deal with a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diversified student population. This is clearly underscored throughout the interviews and focus groups with educators and policymakers (see also section 4.7.1).

4.4   School-parent partnerships

A fit between the expectations of the school and its personnel towards parents and the nature of **parental involvement** in their children's education is an important facet of children's development and learning in school.[108] Schools and parents could aim to establish a real partnership as described in the following extract which reflects that both parties actually strive for **a common goal**, and in which it becomes clear that schools really can try to take into account the parental perspective when discussing parent involvement in education.

> *Standing together on the same line with parents counts. That parents also understand that we want the best for their children and that we share one and the same goal. Namely, that the children receive good quality education and that they grow up as good adults in the end. [...] You always have to respect the parents' dignity. That is really important. You don't work in the sense of "we know it better".*
> (Teacher, Special language school Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

The interviewed immigrant parents express that **they really value their children's education**. They often try as hard as they can to support their children's education, as shown in the following testimonies:

> *I just support my children and I try very hard to learn Dutch, because I want to help my children to learn Dutch. [...] Growing up is participation, between the parent and the school. And that is what I do. I ask the school which kind of lessons they gave him, so I prepare it for my children at home, and me wife also helps me with this. So, the next day he goes to school and he understands what the lessons are about. [...]*
> (Parent, Syrian background, 3 years in the Netherlands)

> *I try as much as I can, but I'm not perfect in the Dutch language, that's a problem. I ask my son if he has homework when he gets home. First, he didn't have homework. I went to his school then and asked his teacher to give him homework, to practice Dutch at home. [...] She gave him more homework, and I try to read it with him, or sometimes he can read it for me. Get the new vocabulary, the definition, or the meaning of the word and try to solve it with him. [...] I try to help him as much as I can.*
> (Parent, Syrian background, 1.5 years in the Netherlands)

> *In general, parents really are involved. They all want the best for their child. Yet, the parents not always have a realistic perspective on the opportunities for their son or daughter. But anyway, they want the students to end up as good as possible and learn the language quickly. And transit as fast as possible also to regular education.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

> *A common misconception that must be broken is that parents do not take care of the education of their children if they do not speak French. This has been heard very often. Yet, all parents, 100% of parents, are concerned about the education of their children.*
> (Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

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[108] Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. & Sandler, H.M. (1995)

Immigrant parents particularly try to **provide emotional and motivational support** to their children. Interviewed refugee students from Flanders, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom all stress that their parents have interest in what happens at school. *"They always ask how it went at school. And what we we think of it ourselves"* (Male refugee student, Special language school, Syrian background, 1.5 years in the Netherlands). The refugee students further express that their parents are involved in their homework to the best of their abilities, in checking exam results, or sometimes also in setting expectations high.

Although immigrant parents in general value education and try to support their children in education, they often have less resources at their disposal to participate and get involved in the school life of their children because of cultural, language, and system-knowledge barriers.[109] Immigrant parents, certainly first-generation ones, lack acquaintance with cultural habits that surround schooling, they often don't master the language of the school sufficiently, and they have limited knowledge regarding the educational system. It is common for them to feel alienated, powerless, and culturally estranged from their children's school, and therefore avoid involvement in the children's education.[110] These barriers lead to **suboptimal parental involvement** in the education of their children. This is something which clearly is reflected across the conducted interviews and focus groups. Room for improvement is particularly mentioned in two ways: not coming to school (e.g. at parent evenings) and not being involved with school at home. Although various educators and policy makers indicate the importance of providing immigrant parents with sufficient information about what is expected with regard to involvement with school at home, providing information is not always helpful: *"During most of our talks with parents we do actually end up along the same lines. But, next, it is not always the case that you see things actually happen from the home"* (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands).

According to the respondents, immigrant parents experience several challenges with respect to being involved in education in an ideal way. If they **don't (sufficiently) master the language of instruction**, for instance, immigrant parents are just not able to help their children with educational matter like homework.

> *My mum doesn't really help me because she doesn't really understand English. Of course she would be able to help me if she would understand more of it or if it was Russian, but she doesn't like to help me in English. Before she was able to help me. If it's like maths then she is able to help me but not if it is English or Science. She doesn't understand it so I just have to do it myself. But she tries to push me as hard as possible to get the things done.*
> (Female migrant student, Secondary education, Lithuanian background, the United Kingdom)

Besides, it is not always easy for parents to notice that their children learn the new language easier than themselves. This can even undermine the child's trust in the parent as a support provider, compared to this perception in their home country, as testified by the Syrian refugee father who lives for one and a half year in the Netherlands. A Dutch teacher in reception education also signals that learning the new language is crucial for immigrant parents, particularly to help them stand their own ground at home with respect to their children who are learning the new language faster.

Next to the language barrier, it can be deduced from the interviews with educators and social workers that a lack of educational involvement on behalf of immigrant parents relates to their **unawareness of educational expectations, uncertainty, and anxiety to do things wrong**. The respective respondents ascribe this to the cultural and educational background of the immigrant parents.

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[109] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)
[110] Scholfield, J.W. (2006)

> *Parents know way too little about what is expected from them. Often they arrive from countries in which interference with the school of children is just not done. Out of respect for the teacher, they just don't interfere with what happens in school. [...] It is very complex to explain to parents what is expected with respect to homework. A lot of them just are not acquainted with homework, they don't know what is expected from their children and from themselves.*
> (Social worker, Educational support provider, Flanders)

An English local counsellor and teacher who works directly with refugees and migrants specificies that the above barriers to immigrant parent integration in education might particularly be at work for some members of the Roma group. According to her, some of them are even suspicious towards education, believing schools have 'a hidden agenda'. Furthermore, an academic expert on migrant education working in the United Kingdom addresses the fact that immigrant parents sometimes work very long hours, making them too exhausted in the evening to help their children with work for school. What equally plays as a challenge, is the fact that some of these parents also **experienced trauma, grief, stress or insecurity with respect to their new situation**.

Several challenges are thus present which hinder immigrant parents to be involved in the education of their children in an ideal way. It is key to break these and to find alignment between the school expectations regarding parental involvement and the expectations and abilities of immigrant parents to get actively involved in the education of their children, both in school life and at home. As a school paying attention to the barriers immigrant parents experience can just make such a big difference, as signalled by the following educator:

> *When it goes well with the parents, it often goes well with the children. So, really, that is important. Whether parents have enough room in their heads to provide their children with attention, then you see that it goes well with the children in almost all cases.*
> (Student guide and programme quality supervisor, Special language school, the Netherlands)

Next to the barriers for immigrant parents, the interviews illustrate that **schools have needs** for involving immigrant parents in education as well, even in the case that they already make efforts.

> *Well, I think that the barrier is that, euhm, in spite of lettres in other languages, in spite of telephone calls ... Well, we really notice that we can reach certain parents just very difficult.*
> (Teacher and Student guide, Responsible for equal opportunities in secondary education, Flanders)

According to an English as Second Language teacher in a college at the United Kingdom, more **information on parents' background** and **more events** are needed as well so that parents involvement in school can be strengthened. According to a Flemish teacher in secondary education, a lack of **time** to follow up on parents who do not show up is an important barrier for schools to improve the school-parent relationship. Another Flemish secondary school teacher aligns to this opinion: "*At this moment, we don't do anything with it. Those parents don't show up and that's it. Actually, we should follow it up.*"

J. L. Epstein, a reputed academic researcher on family and community involvement, argues that schools can focus on six dimensions to foster school-parent partnerships: parenting (*e.g.* regarding health or peer pressure), two-way communicating (*e.g.* inform about students' progress), volunteering (*e.g.* as interpreters), learning at home (*e.g.* goal setting), decision-making (*e.g.* participating in school improvement committees), and on collaborating with the broader community (*e.g.* community service).[111] Several of these dimensions are reflected in the interviews. Schools, educators, and

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[111] Epstein, J.L. (2008)

policymakers testified about **practices that support immigrant parent involvement in the school and at home**.

Schools already work on **bringing immigrant parents together and educating them**. A Dutch teacher in reception education expressed that her school is planning to organise parent meetings the next year, in addition to intake interviews they already conduct. These meetings will focus on explaining how the law on compulsory education works and that they, as a parent, can ask for a new appointment with social service or administrative instances when the appointment interferes with the child interests. Schools particularly aim to work on strengthening the immigrant parents themselves in terms of their knowledge and awareness of how it all works in the education system, and on strengthening their second language skills and educational background.

> *I would improve their own education. Sometimes it is just making parents aware of courses that are available to them and sometimes they think it's going to be such a hard process, but we are now better at signposting them. We now have parents asking, "can you help me"?*
> (Special educational needs co-ordinator, Secondary education, the United Kingdom)

According to a Dutch team leader of a special language school, a challenge in bringing parents together is the fact that they might speak different languages. **Working in smaller groups** with parents who share a language is what they often do in her school. Another Dutch primary school teacher explained that in her school they use **cooperation as a working method** during parent meetings to stimulate open conversations among immigrants about their view on education and on how things are going in school. **Asking parents for help with regard to things that they already master**, might help as well, for instance with regard to bringing tasty food to school parties. A social worker who is active in Flemish education, also gives some insights on how to get parents in the school. She explains that providing information during specifically organised events is not what works that well because too many parents do not show up. What does work, is **to distribute information by means of already existing groups**, like the group of mothers.

> *Groups of mothers together work well. I think that a parent group in each school should be possible, one that works around topics like playing is learning, educational material; topics about things that matter to the children and to which a social component is inherent as well. Providing a coffee and a cake are very important, even necessary. So, you need the budget to buy that cake also. Parents need to feel welcome at a meeting. In advance, you also need to think about which parents you want to reach, how do we deal with that group when they are present. Also the moment of meeting counts. A group in the evening or during the day while school is running leads to reaching another audience. During the day, you can reach immigrant mothers, not in the evenings. Sometimes you want to inform parents and you organise an information event, and then you notice that it didn't work out well. The threshold for parents was too big [...] But then we gave the information during the mother group and that went good.*
> (Social worker, Educational support provider, Flanders)

According to the above interviewee, a school's goal should also be **to reach immigrant parents through their children**. Putting the children central is indeed important with respect to participation of immigrant parents in the school. A liaison to migrants from the UK, for instance, explains that in order to get parents to English classes, you have to listen to the needs they experience with respect to their children during those classes. If needed, the provision of child care during classes or activities that aim at parents is a recommended pathway.

Another recommended practice by several interviewees, is **opening the doors of the classroom and the school** to the parents. Migrant parents should get the opportunity to have a look in their children classes in order to get them more acquainted with how things work in class. In line, a Flemish pre-service teacher following a teacher education programme testified about a school in which the

door is always open to parents and in which parents with another mother tongue enter the school more easily:

> They (i.e. the parents) enter immediately into an open space, and everyone of us can be talked to or we direct them to the right person. Also small things matter, like, there is a large bookcase. Children can bring a book from their home in the morning which the parents can read out loud during the classroom circle. Everyday another child get its turn. The children who lack books at home, can just borrow one from the bookcase so that it (i.e. not having books at home) is not noticeable.
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

In breaking barriers to immigrant parents' involvement and realising parent-school partnerships, it is key to establish **positive relationships** between them and the school staff. Certainly the relationships with teachers are crucial as they are often the first line of communication between the school and the children's family. These relationships might, however, be hampered in school contexts with a high share of immigrant students given that teaching staffs on average expose less trust in parents than in schools with a lower share of immigrant students.[112] This indicates that in some schools, the interests of (immigrant) children might get less supported because both teachers and parents are less likely to reach out and risk vulnerability towards one another, for example in encouraging two-fay feedback on educational matters. Building parent-school trust in light of establishing real parent-school partnerships will be key if schools want to break barriers to immigrant parents' educational involvement. Some Dutch respondents described the importance of positive relationships with parents during a focus group:

> Respondent 1: *It really is about having an open, yes, really an open relationship with the parents. So that you really can say anything, also annoying things, but you first have to build up that kind of bonding with the parents before you can say those things.*
> Respondent 2: *I think it is about the transparency and the openness, and daring to ask en talk about anything, with respect for the other. It sometimes feels strange for the parents, because they are out of their culture, but you notice that they appreciate it very much in the end.*
> (R1: Teacher, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years, the Netherlands)
> (R2: Care coordinator and student guide, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years, the Netherlands)

A crucial challenge to immigrant parents' involvement in education is the **communication** with the school. Language differences clearly add to this, just as limited knowledge of parents about the educational system does. Schools can address this challenge by offering information in translation or by making use of interpreters, or in installing informal opportunities to meet other parents or staff members. Equally important though is that schools demonstrate in their communication to value the home language of immigrant parents.[113] Although the interviews indicate that schools try to work on improving the communication with immigrant parents, for instance by making use of interpreters, work is still needed for schools in applying diversified communication strategies towards their population of immigrant parents.[114]

Finally, parents fulfil an important role in the participation of their children in early childhood or **pre-school education** (see also 4.2.6). With this we not only refer to registering children in facilities that provide care and education before the age of compulsory education, but also with having them attend on a regular and frequent basis. International comparison of pre-school education effects is difficult

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[112] Van Maele, D. & Van Houtte, M. (2009)
[113] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)
[114] Unia (2018)

given that countries strongly differ in the way they organise care and education before the compulsory education age. Yet, it is generally accepted that pre-school experience positively affects children's all-round and school development, particularly for socioeconomic disadvantaged children.[115]

Stimulating pre-school education is accordingly viewed as a way to enhance equal opportunities in education. Children's non-participation to pre-school education is particularly related to parents' educational level and occupational status, rather than having a migrant background. Yet, given that a disadvantaged socioeconomic and migrant background often correlate, pre-school education is also perceived as a pathway to improve migrant children's educational trajectories and their learning of the instructional language when speaking another mother tongue. Registration and attendance rates also differ between distinct migrant groups. A Flemish study indicates that among non-nationals, who on average demonstrate lower registration and attendance rates in pre-school education compared to nationals, participation is most positive among those with a refugee status and a Moroccan or Turkish nationality.[116]

Parents, certainly socioeconomic disadvantaged parents, might experience barriers in letting their children participate in pre-school education. A mismatch between the school and home culture could lay the base for this, fostering a lack of trust among some parents in the educational system. Providing correct and adjusted information to migrant parents is therefore important. Other barriers relate to the proximity of pre-school services to the home area, opening hours, financial costs, and providing quality infrastructure and staff.[117]

4.5   Peer relationships

Whereas relationships with teachers and parent-school partnerships in general might develop more difficult for migrant-background students than for native ones, the same holds true for their interactions with peers in school. Native children and young people are equally exposed to ethnic prejudices and discriminatory attitudes or behaviours that are present within the broader society, whereas migrant students might feel different or less esteemed simply because of being part of a minority group in school. Such prejudices and attitudes could accordingly extend to interethnic peer conflicts at school by means of **ethnic discrimination or victimisation**. Research has indicated, for instance, that about one quarter of Flemish secondary school students with a migrant background have experienced ethnic peer victimisation in school, something which yields these students to experience a lower sense of school belonging.[118] Peer victimisation refers to perceptions of being the target of aggressive behaviours by other students such as getting excluded or being called names in school, whereas ethnic peer victimisation occurs when the victim attributes those aggressive behaviours specifically to their own ethnicity/nationality or skin colour.

The interviews and focus groups with refugee/migrant parents and educators signal that migrant children do get involved in **interethnic peer conflicts** in school. The described cases point out situations in which other children are not willing to speak to them, are not willing to play with them, or are calling them dirty words.

> *The other children need to respect or accept us. They told him (i.e. the son) some things which are not good, for example, "you have to go to Syria, why are you here, and we don't like you".* (Parent, Syrian background, 3 years in the Netherlands)

Such situations negatively affect the students in terms of their wellbeing and sense of belonging at school. The refugee parent quoted above, for instance, testified that the son after being bullied in

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[115] Sylva, K., et al. (2004); Vlaamse Overheid (2016)
[116] Vlaamse Overheid (2016)
[117] Ibid.
[118] D'hondt, F., Van Houtte, M. & Stevens, P.A.J. (2015)

school really felt miserable at home and did not like to go to school anymore. But also the parents might suffer when knowing about the interethnic conflicts their children are involved in.

> *My children are mixed race, when they first went to school, they were picked on because of skin colour, they were called dirty words. It made me sick.*
> (Migrant parent, Community leader, the United Kingdom)

The interviewed educators who mention the topic of interethnic peer conflicts in school attribute its occurrence mainly to the fact that children, particularly in secondary education, just experience difficulties in dealing with cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. But some interviewees also hold the home environment of children responsible for the fact that interethnic conflicts do occur in schools, at least partly.

> *Yes, they discriminate easily. All the things that they do say against one another, or the things they actually don't say. That is unbelievable sometimes. And they don't make it up all by themselves the children. I am afraid that they get endowed with it from their homes also.*
> (Teacher, Special language school, the Netherlands)

> *Because these children, they hear that from their father and mother in the house, they don't accept refugees. "Why are they coming here, they want to steal, blablabla." So the children learn it at home and come to school and talk about it.*
> (Parent, Syrian background, 3 years in the Netherlands)

Research also shows that non-native pupils report a higher level of peer victimisation when the proportion of ethnic minority pupils in school increases. This association gets attributed to the occurrence of a higher amount of interethnic conflicts in ethnically mixed schools.[119] In line with this, the coordinator of a Flemish adult education centre explains that in their classes – which are joined by adults having distinct ethnic backgrounds – it often happens that a kind of intense but silent tension is present among the students. She attributes this to tensions at the international level that are playing between their countries of origin. Interethnic peer conflicts are furthermore specifically mentioned between students from reception education and regular education, certainly in Flanders and the Netherlands in which separate reception education and early ability tracking in secondary education are installed.

Yet, with respect to interethnic peer relationships, it is not only a bad story. Research also shows that a higher share of ethnic minority pupils equally relates to a higher level of interethnic friendships in school.[120] Although the interviews and focus groups demonstrate that interethnic peer conflicts are at play in the schools, the good news is that **positive interethnic peer relationships** are definitely present as well: "*They are nice [...] There are no problems with other students from other countries*" (Male refugee student, College education, Afghan background, 1 year living in the United Kingdom). This is also expressed in the following extracts from interviews with refugee students who reflect on their daily interactions in school.

> *Euh…everybody gets respected here in the same way and I don't feel like an outsider or a foreign language speaker or so … They all are friendly [...] My fellow students, they all are very friendly to me.*
> (Male refugee student, Adult education, Somalian background, 5 years in Flanders)

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[119] Agirdag, O., et al. (2011)
[120] Ibid.

> *We are about twelve. We all get along very good because all of us share the same interests. We all lunch together at noon, have a drink after class. And we keep in touch frequently through social media.*
> (Female refugee student, Higher education, Belgian, Kosovar background, 20 years in Flanders)

Refugee and migrant students particularly seem to get along with their peers in reception or adult education. For instance, during the focus group with 11-18 years old newcomer students in Flanders, the students expressed how well they did get along and how they sometimes met after school. Another interesting point is that in those cases that migrant students lag behind on their school trajectories compared to peers of the same age, their positive contacts with other peers in class can be hindered because of the age difference. The interviews further indicate that migrant students are really **eager to get in contact** with native peers so they can get to know them. Sometimes they are just a bit afraid to make contact themselves because of the language barrier. The migrant students themselves point out the potential of **shared activities** (after school clubs, breakfast clubs, going on trips together, playing together, eating together) in order to promote interethnic contacts (see also 4.2.2).

In sum, in order to improve the social climate in school and as such foster migrant students' social integration in school, attention needs to be paid to strengthening interethnic friendships and reduce interethnic conflicts. The mere presence of other ethnicities in school increases the chances of interethnic conflicts, but equally of positive interethnic relationships. Yet, the existence of contact opportunities is not a sufficient condition to realise inclusive education in a diversified school setting. The way schools deal with this diversity and stimulate positive interethnic interactions will be crucial. For this reason, school policies should act upon diversity and an intercultural curriculum (see section 4.7)

4.6 Community collaboration

Collaboration between schools and the broader community plays an important role in helping to integrate immigrant families in society and in school life: "*What helps for us is a good social network. And not just with other organisations, but also a network with people having a migration background themselves*" (Responsible for equal opportunities, Secondary education, Flanders). Schools can indeed connect with members of the migrant communities to help overcome challenges with respect to the school integration of immigrant families, and they can collaborate with community organisations and volunteers which help to support immigrant families' knowledge and acquaintance of how things work in our society and schools.[121]

The interviews with policymakers and educators suggest that schools are looking out for connections with **members of the migrant communities** in order to facilitate the integration of migrant children, youngsters, and adults within their respective educational settings. In this way, schools mainly aim to find cultural and linguistic support in educating and involving students and parents from the target group.

> *If we talk about Eritreans, then there is such a large gap between what we know about education and expect from those who had education before and everything the Eritreans bring with them in terms of expectations, knowledge, and practices of dealing with education. That is really a bigger difference than we ever had assumed before. And talking about their needs then, well, we actually are in a tremendous need of cultural support coming out of the target group.*
> (Director, Centre for adult language education, the Netherlands)

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[121] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018); Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)

Support from members of the migrant communities **helps schools to reach out** towards migrant students and parents. They not only speak the same language, but they are also better aware of norms, values, and habits that are present within the migrant culture. These people can accordingly help to bridge the distance that schools encounter in laying and having contact with migrant families. A Dutch teacher at a special language school, for example, gave the example of a Syrian family who's children always were absent from school on days that school trips or sport days were scheduled. She wasn't able to get a hold on that family until another Syrian father suggested her that Syrian fathers needed to talk to the father of that family, man to man, and discuss why he was afraid of sending his children to such activities during compulsory school time. It is often about keeping those families in a sense of dignity, and this could work more easily when a member of the migrant community is involved.

> *We are in need of more members from the migrant community who are well integrated, who have a clear view on what is needed to get integrated well, and who can support us to talk with families in those cases in which this is not so obvious.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

Schools may not only recognize the value of the migrant community is bridging cultural gaps but equally in finding **language support in class**. Having such support in class seems interesting to explain subject content to second language learners. According to a Dutch programme quality supervisor of a Special Language School, this class support could benefit the students to learn at their respective intellectual level because too often they only focus on learning a bunch of new words while already knowing a lot. Furthermore, during a focus group with social partners involved in the Flemish sector of integration and labour market participation, an interesting programme showed up that could stimulate both internship positions in the professional labour market for migrant students and language support in class at once. The programme demonstrated positive outcomes for migrant students who could get trained as a caregiver in a preschool class, whereas the teacher felt much language support in class when these students were able to help children that spoke another mother tongue.

Migrant community members can furthermore **support migrant families in finding their way** in the host society and its educational system. These people can help to raise awareness and knowledge about what is common and expected with respect to educational involvement. A Syrian refugee parent living in the Netherlands testified, for example, how he helped other Syrian people and refugees in general in finding their way to different administrative institutions and in explaining rights and obligations that characterise the host society.

In sum, members of migrant communities can really act as go-between persons or liaisons between educational institutions, the community, and migrant families, and be helpful in closing some linguistic and cultural barriers for migrant learners and parents to participate in school life and the community. According to a Dutch advisor of a regional office for student affairs, these persons can also contribute to tackle issues surrounding families which tend to become more traditional because of an intensified integration in their respective migrant culture. Finally, supporting, training, or institutionalising these liaisons in fulfilling their **bridging** role is important too:

> *We really want to empower them (i.e. go-between persons from the migrant communities), because you not only let that person translate things, but you also want him to pay attention to the subject area in which he is translating, and so you train that person in that subject area also. In such a way that person really understands what he is translating about, and accordingly he can help fellow countrymen on that part as well.*
> (Community officer, Refugee support, the Netherlands)

> *We have people in the Roubaix territory who speak Wolof and who can be mobilized very easily, who can come to a meeting in a school, for example, and translate in an instant, or accompany*

a family, to explain to them if there is a difficulty particular in relation to the child. It is the same for associations in which people speak Arabic, Turkish or other languages. So, we really have this chance there. From my point of view, we do not use them enough, as to speak. We could ask them for a slightly stronger contribution, even a little more institutionalized, to make sure that these links are much more fluid with the parents.
(Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

Community organisations can equally support schools in strengthening immigrant integration into education, for example, with respect to providing psychological or language support, or leisure activities.[122] The interviews with educators and policymakers demonstrate a strong need of educational institutions to find collaboration with public communal organisations, social service organisations, and voluntary organisations that operate in the environment of the school.

> *We work with all of the services coming to us. Some people come to the school to provide service and we always welcome them when it is to help our people. We have lots of different experts, and from different communities and this is helpful, from health, from social services. It is important to work with different people so you can have a wide range of services. Work closely with local organisations as well is important.*
> (Liaison migrant families, Secondary school, the United Kingdom)

Such collaboration is said to be beneficial with respect to **educational integration**, but also to **community integration** in general. "*Some of it is around language and ensuring people are in the right frame of mind. Ensuring that it is a holistic approach, it is not just about school but the surrounding environment*" (Policymaker, Local counsellor, the United Kingdom). Immigrant students themselves also value an approach which looks beyond the school premises. During a focus group with Flemish newcomer students (11 to 18 years old), the respondents testified about the usefulness of having an expert from a social service organisation coming over to their school every Monday. She guides young people to training and provides support in their wellbeing. For them, their contacts provide a moment to ask and get answers on questions they have regarding activities that take place outside of the school (leisure activities, cultural participation).

Participating in **leisure activities** is not only viewed as a way to improve the social integration of immigrant students. In addition, it can help to support second language learning and breach the sometimes negative connection that those children may develop with respect to the new, difficult language they need to learn (see also 4.2.2).

The benefits for schools in collaborating with external organisations are perceived as being large, surely with respect to providing health care support to migrant families or language translation support to the schools. But also **volunteers** from the host culture can provide substantial support to migrant families when they function as a kind of **buddy** to the family. An interesting story was given during a Dutch focus group with policy makers and educators, a story about a Dutch neighbour of a migrant family. Initially, the school experienced the contacts with the man a bit as intrusive, but as a neighbour he had arranged Dutch language classes for the family every week evening. The mother and father both learned Dutch in a rather short period because of him supporting their language learning. And when a public employment agency required the father to take up a rather dull, no-where-to-go-job, the neighbour managed a job for him in a local garage workshop. The buddy system which connects migrants to natives is definitely advocated across the interviewees. Yet, such connections do not always have to serve finding jobs, learning the language, or participating in education. It might also be a way to combat the distance that newcomers may encounter from members of the host society and bring members of distinct cultures closer to one another, something which often remains a barrier to transcend:

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[122] Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)

> *Actually, other Syrian families maybe have better contacts and that is because a language coach comes to their house on a regular basis. We are here for three years already, but maybe only twice a Dutch person has entered our house, and that person was just a government official.*
>
> (Parent, Syrian background, 3 years in the Netherlands)

Definitely in the low income areas of cities or communities, voluntary community charitable could play a fundamental role. According to an academic expert who was interviewed in the United Kingdom, connections between voluntary organisations and migrants are especially needed in poor areas which have suffered severely from budget restrictions and withdrawn services. What becomes clear, is that several respondents count on the **public governmental agencies in the local community** to take up more responsibility, coordination, and action in improving immigrant families' integration.

> *In case of their integration, […] I do think that the community can play an important role, for example, through just offer the kids of refugee status holders who live in the community a subscription to a sport club or another club to their choice. This will foster the contacts with Dutch children of the same age. So, this is not really something in the school, but something after school time. Maybe it can do well also to provide nurturing support to parents, for example in organising talking groups, like, talking about what is needed here to support your child in the new environment.*
>
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

> *If the child is hungry, it is not performing in class .... One can very well imagine that since school catering depends on local communities, a specific rate for migrant children from families in an irregular situation, with rates close to 0, is a possibility. For the community, this does not impact its budget. If we are on 15, 20, 30 children concerned for the city of Roubaix, for example, if we have a canteen rate of 20 cents or 50 cents, this family can pay that. And at least we provide for the child one meal a day. And the child will be fit (i.e. in class) since he is entitled to a meal.*
>
> (Advisor in the field of education and extracurricular activities, Self-employed, France)

Schools do experience **obstacles** in working together with community organisations, however. A **lack of coordination, communication, and collaboration** seems to be the most important obstacle. A Flemish focus group with policy makers involved in adult education, for example, discussed the fact that their work is dependent on project funding, whereas a sustainable funding and coordination could lay the base for a stronger network and a better exchange of knowledge and information. They aspire that different experts and coaches from different organisations would actually meet up more often in person to discuss cases. As such, a fragmented provision of services towards the target group might get avoided. Another Flemish secondary school teacher holds this point of view: "*a better communication between schools and external services could attribute to starting up individual trajectories faster and more efficiently*".

Besides, too often there is a lack of coordination between the services that are offered to the target group on behalf of different institutions. Dutch policymakers and educators in particular, complain about the fact that non-educational institutions or experts, such as public administration, social service agencies, or doctors, make appointments with migrant learners or parents during school time. The latter esteem these instances more highly than they do esteem teachers and schools, or they risk to lose an advantage when not showing up – for instance in getting their hands on donated second hand clothing – and as such they choose to remain absent from classes. Those making such appointments could easily ask whether the appointment would interfere with class time and search for another moment if needed. Dutch educators thus aspire to install a more **centralised approach** of making different kinds of appointments with migrants. An approach which does not interfere with school time, and one which could get coordinated by the public community level. This also relates to another barrier which has been discussed in some interviews and focus groups. Namely, that

professionals working in non-educational organisations sometimes expose an inadequate way of working with migrant learners and parents. According to many respondents, these people should get trained more intensively to improve their cultural-sensitivity and intercultural competencies.

Several educators are really ambitious though in strengthening their school network with community organisations, definitely those working in adult and reception education. But also **community officials** are looking to **schools as institutions which could support the community integration of migrant families**. A Flemish educational policy maker at the community level explained that schools are ideal locations to bring a mix of different people together. He wishes to bring leisure time activities into the schools because the latter already have contacts with a lot of migrant families, and because the location of the school could lay the base for more sustainable and enduring contacts with migrant learners and parents. The participants to a Dutch focus group, all educators and policy makers, pointed out that the public community should play a more prominent role in connecting people and in bringing their policies on leisure time activities or poverty reduction closer to the schools, and as such to the target group. The potential role of public community services is furthermore related to the fact that the community level could stimulate a more holistic approach to fostering integration into education by means of paying attention to integration in other domains:

> *Yes, key to the work we did was to have a whole family approach, so to look at whole family needs, background, see how they were exposed to early traumatic experiences, getting them to employment, creating a kind of support services where those parents were keen to drive the support they need for themselves. So we are trying to deliver it now. So we don't just look at solitary items, like just housing, just employment, we try to do it as a whole and dig what are the other needs. We look at why they ended up in our community by understanding why and how.*
> (Community engagement officer, Pre-school education, the United Kingdom)

Although there are still barriers that hamper collaboration between **schools and community organisations**, the interviews demonstrate that **both are in search of strengthening their communication and collaboration**. Several interviewees are looking to the level of the public community in order to coordinate networks between all kind of professionals and organisations involved in the integration of migrant families. Besides, training of non-educational professionals in working with migrant groups should get stimulated as well.

So, with respect to community collaboration, we may conclude that school-community partnerships – whether it is through connections with members of migrant communities, networks with community organisations, or individual voluntary support initiatives –support the integration of immigrant students and parents in both school and community life. It's thus a win-win partnership for all stakeholders involved.

4.7 School policy

In light of improving the educational opportunities of refugees and asylum seekers in particular, school policies should depart from recognizing the specificity and complexity of needs of these students and provide a comprehensive system of support to them.[123] A school policy which departs from a clear vision on inequality in education and tackling educational barriers for disadvantaged students is an important starting point. Smyth therefore argues that schools should (re)invent themselves as '**socially just schools**'. In socially just schools, disadvantaged students – such as ethnic minority students – find the necessary **supportive ties** to access valued institutional resources that are important for their

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[123] Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)

educational success. Commitment across the whole school for establishing social justice and truly realising opportunities for all students is key. Disadvantaged students (and parents alike) are in need of relationships that support them in learning the values, norms, practices and habits of the school system, in people who value what they bring with them to school and who do not give up on them, who empathize with their more difficult circumstances and who create a school environment which offers emotional stability and consistency; an environment which acknowledges the disadvantaged circumstances of these students as a central issue in schooling and the willingness to address it.[124]

When not installed properly and actively, the facets of school policy discussed below are all potential barriers to the educational integration of disadvantaged students such as migrants and refugees. When addressed, embraced, and activated by all stakeholders of the school, these facets provide opportunities to the goal of creating an inclusive learning environment. For instance, with respect to providing adequate care to first-generation immigrant students, a Dutch care coordinator outlines the importance of installing a clear internal care structure within the institution that captures who to reach, who is responsible for what, and that has short lines of communication among responsible staff members. In order to realise such adaptations, the interviewed policymakers and educational staff point out the key role of a **professionalisation** of the organisational school structure and of the whole teaching staff. It is not just about putting a policy on paper but about implementing it efficiently and effectively.

4.7.1   Diversity: Perspective, staffing, and training

Being confronted with an increasingly diversified student population in terms of ethnicity, language, or culture – and an increasing diversity of student needs alike – should not be viewed as a burden for schools but rather as a **an opportunity that enriches school life** for all of its members. When viewed as a burden an institutional and discriminatory barrier to the educational inclusion of migrant students is at place. According to some interviewees, the view on migration as a burden has, however, been anchored within Western societies the last years; as exemplified by the next respondent.

> *The attitude among Dutch people in light of their willingness to accept refugee people has changed. They don't take such a positive stand against it anymore. Refugees are regarded as a problem and not as a chance to enrich society. This is a big difference with the past. Previously they were viewed as exotic surprises about whom you were curious about.*
> (Director, Centre for adult language education, the Netherlands)

This **more negative societal perspective** may also permeates educational institutions, and intertwines with resistance among some educators to deal with the necessary changes to teach the target group. Certainly the group of refugee learners too often gets perceived as problematic rather than holding the potential to bring in new positive opportunities to the classroom.[125]

> *When something changes, a lot of people (i.e. within the educational system) dig in their heels, like "I cannot do that, I am not willing to do that". […] Different kinds of children have enrolled in regular education at a certain point. In the end, there are still people who experience difficulty with that. For a lot of them it remains difficult to marshal on that and to go ahead.*
> (Teacher, Adult education, the Netherlands)

Fortunately, most respondents indicate that **educational personnel in general is really motivated** to make a difference in the lives of their refugee and migrant students; a feeling which gets fuelled by seeing these students grow while getting educated, and knowing they will as such be able

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[124] Smyth, J. (2004)
[125] Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)

to contribute to society. Moreover, if there is any resistance in dealing with changes to accommodate to the group of migrant students, then this is rather related with feelings of not knowing how to.

> *I think it is too bluntly to state that people in education would not be willing to deal with those changes. Of course there are colleagues who find that difficult, but I really know a lot of them who are willing to deal with it with the best will of the world, but who think like, yeah, how do I do that.*
> (Student guide and programme quality supervisor, Special language school, the Netherlands)

Besides, many respondents argue that school populations should be **a mirror of society**. This view aligns with an enriching perspective on diversity as it implies one sees the possible contributions of migrant families to society when being given a real opportunity and fair chance in education. Such a school policy on diversity is not only motivated by the willingness to act fairly, but also by self-interest. It can, for example, lead to new targets or standards regarding the enrolment and graduation of ethnic minority students,[126] possibly improving a school's societal visibility and image or even its financial situation because of higher government subsidiaries due to better learning results of disadvantaged students. "*In the end, it has to do with installing an optimistic and welcoming school culture*" (Responsible for the care of children and content of the curriculum, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands). As a starting point, an enriching perspective on diversity can be incorporated within **a school's vision or mission statement**. For instance, a Dutch regular primary school teaching newcomers has included 'the willingness to create *cheerful involvement* for the children' within their school vision out of the perspective that no kids are empty barrels that need to get filled but that they know themselves very well what they want to learn.

School leaders play a vital role in setting and changing school cultures that are characterized by diversity awareness and understanding how to support diverse learners. They fulfil an important role in **staffing** the workforce, which are valuable ways for schools in realising inclusive education.[127] Recruiting a larger number of **teachers with a diverse ethnic-cultural background** might have a positive influence on immigrant students as these teachers can provide linguistic and cultural-competency skills which boost student outcomes. The interviews do confirm this vision. A UK liaison to migrant families with a migrant background herself, for example, indicates that teachers with a migrant background can just provide more support to newcomer students because they often understand the language barriers these people encounter. To her, presenting successful stories of educational integration to migrant families increases the belief among newcomers that they can indeed be successful. Furthermore, a Flemish secondary school teacher with a Moroccan background stresses that the combination of her migration background and her professional role in the school positively affects the migrant students' school engagement. She exposes a better understanding of migrant students' situation than other staff members given that she has encountered similar challenges alike when she was younger. As a result, she states that most of the migrant students in school – also those not having a Moroccan background – perceive her as a kind of **reference person** within the teaching staff. A refugee student furthermore explained how teachers with a migratory background could serve as a role model for immigrant students regarding their future possibilities in the host society:

> *Representation within education is so important for these groups because they often think that they will not be able to succeed. I have been thinking myself that way for a long time. Before I joined X (i.e. a youth organisation), I said to myself that I didn't belong there because the others were all, in my opinion, rich or middle class youngsters who were enrolled in high-level studies. There were only little females involved too, to say nothing about females with a migrant*

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[126] Heckmann, F. (2008)
[127] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)

background. But once I had taken the step to join, two other females with a migration background joined. It gave me a secure feeling cause if someone with the same background could do it, I could do it myself too. Within education that is just the same. Representation can give you that extra push.
(Female refugee student, Higher education, Belgian, Kosovar background, 20 years in Flanders)

However, the Flemish teacher with a Moroccan-background explained that it remains a quest for her to strive for **a balance between her professional role as a teacher and her more informal role** towards the migrant students. For instance, she points out that she often gets to hear one specific sentence – '*but you understand that/us*' – on behalf of migrant students when they complain about discriminatory things that happened inside or outside the school premises. While trying to be a listening ear to their stories, she indicates that she also tries to put those complaints into perspective out of her professional teaching role – it is not always an act of racism or discrimination on behalf of the other, for example, when a migrant student gets punished by a teacher – and make them equally reflect about why they should not be able to say that one specific sentence to other teachers in school. Next to her role towards students, she further indicates to play a mediatory and often an eye-opening role for the other teachers in school who generally lack knowledge about other cultural habits, values, and norms.

As discussed in the section on teacher competencies towards diversity (see 4.3.2.), teachers require more training on cultural awareness and dealing with diversity in class and school. **Training** the workforce in dealing with diversity should therefore get included within the school policy. It fosters the presence of a school staff which values the presence of a diverse student population and which is willing and able to take the necessary steps to improve cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of immigrant student. In decreasing underachievement of immigrant students, and first-generation immigrants in particular, it is key however to provide **the whole teaching staff** with the necessary didactical resources and capabilities to support diverse learners, and not just those staff members who directly engage in (linguistically) teaching newcomers. This is a challenge which is expressed many times by the group of educators across the interviews.

> *What I would like to see, is that the teachers in mainstream education would get trained to a higher degree, in a way of, yes, really in didactical skills, in order to better accommodate to and take care of those children* (*i.e. children in need of language support*).
> (Teacher, Reception education for children in primary school age, the Netherlands)

Sharing knowledge and exchanging good practices will contribute to support teachers and induce a stronger quality of education to migrant students. For instance, some of the interviewed teachers explain the usefulness of meeting with one another at school and discuss individual student trajectories. I often makes them get to know the individual student better and view his/her trajectory form another perspective. Next to the practice of teacher collaboration in school, collaboration between schools – for instance, between reception and mainstream education – is also advised by the interviewed policy makers and educators in order to avoid that people keep on working on their own islands.

> *Exchanging experiences is what counts. You have questions like how would other schools deal with that. You are equally not provided by all teaching materials, so you are constantly thinking about and composing materials yourself in addition to the materials and methods that are already available. And maybe then people are reinventing the wheel too many times. So, such collaboration (i.e. between schools) is very pleasant, just to exchange thoughts about things too. I do also think that it improves the quality of education.*
> (Team leader, Special language school for children aged 12-18 years old, the Netherlands)

Such collaborative initiatives aim at fostering more positive attitudes and feelings of competence in working with a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diversified student population because they foster an augmented knowledge and understanding of diversity in society and in education. Accomplishing this will ultimately support less stereotypical, cultural-deficit thinking among teachers with respect to the educational trajectories of students with an immigrant background.[128]

4.7.2   Multilingual policy

Schools should equally install a language policy as this plays a central role in the process of integrating immigrant students in school. The school's primary language of instruction often differs from immigrant students' mother tongue because another language is spoken at home or simply because these students have recently arrived in a new country and have another first language. It is obvious that attention should be paid to a setting which effectively fosters second language learning and mastery for those whose first language is not the main language of the country and the school.[129] Such settings should be available from preschool level up to primary and secondary education. This is also what most interviewees indicate, namely, the importance of a language policy which aims at **learning the language of instruction** in the receiving country.

What is crucial in this – and what might get overlooked by many teachers according to the interviewees –, is that a good **mastery of the first language** helps learning the second language and boosts educational development in general.[130]

> *In the past, people always told "you can't speak Arabic anymore at school, you can only speak Dutch at school". But now we know that it is just very important to use that Arabic language. And that it (i.e. subject content) of course grounds much easier for those kids when they now it in Arabic, then you just only have to link it to the Dutch words.*
> (Student guide and programme quality supervisor, Special language school, the Netherlands)

It is essential that schools implement a multilingual policy that values **students' mother tongue** in light of strengthening non-native speakers' cognitive and non-cognitive educational outcomes.

> *I do know a primary school teacher who allows her pupils to say good morning in their own mother tongue. You do hear all languages that are present in that class. Dutch-speaking pupils also say good morning in another language once in a while. I think it fosters the pupils' wellbeing, that they respect each other's language and origin.*
> (Pre-service teacher, Teacher education programme, Flanders)

An educational policy maker in Flanders also discusses the importance of reading out in the home language as a way to improve second language learning, and also the case of asking parents to do this as a way to strengthen parental involvement in school. The interviews clearly demonstrate that a ban on the use of other mother tongues within the school premises only works contra productive. This is a view which is increasingly embraced by researchers and by educators, but which might be a delicate topic in some schools because not all languages that are used in school seem to get valued equally:

> *[….] or when they sometimes speak some words in Moroccan, it just slips out of their mouths, and then they do get punished for that. I think that is so outdated, and just so regrettable. Okay, the instruction language is Dutch, but if that (i.e. Moroccan words) just slips out once in a while, then you don't have to punish that, it is just part of their identity. In class I just say then*

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Heckmann, F. (2008)
[130] Cummins, J. (2001)

"not in Moroccan" [...] but no one cares if pupils use an English word sometimes, that is such a pity, that oversensitivity towards language.
(Teacher, Secondary education, Flanders)

Regarding a multilingual language policy, we can state that the evidence indicates the importance of valuing the home language in school. This is important because "*educators are in need of evidence-based measures – and not political-ideological ones – in how to deal with other home languages in school*" (Teacher and student coach, Secondary education, Flanders). It should be kept in mind, however, that although learning to master the language of instruction is crucial for realising inclusive education for students speaking another mother tongue, it is imperative for schools and teachers to understand that one-sided attention to newcomers' language needs is not effective when this stands in the way of attention to their academic, emotional, and social needs.[131]

4.7.3 Desegregated education

Regarding mainstream education, most researchers and policymakers advocate to prevent the installation of segregated schools – often induced by residential segregation, school admission rules or free school choice – in light of strengthening disadvantaged students' school trajectories. This is underscored by the evidence that, in general across Europe, less quality in education is offered in segregated schools compared to national/local average performances, hampering educational performance of immigrant students.[132] Yet, as already mentioned, it is a challenge to teach **a diverse student population in class**, and teachers clearly need to receive **more support** in doing that.

What I mainly see, is that it is no easy job for teachers. The classes are very diverse. The classes are sometimes too large as well. For example, in school X, preschool education for 5-years-old children, new children have arrived, without any previous school experience. Three of them in one class, a class of 23 toddlers. Three of them, in addition a child diagnosed with ADHD and one with other special education needs.
(Social worker, Educational support provider, Flanders)

According to many interviewed educators, the combination of a diversified classroom and a too **large class size** hampers the provision of adequate support for and attention to all kind of learners in a mixed and diverse classroom. And not just quality education to disadvantaged students might get impeded then, as a UK school governor mentions: "*We need to ensure we don't leave behind those that need further support and those that are high achievers.*"

The above barriers are important catalysators for the fact that distinct **age-related learning groups or educational tracks** are getting organised across different school types, rather than mixing students or grouping them based on their capabilities. This is, however, an approach which is quite extensively discussed among a lot of people involved in education as they realise that it is often just them not having the tradition nor the resources to deal with a desegregated educational system.

I do think it is about that (i.e. having a tradition of mixed classrooms), that in Scandinavia, or in Sweden, that they are just better acquainted with providing more room to all of those differences and that indeed children from special education just get absorbed into the story, and that that goes well. Because over there, we, so the teachers over there, are not used to anything else then doing it like that. And in such a context, refugees and newcomers fit in as well more easily, of course. Because we (i.e. the teachers over there) are just used to working

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[131] Taylor, S. & Sidhu, R. (2012)
[132] European Union (2013); European Union (2019)

> *that way. And apparently, it is possible then too. Also because it gets surrounded with more money and facilities, of course.*
> (Teacher, Adult education, the Netherlands)

Segregated education mainly occurs when **early ability tracking** based on age occurs, meaning that students already at a young age get grouped based on their abilities. This might hamper immigrant students' opportunities in school when, for example, language barriers stand in the way of clearly assessing their interests and talents.[133] Because of early ability tracking, like installed in Flanders and the Netherlands, immigrant students have a higher chance than native students to enrol in vocational and non-academic tracks, and in schools organising these tracks. Secondary schools that really want to make a difference in the educational trajectories of immigrant students and work on inclusive education, should accordingly act on a system of late/no ability tracking in order to counteract between-track segregation of students based on characteristics like ethnicity, language, culture or socioeconomic status. Allowing **flexible learning trajectories** for immigrant students will help to support their needs and enhance their opportunities to perform in school in relation to their own interests and talents. Creating ability groups regardless of children's age could foster peer learning and be beneficial to all children involved. Schools should therefore not opt to place students on fixed educational tracks but allow flexibility in their trajectories, such as switching between streams or offering a mix of classes tailored to their needs.[134] It is about downsizing rigidity in the trajectories of immigrant students and as such allowing maximum responsiveness to their diverse but individual needs.

4.7.4 Intercultural curriculum

The cultures of origin of immigrant students are often relatively absent, or presented in a distorted way, within schools' curriculum. When immigrant students cannot recognize themselves in aspects of school life, textbooks, or teaching materials, their self-esteem and self-image might get harmed, and accordingly their school success hampered.[135] If schools really want to boost immigrant students' integration in school, it is recommended to include multicultural or **intercultural education** within the curriculum and as such incorporate symbols and elements of the migrant cultures of origin into the school curriculum, school life, teaching materials, and textbooks.[136] It is necessary that a school policy gets rid of those rules or habits within its organisation which hamper the interests of ethnic minority groups while it equally makes them to participate more and gives them responsibility.[137] As expressed during the interviews, it tackles, for example, issues surrounding the provision of halal food, swimming classes, or the wearing of religious symbols in school. Such a curriculum adaptation equally adds to the awareness and knowledge of other cultures among native students. When for instance teachers implement aspects of multicultural teaching, native students demonstrate less ethnically prejudices.[138] Intercultural education therefore is an integral aspect of a school policy which not only aims to support immigrant students' school integration but one which stimulates **cultural sensitivity** among school members in general.

The interviews suggest that in some cases **extra attention to an intercultural curriculum is advisable**. "*What could help, for example, is to reconceive history classes as these currently only depart from a Western perspective*" (Student coach, Secondary education, Flanders). Such adaptations to teaching materials and textbooks could indeed benefit intercultural education. In relation to the organisation

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[133] European Union (2013)
[134] Ahad, A. & Benton, M. (2018)
[135] Heckmann, (2008)
[136] European Union (2013)
[137] Heckmann, F. (2008)
[138] Vervaet, R., Van Houtte, M. & Stevens, P.A.J. (2018)

of school life, another Flemish secondary school teacher discussed the fact that the yearly sports day in her school had been organised in the midst of the Ramadan month. In such cases, schools could organise themselves better in finding connection with other cultural and religious backgrounds. Yet, this teacher also signals that immigrant students themselves sometimes expect changes in school that are not so realistic. Assyrian students, for example, tell her that religious classes should literally focus on the Bible whereas the curriculum goals for those classes are conceived more broadly.

The examples show that an intercultural curriculum is not just about complying to all wishes or requests on behalf of immigrant students. It is often about demonstrating that you are willing to consider and take into account other cultural or religious identities and search for adaptations that are are in balance with the school reality.

Intercultural education is **on the rise**, though. Several interviews provide good examples of how schools already take steps in adapting their school policy to an intercultural curriculum. During classes, explicit attention to other cultures has often been installed. In Dutch reception and language education for newcomers, for instance, it is common that the students are triggered to talk about their countries of origin and home cultures during classes, or that teachers ask explicit questions about foreign cultures in order to raise cultural sensitivity among students. Furthermore, during a focus group with Flemish newcomer students (11 to 18 years old), the Muslim respondents expressed their appreciation for the fact that their school adapted its practices during the month of fasting, the Ramadan: they were allowed somewhat more rest time, had to participate less actively during sport activities, and they did not have to show up at school on the day when Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan (Eit al-Fitr festival). They also expressed their respect for the attitude of their teachers who decided not to drink or eat in class or at the school playground in the period they were fasting themselves. Intercultural education can accordingly be concealed within small things that could make a big difference to how immigrant students feel to be a real part of school life.

Students also understand that not everything can change at once. But they appreciate the willingness of schools and teachers to search for suitable adaptations in the curriculum in the future, as regarding the following intention to change on behalf of teachers:

> *The teacher says we will adapt our lunch timing next year to allow students to pray to mosque on Fridays and still have the lunch without being late for the next lesson.* (Male refugee student, College education, Afghan background, 1 year living in the United Kingdom)

So, both the literature and the conducted interviews demonstrate that schools which incorporate intercultural education within their curriculum – for instance by means of including elements of migrant cultures in teaching materials, or in demonstrating religious tolerance and flexibility regarding dress code and holiday time – foster a more **positive learning environment** for immigrant students.[139] They feel that their cultural and religious identity is better accepted in school, and as such become more involved in school life.

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[139] European Union (2013)

5 Conclusion: fostering the integration of migrants and refugees in education

The **integration** of refugee and migrant students and parents into the regional educational systems of Europe's 2 Seas area – covering England, Flanders, France, the Netherlands – is a prerequisite to foster their social integration into their respective national societies and local communities. Global processes have lead to a diversification of immigration flows into Europe the last years. In addition, because of historical immigration, Europe has a substantial share of citizens who never migrated themselves but who have a migration background in their family. Accordingly, in European member states, the share of the population with a migration background is on the rise. European societies, and their accompanying educational systems, therefore have to adapt to this reality of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and languages among its student population.

Both academic research studies and policy reports indicate that the road to inclusive educational systems for immigrants in Europe – systems that embrace and develop immigrants' strengths and adapt to their needs – reflects **several challenges**. In general, migrant students score lower on both cognitive and non-cognitve indicators of educational integration as compared to native-background students. A persistent **structural ethnic inequality in the educational systems** thus occurs across Europe, also in Europe's 2 Seas area. Besides, whereas it is clear that migrants in general are confronted with barriers to their educational integration, refugees and asylum seekers face additional challenges to integrate in the educational system of their host societies.

The main goal of this report was to provide **a general overview of challenges and related opportunities** to refugee and migrant integration into education across Europe's 2 Seas area (see Table 8). The report mainly focusses on challenges and opportunities which play at **the meso-level of the school organisation, and at the micro-level of individuals and interpersonal relationships in school**. The findings and conclusions of the report were derived from a literature study and from 34 interviews and 8 focus groups with refugee/migrant students and parents, educators, policymakers, social workers, and pre-service teachers across Europe's 2 Seas area. Across the report, the derived challenges/opportunities for immigrant integration into education have been structured in how they relate to **different stakeholders** who may influence the educational experiences of immigrant students and the process of school improvement (i.e. teachers/educators, peer students, parents, members and organisations of the local communities, school leaders). In addition, the report discusses specific **challenges and opportunities for the educational integration of refugees and asylum seekers**.

With respect to the findings, it is important to keep in mind that refugees and migrants cannot be perceived as a homogeneous group. The **diversity** among them – in terms of their educational background, occupational status, ethnic-cultural background, language, mental health state – is immense. This means that there is not just one single, uniform approach or practice to increase the involvement and integration of migrants into education. Approaching migrant students and parents as individuals who all have their own experiences and background is a necessity if schools aspire to foster their bonding with them. Moreover, respecting their personal dignity and not taking the perspective of 'we, as educators, know it better' is a good approach.

Regardless of this diversity among migrant students and parents, research shows that most of them are confronted with **similar challenges** that hinder their integration into the educational system. To state the obvious, having another language and cultural background complicates their educational integration. Migrants, especially of the first-generation, are often unfamiliar with the habits and practices of the educational system they enrol in, and they have no clear idea of what is expected from

them. What is more is that next to the language and cultural barrier, migrants often face challenges that relate to a socioeconomic disadvantaged position within their host communities. Schools that wish to foster immigrant integration into education should therefore bear in mind that it is key to overcome **the difference that often occurs between school life and immigrants' linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic background**.

Schools could accordingly try to reduce this distance from school life. The target group should be perceived as an ally to accomplish this because most of them are really motivated and aspire to do well in education; as for instance became clear in their willingness and the efforts they made to learn the language of instruction. **Giving migrant students and parents a real voice in the process of education and listening to their needs** is an important step for schools to take in strengthening their ties with the target group. Providing **adjusted, targeted, and useful information** in order to increase immigrants' knowledge of how things work in education is needed as well. As such, they are supported in developing suitable and realistic expectations. Furthermore, fostering **the quality of interpersonal relationships** between school members with a migrant background and other school actors (peer students, teachers, school staff members, school leaders, other parents) on the other hand, is imperative in order to make the former feel to be a real part of school life. Increasing trust and decreasing (perceptions of) discrimination within these interethnic relationships is a way to boost the relational quality in school.

School policy is a useful instrument in order to install an inclusive school environment for immigrant students and parents. The research suggests that school policy should carry out an **enriching perspective on diversity** for school life, for instance in explicitating this in the school mission or vision. Recruiting a diverse **teaching staff** in terms of ethnic-cultural backgrounds is another way to put this enriching view on diversity into practice. Teachers who have a migrant background themselves indicated to be better aware of some challenges that migrants face. The research suggested that these teachers could act as a kind of reference person towards the target group, while at the same time retaining their professional role in school in setting educational expectations clear or putting perceptions from migrant students about differential treatments into a more realistic perspective. Providing **training** resources for the whole teaching staff to increase their competencies in working in a cultural-sensitive way is another facet that should get included in the school policy. The research demonstrated that teachers, certainly those working in regular education, are in need of training and support to teach the target group; particularly with regard to developing adequate expectations and reducing stereotypical thinking about different cultures. Important to bear in mind is that this need for additional teacher training and support was not just denounced by students, social workers, or educational policymakers, but also by the teachers themselves.

Next to that, schools need to embrace a **multilingual policy** that values migrants' first language and view it as a vehicle to promote second language learning. Related to this, is the necessity to implement an **intercultural curriculum** in school. Incorporating elements of migrant cultures into school life and teaching materials, for example, not only fosters migrants' perceptions that their identity is appreciated at school, it equally increases cultural-sensitive awareness among native students and teachers. Finally, school policies should work on reducing segregated education as much as possible and strive to install mixed and diverse classrooms while providing teachers with support to run such classes. Allowing flexible learning trajectories for immigrant students is one way to promote **desegregated education** and stimulate educational trajectories in line with their interests and abilities.

Establishing real **school-parent partnerships** is another path to improve the school integration of both immigrant students and parents. The research revealed that an initial condition for this is already present among both parties, namely the fact that both schools and parents share the common goal of wanting the best quality education for the children and to raise them as good adults. In general, immigrant parents **value their children's education** and they provide them with the kind of support they are able to offer themselves. Yet, with respect to optimal parental involvement in school, both the immigrant parents and the school experience several **needs**. The former are particularly

confronted with challenges that relate to their own cultural and linguistic background, whereas schools expressed the need for more background information of parents and more time to invest in their (follow-up) relationships with parents. The interviews demonstrated, however, that schools already have undertaken steps in order to foster their bonding with immigrant parents. Such **promising practices** focused on bringing immigrant parents together, often in smaller groups of people sharing the same language, on educating them (*e.g.* offering language training), on using cooperative working methods during parent meetings, asking them for help at the school, inviting them into the classroom, or making use of translated information and interpreters so to improve the effectiveness of the school communication. Despite these efforts, schools continue to experience that they are unable to reach parents the way they would like because of the described obstacles. This is problematic, especially because establishing positive school-parent partnerships is key to improve the registration and attendance of immigrant children in pre-school services.

Schools are advised to stimulate informal **contact opportunities** between migrant and native parents. Such contact opportunities were also requested by the interviewed immigrant students and parents, definitely by those who were in reception and adult education. With respect to this, more opportunities to participate in **after-school and local leisure-time activities** was advocated by members of the target group, educators, and social workers at the community level. Such activities can be organised outside the school but also inside the school. These activities not only got perceived as stimulating positive interethnic relationships, but also as ways to support second language learning among immigrants.

In order to achieve the above, schools need to be aware that they are not operating in a vacuum and that they are embedded by several resources that are present in the surrounding community. **School-community collaboration** is accordingly a fruitful pathway to foster immigrant integration into education. First of all, **members of the migrant communities** can be recruited (and trained) as persons who build bridges between schools and migrant families. They can support schools in reaching out to migrant families, for instancy by offering language and cultural support in the communication with migrant families, and they can also support these families in finding their way in the host community and its educational system. Next to migrant members of the local community, also **native community members** can fulfil a supportive role in volunteering work or in acting as 'buddies' for immigrants, as such helping the latter to find their way and acquire the needed information with respect to educational and community integration.

What seems very promising for schools with respect to community collaboration, is **collaboration at the institutional community level**. This refers to schools working together with various local organisations in the community such as public administration agencies, social service providers, health organisations, … When all of these institutions join forces to foster immigrant integration into education, the chances of being successful will only increase according to several respondents. Training staff members of these non-educational institutions in working with an ethnic-cultural clientele was, however, signalled as an important need by many interviewed educators and policymakers. Particularly with respect to scheduling appointments for immigrant parents and children in non-educational institutions, such as visit to the general practioner or an appointment with a public administration officer, progress and improvement should be achieved so that these do not interfere with school time and cause school absenteism. In realising and boosting this institutional school-community collaboration, the research pointed out the potential role of **the local government** in realising a centralised approach to immigrant integration and supportive of the coordination, communication, and collaboration between the school and the other community organisations.

All of the above described challenges and opportunities relate to the integration into education of immigrants in general, irrespective of their legal or generational status. In addition, the report presents challenges and opportunities that affect the integration into education of **newcomers** such as refugees and asylum seekers. One of the challenges that often got mentioned by the respondents relates to **mobility issues** which newcomers experienced to access the schools. Not knowing to cycle, nor having

the financial means to buy a bicycle, nor having easy access to affordable public transport services are barriers for newcomers to access educational institutions. In overcoming such challenges, school-community collaboration could prove its worth in developing opportunities which improve accessible means of transport for newcomers such the provision of free bus tickets or the organisation of cycling courses.

Several of the interviewed newcomer students/parents and also some of the interviewed professionals who were involved in separate **reception education** – which is not installed in the United Kingdom – indicated their rather discontent with separate reception classes as the best way to learn the new language. Separate reception classes are viewed as not offering sufficient contact opportunities with native children (from the same age), which is also said to stimulate language learning, nor providing courses that suit the intellectual level of the learner. Within reception education, offering tailor-made education that meets individual learning needs deserves more attention and support. Furthermore, many professionals who were interviewed argued the need for reception education to **foster the ties with regular education**. This is mentioned as a way to foster a better informed choice among newcomers about their future education, and as a one to increase the awareness among teachers in regular education with respect to the need of newcomers for continued language support when enrolling in mainstream education.

Newcomers also experience challenges in **adult education**. A lack of customised support, adequate information, transparency, dificulties to validate diplomas, and language requirements in particular hinder their entry into adult education. And when enrolled in adult education, the focus lays on entering the labour market as soon as possible into more vocational-oriented professions, even when newcomers have a higher education background. Language requirements and support are again perceived as barriers to succeed in adult education and to enrol in the labour market. There is a clear need for sustained language support when enrolled in a profession or when doing internships. Besides, participation in adult education gets challenged by mobility issues and other responsibilities of newcomers. In order to guide newcomers to adult education and to transition them successfully to the labour market, a more individualised approach and a better coordination between the involved social service actors is required.

Finally, for newcomers it is important **to feel welcome and safe** in their new school environment. For refugees and asylum seekers in particular, attention to their psychosocial or emotional needs is essential in light of their wellbeing and school attainment. Schools should accordingly make **psychosocial support** available by collaborating with or appointing (a) qualified professional(s). Attention should particularly be paid to unaccompanied minors who have traumatic experiences as this group of newcomers is in need of a structured daily life, and trustful and caring relationships in their new environment.

In conclusion, it became obvious throughout the literature study and conducted interviews/focus groups that a complexity of barriers challenges the integration into education of immigrants, and of refugees in particular. In addition, school's access to sufficient (financial) resources was mentioned as another important concern to adequately cope with increased ethnic cultural diversity. The research indicated that challenges can be turned into opportunities when educators are **willing to establish an inclusive educational environment that recognizes intercultural diversity and as such enriches school life for all students**. And this willingness has clearly been mentioned by all of those involved in the education of migrant students and parents. So, where there's a will, there's a way. Now it is up to various educational stakeholders to connect their willingness to improve the integration into education of migrant students and parents across Europe's 2 Seas area and to collaborate with the target group in order to achieve this goal.

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