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Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents main findings of the research conducted among migrant and local children in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia from October 2019 to March 2021. The main aim of the research was to explore the nature, dynamics, and strategies of the integration process of migrant children who attend primary and secondary schools in Slovenia. We understand migrant children's integration as a complex and multi-layered process through which migrant children who are new to a country become a part of the society (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninix 2016). Following this, our aim was to collect evidence on how migrant and local children perceive and experience the processes of integration. Furthermore, we tried to analyse the experiences of this heterogeneous group through the lens of a child-centred perspective. Therefore, our aim was to capture children's subjective understandings and perspectives about their own lives and experiences of migration, life transitions, integration, and general well-being (Mayeza 2017). Children were considered experts of their own lives, skilled communicators, and meaning-makers (Clark and Moss 2005; Fattore, Mason and Watson 2007; Gornik 2020), and the most relevant source of information (Mayeza 2017).

Personal experiences of the migration process and the dynamics of social adaptation and inculturation after migration depend on various factors, age being one of them (Heckmann 2008; White 2010; Sime and Fox 2015; Huijsmans 2015). While the decision to migrate (at least in the case of voluntary migration) is primarily made by adults, this is usually not the case for children who are forced to follow the decisions of their parents. Moreover, the migration experiences of children differ from those of adults. The issues and challenges related to youth migration are very diverse and range from linguistic and cultural adaptation/acculturation (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2008), identity and belonging (Collier 2015), nationalism, xenophobia, and discrimination (Jensen et al. 2012; Åhlund and Jonsson 2016), well-being and mental health (Ensor and Goździak 2010; Soriano and Cala 2018; Anagnostopoulos et al. 2016) and similar.

There were 2 age groups of children involved in the study: 10-14 years old children (primary school) and 15-19 years old (secondary school). In this report, we use the terms 'child' and 'children' when referring to the participants of the study, although we are aware that this may seem inappropriate and inaccurate, particularly in relation to the older group (15-19 y/o), and that a different expression would be more appropriate when referring to adolescents. This terminological decision stems from the fact that in our fieldwork the integration processes were studied from a child-centred (CC) perspective. The latter takes its point of departure from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, the decision to use 'child' and 'children' is primarily analytical rather than substantive.

In interpreting data, we divided our sample into three categories according to their 'status' (newly arrived migrants, long-term migrants, and local children). According to this, we were interested in the specific experience, challenges and strategies related to the integration of newly arrived children. We were curious about life satisfaction, well-being and future ambitions of long-term migrants and the role of local children in the integration of migrant children.

What follows is: *firstly*, presentation of methodology, *secondly*, the results from participatory observation phase, which lasted at least 15 observation days per school and was conducted prior to the collection of the autobiographical stories, *thirdly*, presentation of the results from the focus groups and the collected autobiographical life stories with the newly arrived migrant children (NA), who are in Slovenia less than three years, *fourthly*, presentation of the

results from focus groups and collected autobiographical life stories with the long-term migrant children (LT) and *finally*, presentations of the results from the focus groups and the collected autobiographical life stories with the local children. We conclude with a short summary and discussion.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research was carried out in 7 schools: 3 primary schools and 4 secondary schools across Slovenia from October 2019 to March 2021. All schools were public educational institutions, located in the urban environment and attended by a significant number of migrant pupils and children who vary in their linguistic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Primary school children were in our first age group (10-14 years old), while secondary school children were assigned to the second age group (15 – 19 years old). In relation to secondary schools, two different types of schools were part of our sample: grammar schools which lead to academic education and vocational schools that offer a profession. More details about the school selection process can be found in the report on WP 4 - *Educational Community and School System in Slovenia* (Sedmak, Gornik, Medarić, Dežan, 2020). Additional information about the methods and methodology used can be found in the attached report on WP5-7 - *National report on quantitative research, qualitative research and reflexive methodology: Methodological section* (Sedmak, Gornik, Medarić, Dežan, 2021).

Data were collected by applying several methodological approaches. First, we conducted at least 15 days of participant observation at 5 schools. At two remaining schools, we were able to arrange 5 to 10 days of observation. This phase consisted of passive, moderate, and active participation. Gatekeepers organised classes that were the subject of observation according to the MiCREATE criteria (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc. diversity). Apart from the organisational role, these gatekeepers did not take an active role in this phase of the research. Considering that Slovenian schools participating in the MiCREATE project collect parental consent forms for the research activities conducted in the school at the beginning of the school year, we were able to start the observation phase immediately.

This stage was followed by the collection of 99 autobiographical interviews and organisation of 11 focus groups. Participants were selected on the recommendation of teachers and gatekeepers (usually a school counsellor or someone who is responsible for migrant learners) or they volunteered to participate. All respondents were informed about the project's purpose and signed informed consent forms before research activities began.

Most interviews were conducted face-to-face. They lasted between 15 and 65 minutes. Only a few interviews involved more participants (e.g., a pair) and always at the request of the children demand, while the rest were organised as a conversation between a researcher and an individual child. In two schools, the interviews took place in an online environment (e.g., MS Teams), as restrictions regarding Covid-19 were in place in Slovenia at that time. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Regarding focus groups, our research team conducted two focus groups in 5 schools and one focus group at 2 schools. In total, we interacted with children in 11 focus groups that consisted of 3 to 6 participants. Sometimes, the children who participated in the focus groups were already participants in the interviews. All focus groups were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Interviews and focus groups started in October 2020 and ended in April 2021. Despite the outbreak of COVID-19 that interrupted and prolonged our research, we successfully reached our goals and fulfilled sample requirements. To some extent, this was a consequence of the partnership previously established with selected schools. All but one school participated in the project's fieldwork within the WP4 in which our research activities focused on educational professionals.

3. RESULTS

What follows is the presentation of main findings from the fieldwork at 7 Slovenian primary and secondary schools.

3.1 Participant observation

This phase lasted from November 2019 to October 2020. Our observations were not limited to classrooms nor to class time exclusively. We extended our research activities to school yards, hallways, school cafés, nearby grocery stores etc., conversed with learners during breaks or on the way to P.E. classes, silently filling field notes in the back of the classroom, or observed interactions from a distance. These field notes included content information (peer interaction, teacher-child interaction, general class dynamic, teaching techniques, child centred approach, etc.) and our personal observations and reflections (thoughts, concerns, doubts, and similar).

3.1.1 Peers

Peer sociability:

In the participant observation phase, our attention was on general observation of peer interactions, social networks, and relationships or in relation to specific determinants such as gender or ethnicity.

In most classes observed, we could identify the tendency towards differentiation between genders; girls hung out and sat together, while boys formed their own group. This was especially true in the primary schools. Sometimes, the number of representatives of a particular gender determined how the groups were formed. For example, if the class consisted of 5 boys and 20 girls, boys were more likely to hang out together. Sometimes gender and ethnic determinants overlapped, as in primary school S1 and secondary school S2 where newly arrived and/or migrant girls socialised almost exclusively among themselves. In addition, although children of younger and older age groups worked and socialised together in the classroom, the situation during breaks, in the cafeteria or in the school playground often revealed that groups tended to form according to gender.

Peer interaction in class was generally friendly, cooperative, and tolerant, however individuals who are less proficient in Slovene language were often excluded. Considering that migrants of Albanian ethnic origin differ significantly in language compared to other migrants from the former Yugoslavia, it is not surprising that this ethnic group was regularly identified as more internally connected or distant from the rest of the classes. To some extent, such patterns are sometimes encouraged by teachers who, when migrant children arrive, decide to sit together children who speak similar language. However, it depends on the individual whether this limits the child's overall sociability.

Another characteristic that may have kept a child from peers was academic ability. Learners who needed more help with learning and/or language, regardless of migrant status, were often less popular in terms of group work. Sometimes, learners who were more successful spent their time together, while children with learning difficulties formed their own group.

At several schools, groups were formed according to language, ethnicity and/or kinship. For example, at secondary school S3, one group of children spoke Bosnian when interacting while the Albanians spoke Albanian. In terms of group characteristics, at no school did we find that migrant status had an impact on whether the group was loud or reserved, noisy or calm, shy, or outgoing. For instance, in primary school S1, migrant children were more often among the noisy lads while in S2 secondary school, Albanian boys were more reserved, quiet, and reserved. In S3 secondary school, local children were more likely to be the ones who sought attention, etc.

Peer communication:

Generally speaking, each observed class consisted of more extroverted, loud, and talkative children, and their more reserved and shy peers. We identified examples of positive and constructive communication, encouragement, and support, but also examples of exclusion, conflict, and sometimes abusive behaviour. Additionally, we could observe closeness between children in terms of knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses (e.g., who is good at which subject, who speaks which language, what hobbies they have, etc.). In several classes, children were willing to help each other with class work. Long-term migrant children (but not exclusively) who spoke the same language as their migrant peers were more likely to help them.

Further, we observed several incidents of exclusion of children whose language proficiency was limited. In S1 primary school, a child from Kosovo who had language and learning difficulties was excluded from class interactions. However, he kept company with peers from other classes who had the same cultural background. Similarly, the Albanian speaking migrant children in S2 secondary school tended to be more silent and preferred to spend time among themselves. In S3 secondary school, the newly arrived migrants were quiet and reserved, some were sitting alone. On the other hand, in S1 primary school and S3 secondary school individual local girls were excluded because of their shy and quiet nature, while in S4 primary school, a girl with mental disabilities rarely interacted with her peers. Regardless of her limitations, classmates helped her. From our observations, we can conclude that the language barrier can severely affect migrant learners' ability to interact with local peers. On the other hand, exclusion from peer groups is not limited to migrant children as we found several examples of local children who were excluded due to their personal characteristics, academic abilities and/or mental disabilities.

In most schools, the children were very communicative, verbally, and nonverbally. Non-verbal communication was very explicit in the form of pushing around, hugging, shaking, playful fighting and teasing, but this was not limited to any particular nationality, and it was present in both primary and secondary schools. Physical communication increased during breaks and in secondary vocational school during practical classes. More violent communication was evident at secondary vocational school S2, where mainly male adolescents insulted each other and used coarse language, however, this seemed to be mostly 'friendly adolescent folklore' rather than serious insults. Further, migrant children often conversed in their languages (e.g., Bosnians in Bosnian language, Albanians in Albanian language etc.), especially during breaks but as in S2 secondary school, also regularly during classes. In S2, teachers did not complain about this and sometimes even teachers' instructions were in Bosnian. Sometimes, local children participated in the discussion and

used the Bosnian language or accent themselves or, as in one school, asked migrant peers to teach them some phrases or words in migrant learners' language. On the other hand, some migrant children intentionally spoke Slovene exclusively to improve their language skills. Sometimes, local children were not satisfied with migrant peers not speaking Slovene in school and were criticising them for speaking in their language.

During our observation, we also noted several examples of more or less prohibited use of digital devices inside schools and secret messages between peers. In S2 vocational secondary school, children openly used mobile phones and Bluetooth speakers during classes, with the knowledge and consent of teachers, to communicate with each other, to use Google Translate to understand the lecture or because they were bored. On the contrary, at S7 secondary school, children relied on more analogue methods to send notes; these were hidden in a pencil case or similar and sent across the classroom.

3.1.2 Educational staff

Engagement with students:

Interaction between teachers and children varied greatly and dependent heavily on the teachers themselves. Some teachers facilitated engagement with children to a significant extent, irrelevant of their language proficiency or interest, by using innovative teaching materials (e.g., video clips, music, boardgames, educational sites and applications) and incentives (sweets), stimulating discussion, and creating a safe but demanding atmosphere. In contrast, other teachers limited themselves to *ex cathedra* teaching methods where they developed little interaction with the children.

In all schools, our research group had difficulty identifying a child-centred approach. The principles of child-centred education require teachers to consider specific learning needs of migrant and local children and to respond to strengths and challenges of individual learner. Further, attention is paid to personal circumstances such as length of stay, ethnic and cultural background, religion, age, gender, socioeconomic and legal status, and other personal characteristics (Gornik 2020: 538). In S6 primary school, some teachers came closer to the child-centred approach because of the general teaching approach this school advocates for, i.e., the 'formative assessment approach'. Here, children are encouraged to play a more active role within the educational approach, set their teaching goals, assess their strengths and weaknesses, choose learning methods, etc. To be more precise, in S6 primary school, we could observe that at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher asked the children what they already knew about a specific topic, and they listed the associations, phenomena, concepts on which they were building. Then the teacher asked them what they wish to know about this phenomenon at the end of this lesson and how they will achieve the goal (which methods will be used), wrote these goals in a notebook and at the end of the lesson the teacher checked if they have reached this goal. After that, the children themselves formulated questions for review and prepared a guide for the next lesson ("What else do I want to find out about this topic, I'm also interested in ..., etc.).

In one primary school and one vocational secondary school, a more child-centred approach was observed in subjects considered 'less demanding' (e.g., art, P.E., home economics) or in subjects that are oriented towards practical skills (hairdressing) and children had more say in the design of activities. For example, children could suggest a particular hair technique or make a certain product from chosen material, decide whether they want to play volleyball rather than football and similar. When observing other subjects, learners were part of the

discussion, however all tasks were selected by the teacher. In general, teachers in all schools expected children to work mostly quietly and independently.

Usually, the additional Slovenian language course for migrant children is an environment where teachers are more innovative, creative, attentive and child centred. One reason lies in smaller groups of such classes and the more relaxed atmosphere. Moreover, the language courses are not so 'task oriented', structured and determined by curricula and teachers have more freedom in designing the lessons. This feature enables teacher with more opportunities to respond to each learner individually. Moreover, such a class is usually smaller and allows teachers to tailor instructions, explanations, and materials more successfully than in regular classes. In these classes, teachers praise learners for all and not just the correct answers, answer questions, use innovative teaching methods, rely on a more personal approach and are generally supportive.

However, we noted examples of scolding, threatening, ignoring, and insulting behaviour. For example, in S1 primary school, most teachers paid no attention to a group of migrant children from Kosovo. Consequently, these children are not motivated or interested in schoolwork. Implicit tensions, lack of respect and lack of encouragement were observed towards a boy from Albania, where a teacher gave the impression that he had given up on him and considered him a failure. In S2 secondary school, few teachers attempted to address individual needs. However, these attempts were limited to occasional checking whether learners understood the tasks. The checking was in a form of direct questions and not, for example, explanation in a foreign language. In S2 school, some teachers did not care whether all learners understood the lessons or had the opportunity to participate. Consequently, learners became bored and texted or browsed on their mobile phones. Surprisingly, teachers were not bothered by such behaviour as long as they had silence in the classroom.

Conflict management:

During participant observation, we did not register any significant conflicts between learners that would stem from ethnic, religious, or racial characteristics. However, there was general misbehaviour present (e.g., chatting during lessons, inappropriate comments, rude behaviour towards teachers or among peers, etc.). Often, teachers looked powerless, they gave a warning, raised their voices, threatened with punishment, or asked for silence, sent learners out of the classroom while a notification about inappropriate behaviour was also sent to their parents or guardians, or changed the seating arrangement. Other teachers tried to engage children who were misbehaving in class activities, but often without success. Sometimes, they continued with the lesson or punished learners. On rare occasions, teachers did not respond to negative and disruptive behaviour which affected the quality of the learning experience for all participants. We were surprised by the prevalence of exclusionary disciplinary methods in primary and secondary schools, where children were asked to leave the class. The ineffectiveness of these methods was also clearly evident during our observation days.

In general, we noticed that teachers often paid more attention to local learners and less attention to migrant learners. However, this was usually because they represent the majority of the class and not necessarily because of discriminatory behaviour. Consequently, this was reflected in the teachers' low attention and sensitivity to conflicts that have possible roots in ethnic, religious, or racial factors. Contrary, in S3 secondary school, two groups of children who differed in their ethnic backgrounds had a dispute, and as a solution to this conflict,

their mainstream teacher organised a class lesson in which they discussed the principles of multicultural cohabitation. Another example comes from S7 secondary school, where although no direct conflict was observed, a teacher reported that local children sometimes express discriminatory attitudes when writing an essay.

One practise that might work to prevent conflicts is the method used by the teacher at S6 primary school. Once a week, the mainstream teacher organises 'the circle' where the children sit in a circle and discuss about interpersonal relationships, evaluate the week and the strengths of their classmates, while at the same time look for improvements in their behaviour and the behaviour of their classmates. Additionally, all classrooms in this school have a class rules board, highlighting positive attitudes and values for a respectful environment.

Discussing this aspect, there were few examples of schools (S4 primary and S5 secondary school) that did not pay attention to topics related to cultural diversity, however, the picture was not entirely positive since explicit and direct engagement was seldom observed. For addressing these topics, primary and secondary schools used different international awareness days and individual school traditions (e.g., charity fairs in December, school talent shows, charity concerts). For example, in S1 primary school, children went to the cinema on the Day of Tolerance. After the movie, they had a class discussion about tolerance and tolerant behaviour. At the same school, International Day of Migrants was dedicated to migrant learners who went to the intergenerational centre where they presented their cultural traditions to the residents. Several schools decided to present different languages spoken in the schools on the World Day of Languages. The hallways were sometimes decorated with posters presenting different cultures and cultural traditions, and one primary school painted greetings on school's stairways in different languages.

Language classes for migrant learners proved to be most filled with various opportunities to discuss about cultural diversity (secondary schools S2 & S7, and primary school S6). In these classes, teachers more often addressed stereotypes, compared linguistic and cultural similarities, and highlighted the benefits of migrations and intercultural dialogue (secondary schools S3 & S7). In relation to other subjects (i.e., Civic Education, History, Geography, language courses, Sociology), we could recognise a cultural blindness approach, even though above subjects offer a plethora of topics related to cultural diversity. This goes in line with the themes of the curriculum, which neither reflects the diversity of learners nor challenges Eurocentrism. Sometimes, teachers satisfy by merely asking migrant children how something is called in their mother tongue (S6 primary school). On the other hand, other teachers linked teaching topics to different cultural traditions. For example, before the Christmas holidays, children compared customs and local traditions related to Christmas (secondary school S7).

3.1.3 Perceptions, values, attitudes and opinions

Positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and cultural cohabitation were observed mainly in two primary schools (S4 and S6) and two secondary schools (S5 and S7). In these schools, we most frequently saw classmates discussing language differences (e.g., different alphabet) and learning one another's language. Further, they were curious about religious activities (especially food prohibitions and traditions) and cultural habits (e.g., family traditions related to holidays) in formal (during class) and informal settings (during breaks).

When topics related to intercultural conflict, racism, migration, and similar were discussed as a consequence of the curriculum, some children openly shared their opinions. Usually, children were advocating for equality, tolerance and an inclusive approach that encouraged adjustments on both sides. At S2, examples of hate speech, intolerant attitudes and ethnic labelling could be observed when children teased each other (e.g., Come on, shut up Bosnian) or migrant children made fun of themselves (e.g., "Teacher, I am just a dumb Bosnian, what can I do?"). Such conversations were not problematized by either the children or the teachers.

In S7, a couple of children decided to organise a roundtable to address issues of migrant peers. During one lesson, the children presented their plan to their classmates and sparked a discussion. Most classmates encouraged them in their attempts or raised no direct objections. In addition, a group of girls shared their positive experience of volunteering at the nearby non-governmental institution that organises learning support for migrant and refugee children. At this school, one teacher often covers topics related to intercultural dialogue, stereotypes, religious pluralism, and the benefits of migrations, thus children's increased sensitivity to these issues may be a result of her teaching. In another class at this school, the children were preparing for the school's annual talent show and one group discussed with interest the number of languages represented in last year's show. From this, we might conclude that they value the school's multilingual environment as an advantage.

3.1.4 School environment

Our observations revealed considerable variety in the visibility of the multicultural nature of the school. In some schools, there was no visibility at all, in some only limited, and in others, we could find several signs of a multicultural nature of the school. In general, primary schools put more effort into visible expressions of multiculturalism with posters, drawings, poems, pictures, etc. displayed in the hallways and on the classroom walls.

S4 primary school has most elaborate visible signs of multiculturality. This school is also nationally recognised as the primary school with the best practices related to addressing multiculturalism and integration of migrant children. The entrance door of this primary school has stickers that read "*Multicultural, multiethnic, multinational, multilingual, contemporary, innovative, healthy, eco-school.*" Further, the school community adapted the school anthem and created a school rap song to include and acknowledge the children of diverse backgrounds present in the school. In the hallway, stairs are covered with stickers with greetings translated into the languages present at the school. In one of the corners, a Nationality stew hung with information about how many different countries are represented in the school, a national flag for each country and the exact number of children from each country. They also organised an exhibition called "*On the path of stories and inspiration",* which features portraits of successful migrants in Slovenia.

Several primary and secondary schools had posters in classrooms and hallways that learners had made to inform the rest of the school about *the European Day of Languages.* These posters contained information about the different languages spoken in Europe and their alphabet. At one school, we noticed an example of a riddle in Macedonian language. Similarly, at S3 secondary school, in the entrance hall posters were informing about *the International Day of Tolerance* and *The Day of Greetings (*also known as *hello day).* These materials provide information about tolerance and human rights declaration. In S6 primary school, posters titled "My Idol" or "My Home" hang in the classrooms, where children present their homeland or a famous person from their country. In terms of school cafeterias, most schools have a policy of acknowledging at least some cultural restrictions related to food (the Muslim children have an alternative menu to pork).

In the geography classroom of primary school S1, dictionaries and English books were stored. In another classroom, we observed language games and books in Albanian and Macedonian that foster cultural identity of migrants. In secondary school S2, there were didactic materials for Slovene language course developed by the teacher of Slovenian

language herself (e.g., the script *I Speak Slovene*, a series of multilingual stories *All for one, one for all*). The latter is a collection of short Slovene tales that was translated into Bosnian, Macedonian and Albanian by migrant peers. Another such material is the workbook Time for Slovene language (primary school S6).

3.1.5 How different factors affect integration processes?

According to the data collected during the participant observation phase, it is difficult to assess the role various factors (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, religion, SES, language) have on the integration process of migrant learners in Slovenian schools.

In terms of cultural background several observations indicated that migrant children with Albanian cultural background and Albanian mother tongue experience more difficulties in the process of integration and acceptance compared to migrant children of other ethnic groups from the territory of the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. The reasons for this are complex: close ethnic boundaries, language constrains, discrimination, 'othering' and stigmatisation by the majority Slovenian population, but also by other migrant ethnic groups, the traditional family orientation, which advocates for mothers staying at home, socialising only with family members and often not being fluent in the Slovenian language, and fathers being absent because they work all day.

Regarding the age, it looks that integrational challenges were more pronounced among newly arrived older children enrolled in secondary school or in the last grades of primary school.

Regarding socio-economic status (SES), we could notice that migrant children from families with low SES has less opportunities for peer socialisation in extra-curricular actives as for instance football training, or other social events that require financial participation (going to the cinema, bowling, shopping, hanging out at the café after school), which affects the integration processes.

Proficiency in Slovenian language by migrant parents also positively influence the integration process of children, as the children are exposed to the opportunity to practice the Slovenian language also at home and receive help with the schoolwork. Children who joined parents who already lived in Slovenia and spoke the Slovenian language and were familiar with Slovenian 'roles', expectations, etc. in school and society had an easier process of integrating to some extent.

Finally, we found that the restrictions related to the COVID-19 outbreak and consequent school closure also affected migrant children integration process. They missed the opportunity to socialize with peers, Slovenian language course was interrupted, some of them returned to their country of origin where they had less opportunity to interact with the culture/language of the host country. Additionally, migrant children had difficulties attending and following online classes; sometimes they had no access to computer, internet, or a suitable room to study, or they were taking care of their younger siblings because their parents were working.

3.2 NEWLY ARRIVED MIGRANT CHILDREN: Focus groups & Interviews/autobiographical stories/narration of location

3.2.1 Dynamics and factors influencing the integration process of migrant children

3.2.1.1 Premigration period and migration experience

Country of birth/country of ancestors

The newly arrived sample in the autobiographical interviews consisted of 31 migrant children living in Slovenia for less than 2 years. In the focus groups, 15 newly arrived migrant children participated. These children had migrated from different countries including Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia, Serbia, Austria and China. Their reasons for migration vary; most migrant families had left their country of origin due to economic reasons, while a few came for educational purposes. Migrant families decided to go to Slovenia directly or after living in some other European country because they were searching for better work, life and future opportunities for the family and especially, as is so often the case, for migrant children.

In most cases, at least one family member (usually from the territory of the former Yugoslavia) worked in Slovenia for years before the rest of the family followed. Usually, it was a father who worked there and was then followed (often after several years) by his wife, children, and other family members (grandparents, etc.). Sometimes, several members of the extended family migrated to the same town in Slovenia. In a handful of cases, the children stayed in the country or origin with their grandparents or another member of the extended family for another year or more, after the mother moved to Slovenia to join the father. In such cases, children finished the primary school, took care of grandparents, and waited until both parents had adapted to the host society and arrange living facilities.

Some newly arrived migrant children were happy and excited when parents told them that they were moving to another country, but later concerns arose about school, peers, academic success, and language barriers. Others did not want to move because of a strong attachment to their country of origin.

> *"Honestly, I didn't want to come here. I didn't like it. I wanted to stay in Macedonia but my father said that there was no life for us, no money." (girl 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)*

On the other hand, not all of them were comfortable with peer relations in their country of origin.

> *"I felt happy when parents told me that we will move because I didn't like it there. I didn't like how people behaved to me in Bosnia. Friends were giving me a weird look. I only had two friends I enjoyed hanging out together." (girl 1, 13 y/o, newly arrived)*

> *"We didn't like each other. I don't know, we quarrel all the time. Had conflicts. I liked it better here than in Serbia." (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)*

Despite fond memories of their country of origin, most newly arrived migrant children have no intention to return. They perceive Slovenia as a country that offers them a better quality of life, better education, and more employment opportunities. Some are eager to live in more economically successful countries (e.g., Germany or Austria). Several migrant children pointed out that their parents invested a plethora of resources to ensure them a better future in the host country, so they try hard not to disappoint them.

"But honestly, I would never consider returning there. I mean, forever. Because … I have more life opportunities and more possibilities here. Something draws me back, but I would not leave Slovenia ever." (girl, 18 y/o, newly arrived).

Expectedly, a significant proportion of migrant children still fell strongly connected with their country of origin and miss their previous life.

"I always want to return to Kosovo. I feel it that way, it's natural, it's good there. I feel good there." (girl 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"In Bosnia, I lived in a village, and I was free, turned on the volume, listened to the music, couldn't hear anything. Nobody was nagging." (boy 3, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

However, newly arrived migrant children are able to identify benefits and advantages of living in the host country.

"People in China just ignore each other. In China, everyone works hard, they need to walk fast, and they don't care about anything around them. My dad and my mum worked every day, students are doing their homework all the time and are exhausted. Life here is healthier, more relaxed, it benefits me." (boy 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"In Kosovo, you have no health insurance and stuff." (girl 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"Life is better here, more work opportunities. Education is better. I learn here more. In Kosovo, the situation is challenging, it's not like here. When they finish schools, they can't work, there's no job. That's why they come here, go abroad, because of money and jobs." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Usually, migrant learners reported frequent visits to their country of origin, where part of their family and friends still live. Before the pandemic, these visits were more frequent (for example every month). However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak several of them have not seen relatives for months or even a year.

"We go in Bosnia every three or four months. When parents take a holiday."

(boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"I wasn't in Macedonia during summer holidays because of Covid. I haven't been there for 10 months actually." (girl 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

During the quarantine, others purposely spent time in their country of origin.

"I liked it when schools were closed because I was in Bosnia with my family." (girl 1, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.1.2 General life

Living conditions

Migrant children differ in their living conditions. Some have large apartments and houses, while others live in crammed, damp and narrow spaces. Sometimes, siblings or relatives had to share their rooms, which was a challenge during the school closure, but also in terms of having a sense of privacy. We were able to identify two examples of newly arrived migrant children who reported additional tensions that arose when landlords took advantage of migrant families. However, when landlords and migrant families share the same ethnic background, these relationships often developed into friendly interactions.

> *"Currently, my father and I, we live in an apartment. We rent a room, share bedroom. We would like to buy a house here." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)*

> *"I share bedroom with my sister. I would love to have my own room. It would be quieter and more peaceful. But we also have a younger brother. He has toys in our room and that's just wow. We constantly tidy up this room!" (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)*

> *"Me and my sister are sharing the bedroom while my brother sleeps with parents." (girl, 12 y/o, newly arrived)*

The majority of newly arrived migrant children have a room for themselves. They listed several advantages of such accommodation, for example having a private place where you can be alone or to talk with friends without being disturbed, the possibility to decorate the room according to one's own taste, it helps to have a quiet place to study and similar. Regarding their future aspiration, migrant families longed for real estate ownership.

> *"We live in a house. I have my own room which is quite large. My brother has his own room." (girl 2, 16 y/o, newly arrived)*

> *"When my brother and mother will arrive, we will move to a larger apartment. Then, we will apply for citizenship so we could buy a house." (girl 1, 16 y/o, newly arrived)*

Sometimes, families live in apartments that present a risk factor for health, mainly because of mould. Small apartments require more adjustment and consideration among family members, which can lead to family tensions. A few migrant children live in student dorms. Usually, these dormitories are comfortable enough so learners can study without unnecessary interruptions. An advantage of such facilities in terms of easier integration is that they also support socialisation with (local) peers.

> *"Student dorm is much better for students. You have everything you need, just like at home. Also, you have friends which help you to achieve. You achieve certain language level, if you don't understand something, they can help you. This helped me tremendously with language learning." (girl 3, 16 y/o, newly arrived)*

Spatial and social positioning

The children share positive perceptions and experiences of the Slovenian towns in which they live. Some children enjoy the availability of parks, playgrounds, shopping malls, cinemas, bowling centres, and football clubs. The majority of migrant children perceive their migration as a transition to a better in terms of spatial and social positioning.

"[name of the town] is beautiful. The nature. Everything is great! When I am here, I feel calm." (girl 1, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"[name of the town] is very good. It has the sea, it has everything and it's good." (girl 4, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

"I like that we could go shopping or for a walk here. I live in the [name of the town] city centre, close to the bakery. It's better to live here than on a hill. It's prettier here, everything is close." (girl 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Others point out the safety of these towns and environment that makes them feel accepted.

"First time I got here, I realised that Slovenians are very friendly. People in [name of the town] are less friendly than in [name of the town]. This country is very peaceful and beautiful. I think lifestyle here is better than in China, people still feel happy. Here is healthier, people live very healthy. This is the best way to live. On the other hand, in Slovenia, there is less things you can do for fun. This city has only one or two places where we could go for karaoke. This city is safe, this is a safe country." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"I like [name of the town] because my new friends live here. I like that we live in a city centre because we used to live in a village. People here are nicer, the nature is more beautiful." (girl, 15 y/o, newly arrived)

Some migrant children have quickly developed strong bonds with their neighbours. Migrant families feel accepted in their new neighbourhood and the children and/or families visit each other regularly. In this context, we would like to point out that the culture of neighbours visiting each other is not very strong in Slovenia, so we should consider such encounter as particularly positive. However, some migrant children reported negative experiences with neighbours when racist or discriminatory remarks were made.

"My mum adapted. She found some neighbours, they are friends now, they drink coffee together." (girl, 19 y/o, newly arrived)

"We also have neighbours that are impolite to me. I don't think they're Slovenes. When they see me, they speak so loudly and say corona. I think they're not from Slovenia because their skin is brown or black. We have a neighbour from Macedonia who is friendly, we talk a lot. Some neighbours are foreign students at the university." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"We have good relationship with all neighbours except one. This older lady often nags if you listen to loud music. Everyone else is friendly and nice. I listen only to Balkan music and once she came upstairs saying that in Slovenia, I cannot listen to Balkan music, especially not so loud. Nobody else heard anything. We talk with all neighbours, they are nice, we see each other every day. This old lady sits on her balcony all day and monitors everything. There are Serbs, Bosnians and Slovenes in our building. I often babysit a girl from one Bosnian family." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Others established polite but rather distant interactions with neighbours.

"Slovenes and Bosnians live in our building. We don't know Bosnians, we don't talk much, we greet each other on a hallway." (girl 5, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

"Our neighbours are fine, I never heard anything negative. We greet each other." (girl 1, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

In terms of SES, most children come from a lower or middle socio-economic background, as their families are mostly economic migrants. Regarding our sample, we could find numerous examples where mothers and children followed the father who previously worked in Slovenia and consequently lived there alone for some time. Mothers often stay at home or work in low-skilled professions (e.g., as cleaners) with rare exceptions of self-employed mothers. Sometimes, the restriction was that the mothers had to wait a certain period of time to obtain a working permit.

Plenty of migrant fathers are self-employed or own a business (having a truck company, construction company, or bakery) or work on construction sites, at the port, as truck drivers, plumbers, and in other blue-collar professions. In rare examples, the fathers still work abroad (in Germany or Austria), but the rest of the family lives together in Slovenia. A very few interviews revealed that the parents had obtained a higher education degree in the country of origin (e.g., in pharmacy, computer engineering, health care) but had to take a lower-paid position in the host country.

"My father is self-employed. Currently, he renovates houses. In Bosnia, he completed a school for programmers. Technical school. My mum wants to work but she can't. She needs some documents." (boy 1, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"My dad works for Slovene company but in Germany." (girl 2, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Several migrant families still own a home in their country of origin. Some migrant children have expressed that the family is attempting to buy a house in Slovenia, while several have already completed this process.

In some cases, older siblings, or migrant children themselves help in restaurants, kitchens, bakeries, grocery stores and similar areas to earn pocket money. Sometimes, they work to help their parents, but they also want to earn some money to support their own interests.

"I was working now and bought my phone. The one I wanted. I don't need a fancy phone. I don't care for iPhones, people look whether is iPhone or not, but I'm not bothered. What matters to me is whether it works fine, fast, that's all I need." (girl 4, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

"I work during summer holidays, I wash the dishes. I save mostly for shoes, make up and clothes are not so important." (girl 5, 16 years old, newly arrived)

During the pandemic outbreak, SES revealed that newly arrived migrant children had to rely on school resources to get a computer or tablet. Sometimes, migrant children owned a personal computer or tablet, sometimes families managed to meet the needs of all family members with computers that parents used at work, or they purchased another device.

Inclusion in peer groups

Our research shows that newly arrived migrant children are part of multiple peer groups, for example in their neighbourhood, in leisure activities, and at schools. Peer groups differ in that some children have friends from the same ethnic background, while others have friends from various backgrounds. Sometimes, relatives of similar age act as a link between different social groups. These groups are important because they work as anchors that enable migrants to identify with the host society (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2018). Their first attempts to become part of a peer group were facilitated by extracurricular activities (mostly related to sports). In terms of class dynamics, it was easier for newly arrived migrant children to interact with other migrant children or children who have similar ethnic backgrounds. Shared experiences and similar cultural characteristics and language eased the process of communicating and interacting with peers.

Newly arrived migrant children in the 1st year of high school often pointed out the advantage that all children were in a new situation and had to form social bonds with classmates from the beginning. This helped them to be more relaxed, proactive, and less anxious. On the other hand, teachers in primary schools are more involved in the process of peer group formation. They have more tools (e.g., tutoring system) and resources to organise a peer support system, which affects how relationships are formed between children.

Migrant children rely on friends for language support, social support, and identification. Usually, newly arrived migrant children assess their peers as tolerant, helpful, and nice. If long-term or second/third generation migrant children know someone from their country who is struggling with the same challenges and situations, they are willing to turn to them.

"Classmates are nice, they didn't comment on anything, they don't tease me, they are good, nice, helpful, also during school closure if I don't understand something they help mi. I write to them, and they help me." (girl, 19 y/o, newly arrived)

"In the dorm, I had plenty of peers from Bosnia. They were Bosnians and they helped me with language. They translated to me, we had a language course in the dorm, another course in school. In the dorm, my roommate was a girl from Slovenia and we talked, we helped each other." (girl 3, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

However, we must not idealise, because sometimes newly arrived migrants are excluded from group activities or peers make fun of them because of their language mistakes. Such behaviour prevents migrant children from participating in leisure activities and reinforces their feelings of being excluded, lonely and alone. As a result, they refrain themselves from approaching peers and cannot practise their social and language skills nor form friendly relationships. In some cases, slightly challenging peer dynamic is the result of migrant children being older than their classmates. However, not all migrant children respond with withdrawal. Several migrant children point out that the responsibility of becoming part of the group lies with the newcomers, who must try to be proactive, brave, and friendly, when coming into a new environment. Eventually, such an approach will result in befriending several peers.

"I was always standing alone during the long break. Nobody came to me. I felt so, I don't know, so bad." (girl 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"At other school, some older girls were giving me a look, they were commenting, laughing when I said something wrong. They weren't nice. That's why I didn't want to play volleyball anymore, I started avoiding P.E. They often laughed at me because I didn't speak Slovene correct and they have comments on my accent." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Peer activities revolve around common interests (music taste, sports clubs) and are characterised by a relaxed atmosphere. Although newly arrived migrant children were concerned about how classmates would accept them, in most cases they had no difficulty making friends with at least few children.

"My classmates are great! I can't say anything bad about them. I didn't expect that they will accept me so nicely. They all want to help, and this is very dear to me. They speak Slovene and I try to answer in Slovene. We don't quarrel." (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

In relation to peer groups that existed in their countries of origin, plenty of migrant learners have lost contact with their friends or were only rarely in touch with them using chat applications (e.g., Instagram, Messenger, Snapchat, Viber, WhatsApp). However, others were eager to visit them, they share common interests and can interact as nothing happened when they visit them. Due to their relatively short time away from their country of origin and the people living there, these connections are still rather strong, and they invest considerable amount of time and effort in maintaining them.

Involvement in leisure activities, sport

The most common leisure activities among newly arrived migrant children are sports, online video games, shopping, watching series on Netflix, and spending time with family or friends. Boys engage in activities such as football, hockey, skateboarding, and video games. We have found that migrant children are able to expand their social network through sports and make friends quickly upon arrival. These children often bond over common interests such as their favourite football teams. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in sedentary and artistic activities or prefer reading. However, several of them enjoy sports activities, such as roller-skating, skateboarding, and volleyball.

Other children reported that their leisure activities had decreased significantly since their arrival to Slovenia. The reasons for this differed. Sometimes, cultural differences regarding how they spent time in their country of origin in comparison with host country's habits affected the quality of interaction. In other examples, the children were still searching for the right activity, or they were not confident to participate in group activities. An additional constraint could be that they are not very well informed about what the environment offers in terms of free time activities. Further, the habit of participating in extracurricular activities may not be developed to such extent within different cultures.

"Here, we hang out with friends, we go out, drink some coffee and talk every time. I feel a little bit bored because we just talk every time, we just eat, and sometimes we go to the cinema. We had different sense of humour. Sometimes, I go and hike or run by the river." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"I walk in the park. That's all. I still haven't found what I'm looking for. I don't do anything at home." (girl 1, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

Health (physical and mental health)

Some newly arrived migrant children reported about the difficulties encountered when they arrived in Slovenia. They struggled with the idea of being away from their country of origin while their relatives still live there. Sometimes, only part of the family left the country, or the decision affected friendships and relationships. Combined with concerns about the new country and anxiety regarding how they will fit in, these challenges affected their mental and physical health. In terms of the first day of school, they worried about whether anyone would understand them, whether they would be laughed at, and how they would get along in school. Such concerns filled them with anxiety and fear.

"When we arrived in Slovenia, I struggled a lot, I left my friends and my sister in Macedonia. I had to adjust to new stuff, school, language, friends, everything was new, I was confused. It was hard." (girl 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Additionally, family calls and visiting their country of origin could cause stress. However, these calls were a stress reliever for several newly arrived migrant children. In the first weeks and months of living in Slovenia, some migrant children developed psychosomatic symptoms (skin rash, heart pain, breathing difficulties) and had to be monitored by medical staff. Other migrant learners reported feelings of being relieved, relaxed, curios and calm after they left their country of origin.

"At first, it was hard, but now I'm better, there's huge improvement. It is not that hard. If I face challenges, I believe I can deal with them. I feel better now. When my family call, I am happy, but afterwards, everything is normal, I am not sad anymore." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

In general, we observed that educational community pay little or no attention to the mental and physical health of migrant children. They did not have relevant professionals, services or interventions designed to address these issues. Similarly, newly arrived migrant children were not paying much attention to their mental health except in cases where disorders significantly affected the quality of their life (e.g., anxiety that causes breathing troubles and requires hospital visit). Additionally, physical and psychological condition of family members was rarely addressed. Perhaps the already challenging situation of migrant parents who struggle with employment and household management pushed the problems related to mental and physical health aside.

3.2.1.3 Educational environment and system

Experiences of inclusion in school

Almost all newly arrived migrant children express positive views about the process of inclusion in schools. They are generally satisfied with their classmates and teachers and their willingness to help them. Before their first days at school, most of them were full of concerns, questions, and fears. They did not know if anyone would understand them, how would they fit in or find the right classroom. However, they soon realised that classmates are attentive and friendly to them, and that most teachers are willing to help them. Such circumstances helped migrant children to adapt relatively quickly to the new educational environment.

"Immediately if they see that I don't understand something or that I have a weird look on my face they explain it to me. Not just Bosnians but also Slovenians." (girl, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Newly arrived migrant children are often involved in school clubs (e.g., reading club, chess club) and extracurricular activities that took place in school, especially in primary schools. From our sample, they are rather quick in approaching these activities and use these settings to expand their social network and practice language. Even though some migrants attract more attention because of their appearance, they rarely encountered negative attitudes.

"I had just one experience that left me feel not that confident. When I walked through the hall, there was a group from a higher level and they said, "From China". And they were laughing, and I didn't know what happened. They never say anything bad, they just say "From China". Sometimes, they look at me and just smile. That confuses me because I don't know if they are friendly, or they laugh at me." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Within the primary schools, teachers are noticeably more involved in the process of welcoming and supporting migrant children. They organise a tutoring system, sit learners who share the same language/cultural background together, organise learning assistance and similar. Migrant children are grateful for such help. In secondary school, most migrant children are more autonomous and do not seek/expect such support from peers. However, they appreciate friendly classmates who are willing to include them in their social circle and support them at multiple levels (with schoolwork, personal life, and bureaucratic tasks). Further, they were grateful for approachable teachers. In general, teachers and classmates were vital in ensuring that the school was perceived as a welcoming environment.

However, not all migrant children are not included as one would hope. During some interviews and focus groups, we found tensions that resulted in this exclusion. In one particular case, there were quarrels present in a female group that discriminated others in terms of SES and ethnicity. A group of girls from Slovenia belonging to wealthier and more educated families, disapproved of migrant girls from BiH whose parents were blue-collar workers. However, the dynamic was not always on the axis ethnic majority-minority as we recognised conflicts also between Serbs and Bosnians or Albanians and Serbs (or other minority groups).

Language & School language policy and practice

Learning to speak Slovene is a key challenge for newly arrived migrant children. For many, their first introduction to Slovene is when they arrive in the host country. Being in a different linguistic environment can cause stress and anxiety. Considering their lack of language skills, learners were concerned how to make friends, achieve high grades, engage with school life and similar. This is in line with Espin's (2006) view that language is among challenging obstacles migrants face. This is not only due to the new linguistic system (grammar and pronunciation) but also due to the 'identity loss'.

Certain school policies play an important role in supporting children to develop language proficiency. Among these, a language course designed for foreign students was most frequently mentioned. These courses vary in duration; some extend over the official period, while other schools stick to the prescribed number of lessons. Another measure schools often adopt is to designate classmates who speak the same language as migrant children as buddies or tutors. Usually, these children sit together. At least for newly arrived migrant children, the possibility to speak in their mother language helps them to integrate more quickly.

Newly arrived migrant children themselves quickly realise that language proficiency is crucial for the inclusion in new environment and succeeding in school. In fact, the number of migrant children who spoke in their mother tongue (when this was possible) when talking to the researcher was very low. Considering this, we can say that migrant children are soon able to have a conversation in Slovene, at least to some extent.

One of the strategies to become more proficient in a new language is to consciously spend more time with local peers and practice the language with them. Additionally, Slavic languages share some common features that help migrant children from the territory of former Yugoslavia (Balkan region) to learn Slovenian language more quickly.

"We all hang out together but sometimes it's better that I sit with a Slovenian girl and try hard so we can understand each other. I need someone who speaks Slovene a lot because this will help me to improve. That way, I will be fluent in another language since I assume that my language will not bring me as many benefits as Slovenian language, especially after some time in relation to job and similar." (girl 6, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Two newly arrived migrant children from Serbia had no difficulties with the Slovenian language because they attended private Slovenian language lessons in their country of origin. Other migrant children read books in their free time to improve their language skills.

"At first, it was difficult. Slovene is very similar to Bosnian language, and this has its advantages and disadvantages. We rely on fact that people will understand us, so we don't need to learn as much. This is not true, we need to learn it, we have to know it. /.../ At first, I had to ask for explanation but now it's quite easy. When someone wants me to speak, I try hard to use Slovene so people can understand me, for example, in hospitals and so." (girl 6, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Children often used social interactions and informal peer support to learn the language better. They indicated that interaction with local peers empowered progress as it enabled practice of the language. In addition, teachers' support and encouragement was appreciated. Several migrant children expressed gratitude because their classmates were interested in their mother tongue and migrant learners had the opportunity to teach them something new.

In some schools, children reported that they are not allowed to use their own language at school. Sometimes, this prohibition extended to formal and informal occasions (e.g., lessons, during breaks, in the cafeteria). Teachers either politely remind a group of migrant children chatting in their language that they should try to speak Slovene because this would help them in various situations, or they prohibit such interactions stating that only Slovene should be spoken.

In some other schools, as in the secondary school S2, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian languages are prevailing languages among children in the hallways, school cafés etc. At the same time, teachers do not interfere with this practice.

"They don't allow us to speak Bosnian in school. Not all but some say that we are not allowed to speak Bosnian because we are in Slovenia and should speak Slovene." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

When migrant children encounter difficulties and do not understand something, some are brave enough to speak up and ask teachers or classmates to repeat or explain it, some of

them use language applications (e.g., Google Translate) and dictionaries, while many of them remain silent.

When they are in public places (for example, hospital, post office, grocery shop), migrant children and their families try to speak Slovene. However, not all families and family members are equally successful in learning the new language. We spoke with newly arrived migrant children whose older siblings had given up studying on university because language barriers prevented them from following the lectures.

Newly arrived migrant children report that peer relationships significantly contribute to their feeling of being part of the group and are accepted, but also to their feeling of belonging and wellbeing. On their first school day, many of them were terrified that they would be excluded and lonely. However, for most of them, it was not difficult to form relationships in the classrooms, school playground, in the cafeteria, in the language course and similar.

"I was worried whether someone who speaks my language will be at school and how will I manage everything. When I came to school, my mainstream teacher told me that there's another classmate from Bosnia. That was great! I hang out with her all the time. We chat and lunch together." (girl 5, 15 y/o, newly arrived)

"At first, I was nervous, I didn't know how I will approach them, how to get to school, everything was different. What should I do, I don't understand their language?" (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

Others experienced more difficulties because of their language constraints and/or reserved character. Another challenge arises when migrant learners differ in age from the rest of their peers. In Slovenia, this may happen because schools want to give migrant children an additional year in which migrant children are not assessed but have the opportunity to learn the language and form close ties with their peers. In such situations, it is not unlikely for migrant children to feel different from classmates and they must find a way to overcome this barrier. Sometimes, migrant families decide to send their child to a lower grade for the same reasons as the schools.

Apart from language barriers, we identified rare examples where cultural differences presented a significant barrier to group dynamics as migrant children were less familiar with the customs and traditions of the host country. Additionally, negative remarks regarding migrant children's language skills, ethnicity, or family affected migrant children's wellbeing and their position among peers.

"Sometimes, I can't get what's the point of things my friends are talking about and sometimes, they think I am weird. Yeah, you need to feel it (laugh). We need to understand each other. That's important. Slovenian teenagers are not interested in making new friends. They always have old friends, they became friends when they were 6 or 7 and that lasts forever. They keep distance. This is hard. Apart from having different logic, this is another thing why we can't talk so much. We can't make fun, we can't joke because we don't understand each other's jokes." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Teachers/educational staff

In general, newly arrived migrant children hold a positive attitude towards their teachers and feel that they can rely on them. Teachers help and encourage them to learn the language, participate in school activities and become part of the class. For most children, mainstream teachers and school counsellors are their first contact after arriving at school. They introduce migrant children to other members of the class community, guide them around the school and sometimes decide which classmates will help migrant children. The latter is especially common in primary schools.

Some teachers pay more attention to whether newly arrived migrant children follow explanations or perhaps need additional information than others. Primary school teachers in particular seem to be more attentive to migrant children compared to teachers from the secondary schools. Throughout the school year, teachers encourage other learners to help migrants when necessary. Considering the low language proficiency of newly arrived migrant children, some teachers adjust learning materials and do not punish language mistakes with lower grades. Especially teachers of Slovenian language and mainstream teachers show a high level of empathy and are more willing to spend time organising activities to promote tolerant behaviour. Sometimes, they recognise when learners struggle in interacting with peers and offer their help.

"Professors are very kind. They take into account that I don't speak Slovene and help me. During Slovenian language class they allow me to read texts in Bosnian language so I can understand the context. Everyone is very kind." (girl 5, 15 y/o, newly arrived)

"Teachers helped me a great deal. They told me that if I have any trouble, they will help me. This felt good, I felt good." (girl 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

On the other hand, some teachers are ignorant and unaware of the needs and concerns newly arrived migrant children have or even openly express negative attitudes regarding migration processes. One teacher frequently makes fun of migrant children and uses sarcastic tone when communicating with them. Another teacher often shouted at migrant children asking what a migrant child does in school if he is not able to learn the language. Moreover, a few newly arrived migrant children had an impression that teachers tolerate inappropriate behaviour more when it is committed by local children than by migrants.

"No, usually they don't pause their lectures, wrap up the content in 5 minutes and explain it to me in English. If I would ask them to do so, they probably would. To be honest, I think they are not very good in English." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"I often heard people say that Bosnians are stupid. One professor said that we, Bosnians, are stupid and good only for work in drains, that we can't be doctors and office workers because we are not smart enough, that we are good only construction sites and so." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Some migrant children compared teachers and school system from their country of origin with teachers and system in Slovenia. A few of them were able to compare both at different educational levels. While some migrant children from BiH and Serbia assessed school system and teachers from their countries of origin to be more demanding, they were convinced that teachers in Slovenia are stricter. On the other hand, some migrant children from BiH and most from Kosovo felt that educational system in Slovenia is much more demanding than theirs and that Slovenian teachers tolerate inappropriate behaviour (e.g., using swear words in schools) for longer. In general, a more demanding school system and teachers with higher expectations were associated with better education and improved future opportunities.

Further, several migrant children have an impression that they can influence the school process and express their wishes and interests for the teaching content. They believe that teachers are often interested in their opinions. When asked to describe exact situations they had difficulties recalling them.

Inclusion and integration practices regarding newcomers

The most often mentioned inclusion and integration practice regarding newcomers is the 'tutorial' and 'buddy system' where a tutor or buddy is selected/appointed by a teacher, especially in primary school, to guide and support the newly arrived child. This contributes greatly to a sense of safeness and overall wellbeing.

Slovene language course for foreigners was also one of the most frequently listed. It is also a highly rated practice. These courses are scheduled early in the morning or late afternoon; however, it is also not uncommon to place these lessons in the middle of the regular schedule. Sometimes, they are concentrated in the first few months of the school year or run through the entire school year.

In few schools, an additional teacher is appointed to the newly arrived migrant children. Such a professional provides learning help and support.

Further, school libraries furnished with books in foreign languages are also highly appreciated by migrant children (and teachers of Slovene language for foreigners).

To a limited extent, and only some of them, migrant children had the opportunity to present their culture and language in class. However, such opportunities were rare.

Another seldomly used integration practice with a questionable effect is the placement of migrant children in a grade below their biological age. Such a decision is usually made to secure the migrant child an additional year without grades, however, the child is subjected to a **more intensive language course.**

Psychosocial support

Some migrant children rely on friends and teachers for psychosocial support, but the main source of support for newly arrived migrant children at this point are parents and family. Only a few migrant children reported awareness-rising activities at school that promote preventive measures related to racism, xenophobia, social exclusion, bullying, and different types of violence. Several migrant children pointed to the supportive role of school counsellors and/or teachers, especially on their first school day and in the first few weeks. However, no migrant child was able to recall whether there is a specific school service to support children's mental health. Note that migrant children in Slovenia do not receive specific and targeted mental health support. They are highly dependent on competencies, knowledge, skills, available time and other resources of school counsellors.

Family and wider community

Family

All newly arrived migrant children in our sample came to Slovenia with their family -parents and siblings, often leaving behind other relatives (grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, etc.). In numerous cases, the fathers had already migrated for work purposes a few years earlier and the rest of the family followed them later. In some cases, the fathers are still working abroad (e.g., in Austria or Germany), while the rest of the family lives in Slovenia. In such cases, the fathers return to Slovenia every weekend, and family time is limited to two days and the holidays. In other examples, one parent and younger siblings of migrant children live in the country of origin (for example, because they are waiting for the younger

sibling to finish primary school in the country of origin), while another parent and the migrant child are already in Slovenia. Such separation affects family dynamic negatively.

In general, we can say that having family members living in the same country encourages migrant children to better cope with the daily challenges that migration brings, while at the same time, this is also a motivating factor for success. It was not uncommon to hear from migrant children that their parents sacrificed plenty to assure better future for them, so the children have to adapt quickly and perform at their best.

"It's hard, nobody can be indifferent in such situation, you leave for example your grandma and you go to some unknown place. The system is different and it's not easy, but we have to make efforts because our parents have done this for our own good. Not because they want something bad for us but because they wish great things for us. We have to adapt, and we have to remain strong." (girl 6, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

In general, the family is considered the most important and relevant factor in the context of children's wellbeing. Especially in the first period after the migration, family is also a source of psychological support and has a therapeutic function. Migrant children spend significant amount of time with parents and siblings and receive plenty of social and emotional support from them. Family life determine their weekends, when they have more opportunity to spend time together, go hiking, grocery shopping, and play boardgames. Sometimes, fathers spend weekends recovering from hard work. Older siblings support the education of younger ones and often help them and parents with language. In addition, many migrant families encourage their members to speak Slovene. Other families decide to maintain their mother tongue and use it at home.

"I speak Bosnian mostly at home where my family is. When we go somewhere, for example, to grocery shop or hospital we try to speak Slovene." (girl 6, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Some migrant children have extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents) in Slovenia who arrived in the country before or after them. These family members usually live in close proximity to each other, or are located in a nearby town. Like parents and siblings, relatives provide vital social and emotional support. Migrant children organise sleepovers, picnics, and game nights for their cousins and maintain contact with them. For a few migrant children, it was important that they could engage in religious activities with their cousins. With relatives who are still in the country of origin or live somewhere abroad, migrant children sustain regular contact through phone calls, video chats and messages.

"We call each other every day using Messenger and Snapchat. We also have a group, but mostly we speak separately. Group is used when we're sharing stuff." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Migrant community, religious community

Religion is important for migrant children lives. It presents an anchor, a sense of belonging, identity, a root and tie with family traditions and culture. It gives children a sense of purpose, hope and tranquillity. Muslim children reported fasting and going to the mosque to learn the Quran, while Orthodox children celebrate Slava. Newly arrived migrant children indicate that religion is important to them, however, they have fewer opportunities to practise it in Slovenia than in their country of origin, since they are not as familiar with the location of

religious institutes and where they can find the necessary information. Consequently, they often limit religious practises to the privacy of their household.

"I like Christmas and Easter. I think Easter is 7 days after your Easter. We paint eggs and then we play games with them. On Good Friday, we fasten." (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

A more institutionalised religious involvement also depends on the concrete local religious community – if there is a religious community or/and a migrant community at all.

Newly arrived migrant children enjoy celebrating religious holidays because extended family and relatives have the opportunity to gather, eat traditional food and play traditional games.

In terms of the migrant community, some migrant families live in buildings where other migrants from the same ethnic background already live. Cultural similarities and experiences of migration help them to connect and socialise. Some migrant families live in rented apartment owned by the landlord, who comes from the same country. Usually, these people helped them with information concerning the host country during their first months. Such communities also enable children to make friends with peers who have a similar background.

"One Serbian family lives in 4ᵗʰ floor. We are in 3ʳᵈ floor, in the basement are another Bosnians and the rest are Slovenes. These Bosnians are from our town, and we know each other from there. They have younger kids, 9-years old boy and 6-years old girl. We often go for a walk together. Her mother is very grateful when I take the girl because she is very curious. I was the same when I was child (laugh)." (girl 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Local environment

Regarding the local environment, newly arrived migrant children often compared the local environment in the country of origin with the environment in the host country. Children who previously lived in a village and now live in the centre of the town were enthusiastic about the proximity of important places (e.g., playground, shopping centre, school), however, they also missed quiet places (especially forests and countryside) from their country of origin.

Additionally, several migrant children said that the size of the town meant that people are more tolerant, friendly, and positive towards newcomers. In relation to this, most of them had very few or no negative interactions with locals.

3.2.1.4 Other

N/A

3.2.2 Conceptualizations of own well–being and life satisfaction

3.2.2.1 Self-perceived well-being and life satisfaction

In general, newly arrived migrant children mostly reported being happy and having a good life. Factors that contribute to overall satisfaction and wellbeing are family, friends, local environment, classmates, school, leisure activities. However, where families are still separated, migrant children's life satisfaction is affected. Before their first day at school,

migrant learners experienced a severe amount of stress and anxiety, they were worried and sad, but soon they were able to interact successfully with peers and establish important social ties that contribute positively to self-perceived well-being.

"I feel better than in the past. I feel better in Slovenia, I like that I found new friends and that we live in the town, we used to live in a village." (girl 5, 15 y/o, newly arrived)

"It's ok but because my father is always missing, I feel like nobody is really here." (girl 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.2.2 Identification and belonging

Migrant children reported feelings of identification and belonging to different nations. However, due to their newcomer status and the relatively short time they spent in the host country, belonging and identity were often strongly linked to their country of origin. However, newly arrived migrant children who feel accepted and supported by teachers, classmates and friends can develop a sense of belonging to the host society very fast.

"I never felt that I'm from a foreign country, I'm from Slovenia. In the primary school, at the beginning, I felt it that way but later no more. Because of my friends, classmates, teachers, this helped me." (girl 4, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

"When I look at it that way, it seems that now my home is here. I go to Macedonia only on vacation, I need to adapt that I will not return to Macedonia, except during the holidays, this will be my home now, job will be here, everything." (girl 5, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

Among important social anchors that influence migrant children's identification and feeling of belonging to the culture of origin are, first and foremost, family, relatives (especially those who still live in the country or origin), and religion. On the other hand, new friends, leisure activities, schoolmates, teachers, and school are the new anchors in Slovenia.

"I like it better here because me and my friends can go to stadium every dan, we go to the beach when it's warm, we swim." (boy 3, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

In terms of language, as Espin (2006) discusses, the acquisition of the new language and the loss of the previous linguistic community is a common feature of migratory experience. Language is identified as another anchor that helps them maintain ties to their country of origin. Migrant children usually speak their mother tongue at home, while they tend to communicate in Slovene in public institutions (e.g., school, post office, grocery shop, hospital). Contrary, when they interact with peers from the same country, they use their mother tongue.

3.2.2.3 Feelings of safety

Newly arrived migrant children feel safe in their lives and neighbourhoods. Several factors contribute to this, from family to friends to the size of the town and an objectively low crime rate. However, some very specific incidents can affect the general feeling of safety, such as violent episode in dance clubs, football hooligans in the town or cultural differences regarding gender. In most cases, life in the host country was evaluated safer than previous life in terms of social security, economic wealth, and physical safeness. Finally, the feeling of not being safe was often related to the pandemic outbreak.

"I've often seen in the clubs that people were fighting. Boys and girls. Last time, two girls were beating each other in the loo because of a guy. I've seen them fighting outside as well.

Sometimes, I see people brawl in the town. I don't like this in Slovenia, people brawl more. In Bosnia and in my town, this doesn't happen so often, people are not fighting in the clubs just because they're bored." (girl 2, 17y/old, newly arrived)

3.2.2.4 Self-perceived opportunities, choices and feeling of control over their own life and future

Moving to Slovenia is perceived by many (especially older age group) children as an 'up-grade' and a chance for a better life. Several migrant children reported that the reason for migration lies in parental decision to secure better future for themselves and especially for their children. Newly arrived migrant children often describe Slovenia as a country with a stable economy, better educational opportunities, and promising career prospects.

"We came here because of me, because of school, because in Bosnia you don't have – you finish elementary school, high school, college and then you sit home because there's no work for you." (girl 3, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"My dad decided for Slovenia because of me. I think this is the most important reason. He wanted to start a business here, give me an opportunity to go to school here because he think's there's a better education. Also, I wouldn't be so tired here as a student." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

Children's future aspirations range from professional athletes (footballers and hockey players), police officers, detectives, lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs, dentists, doctors, hairdressers, beauticians, coaches, plumbers, translators, bodyguards, and car mechanics. They are convinced that if they put enough effort, they will achieve their goals. Such a mindset is not very common in their countries of origin, according to their words. Many of them are motivated to succeed and try hard in school because they feel a certain responsibility towards their parents.

"My parents put plenty of effort to get me here, everything is better here for me. I don't want to disappoint my parents." (girl 6, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.3 Perceptions, values, attitudes and opinions

Overall, the interviews revealed that newly arrived migrant children have positive attitudes regarding equality and intercultural dialogue. Often, the children speak positively about equality, multiculturalism and cultural and religious pluralism.

"For me, it's important that new learners are accepted. In terms of religion as well. This is important for me." (girl 2, 13 y/o, newly arrived)

"If I feel good in your company, I don't care whether you have money or not. In most cases, this is important and that's really impolite. Why do we divide people in such a way? We are all the same, all people. I don't know how parents can raise their children dividing people between those who have money and those who haven't. We are all the same, we were all born, we will all die, that's life. You're not better than me if you speak to me in such a way. How dare you speak to someone in such a way?" (girl 7, 16 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.4 (Perceived) Advantages and weaknesses of existing models of migrant children`s integration

3.2.4.1 Perception of integration

From the interviews, it appears that newly arrived migrant children want to become active members of Slovenian society. Often, they emphasise that they want to learn the language and understand Slovenian cultural traditions because they want to live, work, and raise children here. They are actively engaged in language learning and making friends, which helps them to understand Slovenian culture, but also to maintain customs. They are respectful and tolerant of cultural and religious pluralism. Sometimes, migrant children feel that minorities are more often the target of peer violence.

"I think it's better that they speak Slovene with me, this will help me to learn more, it will be easier for school, for job, for everything." (boy 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.4.2 Advantages

Practices often cited by migrant children as beneficial include opportunities given by teachers where migrant children present their country of origin and cultural characteristics to classmates, additional hours of Slovene language course where teachers use various teaching materials to help them learn the language, and adapted materials. Additionally, ice breakers upon arrival are valued as positive activities that help with the atmosphere. Several children are included in the buddy or tutor system at their schools. These buddies (local learners) volunteer their time and support to migrant learners and help them achieve certain academic and social goals quicker. Sometimes, the buddies are migrant children who are already more proficient in Slovene but have had similar experience. Moreover, migrant children are eligible to special learning status and have a possibility to set the dates for exams in advance, so that they can prepare for exams on their own terms and pace. In relation to the food restrictions, the children reported no incidents where these restrictions were violated.

"Last year, when I arrived, I didn't speak a word. I didn't know the language. My friend spoke for me. Then I started attending this language class, got the foreigner status, set my exam dates." (girl 1, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

"My classmate who sits with me translates instructions or what is for homework." (boy 2, 17 y/o, newly arrived)

3.2.4.3 Weakness

Sometimes, newly arrived migrant children miss more interaction with teachers in their mother tongue (either to talk to teachers who are fluent in their language or to have special lessons in their mother tongue) or a short summary of the lesson in adjusted form. In addition, migrant children sometimes complain that the number of hours for language learning is too low. Several children were not given the opportunity to present their culture, while others were scolded for using their mother tongue during breaks or in class. In some examples, teachers and migrant children struggled in communication and that led to migrant children being ignored. Rarely, this escalates into arguments and impolite behaviour by teachers.

3.2.4.4 Good practices

Look at the chapter 3.2.4.2.

3.3 LONG-TERM MIGRANT CHILDREN: Focus groups & Interviews/autobiographical stories/narration of location

3.3.1 Dynamics and factors influencing the integration process of migrant children

3.3.1.1 Premigration period and migration experience

Country of birth/country of ancestors

The sample of long-term migrant children who live in Slovenia for more than 5 years consists of respondents originating mainly from the territory of the former common state the Republic of Yugoslavia, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Serbia. In addition, we had a conversation with migrant children from China, Russia and Slovakia. Some of these children came to Slovenia as infants and were included in Slovenian kindergartens and/or first grades of elementary school. Others had spent many years in their countries of origin before coming to Slovenia. Their countries of origin are important to them because they still have a part of relatives and friends living there. Additionally, plenty of warm memories were created there. Consequently, several migrant children still consider their country of origin as their home.

"It drags me because my home is there, all my people live there, everything mine is there, we know each other, everything is different. But honestly if I had to decide whether I would go back or not I wouldn't. I have more opportunities and possibilities here. It still drags me back, but I wouldn't leave Slovenia." (girl 1, 18 y/o, long term)

"That feeling I have when I step on my yard, memories, the smell of my house. Despite bad experiences, this is still the place where I was born. My soul is there." (girl 1, 16 y/o, long term)

Some migrant learners initially considered the move to Slovenia as a difficult challenge and had similar concerns as newly arrived migrant children (e.g., how will they be accepted by peers, will they be able to communicate, will their academic success decline, what will happen to friendships made in the host country). Others were excited to move to a foreign country and anticipated new opportunities more relaxed. There are differences in terms of the frequency of visits to their country of origin. Some visit it at least once a year (for a longer period or they have been there on holiday) while others have not been there for years.

"Honestly, I really don't like visiting Bosnia. There's not plenty of people to hang out with. I have family and everything, but I am not used to it. I live here since I was 8 years old, I'm here almost 10 years. I'm used to this town and that's it. Really, I can't wait to return when we go for a visit." (girl 2, 18 y/a, long term)

The decision to migrate has disrupted their lives because they had to leave relatives, classmates, friends, homes, schools, and neighbourhoods. However, some migrant children maintain contact using social media apps.

"We often talk, Snapchat, phone and similar. I also use Instagram, I have TikTok, WhatsApp, Viber and YouTube." (girl, 12 y/o, long term)

3.3.1.2General life

Living conditions

It is clear from the interviews that the living conditions of long-term migrant children vary considerably (both, within the group and in comparison with other groups). In general, their living situation is better comparing it with the situation of newly arrived migrant children. Long-term migrants live in large apartments, or their families own a real estate in Slovenia. Several have houses in their country of origin as well. However, not all have such an advantage. For example, some long-term migrant children share a room with siblings or other relatives. Many families started their life in Slovenia in tiny rooms or they shared apartments with relatives and later moved to more spacious apartments.

> *"Generally speaking, I think that we made a huge improvement. When we arrived, we had this apartment, everything was crammed, only the basics. Throughout these years, we renovated the apartment and now, this is completely different story." (boy, 15 y/old, long term)*

> *"Here, plenty of Bosnians struggle in small apartments. Everyone lives in small apartments. We didn't have troubles with that because we have huge apartment, we live in a house from the beginning, we rented it from Bosnians, and they helped us. We have large apartment; 2 families could live in it. There's 4 of us, everybody has a room, there's living room, kitchen, we don't have problems." (girl 2, 16 y/o, long term)*

We have come across an example of a migrant child living in a crammed apartment that also poses a potential health risk to family members.

> *"My mum has to pay attention because sometimes something black occurs. Mould and moisture. I sleep alone but I don't have my own bed. My mum shares bed with my sister and my brother. My dad has a bed for himself so he can rest. Sometimes, my brother wants to sleep with him, but dad has difficulties sleeping because there's so little space. Our flat is constantly broken." (boy, 10 y/o, long term)*

During the COVID-19 outbreak, when schools were closed, migrant children who have room for themselves enjoyed a quieter place to study, reduced family tensions, and a better sense of privacy. On the other hand, several migrants admitted that sharing a room strengthened ties between siblings.

Spatial and social positioning

Similar to the newly arrived learners, the long-term migrant children also perceive Slovenian cities in a positive regard. They enjoy living in the centre of the town or in its proximity and they like various urban facilities (e.g., shopping malls, parks, schools, cinema, bowling centre, stadiums). Several children who have lived in other areas of Slovenia prefer their current place of residence and often refer to it as their home. Three long term migrant children believe that the size of the town is associated with a more tolerant attitude local people express.

The migrant children feel comfortable and accepted in their town and in their neighbourhood. They plan to stay in Slovenia and raise children here. Additionally, migrant children say that their parents often emphasise that the family has moved to a better place.

Those migrant children who had visited relatives in other countries abroad were able to compare the advantages, but also the disadvantages. of living in Slovenia.

"I was in Switzerland and anywhere where my relatives live. Not that I praise Slovenia because we are speaking right now and want to impress you but such clean environment, such lovely people, this can't be found anywhere else. Currently, Slovenia is on the 1ˢᵗ place. I was in Germany and in Switzerland and neither of them can compare to Slovenia." (girl 3, 18 y/o, long term)

"Here in Slovenia, you have to give a lot of money, more and more and then you run out of it and can't afford a car." (boy, 10 y/o, long term)

Often, migrant families live in surroundings where at least one neighbour has had similar experiences in terms of migration. This helps migrant families feel more comfortable and able to rely on someone nearby. Others who live in less diverse neighbourhoods also feel accepted.

"Neighbours are so lovely, polite, they accept us, they don't speak bad about us despite coming from another country. We are the only Albanians in the building. Others are mostly Slovenes. These people are the nicest, especially elderlies. This is so cute (laugh). I think they are adorable. During the pandemic, we don't visit each other. Sometimes they bring apples or some other fruit. They are really nice and try to accept us. Some understand how it is to move from abroad while some don't." (girl 3, 18 y/o, long term)

Regarding socioeconomic status (SES), many migrant children report that they, as well as their siblings, engage in work activities. To some extent, they help with household expenses, but for most migrant children, work is a way to earn pocket money. They regularly work in restaurants, bars and in factories.

Similarly, to newly arrived migrant children, mothers are often stay at home mothers or hold an occupation in low paid profession (e.g., cleaners, factory workers). This is also the case for migrant mothers who have obtained a higher education degree in their country of origin. Some mothers were also at home in their country of origin. A few of them are employed in a business owned by their husbands. Frequently, fathers work on construction sites, in the port or in utility services, they are truck drivers or business owners.

"My father opened bakery. First, he tried in one town then another and another. Now, we are at the border. When brothers finished high school, he employed them. My father doesn't work, he controls the process, he controls workers. My mum helps him in the bakery." (girl, 17 y/o, long term)

LT migrant children were aware of economic differences among peers. Often, they rejected values of consumerism, reported excluding remarks and negative attitudes toward people who are less advantageous. Regarding equipment needed during the school closure, most of them had their own tablets and computer.

"Now, peers put plenty on material status. You're a top dog if you, I don't know, spent 500 € for shoes. It doesn't make sense to me; I can have shoes for 100 € or 70 € and they're the same. Maybe they will last longer than these for 500 €. In my opinion, peers are very observant when it comes to how someone dresses." (girl 4, 18 y/o, long term)

Inclusion in peer groups

Migrant children identified peer groups as one of the most important factors in their school life. Long term migrant children recall that they had a hard time making friends when they arrived, however, soon they developed strong bonds with classmates, as well as with other peers. Now, they are engaging in several peer groups that extend from school to leisure activities. In these groups, children with various backgrounds interact.

Some long-term migrant children still feel more comfortable spending most of their time with children with whom they share the same cultural background. Others have more diverse social networks. In relation to this, some migrant children were afraid upon arrival that local peers would exclude them if they will be seen with classmates from their country of origin, so they deliberately socialised with local children.

"At first, I didn't want to hang out with them, because I was like "Oh, no, everybody will see it and they'll say "Oh, look, she spends time with her people"" and they will turn against me. This wasn't okay from me." (girl, 17 y/o, long term)

Peer groups also differ in size; some long-term migrant children enjoy the company of a larger group of peers, while others prefer interactions limited to a smaller social circle. Sometimes, migrant children form peer groups in Slovenia differently than in their country of origin.

"Here, I'm not the person who is very out-going. I don't know why. I have one friend that I met when I arrived, and we still hang out. I'm different when I'm in Bosnia. Here, I'm reserved, cautious, I watch what I say and what I do so people wouldn't think bad of me. I don't have many friends, I have one, I hang out with everyone and have good relationship with all classmates, but I keep my distance." (girl 4, 18 y/o, long term)

The main peer groups are related to classmate interactions and leisure activities that define migrant children's lives. Long term migrant children report that peers were helpful from the beginning. However, after they had adjusted, migrant children slowly began to take on the role of buddies or tutors for migrant children who arrived later.

Language is an important feature of such interactions, as they rely on both, their mother tongue and Slovenian. In interaction with local peers, migrant learners point out that conversations became easier when their language skills developed.

In general, we can say that long term migrant children are included into various peer groups and present a valuable and important part of the social circles they form. Especially migrant children in secondary school express a high level of confidence to participate in peer groups without fearing that their migrant status may be a factor of exclusion. Long term migrant children who have gone through primary and secondary education in the host country and have more experience with cultural traditions, customs and local people are even more relaxed in secondary schools. They perceive secondary schools as a place where peers are less likely to question the individual's cultural background, interethnic conflicts, and similar topics.

Involvement in leisure activities, sport

The majority of long-term migrant children report engaging in one form of leisure activity or another. They often go for a walk with friends and family, watch TV, go shopping or to a club, dance, take care of their pets, read, participate in a religious activity, skateboard, watch Netflix, play football or online video games, and hike. Their activities and involvement do not differ from the involvement of local children. These activities are vital for their wellbeing and allow them to spend time with peers and expand their social network. Several activities are linked to their future aspirations and interests, for example, becoming a professional athlete. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, these leisure activities were interrupted and during our fieldwork we could recognise that the children's overall wellbeing was affected.

Health (physical and mental health)

Regarding long-term migrant children's mental health, especially older migrant children reported that their mental health was most impaired upon arrival. Several of them experienced problems in that period due to their ethnicity and language. They were convinced that peers would reject them because of their nationality and consequently suffered from stress and anxiety. Some tried to deny this part of their identity, and this led to internal fights. In several cases, such challenges were resolved when they met a migrant child who was proud of roots but at the same time successfully fit in the peer group.

"The worst part was that I was angry with myself, with who I am. This was horrifying because I was like "Look, if I were a Slovene, if I were something else, this wouldn't happen." It took me a long time to come to my senses and I tell myself "Look, I'm proud of my origin. I'm happy that I have such a lovely family. They took care of me, and they raised me so well." But it took me so long. (girl, 17 y/o, long term)

For a small group of migrant children, socialisation was limited because of former sports injuries or health conditions that prevented them from participating in sports and other peer activities.

"I know how it feels when you're mentally unstable, it's the worst feeling. You can cure everything, but mental health is difficult, you have to figure it out with yourself. I want to help others to avoid such state of mind. I solved this issue alone, nobody helped me. Only now, when I am already saved, I went to psychologist. Only now, when I am out of the woods, my mum realised that something is wrong, that I struggle with something." (girl 1, 16 y/o, long term)

Generally, the older migrant children were more aware of their mental struggles than the younger one. For most, the first school days were a source of stress or a stress reliever. As a result, plenty of migrant children still have very vivid memories of the first months and years that followed the migration.

"I remember that one morning I woke up and I didn't want to go to school among these new people and everything. I called my mum and told her that my heart hurts. She was worried and came home with my father, they took me to doctor, they made some tests, and everything was okay. Then the doctor asked why and everything. She told me that I was stressed because

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of new environment and everything. She gave me pills and I took them one month, every morning before I went to school, I took one and I was fine all day." (girl 3, 16 y/o, long term)

In terms of mental health, some migrant children struggled because of family situation (low SES, family fights, absent parents or relatives) or peer exclusion. In terms of addressing problems, migrant learners often discuss their struggles with family and peers.

Migrant children who completed primary school in Slovenia often benefited from the possibility of transitioning to secondary school. According to them, this allows more equal footing for everyone since the situation is the same for all and everybody has the opportunity to make an impression. Several LT migrant children experienced bullying in primary school. These migrant children benefited from the opportunity to start in a different environment surrounded by new people.

"I feel better here than I did in my former school. Teachers are nice. Sometimes, when I came from school, I was crying, I was sad. Sometimes, I refused to go to school because I knew people will be rude to me there. Now I feel good, I really enjoy being in school." (girl 1, 15 y/o, long term)

3.3.1.3 Educational environment and system

Experiences of inclusion in school

Long term migrant children perceive school as a positive, welcoming, and accepting place. Regarding their class, most migrant children feel that they are part of the class community. In conversation with migrant children who were in their 1st year of secondary school, they indicated that they felt more relaxed and encouraged because everybody was new to the situation and not very familiar with the expectations, school rules and classmates.

Several migrant children reported that they behave more inclusive towards peers because they themselves had been excluded at some point in their lives. Sometimes, migrant children cannot count on peer support when dealing with learning difficulties.

"If I have troubles with certain subject or homework there's no way anyone will help me. No chance. No matter whether it would be that I won't pass the class or will have a resit exam there's no way someone would help me." (girl 1, 16 y/o, long term)

A migrant child is often excluded from group activities by the teacher due to not having homework. When migrant children feel that peers perceive them differently, their strategy is to ignore this feeling or pay little attention to it. If they have classmates from the same country of origin, they are more likely to feel accepted and spend more time together.

Language proficiency is another factor that significantly determines the level of inclusion and integration of long-term migrant children.

"My former classmates didn't talk to me, and they concluded that I'm rude even though I didn't say a word. I was quiet because I didn't know the language. They judged too soon." (girl 1, 15 y/o, long term)

Language & School language policy and practice

Long term migrant children are bilingual or even multilingual. Our sample consists of migrant children who speak a variety of languages, from Serbo-Croatian, Albanian, Macedonian to Bulgarian and Turkish. Upon arrival, they were worried because of their language proficiency and did not know how this would affect their social life.

"I really wished to learn the language and really wanted to become accepted in this group. It's strange to be lonely, you have 28 classmates but you're alone. This was weird, so I started having conversations with people. You can't just stand there; you must come out with a topic despite not being proficient. I had to find myself a company, I had to start talking." (girl 3, 16 y/o, long term)

Having lived in Slovenia for several years now, most of them describe themselves being fluent in Slovene. Among key factors that contributed to their speaking abilities, they list parents, teachers, classmates, everyday interactions with peers, and language course. In general, it took them 3-6 months to feel more confident in Slovene.

"Actually, school really helped me. If I weren't in school, I wouldn't learn Slovene so quickly. And my friends, of course, we chat, and it was way easier, I got into conversation with them and it was really nice, so I learnt quickly." (girl 3, 16 y/o, long term)

However, not all migrant children are proficient in Slovene despite being here for years. Language barrier is still present for a significant proportion of migrant learners who speak Albanian language as their language differs considerably from the languages of to the Slavic language group. Additionally, these long-term migrant children struggle to understand teachers' instructions and have difficulties doing their homework. The distinctive feature of the Slovene language, the dual, causes problems for many migrant children whose mother tongue uses only singular and plural. This shows that long-term migrant children can still benefit from additional language support.

The school environment is also characterised by different languages. Sometimes, teachers use a foreign language to explain part of the learning content to migrant children. It is far more often, however, that language variety is found only in informal settings, e.g., when migrant children interact with their peers. Some migrant children have chosen to communicate with their classmates in both their mother tongue and in Slovene, while others speak mainly in Slovene at school.

"I speak mostly Slovene, however, when girls from Bosnia gather, they speak Bosnian only. But for me, it's embarrassing to speak Bosnian in front of unknown people, I don't know why but I'm like this from the beginning. So, I speak Slovene with them. They speak Bosnian, but I speak Slovene most of the time. In general, I'm not confidant speaking Bosnian in front of strangers because I have this feeling that I came to their country, and I hear sometimes that people don't want to speak Slovene and I have this feeling that I am the one who needs to adapt, not the other way around." (girl 2, 18 y/o, long term)

Several long-term migrant children translate for newly arrived peers, helping them bridge the gap in the process of linguistic and cultural integration.

"I spend most of my time with a friend from Kosovo. We're in the same class. We speak Slovene because she needs to learn the language, it will be easier for her." (girl 2, 15 y/o, long term)

"I helped her a bit when she arrived. I taught her the basics. For example, that you know when someone says "Cheers!" that's not a toast but rather a greeting, when someone says "See you later" this means they go away. The same was with colours and the dual. We have different meanings."

(girl 3, 16 y/o, long term)

According to long term migrant children, most teachers are not particularly fond of listening to migrant children communicating in their language in class and during breaks. In contrast, migrant children perceive their local classmates as mostly tolerant of different languages.

Peers

Long-term migrant children have warm relations with their peers. Especially after their arrival, some were more enthusiastic to socialise with friends who spoke their language, while others quickly connected with local peers. Conversations are held in Slovene, their mother tongue, or they use both languages and English. Friends provide emotional and learning support, they share interests and spend free time together. In addition, they contribute to well-being of long-term migrant children. In general, classmates are friendly, helpful, inclusive, and tolerant. Peer groups consist of friends from school, (younger) relatives, peers from the neighbourhood and children from leisure activities.

Sometimes, long term migrant children are older than their classmates because schools placed them in lower grades to provide them an extra year of language learning or because they did not pass the year due to language or other learning difficulties. These circumstances sometimes affect peer dynamics and perceived level of individual's maturity.

"It's ok, it's not bad, but I think that I'm slightly more mature than them. Overall, they are 2 years younger than me and act a bit childish. I was always a bit more mature, now I'm like a mother to them. It's ok, they're not impolite, just childish." (girl 2, 18 y/o, long term)

In the first year after arrival, migrant children were aware of existing peer-groups, however, some had more difficulty coming into the circle than others. Plenty of them reported being excluded by peers at some point. In some cases, teachers' intervention resolved the situation. In others, it was more a question of language proficiency and time. When migrant children have a better command of the Slovenian language, the quality of peer relationships improves.

Regarding violence, migrant learners admit physical and verbal violence. Sometimes, migrant children experience insults related to their ethnic background or cultural and linguistic characteristics.

"My classmate was explaining the war, how it went, and the next slide was some soldier. But this was not a soldier of our army, it was a boy, 14 years old, who was wearing a uniform and held a toy gun. He literally had this picture on his slide, he put it on and wrote "Kosovar soldier". That was it. When others have seen that, of course, they started to laugh and commented "This is a child holding a gun." It wasn't comfortable nor funny, I don't get it why it would be funny. I'm not saying this because it was insulting to me but because it would be insulting for any nation. This isn't funny, you can't make fun of such things, people lost families." (girl, 17 y/o, long term)

They have developed various strategies to cope with it – from immediate and direct confrontation to ignorance. A troubling peer dynamic affects migrant children's' wellbeing.

"I don't ignore it; I continue as long as I don't win. Seriously! If someone says that I'm a Muslim I ask what makes non-Muslims better? Or why am I worse? Would anything change if I were a Catholic? I respect my religion as well as other religions. Likewise, you have to respect me as a person, not that you downgrade me because I'm a Muslim. I have several classmates that behave like that. All right, in most cases, I will turn around and go away but when I feel attacked and insulted, I show them where's their place. I won't allow anyone to insult me."
(girl 1, 16 y/o, long term)

Teachers/educational staff

Long-term migrant children speak about teachers mostly in a positive light. Teachers appear to be helpful, respectful, supportive, encouraging and kind. Many migrant children feel that they can turn to teachers when they need support. Others expected more support from school counsellors, especially during the application process. Teachers were a particularly important figure upon their arrival. They helped them acquire the language and supported them with their schoolwork. In one example, the teacher discussed issues related to discrimination and this helped to bridge the gap between a migrant child and classmates. Often, teachers encourage other children to help migrants with school responsibilities.

"In the morning, before classes and after them, sometimes also in the middle of the day, teacher worked with me. Sometimes, she gave my classmates some tasks and took more time for me or we were working alone." (girl 3, 16 y/o, long term)

"Teacher gave me another chance because she knew that I was from Bosnia and that I struggle a bit with the language. I was very happy." (girl 1, 15 y/o, long term)

However, some migrant children experienced discriminatory and ignorant behaviour from teachers.

"I don't listen to teachers. When they go away, we intentionally speak Bosnian. Nobody says anything when people in school speak English or German but when we speak Bosnian everything is wrong. We intentionally start to sing. It's not like we don't care, but we provoke and continue to talk Bosnian. We don't struggle with Slovene, but the experience is different when we can discuss in Bosnian." (girl 4, 16 y/o, long term)

"I think it's weird that teachers examine Bosnians only for a grade 2. Like, they gave you minimal criteria. I mean, it's not strange since some assess only for a positive grade, right, but I still think this is weird." (girl 4, 16 y/o, long term)

Some learners point out that teachers explicitly tell them that in case of any trouble, they are welcome to knock on their door and they will help them. Additionally, before the assessment, when long term migrant children had a specific learning status, teachers gave them a list of questions to help them organise their learning. At the same time, some children indicate that they have not received help and support when they have asked for it.

Inclusion and integration practices regarding newcomers

Long term migrant children identify forming friendships with others and acquiring Slovene language as two main and very helpful resources for the integration process. In terms of language proficiency, they cite peer interactions, Slovene language course and teacher support as the most vital ones. After their arrival, several migrant children visited the school before the official beginning of the school year. They were welcomed by the school counsellor and teachers and received the necessary information about school life. Some migrants were accompanied by another teacher who provided a learning support and translated the teaching content. Migrant children from several schools had the opportunity to present their country, religion, and history to their classmates.

> *"Us, migrant learners worked in library with a special teacher. Once, we made a poster, our group from Bosnia, we presented it to our classmates." (girl 1, 15 y/o, long term)*

Looking back on their first months in Slovenian schools, long-term migrant children assess positively the possibility of being excused of exams during their first year in a Slovenian school or that they could set the exam dates in advance. According to migrant children, this helps learners to organise their learning activities and reduce stress. One migrant child pointed out that the school organises special clubs for children from abroad. These clubs unite migrant children who have had similar experiences, offer a possibility to expand social network and learn more about different cultures.

Psychosocial support

In terms of psychosocial support, nobody mentioned any official support available for migrant children organised in the school environment. However, some long-term migrant children visit psychologists or doctors due to stress experienced after the migration. Less institutionalised psychosocial support comes from parents, siblings, relatives, friends, and teachers. There are no data related to the mental health and wellbeing of long-term migrant children in Slovenia.

3.3.1.4 Family and wider community

Family

Long-term migrant children report that their parents maintain the language and cultural and religious practices to ensure maintaining their ethnic heritage. In most cases, migrant children speak their parents' language fluently and often use it in communication with parents and other relatives. Parents also ensure that migrant children are aware of their cultural heritage and cultural identity. At the same time, during the first years, several parents actively helped migrant children to learn Slovene.

The family is also a source of psychological support and gives a feeling of stability. Migrant children also have close ties with members of their extended family. Some relatives live in

Slovenia, while others are still in their country of origin or somewhere else abroad. In the case of relatives who were already living in Slovenia before the migrant child arrived, these family members helped the migrant family find housing, apply for documents, find school, learn the language, and understand cultural differences. Long-term migrant children still stay in touch with relatives from their country of origin. They use phone calls, online communication tools or text messages. Usually, these family members are also the ones migrant learners had most difficulties leaving.

In some cases, coming to Slovenia meant that family members could live together after many years of, for example, one parent being away due to work abroad.

"What's positive is actually that I can be with my family here and that we are together every day. Before the arrival, I couldn't see my dad every day. It's easier now when the whole family is here together." (girl 4, 16 y/o, long term)

Migrant community, religious community

In several examples, long-term migrant children report that in Slovenia they are still able to engage in core parts of their religion, e.g., fastening during Ramazan, attending religious education, or celebrating their traditions. The ability to engage in cultural practices allows migrant children to stay connected to their cultural background. For some migrant children, religion and the religious community are important features of their lives. For example, one long-term migrant child is named after one of the saints in accordance with their tradition. Some migrant children combine their traditions with the traditions of the host country, or migrant families adapt their traditions to the host society. Migrant children's religious affiliation and associated traditions are more often a subject of interest than discrimination.

"I spend holidays with my family, we celebrate everything, Christmas, Easter, New Year, everything that exists in Slovenia, even if it's not slightly connected to the Muslim tradition. We shouldn't celebrate New Year but since we're here, we are adapting to this culture. I fasten during every Ramazan, the same goes for my friends. Sometimes it's hard, but I know that I must. When we celebrate bajram I'm not in school, I always get a permission for absence. I have to respect our rules, I need to be with my family, go to the mosque, that's it, it'll always be like this. I respect my religion, I wouldn't care if I were absent without a permission." (girl 1, 16 y/o, long term)

"As a Muslim, I should wear a hijab, but our family don't follow this. We are Muslims, we believe in God, but we don't comply to strict rules, for example, to wear a hijab." (girl 3, 18 y/o, long term)

For most long-term migrant children, it is common that they attended religious services more often in their country of origin than in Slovenia. Sometimes, they do not know where these services take place, while in other cases the importance of attending these services is diminished. When migrant children were younger, some of them regularly attended religious education classes, however, this was often a result of their parents' decision. Nevertheless, migrant children perceive these moments as another opportunity to meet with friends, but after a few years, some of them have decided not to affiliate with any religion.

In relation to migrant community, sometimes members of the migrant community celebrate holidays, and traditions together and help each other. In terms of common values, traditional gender roles and social expectations inflicted by the migrant community are prominent in the narratives of migrant children belonging to the Albanian ethnic community from Kosovo

and North Macedonia. Several Albanian female migrants point out that these expectations negatively affect their wellbeing. The institution of marriage presents an important topic in their society, and the whole family (more specifically fathers and brothers) is involved in deciding who will marry whom. Albanian female migrants who are in an intimate relationship with a person of a different ethnicity feel uneasiness because they often hide their partners from family members. Additionally, these females point out that migrant girls from the same country of origin understand the struggles related to such cultural traditions and expectations better than local peers.

Local environment

Some long-term migrant children describe their neighbourhood as quiet and peaceful. Over the years, the majority of migrant families have developed respectful and polite relationships with neighbours. Several migrant children speak warmly about elderly neighbours in particular. In some cases, neighbourhoods house several migrant families, while in others, migrant families are surrounded only by local neighbours. Long-term migrant children perceive Slovenian towns as green, tolerant, safe, rather diverse, and calm.

3.3.1.5 Other

N/A

3.3.2 Conceptualizations of own well–being and life satisfaction

Self-perceived well-being and life satisfaction

Long-term migrant children list various determinants of wellbeing, for example, family and relatives, friends, extracurricular activities, and school. COVID-19 restrictions have severely impacted their opportunities to engage in free time activities and spend time with friends in an offline environment. Consequently, their wellbeing was affected.

> *"The last time I was there, was before the quarantine. I miss my relatives and some friends. This virus also affected our rituals during the Ramazan, the whole family usually participated but because of corona this is no longer possible. During quarantine, it was difficult to be with my sister because we had to share everything." (girl 1, 15 y/o, long term)*

Having a friend and building strong bonds with peers are among vital factors for long-term migrant children to feel comfortable, accepted, and relaxed. This is especially important considering the state of several migrant children who were rather distressed, anxious, and sad when they had to migrate. After several years, some migrant children still miss their friends, school, and life in their country of origin. On the other hand, most migrant children are more satisfied with their life and opportunities in Slovenia. One reason is that families are finally together.

> *"In Bosnia, there were me, my mum and my brother, my dad worked here, and he returned once or twice per month, whenever he could. Later, we decided to all come to Slovenia because we wanted to be together and because we believe we have better life opportunities than in Bosnia." (girl 2, 18 y/o, long term)*

Additionally, migrant children value good family atmosphere and strong ties between family members. They aim for open relationship with parents where they feel loved and safe.

"I feel good considering my health, my mental and physical state. There's nothing I miss in my life, I am happy. In my family, it's natural that sometimes somebody is sad or happy. We all have own problems, we solve them as they come and generally, we are one happy family."
(boy, 15 y/o, long term)

3.3.2.1 Identification and belonging

Long-term migrant children have anchors related to their ethnic, linguistic, and religious background. For some long-term migrant children, it is important that they can speak with family and peers in their mother tongue, while others are more reserved to speak their mother tongue in the host country because they consider it inappropriate. Additionally, migrant children often refer to their country of origin as home, although they do not necessarily want to return. Others feel that the bond with their country of origin is broken and perceive Slovenia as their home. For example, one migrant child who already has dual citizenship plans to give up both citizenships to obtain Slovenian citizenship.

Sometimes, peers from the same country of origin help migrant learners develop and embrace their identity.

"Later, one guy came, he is also at this school, he's also Albanian and we started to talk. I liked him a little. I think he is the reason I'm prouder of who I am and that I don't care what another think. Now I can prove someone that we, Albanians, are good people, that we're not as bad as people like to think about us." (girl, 17 y/o, long term)

3.3.2.2 Feelings of safety

We have not been able to gather much information regarding the safety of long-term migrant children. Sometimes, they describe the people in the host country as nice and to some extent this could be interpreted as perceiving them as people without bad intentions. One migrant child mentioned that people in Slovenia always care about other people and try to help when troubles arise. In terms of material safety, the migrant learners think that the household situation is more stable now and has improved compared to life in their country of origin.

3.3.2.3 Self-perceived opportunities, choices and feeling of control over their own life and future

All migrant children have hopes and aspirations for their future. Some long-term migrant children have a very clear idea of what they want to become and how their careers should develop. They want to become professional athletes (footballers), construction engineers, plumbers, office workers, models, journalists, psychologists, lawyers, and hairdressers. Some of them want to move to another country (for example in Turkey, France, Germany, or Switzerland) while others want to stay in Slovenia. Some also want to return to their country of origin. Many of them plan to educate further and apply for the university program.

3.3.3 Perceptions, values, attitudes and opinions

Interviews reveal that most long-term migrant children hold positive attitudes and opinions regarding multicultural communities. Living in a multicultural society and participating in a multicultural classroom allows them to learn about new cultures and communicate in shared

languages. Migrant children pointed out that migrant communities help people integrate into the host society, but also maintain the cultural traditions of their community.

3.3.4 (Perceived) Advantages and weaknesses of existing models of migrant children`s integration

3.3.4.1 Perception of integration

In terms of integration, long-term migrant children address various aspects. One migrant child described how her family perceives integration as a process in which migrant family have to show respect to the host country by celebrating the holidays and traditions of the majority. Often, migrant children addressed the question of language and religion. Plenty of long-term migrant children believe that migrants should learn the language of the host country to be able to participate in the host county, however, migrants who speak the same language should have the opportunity to speak in their language. According to migrant children, learning the language is a sign of respect and an indicator of integration. In terms of religion, long-term migrant children believe that everyone has the right to participate in religious activities in institutions intended for religious services as well as to celebrate religious holidays and traditions within the family. At the same time, migrant families should respect the national traditions and holidays of the host country.

3.3.4.2 Advantages

Most migrant children emphasise the value of the language course that is tailored to the needs of foreigners learning Slovene. Moreover, reflecting their first months in the host country, some appreciate that the teachers adapted the learning material and offered them help and support. Further, the opportunity to set the exam dates and receive exam questions in advance has had a positive impact on their academic performance. Organising a peer support system (having a buddy or a tutor) where local children help migrant learners is another tool that was often mentioned.

3.3.4.3 Weakness

N/A

3.3.4.4 Good practices

Several good practices were described in the chapter 3.3.4.2.

3.4 LOCAL CHILDREN: Focus groups & Interviews/autobiographical stories/narration of location

3.4.1 Dynamics and factors influencing the integration process of migrant children

3.4.1.1 Premigration period and migration experience

Country of birth/country of ancestors

Local children are children born in Slovenia. The purpose of interviewing local children was to find out their views on migrant children, multiculturalism and the integration process. However, many local children have some form of a migratory background. Plenty of local children are second or third generation migrants, born in Slovenia to parents who migrated from various countries, e.g., Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, etc. Their ancestorial countries are important to them. They have mostly visited these countries at least once in their life or regularly spent holidays there surrounded by members of their extended family. Migrant parents often tell them stories related to these places, they have several relatives who still reside there and are aware of family cultural heritage.

> *"My grandpa lives there. And my uncle, he's nice, he always gives me everything. We always play together or build something or have a barbecue." (boy, 12 y/o, local)*

Local children whose parents migrated to Slovenia perceive their ancestorial countries as beautiful countries and many of them feel at home there. However, they are aware that the current economic situation and opportunities for education and employment are worse there than in Slovenia. Local learners with migrant parents are able to compare the infrastructure, school rules and living conditions in different countries.

> *"Honestly, Slovenia is a better country. In these countries, I don't know. Once, when I was in Montenegro, because I have a relative who is of my age, I went to school with him to see what they are doing in their schools and so. It was completely different. Here, these rules and grades and stuff are stricter. I've seen there, for example, that they wrote a story and because someone's handwriting was neat, he got 5. I was like what is going on? They give good marks for nothing." (boy, 14 y/o, local)*

3.4.1.2 General life

Living conditions

Regarding living conditions, local children usually are generally in a better position than their migrant peers. They often live in houses or large apartments where each family member has own room and consequently a considerable amount of privacy. Additionally, they are aware that having their own room was a significant advantage during the school closure. Sometimes, local children share households with grandparents or other relatives. In Slovenia, there is still a strong tradition of living in two-generation households for various reasons.

> *"We live with my grandma, we have two apartments, the lower is a bit smaller and that's where my grandma lives, while our apartment is upstairs." (girl, 12 y/o, local)*

"We live in a house, I have my own room, a study room, bathroom, quiet a lot of space (laugh). That really made distance schooling easier." (boy 1, 18 y/o, local)

On the other hand, some local children have divorced parents and thus children live alternately in a house or an apartment. Additionally, the parents of second or third generation migrant children often have another house or apartment in their country of origin.

Spatial and social positioning

The majority of local children has been living most of their lives in cities or near the places where our research took place. They like the proximity of shopping centres, markets, parks, stadiums, beaches, hills, and forests. Often, local children consider living in the city centre as an important advantage in terms of mobility, leisure activities and the possibility to meet with friends. Most local children perceive their hometowns as open, tolerant, clean, and safe. On the other hand, those who live in the suburbs or nearby villages enjoy nature and the possibility of having a garden in front of their house.

"Me and my sister live with my dad and grandma in our house. We had quiet large property. And some garden. It's not large. But everything is home-grown, nothing artificial or bought."

(girl, 18 y/o, local)

We have been able to identify numerous factors that indicate a child's socioeconomic status (SES). For example, parents' occupation, leisure activities, home description, number of properties, and the amount of pocket money they receive each month. Among professions, parents are, for example, dentists, doctors, librarians, judges, business owners, accountants, teachers, olive farmers, and engineers.

"It's not like I don't have for food, clothes, roof over my head. We don't have problems. In the past, we had some financial difficulties because we bought a property. We are building a log cabin there; we are planning to rent it out and make some extra money out of it." (boy 1, 16 y/o, local)

"We have two apartments. My father inherited this business, and he will continue it. That's why there's no need for my mother to work. If there was, she would work. I could work as well, but I don't need to." (girl 1, 17 y/o, local)

Additionally, local children often have their own computers. Consequently, they experienced less difficulties during the distant schooling and could face school obligations more efficiently. At the same time, they tend to relax with devices such as PlayStation or Xbox.

Sometimes, local children whose parents work in low-income occupations (e.g., construction workers, plumbers, cooks, security guards, butchers, and cleaners) or are unable to work because of illness or other impairment have more household responsibilities than other peers, for example, cooking, taking care of younger siblings and similar. These children, in comparison with children whose SES was higher, rarely speak about participating in extracurricular activities that require a financial contribution (e.g., football, hockey or volleyball practise, horse riding, swimming). In addition, they more often already participate in paid work activities or receive a government scholarship.

"I don't have much – my parents don't have a lot of money, especially now, when my mum is sick and she can't work, she's on a sick leave for the past 4 years and my father is now sick too, but he still works somehow. I learnt myself how to earn the money." (girl 2, 17 y/o, local)

"I receive stipend. I save money for a car. Nothing fancy, just my first car. I spend most of my money for food if we go eat outside. Sometimes, I buy clothes." (girl, 18 y/o, local)

Local children are aware that peers compare in terms of symbols of material wealth. It matters whether a child wears clothes of a certain brand, owns a latest-generation smartphone and an original or fake piece of clothing. Some local children describe such behaviour as immature. Local children admit that they were more receptive to such comparisons when they were younger. On the other hand, one child's classmates planned to cover the cost of an annual class fieldtrip for less advantaged classmates.

Some local children are aware that they live in a culturally diverse neighbourhood, while others do not know the ethnicity of their neighbours. Most of them describe their neighbourhood as nice, clean, and safe.

"I would say that we have 5 – 10% of migrants, at most. Plenty of them are from former Yugoslavia. I know we have two Belarussians. And one Iranian woman and two blacks, although I don't know whether they are from France or North Africa. In small town everybody controls everyone (laugh)." (boy 1, 18 y/o, local)

Some local children spend plenty of time with children from the neighbourhood and have a strong tie with them. A minority of them feel that their surrounding is full of risk factors, for example, traffic.

"Usually, we met on the street and played together. We pretended to have a shelter for horses or something. When there was snow, we sled because there's a hill not far away from us. If somebody couldn't come, the rest still hung out and others joined when they could. We never had those silly moments like "You can't be here now because of this and this and this.". We never excluded anyone." (girl, 14 y/o, local)

Most local children have good relations with their neighbours; people care for each other and help when necessary. The intensity of these contacts varies; in some neighbourhoods, people visit one another, in others, people meet in specific situations (e.g., sawing wood or shovelling snow), and in some neighbourhoods, residents keep their distance. Only a few children described interactions with neighbours as strange or tense.

"We rent one apartment, the main neighbour, the one that's present most of the time, we have a good relationship with her. She visits us from time to time. Once, she gave us a cake after they had some celebration. She watches our dog when we're on holidays. So, we don't have troubles with neighbours. The neighbour upstairs, he's a bit strange, his blinds are always low, shut down, he's in the dark. I mean in the dark, maybe he has some lights. He comes downstairs only when he goes shopping, otherwise he's upstairs all the time, closed." (boy 1, 13 y/o, local)

"There still exist people who look on origin. In the past, they acted strange, they were writing on our car or something. However, my father solved it, and this doesn't happen anymore. Once, they left a note. I don't remember what was written on it, but if I recall it right, it wasn't particularly nice." (girl 1, 17 y/o, local)

Inclusion in peer groups

Local children are part of numerous peer groups, including friendships from the neighbourhood, schools, local parks, leisure activities, and religious centres. Friendships are diverse in terms of cultural and linguistic background, but this cannot be generalised to all

local children. Mostly, friendships are based on similar hobbies but sometimes also on cultural and linguistic similarities.

"These friends are people from my neighbourhood, former classmates, some are from my current school. Most of us play football together. We are in the same football club." (boy 1, 16 y/o, local)

Many local children hold positive attitude towards migrant children. They are supportive, helpful, and friendly and often help migrant children learn the language or do school tasks. They include them in peer groups and group activities. However, some do not like spending time with migrant children and find it annoying to help them. Rarely they state migrant children's cultural characteristics as the main reason, they rather speak about unappealing personal traits or low academic success as factors that make someone less popular to hang out with. Most local children are aware that some peers behave discriminatory to migrant children.

"Personally, even if a person would be darker or were from, I don't know where, I'm not a person that would think less of them because of these characteristics. I don't pay attention to look, this doesn't tell me anything about this person. I don't have any troubles with migrant peers. I spent time with them before high school and they're nice. Some people say how bad they are, but in my opinion, if you are nice to them, they're nice to you." (girl 5, 16 y/o, local)

"I like that my classmates don't push their religion. Likewise, we don't push our religion. I have classmates who belong to some other religion, but we still love each other and understand one another. Sometimes, we discuss holidays of one or another group. We are all in one Snapchat group." (girl 5, 16 y/o, local)

Involvement in leisure activities, sport

Local children are involved in extracurricular activities. Among the most cited are activities related to sports, e.g., football, hockey, swimming, water polo, badminton, skateboarding, horse riding, dancing, and hiking. Several children report spending their free time reading, watching Netflix, playing an instrument, taking care of their pets, shopping, playing online video games, and partying. These activities are vital for them as they allow them to socialise with friends, expand their social network, and develop social skills. However, some are also interested in more individual activities, e.g., agility trainin with dogs, programming, or painting.

"My day is devoted to my dogs. I care about them all day. In the evening, I take some time for myself, I work out and try different tricks in PhotoShop. I edit photos." (boy 2, 16 y/o, local)

Sometimes, we could identify a gender divide in leisure activities. Local males were more likely to be involved in sports activities or video games than local females. The amount of time spent on online video games is sometimes alarming.

"Plenty. There were days when I was gaming 12 hours per day. In case something special was going on, for example, a New Year's Eve, I was 16 hours behind the computer. When I stopped, I was bored and, in that period, I played only two hours per day. Now, I use my computer only for Netflix and stuff." (boy 1, 13 y/o, local)

Leisure activities are beneficial for their physical and mental health, however, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, most of these activities had to be halted for a considerable time. On the other hand, some local children reported that the pandemic offered them more free time and they could easily organise their activities.

"Most of my classmates enjoyed online classes. Not just because we could cheat. It was better, easier, we woke up later, had more time, we could go out sooner." (boy 1, 13 y/o, local)

"The main problem was that we had too much free time and I felt more tired all the time because I didn't know what to do with myself." (boy 2, 13 y/o, local)

Health (physical and mental health)

Some local children have experienced severe traumatic events in the past (e.g., their mother's miscarriage, the death of one of their siblings, substance abuse by a family member) that they have discussed with their parents and other relatives. Children point out that peer relationships are critical to their wellbeing and sense of belonging. They cited a respectful and non-conflict atmosphere, supportive peers, same hobbies, and a similar sense of humour as characteristics of a positive group dynamic.

For some local children, the COVID-19 restrictions had a serious impact on their health. They feel disconnected from their friends and are anxious. Additionally, the lack of practise at vocational schools has affected career choices of several local children, who now feel even more confused about their future aspirations.

"After the last quarantine, when we've seen each other again, it was obvious that we distanced. We aren't very excited about online chatting. It's not the same. It's not the same whether you can talk live or online and now, when we knew that we would have to separate because of school closure, we almost cried. I hope we will see again as soon as possible. I really don't like distant schooling. It takes much more time than a regular school." (girl 4, 16 y/o, local)

Moreover, several local females admitted that they had suffered from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem in the past due to their physical appearance or peer pressure. They often compared themselves to peers; however, several found the solution in physical activity, prayer and talking with family and friends.

Sometimes, older local children feel a significant amount of stress because of their final exams or busy schedules. In the past, one local child had to undergo a series of surgeries that confined him to distance schooling before the pandemic outbreak. This affected his relations with peers and his knowledge of their interests and problems. None of our respondents mentioned receiving any professional support, however, they tend to reduce stress and take care of themselves by involving in sports and engaging in other activities that they find beneficial.

3.4.1.3 Educational environment and system

Experiences of inclusion in school

Local children express mostly positive attitudes in relation to school. Among reasons what they like the most, they cite supportive and kind teachers, their favourite subjects, certain school facilities (e.g., school cafeteria, terrace, schoolyard) and classmates.

"I feel very good in our school. I must admit that I'm very happy with my classmates. We form groups, however, we all talk, we go around together, for example, to the train station. We don't fight. Of course, we had some fights in the past, but we resolved these and now we work as a team. We laugh together, we stick together. I have wonderful classmates, there's not a single bad person in it, we don't exclude anyone. I'm really happy with them." (girl 4, 16 y/o, local)

Local children highlight that some migrant children are more reserved, and they tend to associate with peers from the same cultural background. In their opinion, migrant children tend to sit together no matter how inclusive the class is. Sometimes, local children are curious and eager to gain more information about migrant children and appreciate opportunities when migrant children can introduce their culture in class. Most of them do not hesitate to help migrant children with school tasks, however, some of them do so only because teachers expect them to. In comparison with migrant children, local children seldomly reported about being excluded or bullied.

In terms of hostile behaviour towards migrant children, one learner reported seeing discriminatory graffiti on the school's façade directed against Roma children and migrants from the South. Some local children admit that fights and insults occur between local and migrant children, but not because of the migrant status, but because of the individual's undesirable behaviour or personal traits. For example, one local child finds it annoying when migrant children listen to Balkan music loudly during lunch break.

Language & School language policy and practice

Our research shows that different languages are spoken in the school environment. In accordance with the school curriculum, children learn foreign languages (English, German, Italian) as formal subjects in schools. Local children with a migrant background sometimes complain that they have difficulties because of the variety of languages they have to master.

Informally, local children hear different languages spoken at school and in their classrooms. Several local learners are able to identify the origin of their classmates by hearing the language they used during their first days at school. Some local learners are able to speak the languages of migrant children and enjoy practicing while others feel more comfortable interacting with migrant children who are already more fluent in Slovene. We could notice that switching between languages is often recognised as something negative, as local children are convinced that migrant children do it with the intention that others do not understand them. Consequently, several local children complained about migrant children speaking in a foreign language.

"It bothers me when they speak in their language even though I understand everything. It bothers me because we're in Slovenia, right? I just want them to stop. But I never say anything to them because otherwise, these are nice people, but this really gets on my nerves. I think they should communicate in Slovene when they're in school. They could speak whatever they want outside the school." (boy 1, 16 y/o, local)

The majority of local children from our sample are bilingual or multilingual since plenty of them are second or third generation migrants. These local children speak their ancestral language with their parents and other relatives (siblings and members of extended family) or friends, but most of the time they use Slovene.

Generally, local children are positive about belonging to a linguistically diverse environment. Often children teach each other expressions in various languages. In some examples, local children help or have helped their migrant parents or newly arrived migrant children to develop language skills.

Local children who have a migrant background can be an important bridge between migrant families, friends, and the host society since they can act as translators and facilitate language learning and the integration process (Moskal and Sime, 2016).

Similar to the other two groups of migrant children, friends provide psychosocial support to the local children. They spend their free time together, have similar hobbies and help each other. Peer groups are often formed on the basis of interests (e.g., sports, motor bikes, fashion), shared past experiences, and gender. In one case, a local child indicated that his group has no hesitation in relation to sexual orientation of peers. Among key characteristics of meaningful friendship, local children often listed kindness, honesty, sincerity, reliability, mutual trust, sense of humour, and emotional support.

Some local children have intense interactions with friends, while others are more reserved and find some positive aspects in the social lockdown caused by the pandemic. Only a few local children reported negative experiences with peers; these were mostly related to bullying. During focus groups, some were able to recognise the quality of their relationships after other children had shared their negative experiences.

In terms of ethnicity, local children tend to spend time together, however, a number of peer groups consist of children from different backgrounds. Some local children reported tensions between groups (e.g., Bosnians and Serbs). Usually, peer groups are quite large, but the number of friends classified as close and trusted friends is low (from 2 to 5 people).

Many of local children are empathic towards migrant children when it comes to sudden changes in their lives.

> *"For example, one of my classmates had to move to Austria now. I think this is horrible, they had to go overnight. I think my classmates are okay, but it must be hard for them to come to a country where people speak a foreign language. And all other changes." (girl 4, 16 y/o, local)*

Teachers/educational staff

Teachers are described as kind, helpful and approachable. They are often a source of psychosocial support. Local children admit that their behaviour sometimes affects how teachers perceive them, for example, if they are noisy and do not want to participate, teachers are more likely to be angry with them.

Several local children reported that teachers organise activities to make migrant learners feel accepted in school. According to them, some mainstream teachers inform classmates a few days before the arrival of migrant child that a new learner will join the class and organise a peer support system in the form of tutoring. Local children could not recall other specific actions organised by teachers directly upon migrant children's arrival. During lessons, teachers are willing to communicate with migrant children in their language. Further, teachers and school counsellors organise lessons where the whole class discusses issues related to racism, discriminatory behaviour, challenges of migration, peer exclusion and similar.

> *"They told us that this new classmate comes from, for example, Croatia or Serbia and that he doesn't understand Slovene very well. Usually, a teacher asked those who speak the same language to help them with tasks and everything so they could follow." (boy 3, 13 y/o, local)*

In local children's opinion, the teachers of the Slovene language and mainstream teachers are among the teachers who are most sensitive to migrant children's challenges. According

to them, teachers consider migrant children's language barrier and pay more attention to the content than to grammatical accuracy. Additionally, they also ask local children with a migrant background for help with translation and similar.

"Teachers ask me all the time how something is called in Albanian. They're interested and I don't mind telling them. It's good for them to know this in case they have migrant learners who are not so fluent." (girl 3, 16 y/o, local)

In general, local children have no impression that teachers are stricter or more unfair to migrant children than to local children. However, one local child feels that teachers are more lenient with migrant learners in comparison to locals and tolerate inappropriate behaviour longer. On the other hand, a few local children with migrant parents are convinced that teachers are less tolerant towards them in comparison with local children whose parents are of Slovenian origin. Similarly, a local child with a migrant background recalled how teachers in primary school differentiated between learners according to their surname, appearance, and religion. Those with surnames indicating Balkan origin were more likely to be graded and held accountable when something happened. Further, they often felt neglected by teachers. This child decided to talk to the headmaster and despite not solving anything, the teachers improved their behaviour after this event.

Inclusion and integration practices regarding newcomers

Local children recognise that being in a new environment can be difficult. They believe that all learners should be treated equally. In most cases, local children act friendly toward migrant children, they are helpful and do not mind interacting with them. They often help them with schoolwork and learning Slovenian. In local children's opinion, schools are accepting, teachers are helpful and do not hesitate to speak in the migrant learners' language if they are fluent in it.

Psychosocial support

There are no reports of formal psychosocial support. Most local children cited their friends, parents, and teachers as sources of support.

3.4.1.4 Family and wider community

Family

Similar to other groups of children, family provide crucial support for local children. Families present an important pillar for local children's wellbeing. However, sometimes they do not feel that they have a say in family matters.

In the past, some local children have experienced divorce of their parents. Some of them admit that, as a result, their wellbeing has been affected to some extent. In some cases, however, parents argued, and thus the separation brought relief. Some local children of divorced parents have difficulty forming a relationship with parent's new partner or have regular conflicts with them. One local child witnessed her mother's miscarriage and her brother died when she was younger. These events have resulted in her being more mature and serious than her peers. Many of the local children emphasise that open conversations with parents and maintaining warm relations have helped them overcome such challenges.

Another specific family situation comes from a child who lives with two older sisters in a separate apartment while their parents live in another apartment nearby. Such living arrangement has affected their family dynamic both positively (more independent children) and negatively (fewer common activities and family traditions, more opportunities for dishonest behaviour).

"For example, if someone isn't behind the table, that we, the children, are alone, I usually take my lunch to my room and eat behind my computer. I don't like this, but I still do it. Sometimes, I don't eat everything, and this food goes into toilet. My parents don't know this." (boy 1, 13 y/o, local)

Other local children are part of larger families where they are busy working on the farm, dog breeding, running the family business or they help care for grandparents and/or younger siblings. Often, local children refer to their pets as important family members. The death of a family dog, for example, has strengthened a local child to cope with further loss and conflicts of parents.

In case of second and third generation local children, some speak the language of their parents at home or help their parents learn Slovenian.

Migrant community, religious community

Several local children report their religious affiliation. Some of them frequently attend religious institutions and emphasis the role of faith in wellbeing. For example, one local child says that prayers have helped her to face with mean comments from peers in the past. A Christian local child speaks openly about going to church and participating in activities for the Catholic youth. Several Orthodox or Muslim local children attend religious services and religious education classes. For some of them, the motivation comes from their internal wish to learn more about the cultural traditions of their migrant parents. For some of them, religion poses an important pillar of their identity. For example, one local child whose parents are migrants is named after a saint of the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, local learners also understand the importance of a broad cultural/religious knowledge.

"It's good for us to start learning about their religion, for example, if we will ever go there, we should know how it is to behave according to their customs. This prepares you better for travelling, you know what kind of behaviour you could expect and what customs people abroad have." (girl, 14 y/o, local)

Often, local children meet with their peers at religious centres and find faith to be a common ground for their friendship. For several children, religious practices are an important tool of connecting with family. Certain religious rules also affect how local children interact with peers and family, i.e., whether or not they consume alcohol and with whom they spend their free time.

"We don't drink alcohol at home, but we have various juices. There was a time I didn't consume it at all, but now I've tried it a few times. Just to taste it, but I don't really like it. My parents are quite strict, but I know my limits. I understand everything and when I see that something could harm me, I stop, not solely because of my faith." (girl 3, 16 y/o, local)

In terms of spending time with migrant community, several local children who have migrant background indicate that they sometimes attend picnics and fieldtrips with other members

of the migrant community and spend time with them. Such occasions are filled with cultural symbols, especially traditional food.

Several local children live in a clean and safe environment where neighbours form helping relationships and rely on each other. Those who live in the urban centre like how quickly they can arrange to meet friends and how close certain institutions are (e.g., school, cinema, shopping mall, library). Those who live in suburbs emphasise the advantage of being close to nature. Both groups believe that the surrounding area provides them with enough opportunities to socialise with family members and friends in various places, e.g., parks, hills, cinema and similar. Some of them report occasional negative incidents, which are described in chapter 3.4.1.2.

> *"I like the size of this town. Things are easily accessible, for example Europark [shopping centre]. In my previous town, we had to drive for 40 minutes in order to buy a decent T-shirt, trousers, such things. Here, we need only 15 minutes. The size, accessibility, the whole big city vibe in comparison with what I were used to really suits me, I like it." (boy, 17 y/o, local)*

3.4.1.5 Other

N/A

3.4.2 Conceptualizations of own well–being and life satisfaction

Self-perceived well-being and life satisfaction

Several local children express positive views about themselves and their life satisfaction, however, some are more neutral about their wellbeing. They identify relationships with family members and friends as key factors that influence their wellbeing. A significant number of local children are also affected by their school success or exam stress. Local children describe themselves as relaxed, outgoing, and friendly. They have several close friends they can rely on and most of them can describe their family members as supportive. In the past, some of them have struggled with low self-esteem or have had problems in their personal lives, but they have successfully resolved them. Among their strategies for protecting their wellbeing, physical activities and creative tasks (for example, painting) were mentioned most often.

To some extent, local children's wellbeing was affected by the COVID-19. Several children are scared, afraid and concerned of the impact the virus will have on their lives. Often, the children felt trapped due to the COVID-19 restrictions. They feel that the school closure has weakened their relationship with classmates and that they are overwhelmed with school responsibilities, while the level of knowledge they have acquired during distance schooling is also questionable.

> *"What bothered me was that I had to stay at home all the time, you couldn't move around. Yeah, you can go out with your dog, but still not far away. When you've been at home for some time, things start to repeat, everything is the same. School is nice because you have different subjects every day, you see your classmates, sometimes, we hang out in front of the stadium and talk, we bring longboards. For example, I'm still learning, my classmate teaches me. So, we hang out. You can't be at home all the time, it's difficult." (girl, 14 y/o, local)*

During the lockdown, others tried to keep their spirits high and approached this unprecedented situation with a positive attitude. Several local children admit that distant learning has improved their grades. Additionally, they feel that they had more time for leisure activities. Consequently, they developed new hobbies, which sometimes broadened their social network and improved their life satisfaction.

"I try to stay positive. We follow the measures and rules, and we'll see. I'm not afraid. It's a bit difficult because we can't see each other, and we have to do everything at home. On the other hand, being home is nice. I can sleep longer." (girl 1, 16 y/o, local)

3.4.2.1 Identification and belonging

Sometimes, local children identify with activities that are meaningful and important to their group (e.g., skateboarding), but it is far more common that they identify with their ethnicity, or the language spoken in their family.

Several second and third generation migrant children have mixed ethnic identities, are bilingual or multilingual and have different belongings. Some feel more connected to their ancestorial country while others claim to be Slovenes. However, we could notice the mixed nature of their identities. Sometimes they feel they belong more to one culture, in other situations to another, and sometimes to both. Sometimes multiple identities cause stress and troubles, but most of the time they accept it as something natural. This depends significantly on the attitudes present in the local environment and schools. Migrant parents often put effort to ensure that their children know and respect traditions and language of the ancestorial country and that the family regularly visits family members who still live there.

"I knew that at home, I am Albanian but that I need to behave more like a Sloven here. I learnt that." (girl 2, 16 y/o, local)

"I am Slovene with Macedonian roots. I was born here, raised here, I grew up in this town. I didn't speak Macedonian in my early years, so yeah, I am Slovene with Macedonian roots."
(boy 2, 18 y/o, local)

"My father is a Muslim, my mum belongs to Orthodox Church, I don't belong to any. I'm Slovene, I was born here, I have citizenship, Slovene friends." (boy 1, 16 y/o, local)

3.4.2.2 Feelings of safety

Local children feel safe in their school and neighbourhood and can mostly rely on their teachers and neighbours. Additionally, family and friends also contribute to their feeling of being safe.

3.4.2.3 Self-perceived opportunities, choices and feeling of control over their own life and future

Local children's aspirations for the future range from a variety of professions, for example, they want to become entrepreneurs, professional athletes, hairdressers, personal trainers, translators, teachers, movie directors, physiotherapists, plumbers, office workers, bodyguards, etc.

Some local children have a clear vision of their future while others take it one step at a time. For most of them, a key condition for a successful life is to finish school and obtain a certain level of education. Sometimes, local children plan to start a family one day, however, they want to ensure the best possible environment for potential offspring (for example, by starting a business that could be passed on later). In addition, plenty of them want to travel a lot.

In terms of the near future, several younger local children are determined to go to grammar school, and local children in secondary schools are often pondering whether to apply to university or look for a job immediately. When comparing local and migrant children, we could say that local children sometimes have higher aspirations and ambitions in terms of education and career than their migrant peers.

3.4.3   Perceptions, values, attitudes and opinions

In general, local children do not mind being part of the environment that enables them to interact with people of various ethnic backgrounds. Most local children are empathic to the problems migrant children have and most of them are willing to help them with school tasks, language and similar.

"Our class accepts everyone because we know how we would feel in a foreign country. For example, if someone speaks Serbian we let them so, we start slowly, and people eventually become more proficient. We don't exclude people, they're still our classmates and peers. We try to accept everyone." (girl, 14 y/o, local)

However, not all of them are fond of diversity and point out that intercultural conflicts exist. In addition, several local children think that migrant classmates are only enrolled because their learner's status allows them to live and work in Slovenia.

"I think there's too many of them. They will spread their culture all over Slovenia. They listen to their south music very loud. They act like proper Southerners, speak their language, don't mind about Slovene language, have their groups." (boy 2, 16 y/o, local)

"We could have fewer migrant learners at our school. There's plenty of them. I don't like them." (boy 2, 13 y/o, local)

Some local children perceive migrant children as quiet and reserved, while others think they are loud and noisy, often seek attention, and like to cause conflict when formed in groups. However, most local children think that they do not discriminate between classmates and peers according to the origin, language, religion and similar. During interviews and focus groups, they often criticised people who hold discriminatory views. In their opinion, it is important that migrant children try as much as possible to become accepted and should not rely only on the initiative of their peers.

"Sometimes, you can find people who totally don't accept people who arrived from other countries, and I think this is rude. It's very rude to judge people because of their ethnicity." (girl 1, 16 y/o, local)

Local children who have migrant parents are more understanding because their parents have discussed with them all the hardships they had before coming to Slovenia. In addition, they usually have more knowledge regarding the current situation and quality of life in the countries migrant children come from.

3.4.4 (Perceived) Advantages and weaknesses of existing models of migrant children`s integration

3.4.4.1 Perception of integration

Sometimes, local children perceive integration as an opportunity for local and migrant children to exchange cultural knowledge and information about countries. They mostly limit the benefits of such knowledge to travel situations or when one moves to another country. To a certain extent, they think it is important that migrant children have the opportunity to maintain their cultural characteristics, for example, their religion. However, in terms of integration, they believe that migrants in general should adapt and adjust as much as possible. In their opinion, the main problem migrant children face is language difficulties. Language proficiency should be addressed first since they perceive it as most important for successfully managing other areas of life.

Plenty of local children believe that the responsibility for integration is shared between migrant children (they often use terms like internal motivation and the matter of character) and the school community. Local children who are second and third generation migrants show by example that intercultural dialogue is possible.

"I have classmates who are also Muslims. They said that the way I spoke about our religion and presented our traditions encouraged them to try harder. This means a lot to me. This is our purpose, to encourage other to good deeds." (girl, 17 y/o, local)

3.4.4.2 Advantages

Most local children point out that teachers support and help migrant children. Teachers adapt the material, use technological solutions (for example, Google Translate), organise group work, ask learners fluent in migrant's language to help the migrant children, and they are willing to help the migrant children before or after school and during breaks.

Teachers organise peer support system and often sit together children with similar cultural background. Note, however, that when teachers decide to pair migrant children with children who speak their language this may cause further ethnic divides.

In some schools, teachers organise topic lessons where migrant children present their culture or the whole class discusses the challenges of migration, discrimination, and racism. Local children know that teachers do not assess migrant children in their first year and allow them to set exam dates in advance. They would wish the same treatment for themselves if they moved to another country. Further, teachers prepare a set of exam questions for migrant children in advance, so that they know the content before the exam. In general, local children do not perceive these measures as unfair.

3.4.4.3 Weakness

Several local learners are sceptical about whether the amount of Slovene language course lessons is sufficient. Moreover, they believe that it is more important whether migrant learner have an intinsic motivation to learn the language than to have a specific set of hours available for language learning. In local learner's opinion, some teachers are often impatient or rude as they would not acknowledge the challenges migrant learners face.

3.4.4.4 Good practices

These were discussed in the chapter 3.4.4.2.

3. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this report, we have aimed to reflect on the integration process of migrant children from a child-centred perspective, drawing on observations and opinions expressed in interviews and focus groups with newly arrived and long-term migrant children as well as local children (some of them also second or third generation migrants). The children involved in the research have a variety of linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds, however, most of them come from the territory of the former Yugoslavia: Bosna and Hercegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, etc. According to the theory of social anchors by Grzymała-Kazłowska (2016), migrant children have different anchors in the process of integration. Some of them are related to the country of origin, while the others are related to the host society. The most important anchors for migrant children included in our research are (extended) family and friends, school, teachers and classmates, leisure activities, religion, and orientation towards a (better) future. All anchors contribute to an easier integration into the host society, while allowing the preservation of the children's family culture. Moreover, all anchors contribute to a sense of ontological security, belonging, identity, and personal meaning. All these factors are essential in preventing potential social exclusion, spatial and social segregation, and radicalization. Finally, anchors change upon arrival. Those connected to their homeland and past experiences are stronger, and over time their strength weakens, and the anchors established in Slovenia become stronger.

Social media and frequent visits to the home country help migrant children stay connected to their country of origin, so most migrant children have transnational and mixed belongings and identities.

Migrant children perceive host country Slovenia as a country of better educational and job prospects and also as a country with a high level of social and physical security. All these are very strong motivators for integration. Consequently, most migrant children perceive Slovenia as a place where they will stay and raise a family; very few plans to return to their home country.

Most migrant and local children who participated in the study advocate for multiculturalism and cite its benefits. Local and migrant children often state that they enjoy being part of the school where different cultures, languages and traditions are represented. Local children (especially those who have migrant background) offer support and are a crucial factor in the integration process and in the providing well-being of migrant children.

Children are empathic to one another. However, we could recognise several patterns in terms of migrant children cluster in groups according to specific characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, language, or gender). Thus, interethnic interactions are not developed to the extent one would hope for. Schools should spend more time and resources cultivating interethnic relations among children.

Peers and friends present crucial pillar of children's wellbeing. Local children and long-term migrant children support newly arrived migrant children learn the language, while social ties

extend over these categories. Children engage in activities designed for migrant children; they are tutors or study buddies or translate instructions. However, some migrant children find it difficult to make local friends. Several children reported instances of discrimination and violence, but generally, interactions are tolerant. Belonging to a group of peers is crucial to the experience of inclusion in society, regardless of the individual's background.

In terms of integration, language is cited by all learners as a crucial barrier and important factor for successful integration. In schools, children mostly speak Slovene, however, some schools are less tolerant of speaking other languages during classes or breaks, and explicitly state that "this is a Slovenian school thus Slovene should be spoken there". Due to such policies, many migrant children speak their mother tongue or the language of their parents' country of origin only at home and in informal situations with peers from the same language group. As Moskal and Sime (2016) note, schools should promote diversity of languages and include them in the curriculum. Similar to our findings from research with the educational community in WP 4, schools rely only on additional Slovene language course for migrant children, but migrant and local learners often point out that language courses are often insufficient. Findings regarding language practise point to the assimilatory approach since learning Slovene is happening at the expense of other languages. However, English, German, and Italian language are exceptions since they are part of the foreign languages officially taught in Slovenian schools.

Regarding teachers and school approaches, we could hardly detect any child-centred approach. However, learners often describe teachers as supportive, friendly, and respectful. Some children feel nervous in class or report discriminatory attitudes from teachers as well.

Feeling safe and having a stable position for future events appear as one of the key factors influencing the integration process. Overall, learners report high levels of life satisfaction and have many aspirations and ambitions. However, the restrictions caused by the pandemic outbreak have noticeably affected their general wellbeing.

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