

EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS: SLOVENIA

Migrant children and communities in a transforming Europe



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The project Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe (MiCreate) aims to stimulate inclusion of diverse groups of migrant children by adopting child-centered approach to migrant children integration on educational and policy level.

www.micreate.eu

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1. Introduction

This report presents a complex relationship between the members of the educational community and migrant children in the Slovenian context. It addresses the existing situation in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia related to the integration of the newly arrived migrant children and long-term residents. It describes perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of members of the educational community regarding the inclusion and integration of migrant children in the Slovenian school system and, more broadly, in Slovenian society; presents and evaluates practices implemented in order to integrate migrant children, promote intercultural coexistence and organize everyday school life in multicultural schools.

The report addresses the following questions:

- How Slovenian primary and secondary schools approach cultural diversity and integration of migrant children?
- How ethnic diversity affects schools?
- Which are the resources and mediators used for the integration of migrant children?
- What are the obstacles, difficulties, and weaknesses in the integration process?
- What are the possibilities for better organization of school life?
- Do teachers apply child-centered approach to education and integration of migrant children?

The report summarizes results gained by crossing of interviews and focus groups with members of school communities (principals or a person responsible for the integration of migrant children, counsellors, school psychologists, teachers, etc. and analysis of the school's existing visual displays, curriculum, and teaching materials.

2. Methodological approach

The research among members of the educational community took place in the period from June to December 2019. Firstly, 16 (primary and secondary) schools were chosen from across Slovenia on the criteria of cultural diversity. One interview was conducted with a school representative (principal or a person responsible for welcoming/integration of migrant children) in each of the selected schools.

Among 16 schools, 7 schools were selected for further in-depth research: 3 primary and 4 secondary schools. In these schools additional 38 interviews and 14 focus groups were carried out with members of the school community (counsellors, school psychologists, teachers). The interviews lasted between 1–1,5 hours and were recorded and transcribed with the aim for further analysis. Interviews were collected in the school environment. School's existing visual displays, curriculum, and teaching materials were also examined for the purposes of answering our research questions.

2.1. School sample

All schools involved in the research are public schools, geographically dispersed across urban and rural parts of Slovenia; most of them are located in the areas with the traditional presence of migrants (bordering, economically well-developed, and/or urban areas). Level of cultural diversity of pupils attending the schools was the main criteria for their inclusion in the research.

Table A. Schools and community characteristics.

School	Typology (public/ charter/private)	School level (primary/ secondary/both)	Location (City, small village, countryside...)	Number of total students	Migration rate	Languages	Religions
S1	Public	Primary school	Town	730	9,6 %	Slovene Albanian Croatian Serbian Bosnian Macedonian Italian Russian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S2	Public	High school	City	770	40 %	Slovene Albanian Serbian Croatian Bosnian Macedonian Russian Ukrainian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S3	Public	High school	City	530	40 %	Slovene Albanian Macedonian Serbian Bosnian Croatian Russian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S4	Public	Primary school	City	400	90 %	Slovene Bosnian Macedonian Albanian Serbian Arabic Persian Farsi English French Ukrainian Russian Bulgarian	Christian Muslim Orthodox Hindu
S5	Public	High school	City	450	30 %	Slovene Serbian Bosnian Croatian Albanian Arabic	Christian Muslim Orthodox

						Persian	
S6	Public	Primary school	City	471	13 %	Slovene Bosnian Serbian Croatian Ukrainian Albanian Persian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S7	Public	High school	City	382	8 %	Slovene Ukrainian Serbian Croatian Bosnian Albanian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S8	Public	Primary school	City	731	17 %	Slovene Albanian Serbian Bosnian Macedonian Russian Ukrainian Romanian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S9	Public	Primary school	Town	1000	4 %	Slovene Bosnia Albania Kosovo Croatian Ukrainian French	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S10	Public	Primary school	City	900	40 %	Slovene Russian Ukrainian Bulgarian English Farsi Persian Bosnia Macedonia Serbian Albanian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S11	Public	High school	Town	303	25 %	Slovene Bosnian Serbian Macedonian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S12	Public	High school	Town	400	40 %	Slovene Bosnian Croatian Serbian Macedonian Albanian Vietnamese Italian English	Christian Muslim Orthodox

S13	Public	High school	City	900	10 %	Slovene Macedonian Bosnian Albanian Serbian Russian Bulgarian Croatian Hebrew	Christian Muslim Orthodox Jews
S14	Public	Primary school	City	500	40 %	Slovene Bosnian Albanian Macedonian	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S15	Public	Primary school	Town	235	15 %	Slovene Bosnian Russian Serbian Macedonian English Hungarian German	Christian Muslim Orthodox
S16	Public	Primary school	Town	440	40 %	Slovene Bosnian Macedonian Serbian Croatian Albanian Ukrainian English	Christian Muslim Orthodox

2.2 Participants

Table B. Participants in focus groups and interviewees.

School name	Interviews (indicate role)	Focus group teachers (indicate role)
S1	School Representative (R1) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5) Teacher 6 (T6) Counsellor (C1)	Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 6 (T6)
S2	School Representative (R1) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5) Counsellor (C1)	Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Counsellor (C1)
S3	School Representative (R1) School Counsellor (C1) Teacher 1 (T1)	Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3)

	Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4)	Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5) Teacher 6 (T6) Teacher 7 (T7) Teacher 8 (T8) Teacher 9 (T9)
S4	School Representative (R1) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5)	Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5) Teacher 6 (T6) Teacher 7 (T7) Teacher 8 (T8)
S5	School Representative (R1) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) / Counsellor (C1) Teacher 5 (T5)	School Representative (R2) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 4 (T4) / Counsellor (C1) Teacher 6 (T6) Teacher 7 (T7) Teacher 8 (T8) Teacher 9 (T9) Teacher 10 (T10)
S6	School Representative (R1) School Representative (R2) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4)	Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4) Teacher 5 (T5) School Representative (R2)
S7	School Representative (R1) School Representative (R2) Teacher 1 (T1) Teacher 2 (T2) Teacher 3 (T3) Teacher 4 (T4)	Teacher 1/ School Representative 1 (T1/R1) Teacher 5 (T5) Teacher 6 (T6) Teacher 7 (T7) Counsellor (C1)
S8	School representative (R1)	
S9	School representative (R1)	
S10	School representative (R1)	
S11	School representative (R1)	
S12	School representative (R1)	
S13	School representative (R1)	
S14	School representative (R1)	
S15	School representative (R1)	
S16	School representative (R1)	

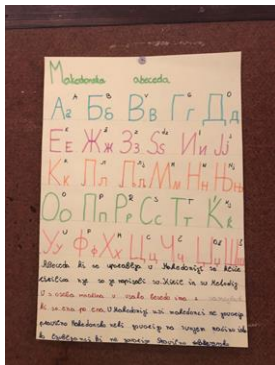
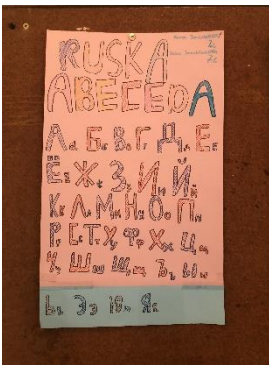
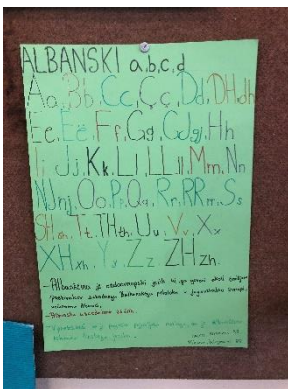
Source: Own elaboration.

2.3. Analysed teaching materials

Table C. Analysed teaching materials.

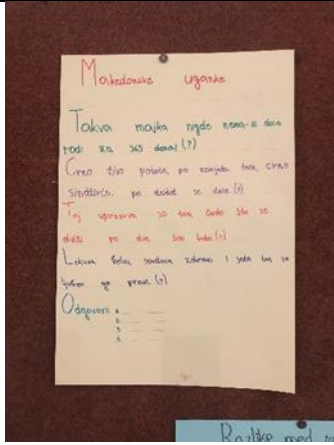
School	Typology/name of the material	Description	Who brought/created	Relevance for the project
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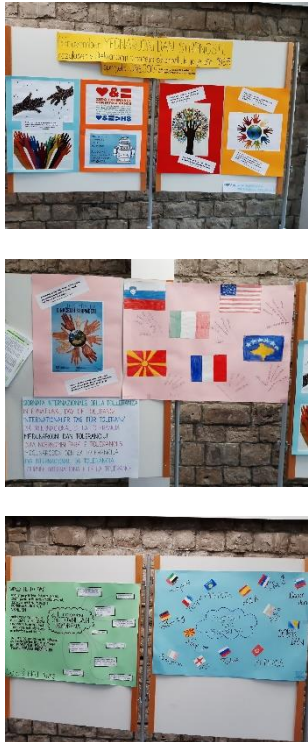
S1








Located in the classroom for the course Slovene as foreign language (which is also computer classroom) with the aim to inform about the European language day (26th September)

Posters inform about languages, alphabet, linguistic differences, compare words in different languages, describe a riddle in Macedonian language.

				
	Dictionary, books, English books (Geography teacher), handbooks	Tools for stimulation of migrant's participation and language learning, improves comprehension of language and teaching content.	Bought in shops	Enhances participation of children.
	Books, IC tools (linguistic games), storybooks in Macedonian and Albanian language	Tools for stimulation of participation and language learning. It fosters migrant' cultural identity and builds trust and social relations.	didactic tool developed in the state-financed project and available online, bought in shops, teachers-made	Child-centered because it enhances integration through play, building community and trust, playing social games.
	didactic games, social games, DIY (used by teacher for additional Math teaching classes, Slovene and English language classes)	Tools for teaching Slovene language through play, building community and trust, social relations, playing social games.	Bought in shops, teachers-made	Child-centered because it enhances integration through play, building community and trust, playing social games.
S2	"I speak Slovene" - script for a 25-hours Slovenian course	The script is a valuable source because it is one of the rare scripts for learning the Slovene language adapted for children (visually and content-wise)	Created by the teacher of the Slovenian language as a secondary language especially for her classes.	Plenty of the scripts for the Slovene language learning are prepared for adult learners. Adaptation of the script for children is the expression of child-centred approach.
	"All for one, one FOR ALL" - Multilingual stories	Collection of short Slovene tales translated by the migrant students into Bosnian,	Created by the teacher of Slovenian language as a	Created with the aim of local children' sensibilization and promotion

		Macedonian and Albanian language	secondary language.	of intercultural awareness.
	"A multilingual dictionary for the Slovene language"	The Slovene-Albanian dictionary of basic words used while learning (Slovene)/foreign language such as: language, literary language, communicator, public text etc.	Created by the teacher of Slovenian language as a secondary language.	The Albanian speaking children are among the most discriminated; the aim of this dictionary is destigmatisation and facilitation of learning the Slovene language.
S3	Posters 	Located in the entrance hall for a few weeks in September/October and November with the aim to inform about the European language day (26 th September), international day of tolerance (16 th November), and World greetings/hello day (21 st November) Posters inform about languages, tolerance, the Human Rights Declaration, the necessity to solve conflicts by communication etc.	Social science teachers and students.	It promotes intercultural awareness, intercultural communication, and solidarity. It includes multicultural and multilingual elements.
S4	Textbooks, maps, photos or pictures, web applications, animations, books (geography)	The teacher for geography employs an array of visual materials to explain the teaching subject to students that do not understand the language (well)	Teacher of geography	Teaching material is prepared to help with learning and understanding those who do not understand the language (well).
	Demonstrations (physical education)	With the aim to integrate, all students take part in physical education. The primary teaching method is demonstration.	Teacher of physical education	Integration of the newly arrived migrants.
	Music sheets, musical adaptations (music education)	To acknowledge and include all students of the school who come	Teacher of music education	Approaches and integrates cultural diversity.

		from a variety of cultural backgrounds, a school anthem and a school rap song are prepared in all represented languages.		
Provisional, DIY dictionary		In the first "preparation course" (<i>pripravljalnica</i>) for the newly arrived migrants, the teacher and students prepared a DIY dictionary for the languages used in the school	Teacher in the preparation course for learning Slovenian	It's multilingual.
School primary entrance door stickers		The school embraces and presents its multicultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic composition which is visible already before entering school as the sing/stickers on the door say: "Multicultural, multi-ethnic, multinational, multilingual, contemporary, innovative, healthy, eco-school".	School leadership	It promotes intercultural awareness.
Stickers on the floor and stairs: "Good Day"		In the halls cultural and lingual diversity is visible. The stickers accompany students in their "mother" tongue through school, wishing them a "good day"	School leadership	It promotes intercultural awareness, intercultural communication and solidarity. It is multilingual.
"Nationality stew"		In a corner on the hall the "Nationality stew" is prepared: there are framed the numbers of students from different countries in the school, each	School leadership	It promotes intercultural awareness, intercultural communication and solidarity.

	<p>country represented by the national flag in its own frame and the number of students</p>		
	<p>House rules of the Room with a view", i.e. "preparation course" for learning Slovenian (<i>pripravljalnica</i>) for newly arrived migrants from Slavic languages: "We speak in all languages", etc. The teacher of Slovenian for newly arrived migrants from Slavic background includes students in different activities, plays and all sorts of activities (e. g. preparing greeting cards and birthday cards, where they are encouraged to write in their own language)</p>	<p>Teacher of Slovenian language to students with Slavic language background.</p>	<p>It promotes intercultural awareness, intercultural communication and solidarity. It is multilingual.</p>
	<p>-Part of the project "We are all migrants" (<i>Vsi smo migranti</i>) was the exhibition of portraits "On the path of stories and inspiration" (<i>Na poti zgodb in navdiha</i>). Portraits of successful immigrants in Slovenia and a fragment from their first-person narration was exhibited.</p>	<p>It was a project of different organisations / institutions, however, the headmaster at the end asked to have some of the portraits for a long-term exhibition.</p>	<p>It promotes intercultural awareness, intercultural communication and solidarity.</p>

S5	Visual materials: pictures	Some teachers said they try to include more visual material that is easier to understand for those who do not speak/understand Slovenian well.	Teachers	Helping newly arrived migrants to understand the subject(s).
	Extraordinary practice – one teacher engages with two foreign students from non-Slavic backgrounds	A teacher on a voluntary basis (usually on weekends) is teaching two students from non-Slavic backgrounds Slovenian language and the school subjects in her own house	Teacher of arts and philosophy	Facilitating the feeling of acceptance and integrations as such.
S6	Posters	Posters hang on a classroom wall and were assessed during a project 'My Idol/My Home'	Migrant and local students	It approaches cultural diversity, includes multicultural elements and it is multilingual.
	Dictionary/Pictionary	Learners have them on their table to use it during the course	Teacher-produced	Teacher prepared a dictionary in various languages (e.g. Albanian, Croatian) to ease the process of understanding of the basic vocabulary. Dictionary circles around school members too. Pictionary has icons and explanation in foreign languages.
	Workbook 'Time for Slovene language'	Library and classrooms have a few editions. Teachers use them during courses to provide additional exercise for migrant learners.	Faculty of Arts (University of Ljubljana) and Centre for Slovene language as a foreign language.	It approaches cultural diversity, it is multilingual, helps to introduce language and culture.

	Cards	A game used to learn simple words with the help of pictures.	NGO	Language learning through a game.
	Books	Classes have reading sessions where they tackle topics such as diversity, equality, racial issues, poverty, war, etc.	School provided such books	Teacher and pupils establish a conversation about interpersonal relationships, respect, diversity, equality, tolerance, racism, cultural differences, etc.
	Annual school excursion to humanitarian centre Karitas/Red Cross	Within specific course pupils visit charity centre and community kitchen to get acquainted with charity organizations and poverty.	Teacher's idea	Pupils get an opportunity to meet migrants, understand the role of war in migration processes and poverty, it encourages humanity and understanding. Includes anti-racist perspective and elements from different religions.
	Presentation of a book/movie	The content of the book is related to the content of the course (e.g. History), however, pupils are encouraged to choose the topic independently.	Teacher-produced list	It is multilingual and it allows learners to present and get acquainted with different races, religions, cultures, etc. They compare topics and seek for similarities.

	Workbooks for Civic Education, Social Science, Slovene	Topics: globalization, migration, poverty, cultures, religions (Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism), freedom, nations, human and children's rights, environmental issues, democratic values, rules, laws, community, prejudices, stereotypes, celebrations, language groups, literature	School provides	It approaches cultural diversity, includes multicultural elements, includes elements from different religious, includes anti-racist perspective, etc.
S7	PowerPoint presentation	Presentation of Islamic religious book Koran	Migrant students produced it	It approaches cultural diversity, encourages peer-to-peer learning, includes multicultural elements because a short comparison is made
	Posters	Bosnian literature	Migrant student	Comparison of Slovene and Bosnian literature. It is multilingual and tackles cultural differences and similarities. Encourages conversation and appreciation of different cultures.
	Workbooks for Slovene language, History	Topics: language groups, mother tongue, official language, foreign literature, wars, migrations, conflicts, religions	School provides material	It approaches cultural diversity, includes multicultural elements, includes elements from different religious, includes anti-racist perspective, etc.

	Personal dictionary for Biology	Migrant learners have them on their table to follow the course	Teacher-provided	It is a multilingual tool.
	Workbook for Biology	Topic: global problems (poverty, illness, migration)	School provides material	It approaches global perspective and encourages acceptance, understanding and tolerance

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Results

3.1. Approaches to integration in schools

3.1.1. Knowledge, perceptions and attitudes about integration of migrant children

The issue of migrant children's integration is relatively new in Slovenia. Although the very first discussions on the integration of migrant children within the educational system arose in the 1990s, incited mostly by large number of refugees from Bosnia who sought shelter in Slovenia, the measures of integration for migrant children began to be discussed more in-depth in recent years. The rise of interest in the integration of migrant children in Slovenia can be attributed to increased migration flows in Europe and increased political and media attention on topics of migration, migrants and their integration into European societies.

Members of the Slovenian educational community unanimously emphasize that visible changes for the better have been observed in recent years. The school environments are generally more aware of cultural diversity and more inclusive, there is a greater emphasis on the respect of cultural diversity and inclusion, and more attention is devoted to management of linguistic, religious and cultural diversity. A turn for the better is also attributed to the recent interventions of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, that launched some extensive national projects (*Communication in Foreign Languages 2008–2010*, *Successful integration of children and migrant pupils from primary and secondary school in education for the period 2008-2011*, *Interculturalism as a new form of coexistence 2013 to 2015*, *Facing the Challenges of Intercultural Coexistence, 2014-2020*, *Only (with) others are we, 2016-2021*) for sensibilization of educational community, raising awareness about the presence of multiculturalism, to promote intercultural coexistence and raise competencies of teachers in order to better cope with the challenges of integration of migrant children.

Our study was conducted among the members of the educational community and shows that national projects launched by the Ministry make a difference. Members of schools involved in the above listed projects are more sensible and aware of the integration issues and migrant children's needs, and these schools introduced some very concrete measures for better integration of migrant children. At the same time, other members of the educational community explain that multiculturalism is something completely new for them and facing migrant children's integration presents them a huge challenge.

However, the overall situation regarding the integration of migrant children in Slovenia is far from being satisfactory.

The **vision of the educational community** and their knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward migrant children and their integration in the Slovene society is not one-sided, but rather **polarized**. On one hand, there are traditionally more multicultural areas (due to the presence of traditional ethnic minorities, bordering areas, and areas attractive for economic migrants) with higher levels of multiculturalism in schools, where members of the educational community are more aware of the needs and challenges stemming from the cultural diversity. Some of these schools have also developed internal roles and informal procedures, and the overall climate toward acceptance, inclusion, and integration of migrant children is more positive or at least neutral.

On the other hand, in traditionally more monocultural local communities there are schools, where employees have low awareness and pay little attention to ethnic, religious and language diversity; they manifest a lack of knowledge on the management of intercultural differences, and lack of competences regarding the integration of migrant children. In these schools, the attitudes toward migrant children by the members of the educational community are indifferent, also ignorant or even negative.

The attitude and knowledge related to the migrant children's integration among the educational community is reflected also in their understanding of the basic **concepts related to the integration**. Generally, there is no consensus about the concepts related to integration among the members of the educational community. The most unified view relates to the concept of assimilation, which is generally rejected. The concepts of inclusion, integration, and adaptation are more frequently used among the members of the educational community addressing the fact that migrant children must adapt to the new cultural environment, be included and integrated as much as possible. Sometimes, it is exposed that this must be a two-way process, but not always. Integration is seen as a way to become "part of", "to be accepted".

The issue of integration of migrant children in Slovenian schools is largely reduced to **language learning**. In other words, most of the focus, energy, and resources are dedicated to the learning of the Slovenian language while other aspects of the integration processes are neglected. Likewise, the national integration policy at state level mainly supports language

learning through the obligatory language courses for all newly arrived migrant children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia (120 hours/year).

Consequently, the main concern is that the process of **integration of migrant children is not holistically, systemic, and systematically approached, and legislatively regulated** (with the exception of the language course and some adaptations, e.g. the right to not be assessed during the first year of enrolment in the Slovenian school system). Integration support initiatives are predominately left to autonomous decisions of an individual school, the good will of the principal, school leadership, etc. Even in the schools that approach migrant children integration better, this rarely means that all school staff is involved actively in the process of integration. This is rather the responsibility of an individual person – usually school counsellor and main class-teacher. The success of integration “interventions” is, therefore, depending again on the individual’s good will and enthusiasm. The self-assessment or evaluation of the success of migrant children integration is completely absent.

3.1.2. Knowledge, perceptions and attitudes about migration

Among the members of the educational community, the migration as such is prevalingly seen as **a fact and a challenge** that must be faced. Rarely (mostly in traditionally multicultural areas) it is seen as a positive characteristic that can enrich the local community and a whole society, and more likely as a **problem affecting the learning process**. Some members of the educational community express negative feelings toward migrants in general, influenced also by the prevailing media reports and political discourse.

The Slovenian specific is the **division made between “proper migrants” and “nonproper migrants”** coming from the republics of former common state Yugoslavia (Serbs, Bosnians, Croats, Albanians, Montenegrins, Macedonians). This distinction is introduced by the terminological addressing: for the “proper migrants” the English word “migrant” is used, for those coming from the areas of former Yugoslavia, the Slovenian translation for migrant “priseljenci” occurs. The vast majority of immigrants living in Slovenia are “priseljenci”, since Slovenia presents for most migrants only a transition state. Other studies show that the reason for this lies in the fact that Slovenia is too small, economically not attractive, and politically not well recognized in relation to some other European states. In this context, principals and other schools’ staff often explained that they do not have migrant children enrolled in their schools but have a lot of “priseljenci”.

Regarding the contact and collaboration of the educational community with **migrant families**, there is a big **discrepancy between primary and secondary schools**. In the primary schools, the involvement of the family members is more intensive: teachers meet parents at the beginning of the school year or even before and usually stay in contact during the whole school year. Some schools organize language courses for parents or some other form of involvement. Primary schools’ principals assess the collaboration with migrant parents as good. The situation is completely different when it comes to secondary schools: if the parents usually contact the school at the beginning of the school year, after that period there is no collaboration or contact between both parties.

Regarding the **local parents** and local community, our interviews exposed some hesitation and negative feelings among local parents regarding the integration of migrant children and their families in the local community. However, very rarely (primary) schools address this issue openly. Again, only a few primary schools perceived the integration as a holistic process that must involve all actors: migrant children and migrant families, local children and families, members of the educational community and local community as such. In these schools, they try to present the broader local area and crucial local institutions to migrant children and their families. However, there are no guidelines on how to do it, there is a complete lack of systemic approach in this regard. Every school organizes its own way of establishing contact with parents relying on previous experiences and usual practices.

The **data** schools collect about migrants **are scarce**. With the enrolment of a migrant child, the school collects the data about the child's mother tongue, place of birth and state of arrival. These data are the base for organizing the language course and gaining the money support from the Ministry. However, the collection of data is no legal obligation. After this initial period, the data related to ethnicity, foreign status, religion or mother tongue or whatsoever are not monitored or systematically measured any more. This kind of data is perceived as "sensitive data" and it is not appropriate to ask.

3.2. How diversity in a migratory context affects school

Diversity affects Slovenian schools in various ways. Sometimes, having a migrant student in a classroom or school influences teachers' preparations, external school evaluation and results, the content of the teaching course, formal procedures, organization of meals, classroom atmosphere and interpersonal relations. In general, we could say that the majority of Slovenian schools at both, primary and secondary level, **recognize weakspots** they have, however, they express **lack of will and knowledge** how to tackle opportunities and issues multiculturalism brings along.

When it comes to **teachers' course preparation**, primary school teachers are, to some extent, more willing to adapt and/or prepare additional material for foreign learners than their high school colleagues. It seems that especially teachers of Slovenian language are more attentive and sensitive, probably because they often teach in an additional Slovenian language course organized for migrant students. On one hand, we have teachers who had reported that they frequently reach for Google Translator, newspaper articles about migrations, they compare Muslim and Catholic holy books, Bosnian and Slovene literature, etc. while on the other hand, some teachers are completely ignorant and pay no attention to migrant learners. Sometimes, teacher's explanation is given in several different languages, for example Slovenian, English, German, Italian or Serbo-Croatian. Quite common example of teaching at several primary and at two secondary schools was that when the class was acquainted with a new terminology, a

number of translations was provided (English, Slovene and in a language of specific migrant student); teachers explained that such approach encourages learning from migrant students.

How do school members feel in this swirl of cultures? We have met teachers who clearly stated that they will not speak English or any other foreign language with migrant children and teachers who perceive migrant learners as a challenge and opportunity to learn something new. Sometimes, teachers insist that students should speak Slovenian also between breaks and out of the class, other teachers do not mind if foreign students speak mother language with other migrant children out of the formal lessons but in school environment. Some teachers openly said that migrant students present additional workload for them, a burden, while others told us that teaching migrant students is an honour. Overall, teachers stated that it takes plenty of energy and time to prepare additional tasks and material for migrant children if they want to include them in a working process. It seems that the longer they work, the more competent they feel to work with migrant learners. Primary school teachers try to sit migrant students in first rows; however, they are not certain whether it helps that migrant students sit with other learners who speak their language or not. Sometimes long term migrants can help newly arrived because they speak the same language. Teachers at both levels miss more material, sources and tools that could help them to address topics like tolerance and multiculturalism, while on the other hand some reported that they are fed up with lectures and seminars about inclusion of migrant children in a classroom. Among co-workers, teachers can identify people who have prejudices, lack sensibility, they spread hate speech, are intolerant and those who are suitable to work with migrant learners. School members state that it is of crucial importance to have a headmaster who support the idea of acceptance, tolerance, multiculturalism, and equality.

The subjective feeling of the majority of schools was that they are quite respected in their surroundings, recognized as multicultural and perceived as tolerant toward migrant students, however in-depth discussion revealed that this is not always true. Particularly secondary schools that carry out vocational programmes and primary schools located in more intolerant environments have bad reputation among local population. We encountered schools that do not perceive multiculturalism as added value; some school members recognized multiculturalism as a stigma. Such institutions think about migrant students more in a term of additional workload than as an outstanding characteristic.

The very first contact between **migrant families** and the school environment happens in the process of the enrolment. Administrative offices admitted that migrant students who have been in Slovenia for several years are frequently asked to help with translation in communication with parents, although, teachers are not entirely satisfied with such solution because they cannot be certain whether the message is carried around properly. Examples of foreign parents who made an official complaint about the school not accepting their child or that their culture has been violated are rare. This surprises us because regarding specific food restraints (e.g. not eating pork), our impression is that not every school respects such restraints or provides a substitute meal.

Certain schools that offer dishes containing pork decide to include the figure of a pig on a menu to provide clear information for students who are not familiar with Slovene language. In high schools, food providers and students communicate daily in order to provide appropriate food. Sometimes, it takes some time for children to start eating in school because Slovenian food tastes differently to them.

Earlier, we mentioned parental perception, and in contrast with migrant parents, we encountered examples of **local parents** who do not appreciate multicultural schools. Parents recognized such schools as institutions intended to accept unwanted students from the Balkans and expected that their children would not be able to achieve good results there. It should be noted that some primary schools actually ask migrant students not to come to school when national external exams take place because migrant students potentially lower school's overall results and this, consequently, affects school reputation. On the other hand, many local parents do not mind that learners come from different countries and do not hesitate to enrol their children to a designated institutions. In fact, two primary schools reported about parents actually insisting to enrol their child to a certain school because they heard about multiculturalism and diversity they offer.

What about **school atmosphere and interpersonal relations**? Generally speaking, classmates are tolerant, accepting, curious and friendly, although it seems that the older the learners are, the higher the level of intolerance is. Especially primary schools promote a system of tutor help where children are encouraged to help and take care of each other. This is a voluntary action that is not set by law and is, as such, dependent on the good will of individual schools. Formally, schools try to provide accepting, tolerant, warm and emphatic environment, nevertheless conflicts happen. It was noticed that verbal accusations and conflicts occur; there were insults conveyed through SMS and in interpersonal contacts, but no example of repetitive bullying or insults happened that based strictly on nationality, religion, ethnicity, etc. Teachers reported about individual learners expressing attitudes and beliefs their parents hold, for example that migrants take away money we should spend for our citizens well-being, etc. Such opinion is usually expressed in essays and on school excursions where atmosphere is more informal. It is important to notice that conflicts among members of the same country exist too (e.g., Bosnian girls insult each other, two groups of Albanian boys get in a fight). When conflicts happen, official disciplinary measures follow.

Regarding the **academic outcomes** and academic trajectories, the situation could hardly be generalized. Schools are not formally assessed, but in general, public schools with a higher number of migrant children are often perceived as schools of lower quality. Schools reported about examples of migrant learners who knew zero words at the beginning of a high school and in their final year they had higher grades than local students while on the other hand, at the same school 40 % of migrant students do not finish high school. This might be because plenty of them migrate to another foreign country that has more attractive economy (e.g. Germany and Switzerland) or they are already active workers because their parents possess bakeries, building companies, fast food restaurants etc. Such situations of course influence their academic success and class participation. Based on teachers' reports, among characteristics that seem to promote academic success are motivation, open-mindedness,

being ambitious, communicative, giving initiative and having supporting environment. It is reassuring to see that school staff try to be supportive and understanding in terms of knowing that some migrant students were successful in their home country and now they struggle with bad grades that lead to their bad self-esteem. This is especially common for primary school teachers. Most migrant students (or their parents) decide for vocational programmes that are less difficult and last 2 or 3 years. We recognized examples of parents who have high expectations, and this can cause additional stress for children, and parents that were completely indifferent toward academic results of their child. General opinion is that most children from former Yugoslavia adapt quicker because the language is similar, while Albanian, Syrian, Iranian, French, etc. children struggle longer with the language barrier. Most of their grades are achieved through oral assessments; they have to meet minimum criteria, however higher grades are not completely unattainable for them, even though the majority achieve average or lower results. Teachers say that it is encouraging that they can assess learner's progress too, not just knowledge. Regarding academic outcomes there is a discrepancy between primary and secondary schools in our sample: while 90 % of migrant students successfully finish primary school, at least one third of migrant students fail or drop out of vocational secondary schools.

3.3. Resources and mediators for the integration

3.3.1. School reception policies

The lack of a holistic systemic approach towards the integration of migrant children is reflected also in the **school reception policies**, which differ significantly across schools. Protocols dealing with the welcoming of migrant children are sometimes implemented in primary schools and are almost non-existent at the level of secondary schools. As previously presented, reception, inclusion, and integration of migrant children depend on an individual school, its leadership and the sensitivity of the school staff, thus individual teacher/headmaster/counsellor, worker/multiplier, etc. Namely, counsellor workers and teachers (particularly class teachers) play an important role in welcoming the child as well as establishing an environment in which all children (including migrant children) feel well and accepted. In schools that recognize cultural, linguistic and religious diversity as an important issue, some good practices regarding school reception policies were identified, however, often migrant child is included in education without any prior preparation.

In the framework of the 2016–2020 *Let's enrich the school* Ministry of Education, Science and Sport call, some of the primary schools were funded a person (**multiplier**) who works on different aspects of developing competencies of children. In some schools, this person devotes plenty of time to welcome migrant children as well as help with their inclusion, integration, and well-being, however, this is not a norm.

In schools that are sensitive towards this issue, parents may be supported by the school staff already at the time of enrolment of the child. Sometimes, they are contacted and given information in their language. On the first day of school, migrant children may be particularly

welcomed, even greeted in different languages, etc. This would, nevertheless, differ across schools.

Following the *Guidelines for the Integration of Immigrant Children in Kindergartens and Schools (2012)*, for each migrant child enrolled in the Slovenian education system teachers should prepare an **individual program in cooperation with the child** and the family in which objectives, activities, assessment modification, additional teaching support, etc. are set. This is often practiced in elementary school, but not at the secondary school level. There are also differences with regard to how this is implemented, again depending on the individual who is involved in preparing this plan – some see it more as a formality, even burden, while others really put an effort, first to welcome the child and the family, and second, to prepare the plan that takes into account the child`s age, provenience, and existing knowledge. In many cases, however, the child is not actively involved in the preparation of the plan. If parents do not speak Slovenian, they usually bring someone along who does (for the enrolment.). In (rare) cases of some schools, there is a regular outside translator who helps on a voluntary basis, and sometimes other parents or children help.

Several schools were involved in a project-based “**introductory weeks**” that usually take a course before the beginning of the school year. During this time, migrant children are welcomed by the teachers, they take a tour around the school, sometimes a tour in their local environment or a trip (like in the ZOO). Additionally, they begin to learn basic words and phrases in Slovenian language, so they are for instance able to present themselves or even welcome their classmates when they enter the class for the first day of school. Unfortunately, these project-based activities are stopped after the funding is ceased.

Along with other practices addressing migrant children`s integration presented further below, the aim of these activities is generally to develop multicultural values for better inclusion and integration of children from a different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the Slovenian education system. However, these activities are not systematically introduced in all schools.

3.3.2. Practices addressing migrant children`s integration

Regarding the practices addressing migrant children`s integration, again duality can be observed – in some schools, particularly on the secondary level, there are virtually no practices related to welcoming, improving coexistence, including or integrating migrant children. On the other hand, in some schools where they are devoted to this issue, there do exist activities addressing these issues. Common to all schools is the organisation of Slovenian language courses, the possibility for children not to be assessed the first year, and the possibility to have assessing adjustments for the first two years. Other practices depend on individual schools. In some schools, there is a person responsible for the support of migrant children, such as a multiplier or school counsellor.

Many existing practices in schools are related to language learning. **Slovenian language courses** are organised for all migrant children enrolled in the Slovenian education system.

Currently, migrant children are involved in Slovenian language learning that takes a course from the beginning of the school year. Many schools' educators support the view that children should learn the Slovenian language before enrolling in (secondary) school. There is no consensus on a professional level on this issue in Slovenia, since some, on the contrary, support the view that children should be included in regular classes as soon as possible in order for integration to start happening as soon as they enrol. Some schools offer additional support for children in the form of additional hours of language learning. Rarely, courses in their mother tongue (like Macedonian Serbian language, etc.) are organised in primary schools in the framework of bilateral agreements with their country of origin.

Furthermore, individual schools have additional practices of supporting migrant children and their families, sometimes in cooperation with other schools or local communities, such as additional language teaching for children's parents. In rare cases of schools in which the whole local community is recognised as important for the integration of migrant children, schools connect and encourage cooperation between the school and different actors in the local community. Children and parents are informed about the possibilities offered in local communities.

Some primary schools organise **peer-related support** for migrant children in the form of tutoring. Other children thus help migrant children to get familiar with the environment, getting around the school, etc. It is often the practice that children are helped by other migrant children speaking their mother tongue. Additionally, in some primary schools, migrant children may also receive additional support from volunteer students, NGOs from the local environment, etc.

Schools that generally **acknowledge cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity**, also support the participation of migrant children in school ceremonies and events with their traditional poems, songs, dances, food, etc. These events may include school plays, school balls, exhibitions, fairs, charity concerts, International Day of Languages, Migrant Day, etc. On such occasions, migrant students are given the opportunity to present their national anthem, hometown, language, national customs, etc. to their classmates or the whole school. Additionally, individual schools have specific activities, a school bulletin where poems written by migrant students in their mother tongue are included, school anthem in all languages that are spoken at school, etc. These practices are more frequent in primary schools. Different celebrations of holidays are recognised, and children are allowed to miss school in these cases.

As a general rule, children are enrolled in a class based on their age and there is no evaluation for entering the school, previous records of education are, however, taken into account. Sometimes students are suggested to enrol in lower class in order to learn Slovenian language better. In both, primary and secondary schools in Slovenia in the first year of enrolment in school, migrant children have the possibility not to be assessed. In some schools, they take this as a norm and do not assess the children in the first year at all, meaning also that the child cannot progress to the next class. Nevertheless, migrant children may be exempt from

assessment in some subjects and still progress to the next class upon teachers' assembly decision.

In some primary schools, it was emphasized that **not being assessed** is problematic and may also be demotivating for children, therefore, they encourage the practice that children are first assessed in subjects that are not so language-dependent, such as music, arts, sports, etc. and when they are able to express themselves in Slovenian language also in other subjects, with some adjustments. These adjustments may include announced oral examination, predominantly oral assessment instead of writing, a longer time for writing, a requirement of fewer grades compared to other children, the possibility to learn the same learning content in few smaller packages, etc. If teachers speak/understand the language of migrant children, as it is often the case of migrants from ex-Yugoslavia, they might be allowed to express themselves in these languages or in English. Migrant children have the right to these adjustments for two years. Teachers have a certain amount of autonomy; therefore, these adjustments depend on the individual teacher. In this context, problematic practices of lowering standards for the assessment of migrant children were identified.

A child-centred approach is virtually non-existent in Slovenian schools. Even in cases when it would be expected, such as the preparation of individual plans for (migrant) children, children are often not involved. There is evident lack of support for migrant children and the responsibility for their successful integration is placed mainly on themselves (and their families).

3.3.3. Teaching material resources

Textbooks and teaching materials rarely address the issues of the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of students. In primary school, this is briefly addressed within subjects such as Civic education when covering the issues of globalization, stereotypes, racism, conflicts, etc. In secondary schools, some of the issues may be addressed within Sociology, Geography or History. Individual teachers have a certain amount of autonomy to address these issues within the curricula, but this is dependent upon their awareness and sensitivity. The majority, however, does not introduce them. Since there are no guidelines on whether and how to implement these themes, individual teachers are implementing them occasionally, if and when they see the opportunity.

Schools recognising cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity would typically have other forms of visual displays supporting it, not only on specific days, such as Language days, Solidarity day or Migrant day when children might be encouraged to prepare posters or other products. There would be writings in different languages, pictures, and photos recognising diversity, in the case of one school, for example, photographs of successful migrants, etc.

At some schools, own materials or even textbooks for teaching the Slovenian language as a second language were developed. This is due to the lack of teaching materials for teaching

Slovenian as a second and foreign language because most of the textbooks are intended primarily for adults.

To sum up, generally there is a lack of teaching materials which would address appropriately cultural diversity or help learning Slovenian language to migrant children.

3.3.4. Training and accompaniment

Teachers are not involved in any obligatory professional training concerning the integration of migrant children. In the last years, some of the above-mentioned national projects have been oriented towards improving the school staff skills through workshops, short-term courses, lectures, etc. Again, the involvement in this kind of training is often voluntary and dependent on the priorities of the headmaster, individual teachers, school counsellor, etc. Generally, lack of educators' skills to work with migrant children has been highlighted, particularly lack of skills of teaching Slovenian language as a second language. Teachers often expressed the need for training on themes, such as intercultural coexistence, dealing with cultural, religious, and linguistic plurality in school etc., but on the other hand, some of them did not see any necessities for such trainings.

In schools that support the integration of children, usually the majority of teachers are involved in some kind of voluntary training. In schools where there is a person, for example, a multiplier actively focusing on the integration of migrant children, a vast amount of time is devoted to these issues through workshops, lectures, regular updates, information, etc. Sometimes, individual teachers, multipliers or counsellors take part in this training and inform other teachers about it. The majority of training are project-based, provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Individual schools established good **collaboration with the local environment** that plays an important role in integration of migrant children, for example, municipalities that offer financial support, institutions that organize Slovenian language courses for parents and children, NGOs or other institutions that support (migrant) children by offering learning help, migrant's associations, voluntaries from nearby faculties or NGOs, etc. Some schools, on the other hand, are not connected with any institutions within the local environment.

3.4. Obstacles, difficulties and weaknesses

The general weakness of the existing system in Slovenian schools seems to be the **lack of a holistic and systemic approach to the integration of migrant children**. At the present, the whole process of reception, inclusion, and integration of migrant child is left to the individual school, individual principal and individual teacher, her/his sensitivity, awareness, good will, and ingenuity. General engagement of the state is in this regard subjected to the critics: "the state is offering very little, only some additional professional help for language learning and

very few hours". The lack of better financial support which will enable stable financing and full engagement/employment of a person who will be responsible for the integration issues is also exposed.

At the moment, work with migrant children is mainly the responsibility of school counsellor and/or psychologist, who often, due to all other responsibilities (working with students with special needs and behavioural or psychological problems, consulting about the enrolment in secondary school/faculty, etc.), have no time. Another way is project-financed staff (as for instance multiplier) and this means that schools are engaging the person working with migrant children only for the period of project lasting. Sometimes, the school receives from the local employment office an unemployed person who is within the employment "public work" scheme posted to the school to help. The problem is that all these *ad hoc* involved persons do not necessarily have skills, knowledge, and affinity to work with migrant children and their presence is just temporary.

Our study exposed the language constraint and language learning process as the core issue of the integration process. Migrant children are the very first day enrolled in ordinary classes without any knowledge of Slovenian language, but at the same time they are attending additional language course. They cannot follow the lectures and the teachers have no time for individual approach and treatment. In general, classes in Slovenia consists of average 25 children/pupils, up to 33. The whole responsibility is lying on individual teacher (is she/he able/prepared to speak in English or Croat, Serb, etc. language, to prepare some additional or adapted teaching material or no) and on migrant child/pupil (is she/he motivated, smart, resourceful, etc. enough). If there are children with special needs (learning, physical or psychological constrains, etc.) in addition to newly arrived migrant children one teacher cannot really dedicate to any of them and cannot individualize learning process.

Additional problem is that sometimes the teachers are highly qualified, meaning that they are the teachers of Slovenian language additionally trained to be teachers for foreign students, children whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. Our study, however, exposed that Slovenian language for migrant children is sometimes thought by teachers of other subjects (for instance biology), without any proper knowledge and skills except that they are native speakers. These teachers are involved in teaching Slovenian language because otherwise, they do not have enough hours for full-time employment.

All teachers agree that existent hours of language course are not sufficient. Especially for migrant children of non-Slavic language background. Some schools are in this regard more innovative, proactive, and receive some additional funding from the local community to cover the additional language courses. Some schools use volunteers from the local community, however, most of the schools do nothing.

The language problem is even more exposed in higher classes of primary or in secondary school because the learning content and vocabulary are very complex and there is always a lack of time. In general, our study exposed that the integration process is easier in primary than in secondary schools.

Due to the language knowledge deficiency, migrant children cannot demonstrate their real knowledge and consequently get lower marks than they used to have. The Slovenian system does not have any alternative system of testing. This has negative consequences on self-perception of migrant children and the whole integration process.

One of the challenges of the integration of migrant children in the Slovenian school system exposed by teachers, besides the language, is **unequal foreknowledge** of those migrant children coming from the states of former Yugoslavia which is in comparison with Slovenia poor and insufficient. According to the Slovenian legislation, as already mentioned, the child must be enrolled in a class based on his/her age and it is a challenge to full fill the gap in knowledge the migrant children do not have. Higher the class, the more difficult it is.

Sometimes the challenge is also **a lack of support from the family** (they don't have necessary language competences, low educational aspirations, low cultural/educational capital). In relation to this, an additional challenge is how to reach and involve the parents of migrant children. A special challenge is the involvement of parents who do not speak Slovenian language or those from traditionally more closed communities. As already exposed, especially on the level of secondary schools, the inclusion of parents is almost non-existent.

One of the very concrete problems is the following: at the end of the last year of primary school (9th class) migrant children must be assessed if they want to finish primary school although they have legal right to not be assessed the first year of enrolment in the Slovenian school system.

Last but not least, regardless their interest and aspirations most of the newly arrived migrant children **enrol in the vocational secondary school** because they parents believe that will be easier for them and at least they will have a job quickly.

Some school's headmasters expose the general problem of treating migrant children as a homogenous group with commonalities without internal differentiation and diverse needs. An approach addressing all specific needs which are real in its consequences is missing.

3.5. Possibilities for doing it better

Our interviews exposed that a relevant percentage of members of the educational community **do not have any concrete idea on how to improve** the integration process of newly arrived migrant children.

Those who are more involved expose the urgent need for the **introduction of a holistic and long-lasting systemic approach**. The introduction of needed integration measures which will be permanent and not related to the duration of an individual project.

Most of the members of the educational community expose that it would be better to include newly arrived migrant children in intensive language courses before enrolment in ordinary classes. Only a few thinks oppositely; the existing system of immediate inclusion in the class with parallel learning of Slovenian language is a better solution. The advocates of the first option expose that in present situation, without any additional support, presence of cultural mediator or interpreter newly arrived migrant children in the ordinary classes feel lost, have serious problems to follow the lectures, are bored, their self-confidence is lowering, they feel incapable, unsuccessful, experience problems to socialize with others, their school achievements and success are low. This is even more true for children at secondary school level and for children from upper classes of primary school.

More concretely, the introduction of the following measures is suggested:

- Systematization of (introduction of) one or more working place/s for a person who is responsible for working with migrant children; especially newly arrived migrant children needs constant support and a translator from the very beginning of the school year
- Legally guaranteed more hours for Slovenian language learning
- If possible, the learning language course should start earlier, before the enrolment in school
- The (rare) special adjustment the migrant children are entitled to during the first year of enrolment in the Slovenian educational system should be extended for a longer period. E.g. language support is needed also the second and third year and sometimes longer.
- Establish better relation, communication, and inclusion of migrant children families
- Establishment of a more supportive environment/system for migrant children by including several stakeholders (family, local children and parents, the institutions from the local community) monitored and coordinated from one source.
- A more holistic approach to the migrant children and their families (linguistic, social, psychological etc.)
- A more individualized approach to the child and his/her family (considering specific personal trajectories and child/family history and circumstances of migration)
- Introduction of a more child-centric approach; consider child perspective!
- Preparation of written information about school, local community (also on the website) and school leaflets in languages of migrant children
- Better preparation of and work with local children, including correct and positive information about migrant children; sensibilization of local children about migrant topics and migrant children needs, fears and desires.
- Changes of normative about the number of children in classes with newly arrived migrant children (lower number of children)
- One of the special adjustments newly arrived migrant children are entitled to is not to be assessed the first year. More clear definition/instructions are needed what this means for migrant children who are enrolled in the last 9th class of the primary school.

4. Conclusions and discussion

When analysing the integration processes of migrant children into Slovene schools and society, the members of the educational community expose that being integrated primarily means *being accepted and being a part of* class/school/community/society.

How educational community can make possible and facilitate this process of becoming accepted and being part of? What is the situation in in Slovenia? What are the main shortcomings, challenges, and possibilities for doing it better?

The results of our study show that the integration of migrant children in Slovene schools and society relies largely *on individuals* (their good will, knowledge, resources, and energy), on non-permanent *ad hoc* solutions and *project interventions*, it *varies* from school to school, and additionally between primary and secondary schools. In addition, a more *holistic and systematic approach is missing* – at the moment, the biggest emphasis is put on language issues and learning, while all other aspects of integration (social, psychological, cultural) are mostly neglected.

The reason for such a situation is acute **lack of systemic, legally supported approach** to migrant children integration in Slovene schools and society. Such an approach would allow holistic, permanent and generalized treatment and procedure in every school; it would clearly define responsibilities and obligations of schools and members of the educational community in ensuring successful integration.

Untapped potentials in the existing approach to migrant children integrations are better relations and involvement of migrant children families, better involvement of local community institutions and greater involvement and sensibilization of local children, their families, and local community members. In this regard, the two-way process of integration should be better addressed.

The reasons for the existent approach of the educational community toward integration can be searched in the broader social and political context that is framing prevalent political, social, and media discourse. A discourse that is consequently influencing existing school politics, policies and practices. The issue of migration and migrants is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior in Slovenia and the prevalent frame that is influencing perceptions of migrants is the security (and fear). The political tradition of monoculturalism, hidden non-acceptance of cultural diversity, and securitization of the migrant issue has the impact on educational policies and members of educational community who have on the average very low level of intercultural awareness.

The situation is, however, improving in the last years. The extensive national projects launched by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport made a difference. The important impact was made by individual teachers and schools. Through their everyday experience in working with migrant children they produced and elaborated practices, approaches, and

learning materials for better inclusion of migrant children. Such activities range from welcome days to collaboration with migrant children's families and local institutions.

Once again, it is the individual's goodwill and sacrifice that improves situation. However, without systemic and legally supported approach the high quality, all-inclusive and successful integration process of Slovene school system cannot be achieved.