

# “THE FAMILY IS MOST IMPORTANT!”

## Child-centred perspectives on the role of the family in the integration process

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# INTRODUCTION

- The aim to explore the role of the **family** in the integration process as perceived by **migrant children** and as seen by the **school community** (involvement of migrant children`s parents)

# METHODOLOGY

- MiCREATE project - *Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe*, funded by the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Action.
- Research among Slovenian migrant and local children and youth (10-17): **7 schools: 3 primary and 4 secondary** in the period from October 2019 to March 2021
- Aim of the research: to explore **well-being in everyday lives, relations in schools; attitudes and opinions related to multiculturalism, cultural and religious diversity, migration etc.**; focus on **integration of migrant children**
- Child-centred approach: focus was on children`s and young people`s experiences and they were considered as experts of their own lives, skillful communicators and meaning makers (Clark and Moss 2005; Fattore, Mason and Watson 2007; Gornik 2020) and as, the most relevant source of information (Mayeza 2017).

- **Methods: participatory observation (15 participatory observation days) and interviews/ autobiographical life stories .**
- **A total of 99 interviews/autobiographical life stories** were collected from newly arrived migrant children, long-term migrant children and local children
- **Research among members of the educational community** in primary and secondary schools conducted in the period from June to December 2019.
- **54 interviews and 14 focus groups in 16 schools** were conducted, with school representatives, teachers, but also with counsellors, and school psychologists...

# STARTING POINTS

- Contemporary family patterns – shifts from controlling towards emotional community (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002)
- Parental involvement in school important in attempts to understand the parental role in the educational career of their children, as well as explain the relations between school and family (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997, 2005).

# CHILDREN`S PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY

- The FAMILY is of a central value and the most important anchor (Grzymala-Kazłowska,2015) to migrant children and young people. Many of them expressed the importance of the family with words, such as: *'family means everything to me', 'family is tthe most important', 'family means life to me'*
- Some also feel that the members of the nuclear family, especially parents are the only environment they can trust: *"I don`t trust anyone but my parents."*
- For migrant children: sense of anchorage / connection / security and identity.

- Family is not confined to the nuclear family, namely, **extended family** also plays an important role, as a teenage girl from Bosnia reports:

*"We have a lot of family here, on the Coast, so it was a little easier for us. My mother's brother came here and another cousin of my mother and also from my father's side there are many and then it was easier for me, I didn't feel alone here."*

The role and importance of the extended family also in the **hometown or other places** - adding to the senses of anchorage connection, security and identity

- Supportive role- family members living in the same country- migrant children better cope with the daily challenges that migration brings
- Especially in the **first period** after the migration, family a source of **social and emotional support**:

*"Also, my family, my parents always talked to me and everything. / ... / It meant a lot to me, we talked every day, they told me that everything would be fine, that I would slowly get used to being here, that they are here for me and similar things."*



- **Older siblings support the education of younger ones and often help them and parents with language (long-term migrant children).**

*„My brother always helped me for school“*

*„My brother accompanied me to school, it was like I was 5 years old (laughs). I took his hand and said, "Oh, I'd like to go home, I don't want to be here."“*

**For migrant children sometimes this was a burdain:**

*„For me it was difficult, because my mother does not understand the language, and when I did not have school at 7, 7 30 I had to help my brothers and translate if they did not understand“*

- **Extended family** offer social support: information, spending time together – socialising, shopping, going on trips together, support for school activities
- Who would you turn to for the information if you needed to arrange something for school or about scholarship?

*I would first ask my relatives who live here, because they have been living here for longer time and they know.*

# FAMILY AND SCHOOLS

- Families (parents) of migrant children often **not involved in school activities and school life**
- Discrepancy between primary and secondary schools - on the level of secondary schools, the inclusion of parents is almost non-existent
- Involvement different across schools, also depending on individual parents, parents sometimes seen as non-cooperative, language issues (migrant children of non-slavic origin)
- Individual good practices in (primary) schools: 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 (sometimes project – based).

# FAMILY AND SCHOOLS

- Guidelines for the Integration of Immigrant Children in Kindergartens and Schools (2012) - for each migrant child 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. – often not implemented – rarely applied, even if applied often not including parents

# CONCLUSION

- Family important factor influencing their general well-being and overall life satisfaction for migrant children
- At the same time migrant parents often **not involved in school activities** and school life
- Contradiction to the findings that in the European context Slovenian parents are more than average involved in their children's educational pathways, school activities and schoolwork (Ule, 2015) - European project Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe (GOETE).
- Parental (non) – involvement is an important element of social differentiation (Ule, 2015), and it influences the integration process of migrant children in Slovenia – further research (the reasons behind, existing practices...)
- For succesful involvement schools need to address multiple needs of migrant parents on a daily and ongoing basis (López, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001)

THANK YOU!