

CHILDREN HANDBOOK



DISCLAIMER

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About the project

Theory of Change: The use of the art of Rhetoric Speech as an innovative tool in the education and training of migrant children in language learning, empowerment, and social integration activities

(Project code: **101141204**, Acronym: **ToC**)

Theory Of Change (TOC) project focuses on strengthening the participation, empowerment, and social inclusion of migrant children through education. Funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (**AMIF**)

The project brings together partners from different European countries to explore how children can better express their views, develop their voices, and actively participate in decisions that affect their lives.

At the core of the project is the belief that children are not only recipients of support, but active contributors to their communities. By using language learning, experiential activities, and rhetorical speech practices, the project creates safe and meaningful spaces where migrant children can share their experiences, build confidence, and feel heard at school and beyond. In doing so, the project supports children's right to participate in democratic and social life, as recognised by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

About this handbook (Work Package 5, Task 5.3)

This handbook is one of the key outcomes of the ToC project and has been created with children and for children. It brings together real stories, reflections, and ideas shared by migrant children who participated in the project activities across different countries.

Through their own words and experiences, children talk about participation, belonging, language, and everyday life in their host societies. Alongside these stories, the handbook highlights common themes that emerged during group discussions, helping readers understand what supports children's inclusion and what challenges they continue to face.

The purpose of this handbook is to encourage understanding, empathy, and action. It is addressed to children, parents, educators, practitioners, and decision makers who wish to better understand migrant children's perspectives and support environments where every child feels respected, safe, and empowered to take part in shaping their own future.

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WHAT SHOULD WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC LIFE



1. What is the right to participate in political and democratic life?

Having a say in things that affect your life:

Children should be able to speak about decisions that affect them at school, at home, and in their communities.

Participation is not only about voting. It can also mean:

- *sharing ideas,*
- *asking questions,*
- *joining activities,*
- *and helping make decisions.*

“If a decision affects you, you have the right to be heard.”



2. Migrant children have these rights too

All migrant children have equal rights, no matter where they come from or their legal status.

Every child has different experiences, cultures, languages, and stories, and all children deserve respect and inclusion.

3. Children's rights are protected

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12) protects children's right to express their views freely.

Children also have the right to:

- *receive information,*
- *express themselves,*
- *meet with others,*
- *and participate in their communities.*



What counts as political and democratic participation for children?

Engagement, expression and participation



School and student councils



Youth groups and community organizations

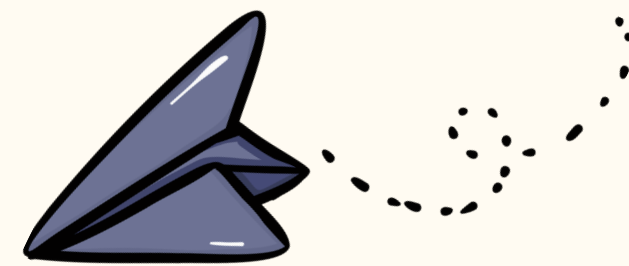


Online platforms and social spaces



Art and storytelling projects





BEFORE YOU READ THE STORIES

The following stories are based on real experiences shared by migrant children who participated in the Theory of Change (ToC) project activities.

Through their own words, children share parts of their everyday lives, experiences, challenges, hopes, and dreams.

Each story is unique, reflecting different journeys, cultures, and personal experiences.

These stories are included to help readers better understand migrant children's perspectives and lived experiences while encouraging empathy, reflection, inclusion, and participation.

By listening to children's voices, we can better understand their strengths, resilience, and the importance of creating spaces where every child feels heard, respected, and supported.

READ THESE STORIES WITH OPENNESS, CARE, AND CURIOSITY.

DANIEL'S STORY

Daniel is an 11-year-old boy from Cameroon who arrived in Italy six months ago through family reunification. His family are refugees and live in an apartment provided by a housing project that supports vulnerable families. He enjoys living in Italy but is unsure if he wants to stay in the future, as he dreams of visiting different countries and choosing where he would like to live.

He started school in January, joining fifth grade, and will begin middle school in September. He enjoyed learning Italian and received strong support from his teachers, classmates, and family, especially his mother. He practices the language by reading, using the internet, and watching TV in Italian. After about four months, he reached a good level of understanding. Overall, his school experience has been positive, and he feels accepted and supported. At school, he has made friends and interacts well with his classmates. Outside school, his social life is limited because of his age and his mother's rules. He does not practice sports but enjoys reading, mainly in Italian, and spends most of his time with his family.

When asked about his knowledge about civil rights and rights to education, the interviewee didn't seem to have a great understanding of the concept. However, he said that he would like to be a carabiniere (police officer) because he wants to help people. He said that, for him, the important things to be happy are his education, his family and having a home. He is also aware that not every child has access to these things, but he doesn't know who could help them.

Overall, his knowledge about the subject is quite limited, apparently because of his young age and the lack of attention to the subject inside the school system. For him, happiness means having education, family, and a home.



ALEXANDER'S STORY

Alexander is a 14-year-old boy from Cameroon who has been living in Cyprus for two and a half years with his family. His journey has been shaped by both challenge and hope, and throughout the interview, he speaks with honesty about his life, his passions, and his dreams for the future.

One of the most important things in Alexander's life is football. He explains that he has loved the game since he was eight years old, and that this passion has remained strong over the years. In Cameroon, he was not able to continue developing this dream because of the war in his country. For him, coming to Cyprus opened new opportunities, and he feels happy that he can now pursue football in a safer environment. He has been playing in an academy for two and a half years, and a particularly important achievement for him is that he has recently been accepted by the Cyprus Football Federation, which now gives him official access to football competitions.

Alexander also speaks positively about his social life in Cyprus. He has made friends both at school and through his football team. These friendships matter to him because they help him feel included and connected in his new environment. He says that they usually speak Greek together, and he is happy that he can communicate in the language. This shows that he is gradually adapting to life in Cyprus and building confidence in his everyday interactions.

At school, Alexander receives support when he does not understand something in class. Teachers help him by translating difficult words or explanations into English or another language the students speak. This support has been very important for him, because it helps him follow lessons more easily and continue learning. He also mentions that he likes speaking Greek, which suggests that he is making good progress in integrating into the school community.

Alexander's dream is to become a professional football player one day and to compete in international championships. His words show ambition, determination, and a strong desire to succeed. At the same time, he encourages other children to follow what they are truly passionate about and to listen to their parents, because parents can also help guide and support them.

Overall, Alexander's story is one of resilience, adaptation, and hope. Despite the difficulties he has faced, he has found in Cyprus a place where he can learn, grow, and work toward his dream. Football gives him purpose and motivation, while school and friendships help him feel part of a wider community.



ANNA'S STORY

Anna, 16 years old, was born in Nigeria and has lived in Sweden for four years with her family. From the beginning, she felt welcomed by the community, which helped her adapt quickly. She values the education and healthcare in Sweden and believes they give her good opportunities for the future. For this reason, she hopes to continue building her life there.

When Anna started school, her first day was positive. Teachers and classmates supported her, making her feel comfortable. At first, she only knew a few words in Swedish, but she practiced every day and learned the language in about ten months. Although speaking in class was difficult at the beginning, she did not give up.

With time, she became more confident and took part in school plays and cultural activities. These experiences helped her improve her Swedish and feel more connected to her new environment. Her friends were also curious about her background and enjoyed learning words from her native language.

Today, Anna speaks Igbo and English at home and uses Swedish at school. She enjoys watching English programs but also listens to Swedish music and watches local movies to improve her language. She loves acting and dancing, which help her understand Swedish culture better.

Her family, especially her sisters, gives her strong support. She also helps migrant friends by connecting them with support migrant organizations.

Anna dreams of becoming a doctor so she can help people in her home village in Nigeria.

Anna views a happy childhood as one characterized by freedom, adaptation to new environments, social interaction, and access to education. She is a strong advocate for children's rights, including the right to education and healthcare, and believes that children should be able to voice their needs to appropriate authorities.



MATEO'S STORY

Mateo was born in Argentina and moved to Italy in May 2023, when he was twelve, with his mother, older sister, and younger brother.

At first, the change was difficult, especially because of the language. Mateo repeated a school year to improve his Italian, and through daily practice and time with friends, he learned quickly. Today, he speaks Italian fluently and often helps his mother understand official documents, since she and his sister are still learning. His mother also attends language courses to improve.

The family first lived near Venice and later moved to Alano, a small mountain village with only a few hundred residents. Although life is simple and sometimes requires sacrifices, Mateo feels that coming to Italy has given his family better opportunities. He believes that learning the local language is essential for making friends and feeling included.

At school, Mateo receives strong support from teachers and classmates. He works seriously and gets good results, even if studying is not always his favorite activity. He enjoys learning most through real-life experiences with his peers.

In his free time, Mateo helps neighbors with gardening and small jobs. This allows him to earn some money and feel independent. People in the village know him as a responsible and kind boy.

Mateo has a good understanding of the rights that are guaranteed to him and feels welcomed and respected in his community. He has never experienced discrimination and believes that support from others is essential for growing in a new country.



YASSIN'S STORY

Yassin was born in Italy to Moroccan parents, but he spent his early childhood in Morocco, where he attended kindergarten. When he was six, his family moved back to Italy, first to the south and then to the north. At home, they mostly speak Arabic, and his mother often listens to Moroccan poetry while doing housework. Yassin and his siblings speak both Arabic and Italian, and he often helps his parents understand difficult words or documents.

Yassin knows that learning a new language is not easy, especially for adults. He has seen how his mother learned Italian faster than his father, and this has made him more patient and understanding. In the future, he imagines staying in Italy but spending his summers in Morocco with his relatives. He also dreams of traveling and learning English one day.

School was not always easy for Yassin. During his first years, he was bullied and felt unsupported by some teachers. What helped him most was his mother's encouragement and the friendship of two older boys from Morocco. From that time on, he learned to focus on his studies and believe in himself.

Today, Yassin enjoys drawing, writing in his diary, playing chess with his younger brother, and practicing karate. He also attends Arabic school and spends time at the community center. In his free time, Yassin watches videos on YouTube, sometimes in Italian and sometimes in Arabic. He likes content about crimes and mystery stories or "Naruto."

At school, they have talked about and read about rights. He believes that everyone has basic rights, such as the right to live, speak, eat and learn.



VALENTINA'S STORY

Valentina is a young woman from Venezuela who has been living in Spain for two years with her family. They left their country because of serious economic and social problems, hoping to find safety and stability abroad. Although Valentina enjoys her life in Spain and sees many opportunities for the future, she still misses Venezuela deeply. At times, she and her family experience discrimination for being Latino, but Sofía tries to remain positive and focused on her goals.

Starting school in Spain was difficult. Even though she spoke Spanish, her accent and expressions were different, and some classmates made fun of her way of speaking, dressing, and of the situation in Venezuela. These moments made her feel insecure. However, with the support of her teachers and a small group of classmates who became close friends, she slowly gained confidence and felt more accepted.

In her daily life, Valentina follows a simple routine of studying, helping her mother, and spending time with friends. She enjoys skating and relaxing, and she is also trying to improve her English for her future.

Valentina believes that every child needs security, stability, and supportive adults to grow well. She sees social media as a powerful way to defend young people's rights and share their stories. Social media connects people globally, and by sharing stories of injustice, it can help bring attention to the rights and challenges faced by young people around the world.



AHMED'S STORY

Ahmed has been living in Greece for about a month and a half. He enjoys being there and hopes to build a future in the country together with his family. Although he feels comfortable and generally happy, he is also worried about what will happen when he turns eighteen. Without relatives in Greece, he fears that he may lose his place to stay and be forced to live on the streets. For this reason, he is determined to find a job and become independent as soon as possible.

At the moment, he does not attend a regular school, but he is actively learning Greek through lessons offered in the reception structure where he lives. His teachers support him in this process, helping him improve his language skills and integrate into society. In the future, he would like to study economics and open his own business.

In daily life, Ahmed mainly speaks Arabic with friends and interpreters, and he prefers Arabic media online and on television. He enjoys going to the gym and playing football, using sport as another way to practice Greek. His family and friends are his main source of strength.

For Ahmed, a good childhood means having access to language, education, and safe housing. He believes children should respectfully defend their rights and values Greece as a place of opportunity, even if some people still show a lack of respect towards him.



MIGRANT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND INCLUSION EXPERIENCES



BEFORE EXPLORING THE FINDINGS

This section presents key findings on migrant children's learning and inclusion experiences. The findings were collected through focus groups, interviews, pilot activities, and surveys conducted as part of the Theory of Change (ToC) project.

The section brings together the voices of migrant children and the perspectives of professionals working with them across different European countries. Some findings are presented through percentages, while others are shared as direct quotes or qualitative insights from children, helping to show how learning, inclusion, and participation are experienced in their daily lives.

The selected themes focus on key barriers, support needs, and learning practices affecting children's education, participation, and sense of belonging. These include language barriers, difficulties in social integration and friendships, teacher support needs, participation in school and community activities, technology and media use for learning, and cultural barriers.

The findings presented in this section are based on contributions from children and professionals across Italy, Greece, Spain, Sweden, and Cyprus, including:

- 85 children aged 10–18 who participated in focus groups, interviews, and pilot activities.*
- 493 professionals working with migrant children across partner countries.*

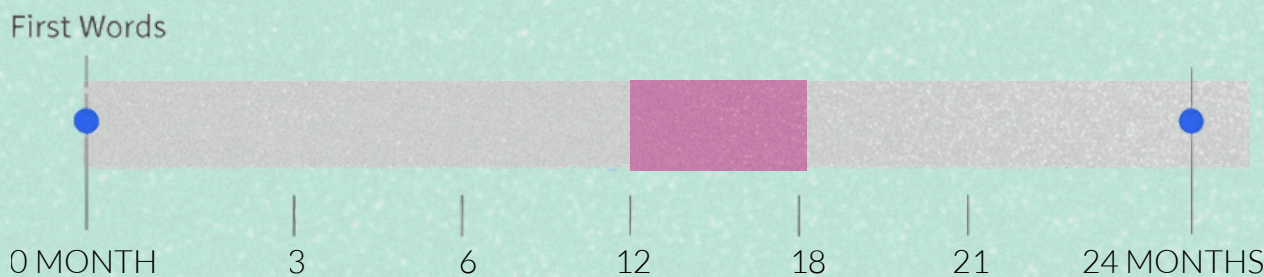


1- LANGUAGE BARRIERS

85% children who said language is their TOP barrier to integration.



N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).

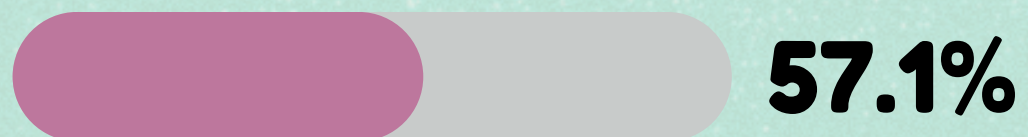


Average time for kids to reach language fluency.

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups) and N = 5 children aged 15-18 (Greece interviews).



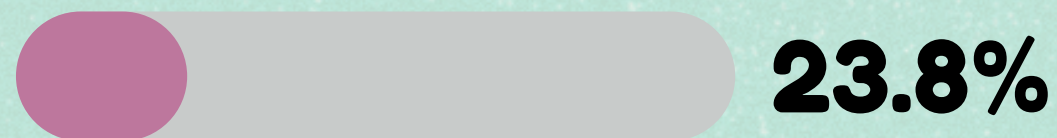
Children's views on the importance of language learning



57.1%

57.1% Children said learning languages is important for work and employment opportunities.

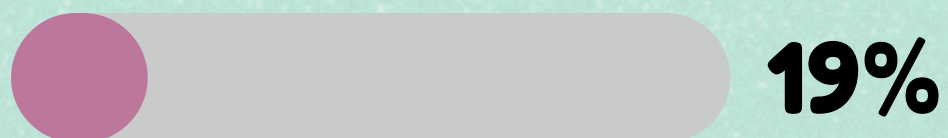
N = 21 children aged 10–18 (Spain pilot group).



23.8%

23.8% Children connected language learning with education and personal growth.

N = 21 children aged 10–18 (Spain pilot group).



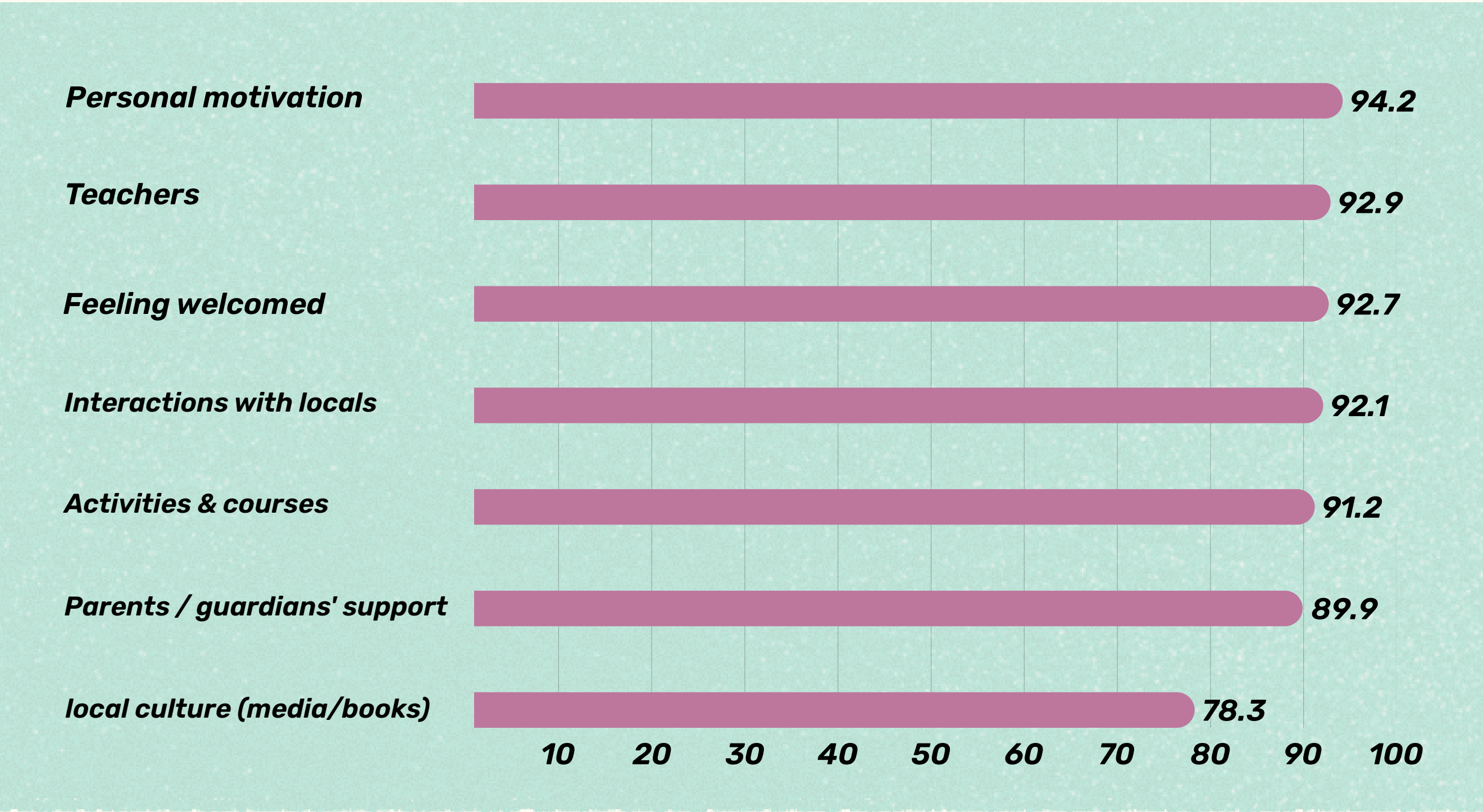
19%

19% Children believed languages help with integration, friendships, and daily life.

N = 21 children aged 10–18 (Spain pilot group).



The factors that support language learning



N = 493 respondents (professionals working with migrant children) across Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Sweden, and Greece

Personal motivation, teachers, and feeling welcomed were identified as the strongest factors supporting language learning among young migrants.

2- DIFFICULTIES IN SOCIAL INTEGRATION & FRIENDSHIPS

72% Children struggling to make friends/socialize in new country



N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).



92 % children emphasize friendships as a critical resource for integration.

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).

Peers who are welcoming and inclusive can help mitigate the social isolation that migrant children often experience

N = 16 children aged 10-17 (Cyprus focus groups).

*First, when I was in
Larissa, I had one
friend, but here
[Athens], I don't have*
Child Participant

3- LIMITED TEACHER SUPPORT AND TUTORING NEEDS

Teacher Support Needed



68% children requesting more teacher support/tutoring

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).



” ***I don't really think that my teacher knows how to approach me. I feel she doesn't have time...there are a lot of children in the classroom and a lot of noise...***

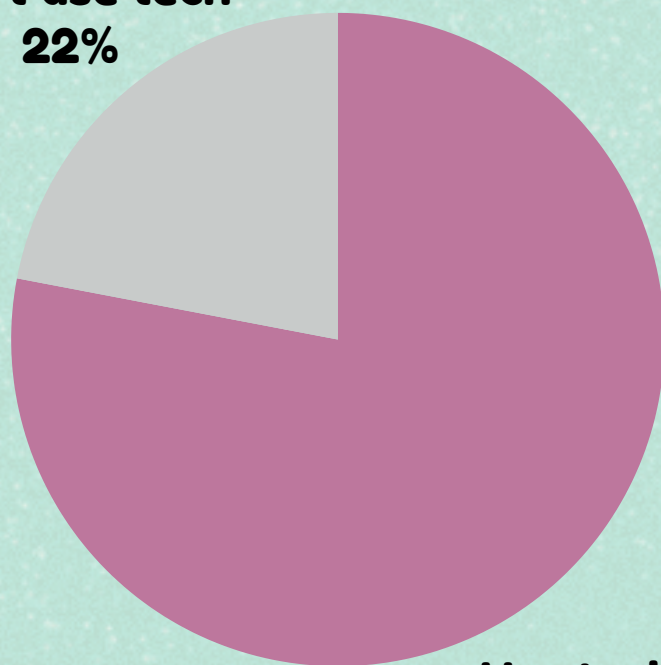
Child Participant



4- TECHNOLOGY USE FOR LEARNING

Technology Use for Learning

Don't use tech
22%



Use tech tools
78%

78% Children using phone/translator apps/digital tools to learn.

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).

“

I put Moroccan money and Italian money on Google... [to understand currency conversion]

Child Participant

”

“

If I listen to people say a word [don't understand] ", I ask a translation to translate [using a translator app], then I repeat the word.

Child Participant

”

“

I spoke to her [teacher] on the phone, wrote in Arabic [using a translator], and... yes, she understood.

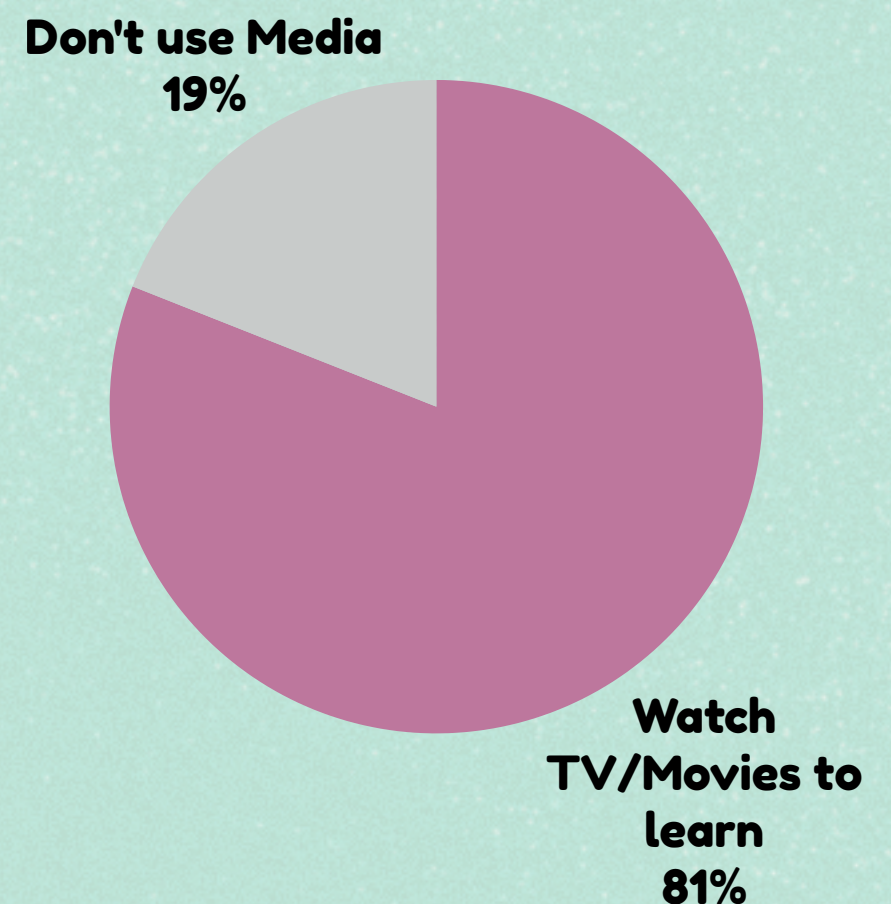
Child Participant

”

5- MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Media Engagement (TV/Video)

81% children using TV, cartoons, movies to learn language



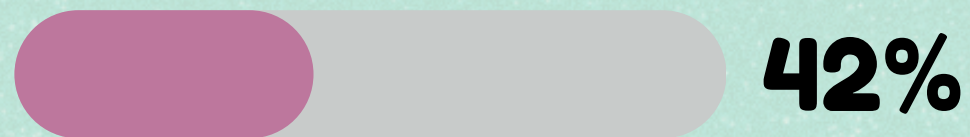
N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).

” I would watch more movies... with subtitles of course... For the first few months, yes. And then later on I start to watch the movies with subtitles in my native language so that I learn how to pronounce the words.

Child Participant



6- EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION



42% Children engaged in sports, clubs, and after-school programs.

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).



7- CULTURAL BARRIERS

Cultural Barriers Identified



55% children identifying cultural/religious practice challenges.

N = 18-25 children aged 10-14 (Sweden + Italy focus groups).

In Morocco, you go from 8 and come back at 1. Then go from 2 and come back at 4. That's how it is [school schedule]. Here it's different.

Child Participant

We have to put up a big cloth or something like that because if some people don't agree, they might report it [animal sacrifice tradition].

Child Participant

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