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WP2 Research Analysis & Needs Assessment

National report

ITALY



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National report - ITALY



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1. Introduction

The project Theory of Change (101141204): The use of the art of Rhetoric Speech as an innovative tool in education and training of migrant children in language learning, empowerment, and social integration activities is implemented under the framework of the AMIF (Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund) program. Its overarching goal is to foster the development of democratic citizenship values, respect for human rights, equality, social justice, and environmental stewardship among migrant children. This is achieved through innovative approaches such as experiential learning and non-formal education, with a particular focus on rhetoric speech activities. These methodologies are designed to facilitate language acquisition and empower migrant children to integrate more fully into their host societies. The consortium comprises partners from six countries, including Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, and Sweden.

The project is structured around several work packages, including research and needs assessment, the development of specialized training materials, hands-on language learning workshops, and the design of digital platforms to support language education between others. This national report serves as a comprehensive overview of the findings obtained during the research and needs assessment stage in Italy, encompassing the results from in-depth interviews with migrant children (30 per country), focus group discussions (8 per country), survey data (100 questionnaires per country), and a stakeholder mapping exercise, whose objectives was to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges and barriers that migrant children face in language learning and social integration. These activities were designed to gather valuable insights from key

stakeholders, including children, parents, educators, and guardians, enabling the project to identify the most pressing needs and obstacles in the educational and social inclusion of migrant children. Each section of the report provides a detailed analysis of the participant samples, highlighting key insights and results drawn from these activities. The report offers a critical examination of the challenges and opportunities faced in the education and social integration of migrant children, grounded in the specific context of our country, and underscores the role of innovative educational tools in overcoming linguistic and social barriers.

2. RESULTS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The interviews were conducted in medium-sized or small-to-medium-sized cities in a region of Northern Italy. A total of 25 interviews were carried out with migrant children (14 boys and 11 girls) aged between 10 and 18 years (average age: 14). The participants attended educational institutions ranging from primary to upper secondary schools, with the majority enrolled in lower secondary education. Their countries of origin were diverse, including Morocco (5), Kosovo (4), Nigeria (3), Guinea (2), Iraq (2), Cameroon (2), as well as Argentina, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ukraine, China, and Colombia. All names used to report examples from the interviews are fictional.

ID	Age	Gender	Country of Origin
1	13	m	Argentina
2	18	m	Guinea
3	16	f	China

4	14	m	Marocco
5	15	f	Nigeria
6	17	f	Nigeria
7	12	m	Nigeria
8	13	m	Morocco
9	16	m	Morocco
10	12	m	Morocco
11	10	f	Bangladesh
12	11	f	Kosovo
13	12	m	Kosovo
14	16	f	Ukraine
15	13	f	Kosovo
16	10	m	Kosovo
17	15	m	Cameroon
18	11	m	Cameroon
19	15	f	Colombia
20	17	f	Cameroon
21		m	Burkina Faso
22	16	m	Guinea
23	10	f	Morocco
24	16	f	Iraq
25	17	m	Iraq

2.2 MAIN RESULTS

1.1.1. Migratory trajectories, situation, and expectations

The linguistic learning needs of minors cannot be fully understood without considering the

diversity of individual and family experiences, as well as the projects and expectations tied to their migratory journeys and daily life conditions. Do they perceive their stay as transitory? Does their interest in the language extend beyond bureaucratic or survival purposes? These questions become particularly pertinent in contexts where the language lacks widespread international diffusion, as is the case with Italian. Migratory trajectories, circumstances, and aspirations are all factors that shape motivation, access to resources, and the ability to learn a new language and integrate into a new social context. For these reasons, in the Italian context, we aimed to gather a wide range of experiences, varying by length of stay, migratory motivations, family origins, and legal or socio-economic status. This approach allowed us to identify diverse challenges, strengths, and issues.

The interviewees involved have followed varied migratory trajectories: some were born in Italy, while many arrived through family reunification or accompanied by their families, with lengths of stay varying significantly. In general, at least one-third of respondents have lived in Italy for less than three years, with a minimum duration of six months. This considerable heterogeneity directly influences their everyday life experiences. Regarding those who arrived through family reunification, in some cases, one of the parents had already been living here for many years and was able to arrange family reunification after addressing the main issues related to documents, work, and housing. Generally, the children express a desire to build their lives in Italy or in other countries, showing a positive cultural “double presence” when speaking about their feelings of belonging. For some of them, the motivation to learn Italian (and, in some cases, French and English) is very strong and linked to their opportunity to integrate and build a life project. Others express a more “cosmopolitan” attitude, considering Italy a good place to live but not necessarily their

imagined home for the future.

Difficulties in learning the language is also related to the distance between Italian and the languages they already speak or to the support they can find within their families, which in most cases are accustomed to bilingualism (or even speak three languages, as in the case of a Moroccan child who speaks Moroccan, French, and Italian).

Around one-third of the children involved are refugees, asylum seekers, or hold residence permits for humanitarian protection (in particular, those coming from Ukraine, Guinea, Iraq, and Colombia). Some of them are living in community-based housing or shelters, while a few have achieved more stable living conditions. For them, telling their stories is often a painful and difficult task. Moreover, their experiences most clearly mirror the critical link between language learning, a sense of belonging and safety, and the resources necessary for positive integration. Karim, for example, is a sixteen-year-old unaccompanied minor from Guinea – Conakry. He arrived in Italy in September 2023 and is living in a SAI Centre for Unaccompanied Minors in Milan. He feels that Italy is a good and safe place for him to build a life. While he still does not have specific plans, he wants to concentrate on his studies. Erik is an 11-year-old boy from Cameroon who arrived six months ago in Italy through family reunification. He and his family are refugees, and they are living in an apartment provided to them through a housing project aimed at the integration of vulnerable citizens and families. He likes living in Italy, but he is not sure he wants to stay in Italy in the future. Indeed, he said that he would like to see and live in other countries around the world and choose the country he likes the most. Ahmed is a 17-year-old asylum seeker from Iraq, living in a CAS (*Centro d'Accoglienza Straordinaria*) with his parents and sister. They emigrated from Iraq in 2005 when he was 7 years old, and first

sought international protection in Sweden. They moved to Italy two and a half years ago, when they started the asylum-seeking process over again and were moved into the CAS. Therefore, Ahmed attended elementary and middle school in Sweden and is currently attending high school (CFP) here in Italy. He likes living in Italy and thinks it is a good place to build a future with his family, with plans to open a restaurant. In some cases, particularly when migration stems from forced displacement from their home country (as in the case of Ukraine), the desire to return to the country of origin prevails. Ana, a 16-year-old girl from Ukraine, arrived in Italy as a refugee two years ago and lives with her mother and grandmother (who had been in Italy for a long time). Although she affirms that Italy is a good place to live, she also stresses how “everyone wants to go back home”. Her efforts to learn the language are therefore not linked to a life project but to the fear “of being in a class and not being able to speak”. Her dramatic experience clearly shows how language acquisition cannot be separated from the personal plans, fears, and dreams expressed by the children.

1.2.2. Experience in the education system

With regard to the relationship with the school environment, the children interviewed share a wide variety of experiences. Social resources, personal motivations, and relationships with families, friends (both Italian and migrants), and teachers interact in various ways, defining different experiences and outcomes. Manuel, for example, is a 13-year-old boy who arrived from Argentina who explains that, in his case, being a native Spanish speaker

has allowed him to learn Italian quite easily. Having been in Italy for only one year, he understands and speaks Italian perfectly, and he's already able to help his mother understand documents. He says he has received good support from both teachers and classmates, and while he says he doesn't like school much, his relationship with the educational system doesn't represent a issue for him.

Others recall more complex stories. Lucy, a 17-year-old with Nigerian parents, has attended Italian schools since she was very young. Her account offers an opportunity to reflect on the long process of language acquisition and integration into the Italian educational system, highlighting issues that are quite common in the experiences of young migrants - for example - regarding her discontinuous presence in school. She recalls that, during her time in preschool, before she could fully learn Italian, her parents temporarily brought her to Nigeria for 3-4 months. She remembers how this interruption made it challenging to regain proficiency in the language upon returning to Italy, leading to some discomfort in interactions with both classmates and teachers.

Similarly, Qiu, a 16-year-old girl from China, experienced something similar, although she stresses a more difficult relationship with the Italian language. She was born in Italy, but at the age of one, she returned with her family to China and then, at the age of 8, moved back to Italy. Since then, her main difficulty in the Italian school system has been learning the language. She stresses the importance of having support from both peers and teachers:

At school, the difficulty was communicating, but thanks to a Chinese classmate who helped me, it was better. The teachers also helped us, for example, by giving me and my sister some words and then asking us to rewrite them, with drawings next to them to help us learn.

She also recalls meeting



*unpleasant classmates who maybe said bad words to you or words that you didn't know.
Not knowing the language made you feel at a disadvantage.*

In various stories, although most children declared they did not experience racism or bullying, they remember times when the language barrier was a huge obstacle, accompanied by feelings of fear and experiences of discrimination. Alì has “bad memories” from his first years in primary school and stresses how difficult it was:

not knowing much Italian and having a child who bullies you.

He found support in his family and among friends “who were also Moroccan and older than me”, while he did not feel supported by the teachers. Ana, a 13-year-old girl, and Enis, a 10-year-old boy (siblings from Kosovo who arrived in Italy via family reunification one year ago), talk about the fear they felt about being at school with only basic knowledge of Italian. However, after 8-12 months, they feel somewhat satisfied with how much they have learned.

These (and other) experiences remind us that learning a language is a process with deep social and cultural dimensions. The interviews reveal other relevant aspects. For example, children mention how difficulties tend to grow with the educational level of the school they are attending. The need to learn more specific vocabulary and the decreasing support from teachers (who focus more on content and less on pedagogic support) are often cited as specific issues. Some of them highlight the importance of support from peers who come from their own country, not just for social and emotional support but also to learn the new language. Initiatives aimed at improving Italian skills for migrant minors are highly appreciated, while the evaluation of initiatives aimed at valorising different cultures is not necessarily considered as relevant by children. This suggests a rather pragmatic approach,

in which what is most valued is the opportunity to gain individual skills that allow them to communicate and also to express their cultural identity.

1.2.3. Social interactions in daily life

In most cases, at least some words of Italian are used on a daily basis. Speaking about their personal experiences, the interviewees express very varied forms and ideals of “integration” within the local context, which, in many cases, is represented by small towns in rural areas. Here, we limit ourselves to highlighting two main dimensions that should be considered in relation to language learning skills.

Assimilation vs Integration. The interviewees often express the desire to be able to inhabit different cultural and linguistic spaces, for example, Italian and their language of origin. The possibility of speaking Italian also at home plays a significant role. It should be noted that being able to speak the native language can produce very relevant positive effects: for example, having a full command of one’s mother tongue is an important prerequisite for learning the language of the country in which one lives. The mother tongue can be seen as fertile ground, essential for nourishing the languages of education and interaction. This also helps in giving children the opportunity to showcase their cultural competence to peers and teachers. In this sense, most of the respondents enjoy the possibility of using different languages with different people, even within the family: for example, speaking French or Italian with siblings, Moroccan with one parent, and so on. In other words, the multilingualism of some interviewees is claimed as one of the most valued and exclusive forms of cultural capital they can express in their daily life. In this sense, it is certainly

easier to learn Italian for those who speak it at school, with friends, and even at home. At the same time, the experience of those who speak Italian mainly outside the home, with friends or at school, should not automatically be identified as a social problem.

Isolation vs Integration. A second relevant dimension is related to how the interviewees assess their social life. Again, the fact that some face more demanding family tasks (such as caring for younger siblings) does not necessarily mean having an unsatisfactory social life (at least in their personal perception). Most of the respondents declared having friends, participating in sports or other activities, and finding relevant motivations (or even support) for learning Italian in these informal social spaces. Of course, the two aspects tend to influence each other. Those who face more difficulties in learning the language often feel more isolated. And those who feel more isolated tend to express their difficulties in learning the language more clearly. The support of friends and networks that share the same nationality is reported as more relevant when experiences of discrimination and racism are mentioned. However, migrants' networks play other important roles, such as providing information, informal training (even for the Italian language), and a sense of safety. Of course, in some cases, these networks could also lead to forms of ghettoization based on the rejection of dominant cultural and social norms. Participating in sports activities is the most frequently recalled element of integration with local peers and also a source of motivation to learn Italian in a less formal context.

1.2.4. Knowledge of Civil Rights and Rights to Education

Many respondents have a limited understanding of the meaning of “civil rights” and “rights to education,” especially the younger ones. In this sense, many simply mention what is

relevant to them: education, a good family life, food, health, and freedom of choice and speech. In general, the answer to this question mirrors personal and family ambitions and ideas of what represents a worthy life, without mentioning political or institutional issues.

2.3 CONCLUSION

The findings of interviews underscore the profound interconnection between migratory trajectories, personal expectations, educational experiences, social interactions, and the process of learning the Italian language among migrant minors. Language acquisition emerges not merely as a technical skill but as a multifaceted process shaped by the minors' migratory backgrounds, family circumstances, and personal aspirations. These factors influence their motivation, resources, and capacity to integrate into a new cultural and linguistic environment. For some, learning Italian is driven by the desire to build a long-term life project in Italy, while others view the country as a temporary stop in a broader cosmopolitan journey. Factors such as family reunification, refugee status, or forced displacement significantly shape attitudes toward language learning and cultural adaptation. Challenges, such as the linguistic distance between Italian and the minors' mother tongues, are often mitigated by support networks, including family, peers, and educators.

Within the educational system, the experiences of migrant minors are equally diverse. Positive examples of integration demonstrate how early and sustained support from schools and peers can foster confidence and language proficiency. Conversely, other cases highlight the difficulties arising from discontinuous schooling, experiences of

discrimination, or limited institutional support. As students progress through the educational system, challenges often intensify, with increasing linguistic and academic demands being met by inadequate pedagogical assistance.

Social interactions further illuminate the dual dimensions of integration and isolation. While many minors successfully navigate multiple linguistic and cultural spheres, this fluidity is not always recognized as a strength by formal institutions. Multilingualism, however, can serve as both a facilitator for language acquisition and a means of expressing cultural identity. Additionally, the role of informal networks, sports, and community activities is evident in building motivation and providing practical support for language learning and integration.

Finally, the understanding of civil rights and the right to education varies significantly among respondents, often reflecting immediate personal and family needs rather than broader institutional or political dimensions. This underscores the necessity of strengthening awareness of fundamental rights as a means of empowering migrant minors to navigate their social and educational environments more effectively.

3. RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUPS

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

In total, 10 focus groups were organized and conducted (instead of the eight initially planned) as they were considered particularly effective and informative in relation to the Project's objectives. Participants were selected based on the need for relatively

homogeneous groups (e.g., in terms of language proficiency, social status, etc.) to facilitate equal and participatory discussions.

2.1.1. Focus group with Children

Two focus groups were carried out, involved a total of 14 children with migratory backgrounds. The first focus group included eight children participating in after-school educational activities and projects. The group was balanced in terms of gender (4 boys and 4 girls) and, apart from two participants aged 14 and 15, was relatively homogeneous in age (11 years). All participants lived in the Veneto region, in the northeast of Italy, and were mostly attending secondary schools.

The second focus group involved four children (one girl and three boys) of Moroccan origin. Apart from one boy who had been in Italy for about a year, the other three participants had lived in Italy for 4 to 5 years and demonstrated a good knowledge of Italian. All were enrolled in secondary school.

2.1.2. Focus group with parents/guardians

In the Italian case, three focus groups, involving a total of 28 migrant mothers were carried out.

The target for the first Focus Group consists of 12 mothers attending an Italian language school in Milan. Participants already knew each other, having previously participated in common activities, and they voluntarily joined the Focus Group Discussion proposed by the



educators who supported them during the year. The group had a heterogeneous composition. In terms of countries of origin, they come from Egypt (6), India (2), Japan, Philippines, Nigeria and Algeria. The years of residence in Italy are rather variable and generally goes from 3 to 12 years (on average 6,3 years). The Japanese woman represents an exception, as she lives in Italy for 29 years. She is also the oldest participant (62 years old), while the others are between 26 and 45 years old (on average 34 years old). Participants have children at different school levels, from pre-school to high school. Some have a job outside the home while others are now housewives. Moreover, 6 of them have a university degree. The participants' level of Italian proficiency was generally intermediate, allowing to have a fairly fluent conversation in Italian.

The target for second Focus Group is made of immigrant mothers of children born either in their home or host country. They are mostly Moroccan (5), with two more mothers coming from Ukraine and one from Lithuania. On average, they live in Italy from 11 years (min: 4; max: 21) and have children of different ages: some of them have already finished their studies while others are still attending elementary, middle, high school or even university. These women are participating in an Italian learning course organized by UCPU to help them integrate better in Italian society and to help them gain independence in their daily life. Five of them are housewives while the other three are workers.

The target for third Focus Group is made of immigrant mothers of children of different ages born either in their home or host country. They are all of Moroccan of origin and are between 34 and 60 years old (mean: 45 years old). On average, they present very different migratory experiences. Some of them (3) have arrived in Italy from 2-4 years, while the

rest have lived in Italy from 13 to 25 years. These women are part of the Sportello Arcobaleno (Rainbow Help Desk), a project that aspires to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that supports the integration and active participation of mothers with migrant backgrounds within the school community. Two of them work as cultural mediators. The others are housewives with low education level (primary or lower-secondary school degree)

2.1.3. Focus groups with teachers/educators

Three Focus Groups were carried out with teachers (2 FG) and educators (1 FG). An overall number of 21 teachers and 7 educators were involved.

The first Focus Group involved 11 elementary and middle high school teachers who are part of the foreign student integration network of the province of Treviso, area of Montebelluna; and teachers from the local public institute for lifelong education for adults (CPIA), that provides Italian courses as second language for immigrants. The network's aim is to plan interventions and implement initiatives to facilitate the inclusion of foreign pupils in the various schools belonging to the network and to promote constant training activities for the network's teachers. These teachers work mainly in the city of Montebelluna and in neighboring municipalities. They are all female teachers, varying in age and in the professional roles which they hold in the scholastic institutions they work in.

The target of the second Focus Group is made of 10 elementary, middle and high school teachers who are part of the foreign student integration network of the province of Treviso,

whose aim is to plan interventions and implement initiatives to facilitate the inclusion of foreign pupils in the various schools belonging to the network and to promote constant training activities for the network's teachers. These teachers work mainly in the city of Castelfranco Veneto and in neighbouring municipalities. They are all female teachers, varying in age and in the professional roles which they hold in the scholastic institutions they work into.

The target of the third Focus Group is composed of seven educators (3 women and 4 men). Most of them currently work in a day educational community for boys and girls from 8 to the age of majority who are going through a difficult time. Educators develop tailor-made projects for children to meet educational needs in close collaboration with families, schools and social services. Some of the focus group participants have decades of experience and have also worked in residential communities hosting unaccompanied minors, helping them integrate into the local community with language courses and job preparation courses. Some of the participants take care of afternoon aggregation centres with children attending middle school, organizing school support activities and recreational activities. An educator develops youth policy projects in collaboration with the school. Among them was a social worker who reported her experience with asylum-seeking families for the protection of minors. All participants in the discussion group have experience in home and street education.

2.1.4. Focus groups with stakeholders

Two Focus Groups were carried out with Stakeholders.

The target of the first focus group is made up of members of social cooperatives, volunteer associations and NGOs. Not all of them work directly with foreign minors but all of them are involved in social projects with foreign families living in the territory. They have experience in working with this target and in building support for foreign minors and families. The participants are all women and work in the Veneto region.

The target of the second focus group consisted of social workers operating in municipalities and professionals working in family planning clinics, coordinators of facilities that accommodate unaccompanied minors, and members of municipal and provincial administrations. All the professionals involved in this focus group work to varying degrees with both unaccompanied minors and minors and their families. Each of them has experience related to the daily challenges encountered by minors and their families.

3.2 MAIN RESULTS

2.3.1. Exploring barriers and facilitators for language learning

Children

The findings of the two focus groups centered on the hypothetical story of Sara, a young immigrant in Italy. The aim was to engage minors in discussing the challenges and

potential solutions for integrating into a new culture, with a focus on language acquisition, social inclusion, and the role of educators.

Language Learning

Learning the Italian language emerged as the most significant challenge for Sara. The children emphasized that language acquisition is essential not only for academic success but also for social integration. Barriers to language learning were identified, particularly “social isolation,” as Sara might struggle to practice Italian outside the classroom without friends. Additionally, a lack of understanding of cultural norms can hinder communication and connection. Concerning the school system, the absence of tailored resources - such as simplified reading materials or dedicated language courses - is considered problematic. Bullying and teasing also play a role; if Sara is mocked for her language difficulties, her confidence and willingness to engage will diminish.

The children also suggested pragmatic strategies to overcome these barriers. They proposed that technology and media could assist Sara in her language learning. For example, she could use tools like Google Translate, language-learning apps, and Italian media (cartoons, TV shows, books) to improve her skills. Making friends and receiving encouragement from classmates could provide informal, practical language practice. Classmates should be welcoming, refrain from teasing, and actively include Sara in activities. Teachers may provide simplified materials and extra tutoring to assist newcomers. Extracurricular activities, such as Italian language courses and opportunities to engage with native speakers outside the classroom, are also considered important.

Finally, the children emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and patient learning environment where mistakes are seen as a natural part of the learning process.

Social Integration

The participants underscored the critical role of friendships and social connections in helping Sara adjust to her new environment. Friends not only contribute to emotional well-being but also offer opportunities for Sara to practice Italian in a natural setting. Interactions during play, shared activities, or group projects can accelerate language learning and foster a sense of belonging. Empathy and kindness were highlighted as key elements to ensure Sara feels accepted and valued in her new community.

The children also recognized the ambivalent role of teachers as both educators and mediators. While teachers are vital in helping newcomers adjust, participants noted gaps in educators' understanding of immigrant students' struggles. A recurring theme was the need for teachers to demonstrate patience and understanding, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by immigrant students.

In both focus groups emerged also relevant obstacles to social integration, again projected onto Sara's experience. For example, Sara might face teasing or exclusion due to her background, appearance, or religion, which could negatively impact on her self-esteem and hinder her willingness to engage with peers and educators. The participants also discussed the difficulty of maintaining cultural traditions, particularly religious practices, in a new environment. For instance, Islamic students highlighted the lack of facilities to practice their faith.

Imagining the Future

The children envisioned two potential futures for Sara, shaped by the level of social and educational support she receives. The first scenario is a positive one: Sara will have good friends, receive encouragement, excel academically and socially, and potentially pursue higher education and achieve her aspirations. The second is a negative scenario: without proper support, Sara might struggle academically and risk falling into an unfavorable social trajectory.

The focus group concluded with a discussion on how everyone can contribute to Sara's integration. Some reminded participants that spending time together, helping with homework, and engaging in shared activities - such as watching movies or playing games - could support Sara's integration process. Others emphasized the power of simple gestures of kindness and inclusion. The children highlighted that integration is a shared responsibility. Schools, peers, and the wider community all play crucial roles in creating a welcoming environment.

Conclusion

The focus group offered valuable insights into the integration process for immigrant children. Language learning, social connections, and the role of educators emerged as key factors in shaping Sara's experience. The discussions revealed a strong awareness among children of the challenges newcomers face and the importance of fostering a supportive, inclusive environment.

Key recommendations include:

- Encouraging peer support and empathy to help newcomers feel included.
- Using modern tools and media to make language learning engaging and accessible.
- Providing tailored educational resources and additional support from teachers.
- Addressing cultural barriers and promoting sensitivity in schools.

Ultimately, the focus group emphasized the importance of collective responsibility, where integration is seen as a shared task involving the individual, their peers, and the wider community. By addressing both linguistic and social challenges, schools and communities can empower immigrant students to succeed academically and socially.

Parents/guardians

The experiences shared by mothers during the focus groups highlight critical aspects of integration, education, and language acquisition for immigrant families in Italy. Most of the focus group participants praised the organizational structure and overall quality of Italian schools, noting that the system generally met their expectations. However, the participants also identified challenges in navigating the Italian school system due to language barriers and bureaucracy. For example, mothers mentioned the need to rely on tools like Google Translate or external assistance from CAF (Centres for Family Assistance). The participants also expressed positive relationships with their children's teachers, with many

mothers appreciating the kindness and availability of teachers, even though communication was sometimes hindered by language barriers.

Cultural mediators were viewed as valuable resources, though not always accessible. Mothers strongly emphasized the need for better support in this area. A recurring theme was the potential benefit of cultural and multilingual programs. Many mothers expressed a desire for their children's schools to organize activities that celebrate their heritage, allowing the children to connect with their roots while fostering a sense of pride in their identities.

The focus groups also revealed some areas of disagreement among participants. For example, while some mothers advocated for the exclusive use of Italian in schools, others supported a more inclusive approach that allowed for the use of their mother tongue in certain contexts.

Another interesting divergence emerged regarding the Moroccan community. While some participants viewed its closeness as a hindrance to integration, others saw it as a supportive network for navigating challenges and practicing Italian. Despite these differences, all participants agreed on the importance of mastering Italian for integration and independence. This shared sentiment highlights the critical need for accessible language programs and initiatives that foster both linguistic and social inclusion.

Challenges in Language Learning

Participants underscored significant differences between their children's and their own experiences with language learning. They agreed that age played a vital role; younger



children integrated more easily, whereas older children often struggled. One mother observed:

The unlucky ones are the children of immigrants who arrive when they are a bit older. They really struggle because if a young child arrives and starts from the first grade, then it's fine. But those who arrive already grown-up find themselves there with zero language skills.

For parents, the journey was far more challenging. Factors such as isolation, limited social interactions, and the exclusive use of their mother tongue within the family context were major obstacles. Some mothers stressed the importance of language courses and practice in building confidence and fluency.

Facilitators to Language Learning

Early immersion in the Italian school system for children, opportunities for social interactions with Italian peers, and participation in extracurricular activities were identified as key facilitators of language learning. For parents, Italian language courses, friendly neighbours, and a willingness to engage with the broader community significantly contributed to their progress.

Barriers to Language Learning

Late arrival in the host country was a primary impediment for children. For adults, barriers included social isolation, limited opportunities for Italian practice, and the dominance of their mother tongue at home. Some participants emphasized the need for proactive efforts to overcome these barriers.

Conclusion

The focus groups illuminate the multifaceted challenges immigrant mothers face in their journey toward integration. It underscores the importance of providing tailored support for both parents and children, from cultural mediation to language courses and community engagement. These initiatives not only benefit individuals but also contribute to building a more inclusive society.

Teachers/educators

We present the results of the two focus groups with teachers separately from the one carried out with educators.

Focus Groups with teachers

The focus group discussion provided insights into challenges and best practices concerning the integration of migrant students and their language learning in schools. Teachers expressed concerns about cultural, social, and systemic barriers while sharing effective strategies and motivational examples. A key theme was the need for systemic improvements and tailored approaches to foster integration and language acquisition.

Challenges in Integration

Some teachers have stressed a cultural Mismatch Between Schools and Families. In this sense, school demands and expectations are considered as clashing with the traditions and cultural understandings of migrant families. Moreover, the students' parents, particularly mothers, may struggle to engage due to language barriers, lack of familiarity with school systems, and isolation. In some cases, mothers restricted by cultural norms or lacking linguistic skills, rely on children to mediate between school and family. This can result in miscommunication or a lack of parental oversight in educational matters. In other cases, female students, particularly from conservative backgrounds, are considered often restricted from participating in extracurricular or social activities. Some male students, instead, are perceived as creating disciplinary and relational challenges in classrooms. Some teachers marked how issues such as differences in personal hygiene can lead to complaints from peers or parents, and triggering racist attitudes or social exclusion. While others have argued that prejudices, both positive (e.g., stereotyping certain nationalities as good at math) and negative, hinder fair evaluation and inclusion. Teachers have also highlighted a lack of systemic integration policies and insufficient staff, which undermine efforts to support migrant students effectively.

Strategies and best practices

Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding the cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds of migrant students to build trust and mutual respect and raise

cultural awareness. Moreover, some remarked how workshops and activities aimed at engaging parents (e.g., cooking or sewing) have proven effective in involving mothers, providing a platform for interaction and support. Other activities can create opportunities for interaction among children and parents across different cultural backgrounds, such as community celebrations or shared activities, building relationships and reducing isolation. Even initiatives like teaching greetings in multiple languages at pre-primary levels are considered encouraging cultural appreciation and inclusion. Teachers recommended moving away from standardized teaching models and embracing intercultural and differentiated approaches. As a teacher stated: “Standardization creates barriers. Either you fit the mold, or you're excluded. This is not inclusion.” Civic education projects and authentic tasks tailored to individual abilities, better if carried out in small groups, were proposed as effective methods.

Challenges in language learning

Insufficient staff limits the ability to provide tailored learning experience. Moreover, afternoon language classes are considered less effective as students are often tired from regular school hours. Some have stressed how young people may amplify cultural differences, making integration and language learning more challenging.

Facilitators in language learning

As in other Focus Groups, it emerged how interaction with peers fosters natural language acquisition. However, other initiatives can be provided: for example, summer activities to

reinforce language skills in a relaxed and social setting. Of course, families can work as facilitators when value education and invest in learning. Even the relationship with the local community is relevant. Collaboration with local organizations, such as churches, sport associations etc. helps provide educational support in inclusive environments.

Conclusion (teachers)

The discussion emphasized the need for systemic changes, including increased staff, teacher training, and tailored approaches to integration and language learning. Key recommendations include:

- Cultural Training for Teachers
- Parental Involvement Initiatives
- Recruit additional staff to support individualized learning.
- Community Collaboration
- Lifelong Learning for Teachers

Focus Groups with educators

Educators shared their work experience and described how they engage with migrant minors. Although foreign families and minors have long been present in the community, some educators stressed how today's migratory flows come from new countries, requiring cultural mediators with different backgrounds, who are often unavailable. All educators emphasized the importance of family involvement, particularly engaging mothers in

community activities. Unfortunately, mothers often have limited participation due to language barriers and cultural norms that keep them at home. The discussion also noted the value of local associations in promoting integration through cultural events that facilitate exchanges between different cultures.

Facilitators to language learning

The group identified factors that aid language learning, such as participation in extracurricular activities, peer interaction, and mutual support among minors from the same country of origin. Engaging mothers in Italian courses is crucial, as many families primarily speak their native language at home. Involving families in community activities fosters integration by building support networks.

Barriers to language learning

Conversely, several barriers hinder language learning. Bureaucratic delays prevent unaccompanied minors from accessing Italian courses promptly. Insufficient support in schools often leaves children feeling lost and unmotivated. Additionally, financial constraints and limited transportation hinder access to extracurricular activities that promote social integration and informal language practice. Migrant parents often cannot focus on their children's integration due to other priorities.

Challenges

Some challenges were specifically addressed: local people may be unfamiliar with diversity and need encouragement to engage with migrant families. Many local activities are parish-driven, making them less accessible to people of different religions. Neutral and inclusive spaces are needed. The fragmentation between associations, municipalities, and parishes creates other challenges

Advice for Educators

When asked what advice they would give their younger selves about working with migrant minors, educators agreed on these key points:

- Remain unbiased.
- Continue learning, stay informed, and nurture curiosity about others.
- Be patient in understanding and learning about the other.
- Recognize that educating minors involves engaging with their families as a whole.

Conclusion (educators)

The educators emphasized the need for cultural mediators, family involvement, and community support to foster the integration of migrant minors. Schools play a crucial role but are hindered by systemic challenges and resource limitations. Mothers' engagement in Italian courses and community activities is essential but often constrained by language and

cultural factors. Barriers to language learning include bureaucratic delays, inadequate school support, financial constraints, and limited transport. Extracurricular activities, mutual peer support, and cultural events by local associations can significantly aid integration and reduce fear of diversity.

Educators advocate for a holistic approach that respects migrants' cultural identities and involves their families. Finally, they stressed the need for lifelong learning, patience, and bias-free interactions in their work.

Stakeholders

This report synthesizes findings from discussions held during two focus groups with stakeholders, with a particular focus on challenges and opportunities related to integration, language acquisition, education, and emotional well-being.

Barriers and obstacles

Many immigrant parents, particularly mothers, lack proficiency in Italian, limiting their ability to integrate into the community. This creates a dependency on their children, who often

serve as translators and intermediaries. This role reversal places undue responsibilities on children, hindering their personal development and integration. Language barriers also affect families' comprehension of Italy's legal and administrative systems, even with the assistance of cultural mediators.

In some cases, as for unaccompanied minors, delays in obtaining proper documentation prevent them from accessing education, delaying their exposure to the Italian language and community. This bureaucratic inefficiency prolongs isolation and educational gaps.

Immigrant children often form peer groups along cultural lines, limiting opportunities to practice Italian and integrate socially. Similarly, parents may struggle to build connections within their local communities due to linguistic and cultural barriers. Parents, preoccupied with securing basic needs like housing and employment, often lack involvement in their children's education. As a result, children miss critical support and encouragement to succeed at school. Schools lack tailored approaches for immigrant students. Teachers often struggle to navigate the cultural and educational gaps, and intercultural training remains underutilized or resisted. Rigid and rational educational structures may fail to engage children from diverse backgrounds who benefit more from hands-on, exploratory learning.

Strengths and opportunities

Literacy programs for mothers, funded by the state, provide an important gateway for their social and economic inclusion, which positively impacts their children's integration. Refugee children display remarkable resilience and adaptability despite the challenges

they face. This quality can be nurtured to support their integration into Italian society. Although at times prone to "ghettoization", after-school initiatives serve as valuable spaces for relationship-building and informal learning. They could be enhanced to foster both educational and social integration. Introducing hands-on tools and activities, such as simple games and physical tools, has shown success in engaging immigrant children, promoting creativity, and enhancing their learning experience.

Recommendations

- Expand language courses tailored for immigrant parents, particularly mothers, to enhance their independence and integration within their communities.
- Offer accessible legal and cultural orientation programs with simplified communication strategies.
- Provide teachers with intercultural training to better understand and respond to the unique challenges of immigrant children.
- Develop flexible and adaptive curriculums that incorporate group work, practical learning, and peer mentoring.
- Create mechanisms for improved collaboration between schools, social services, cultural mediators, and municipal administrations to ensure holistic support for immigrant families.
- Establish spaces where unaccompanied minors can connect with peers who have successfully integrated, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation.

- Integrate emotional and psychological support programs within schools to address the unique stresses faced by refugee children.
- Rethink the structure and inclusivity of after-school programs to ensure they serve as spaces of integration rather than segregation.
- Simplify and expedite the documentation process for unaccompanied minors, enabling timely access to education and social services.

Conclusion

The integration of unaccompanied minors and refugee families into Italian society presents both challenges and opportunities. Language acquisition, education, and emotional well-being emerge as interconnected pillars that require systemic attention. While the focus group highlighted critical gaps - such as parental disengagement, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and fragmented support systems - it also underscored the resilience of children, the potential of educational innovation, and the importance of fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

4. STAKEHOLDERS SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

3.1.1. Respondents' characteristics

A total of 100 questionnaires were collected from selected representatives of schools, educational institutions, municipalities, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders. The vast majority of respondents reside in the Veneto Region, with most living in various small towns. Respondents are highly educated: 9 out of 10 hold a university degree (64%) or a postgraduate degree (27%). Women represent 86% of respondents, while one person identifies as non-binary (1%), two preferred not to disclose their gender, and the remaining 11% are men. In the Italian sample, the gender imbalance - common in sectors such as education, social services, and NGOs - appears particularly pronounced.

Gender distribution – Italian sample (N=100)

Gender	Frequency
<i>Woman</i>	86
<i>Man</i>	11
<i>Non-binary</i>	1
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	2
<i>Total</i>	100

Age composition is quite varied. 18 respondents are between 25-34 years old, 27 between 35-44 years old, 33 between 45-54, 18 between 55-64. Only one person is under 24 years old and 3 are over 65. The majority of respondents fall within the 45-44 age group (33), followed by those aged 35-44 (27). This suggests that the survey has intercepted professionals with significant experience. Only one person is 24 years old or younger.

Given the low proportion of early-career professionals – only one respondent out of 5 is younger than 24 years old, the need to train younger staff seems to pose a relevant issue.

Age – Italian sample (N=100)

Age group	12-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	64+	Tot.
Frequency	1	18	27	33	18	3	100

1.2 Information about the organization/service and the work with migrant children.

Type of organization – Italian sample (N=100)

Type of organization	Frequency
<i>School</i>	41
<i>Public social services</i>	24
<i>NGO's</i>	20
<i>Public authorities</i>	11
<i>Health services</i>	3
<i>Other</i>	1
<i>Total</i>	100

A significant portion of respondents works in educational institutions (41), followed by social services (24), NGOs (19), and public authorities (10) (see Figure 1). The majority are employed in public schools (41), public social services (24), and NGOs (20), indicating strong representation from the public sector, particularly in education and social services.

The respondents' characteristics reflect their daily involvement with migrant children across various settings. The primary professions represented include teachers and professors at different school levels (37), social workers primarily in public social services (25), coordinators and managers of public and private services (17), and educators predominantly working in NGOs (13).

Role in the organization – Italian sample (N=100)

Role in the organization	Frequency
<i>Teacher</i>	37
<i>Social worker</i>	25
<i>Coordination/manager</i>	18
<i>Educator</i>	13
<i>Other</i>	7
<i>Total</i>	100

Only one-third of respondents hold a managerial or decision-making role. This is expected among coordinators and managers (14 out of 17), but such roles are also present among educators (3 out of 13), social workers (4 out of 25), and teachers/professors (8 out of 37).

Decision-making role in organization (yes/no) – Italian sample (N=100)

Holding decision-making roles	Frequency
<i>Yes</i>	37
<i>No</i>	63
<i>Tot.</i>	100

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents (83%) work directly with migrant children, which highlights their potential firsthand insights. Since most respondents are directly engaged with migrant children, they are likely to have valuable insights into practical issues related to working with this vulnerable population, including barriers and facilitators associated with language learning and integration processes. The smaller fraction of respondents (17%) who are not in direct contact often hold critical administrative or coordination roles, contributing to higher-level strategy formulation. While they may not encounter these issues on a daily basis, their contribution is crucial for identifying policies and best practices to be implemented at the local level.

Direct Work with Migrant Children – Italian sample (N=100)



Do you work in direct contact with migrant children?	Frequency
<i>Yes</i>	83
<i>No</i>	17
<i>Total</i>	100

The majority of respondents have extensive experience, with 53% working over a decade in their organization. This trend likely reflects an experienced workforce capable of handling the complex issues associated with migrant children, although the smaller percentage (13%) of less experienced professionals suggests room for continued skill development and fresh perspectives.

Years of experience in the organization – Italian sample (N=100)

How long have you been working with this organization?	Frequency
<i>Less than 2 years</i>	13
<i>2-5 years</i>	22
<i>6-10 years</i>	12
<i>More than 10 years</i>	53
<i>Total</i>	100

Most professionals work with children born in Italy to migrant parents or arriving via family reunification (76%), whereas fewer interact with unaccompanied minors, refugees, or asylum seekers. This distribution underscores the diverse challenges professionals face, ranging from integration of second-generation migrants to addressing the unique needs of asylum-seeking children.

Cross-Tabulation – Migrant background of the children you work with and Age group of the migrant you mainly work with

Migrant Background	Main Age Group			Tot.
	Young children (0-10)	Teenagers (11-18)	Young adults (19-25)	
<i>Children arrived with family reunification</i>	6	7	0	13
<i>Children born in this country whose parents are migrants</i>	26	36	14	76
<i>Children of recognized refugees</i>	1	2	3	6
<i>Unaccompanied minors/asylum seekers</i>	0	4	1	5
Tot.	33	49	18	100

Services offered to migrant children in the respondents' organizations (yes/no) – Italian sample (N=100)

Service	YES	NO	TOT.
<i>Housing</i>	23	77	100



<i>Economic Support</i>	39	61	100
<i>Vocational Guidance</i>	46	54	100
<i>Language Training</i>	65	35	100
<i>Legal Support</i>	11	89	100
<i>Health/Mental Health Care</i>	44	56	100
<i>Counseling and Support for Children</i>	80	20	100
<i>Assistance in Accessing Services</i>	83	17	100

Services such as assistance in accessing services (83%), counseling (80%) and language training (65%) are the most frequently provided, aligning with core needs of emotional and linguistic support for integration. Conversely, services like housing (23%) and legal support (11%) are underrepresented.

Consistent with the profile of organizations and professional stakeholders involved in the survey, the types of support most frequently requested and provided in daily work practices include counseling and support for children (63 respondents report this daily or often), language training (51 daily or often), and assistance in accessing services (60 daily or often). It is important to note that, despite the limited presence of health professionals, one of the most requested services is health and mental care (26 daily or often). This type of intervention reflects the potential trauma experienced by children with migratory backgrounds.

Services Provided by Organizations in daily practices – Italian sample (N=100)

Service	Daily	Often	Sometime s	Rarely	Never	N/A*	TOT.
<i>Housing</i>	8	7	17	14	30	24	100
<i>Economic Support</i>	9	22	19	8	19	23	100
<i>Vocational Guidance</i>	7	39	22	10	10	12	100
<i>Language Training</i>	25	26	21	11	8	9	100
<i>Legal Support</i>	4	9	20	14	28	25	100
<i>Health/Mental Health Care</i>	10	16	23	8	19	24	100
<i>Counseling and Support for Children</i>	24	39	27	4	2	4	100
<i>Assistance in Accessing Services</i>	19	41	28	7	3	2	100

* Not applicable for my organization

While a majority of respondents occasionally (59%) or often (27%) work with cultural mediators, the presence of 14% who never do highlights a possible underutilization of this resource in enhancing cross-cultural understanding and communication.

Working with cultural mediators (often, sometimes, never) – Italian sample (N=100)

Working with cultural mediators	Frequencies
<i>Often</i>	27
<i>Sometimes</i>	59
<i>Never</i>	14
Tot.	100

4.2 MAIN RESULTS

3.2.1. Barriers and facilitators for language learning

The most challenging aspects in the work with children with migratory background – Italian sample (N=100)

Aspects:	Very challenging	Challenging	Neutral	Somewhat challenging	Not challenging	Tot.
<i>Language</i>	29	49	3	16	3	100

<i>Relationship with parents</i>	40	47	-	13	-	100
<i>Cultural differences</i>	23	43	9	21	4	100
<i>Children's lack of motivation</i>	9	34	23	26	8	100
<i>Institutional aspects (ie. Access to services, documents etc.)</i>	28	40	15	13	4	100
<i>Operators poorly trained</i>	9	36	29	18	8	100
<i>Lack of institutional resources/support</i>	42	39	5	13	1	100
<i>Mutual lack of trust</i>	3	24	31	28	14	100

Challenges like lack of institutional support (42% very challenging) and parental relationships (40% very challenging) dominate, reflecting systemic issues and family dynamics as pivotal areas for intervention. The lesser challenge reported with children's motivation (9% very challenging) suggests that children generally display a willingness to engage, despite their circumstances.

Personal motivation (61% very effective) and interaction with locals (56% very effective) emerge as key facilitators of language acquisition, emphasizing the importance of personalized and community-based approaches in fostering linguistic integration.

Factors and conditions can most effectively assist young migrants in learning a new language – Italian sample (N=100)

Factors and conditions:	Very effective	Effective	Neutral	Somewhat effective	Not effective/relevant	Tot.
<i>Interaction with "locals"</i>	56	38	2	4	-	100
<i>Parents/guardians' support</i>	39	52	1	8	-	100
<i>Feeling welcomed</i>	48	42	4	6	-	100
<i>Personal motivation</i>	61	28	8	3	-	100
<i>Teachers with transcultural skills</i>	58	36	4	2	-	100
<i>Interest for the local cultural</i>	28	40	18	13	1	100
<i>Activities/courses</i>	42	50	3	5	-	100

Can you think of any best practices or projects that have successfully enhanced linguistic diversity and competency among migrant children? (open question)

About one in five respondents cannot answer this question. Among those who propose actions or initiatives, prevails the indication to mix formal education with informal education related to socializing activities:

- Italian courses (L2)
- After-school activities (sport, theatre, leisure activities)
- Initiatives aiming at involving migrant parents
- Peer-to-peer education (ie. Activities in small groups)
- Intercultural initiatives at school
- Events to enhance community and intercultural relations

Initiatives blending formal education with social engagement activities, such as sports and intercultural events, are recognized as effective. Peer-to-peer learning and parental involvement further enrich these practices, highlighting a need for comprehensive, community-inclusive strategies.

Which practices and activities would be helpful to enhance migrant children's language skills – Italian sample (N=100)

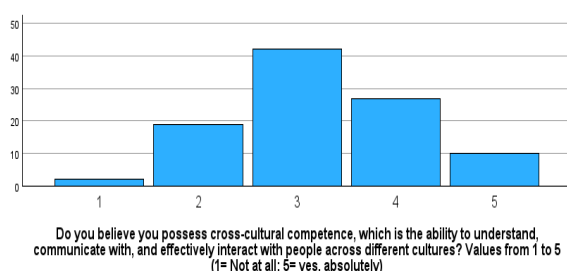
Helpful practices/activities	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Tot.
<i>Immersive language learning environments</i>	20	64	12	3	1	100
<i>Culturally relevant teaching materials</i>	20	50	27	3	-	100
<i>Non-formal education activities</i>	40	55	3	-	2	100
<i>Peer tutoring and language buddy programs</i>	40	55	3	-	2	100
<i>Multimedia learning tools</i>	21	60	17	1	1	100
<i>Parental Involvement Programs</i>	34	52	11	2	1	100
<i>Community Language Events</i>	24	45	22	6	3	100

3.2.2. Intercultural training and policies

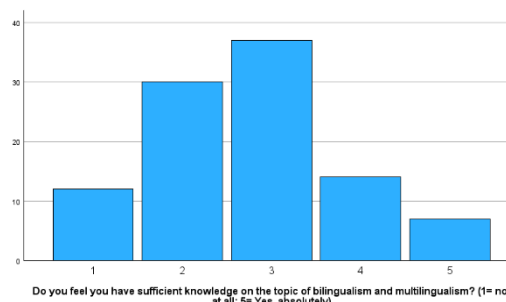
Participation in any training related to cross-cultural approaches and orientations, both before and during your service.

Training related to cross-cultural approaches	Frequencies
<i>Yes</i>	71
<i>No</i>	29

Self-assessment of cross-cultural competence (Likert 1-5 points; 1 = not at all; 5 = yes, absolutely).



Self-assessment of knowledge on bilingualism and multilingualism (Likert 1-5 points; 1 = not at all; 5 = yes, absolutely).



Topics of the training received. Multiple choice. Respondents: 84; total choices: 184.
Topic of needed training. Multiple choice. Respondents: 100; total choices: 296.

	Training received (84 valid answers)		Training desired (100 valid answers)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<i>Cross-cultural approach</i>	49	26,6	64	21,6
<i>Integration of children with migrant background</i>	23	12,5	58	19,6
<i>Migration aspects and dynamics</i>	32	17,4	40	13,5
<i>Trauma informed care</i>	10	5,4	45	15,2
<i>Legal aspects related to migration</i>	35	19,0	29	9,8

<i>Language training for migrants</i>	23	12,5	37	12,5
<i>Working with interpreters or cultural mediators</i>	12	6,5	23	7,8
<i>Tot.</i>	184	100,0	296	100,0
<i>Average number of choices per respondent</i>	2,2		2,96	

The majority (71%) of respondents have participated in cross-cultural training, yet gaps remain in critical areas like trauma-informed care, with high demand (45%) indicating a pressing need for expanded training opportunities. Self-assessments and desired training topics reinforce the necessity for a continuous, multidimensional approach to professional development.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings from this national report underscore the interconnectedness of linguistic, educational, and social dimensions in fostering the integration of migrant children into Italian society. Through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the research highlights the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by these children, their families, and the institutions that support them.

Language acquisition emerges as a pivotal factor for integration, shaping educational success, social inclusion, and personal empowerment. The study identifies both systemic barriers, such as insufficient tailored support and bureaucratic delays, and personal challenges, including isolation, that hinder the learning process. However, it also highlights the resilience and adaptability of migrant children, particularly when supported by inclusive educational practices, strong peer networks, and community engagement.

Educational institutions play a critical role in this integration process. The importance of intercultural training for teachers, tailored curricula, and initiatives that value multilingualism

is evident. Schools must move beyond traditional teaching models to create inclusive environments that address the unique needs of migrant children.

Social interactions, both within and outside the school environment, are equally significant. Informal spaces, such as sports and community activities, serve as powerful facilitators for language learning and integration. Furthermore, the involvement of families, particularly mothers, in language courses and community programs emerges as a key factor in building a cohesive and inclusive social fabric.

To maximize the impact of the Theory of Change project, a collective effort is required. This includes fostering collaboration among schools, social services, NGOs, and local communities. Policies must aim to streamline access to resources, enhance cultural sensitivity, and provide support to migrant children and their families. Ultimately, the study underscores that integration is a shared responsibility, demanding systemic reforms, proactive community engagement, and individual resilience.

6. STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING

[please provide a brief summary of the process of mapping the stakeholders in your country, including analysis on types of stakeholders and engagement]