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**IMMIGRANTS CHILDREN INTEGRATION: FINDINGS FROM
BALTIC AND SOUTH EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

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ABSTRACT

Title: Immigrants Children Integration: Findings from Baltic and South European Countries

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The research aimed to analyse the level of integration within the EU achieved by immigrants' children from a non-EU country. The cases of the Baltic countries, Lithuania and Latvia, and the Southern European countries, Italy and Spain, were taken as the target countries. The objectives of the research were: (1) to explore theoretically the phenomenon of child immigration in the European Union; (2) to analyse the practical issues integrated into immigration policies that help immigrants' children to integrate into the host country, in particular the Baltic and Southern European countries; (3) to study the level of immigrant children integration in the Baltic and Southern European countries.

The research was developed through face-to-face and online interviews with minors aged 10-15 years in the presence of at least one of their parents. The results show that on most occasions immigration is caused by difficult circumstances that leave families with no room for choice. The results report several factors that help the integration of foreign minors within the host country; these factors are having an appropriate home in which to live, having the possibility to study, having stable relations with the family, and creating relationships of trust and friendship with their peers, having access to health care services, and receiving emotional and social support from territorial NGOs, social services, and host society.

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MAIN CONCEPTS

Child – Every individual who is younger than eighteen years old, unless the age of majority is earlier under the legislation that applies to minors (United Nations Convention Rights of the Child, 1989).

Migrant – Someone who, whether temporarily or permanently, and for a number of reasons, moved away from their regular residency, whether inside their own country or across an international boundary (IOM, 2019).

Migration – A person moving away from their country of origin, whether it be across an international border or inside a State (Sironi, Bauloz & Emmanuel, 2019).

Refugees – A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, participation in a particular group, or political position who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin (Refugee Convention, 1951).

Psycho-social support for migrants – For migrants to integrate and participate in society, they must have access to health care, mental health services, and psychosocial assistance. Lack of access to mental health and psychosocial support services and associated barriers (such as procedural challenges, unfamiliarity with the health and social care system, and linguistic and intercultural difficulties) can have a significant negative impact on a person's capacity to integrate into their country of resettlement (IOM, 2021).

INTRODUCTION

Research background and relevance. Migration is a complex phenomenon that belongs to our past as much as to our present and future (Fucà, 2019). Various motivations drive an individual to leave his/her home country and embark on a journey that could cost his/her life, which is why it is crucial to carefully study all stages of this process (Openpolis, 2021). Within the large group of people who migrate, a significant number are minors. For example, statistics show that in year children immigrated into the European Union (also, further in the text – EU) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and Council of Europe, 2020); in most cases, children migrate following the decision taken by their families, or they can decide to seek work in a foreign country to help their families economically (Boyden and De Berry, 2004). The integration issue of such families and especially minors within the European Union is fundamental both for the person himself and for the host country (Alba, and Nee, 2003), which is why it is of relevant importance to analyse all the elements that can guarantee a good level of integration within the host society.

Research novelty. The Master's Thesis regards immigration and integration within the European Union and how these phenomena are connected with minors and their families. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles - ECRE (2002), have pointed out that the integration process of a migrant person is complex, long-term, and multidimensional, as it concerns both the host society and the foreign person, with all their spheres of life, such as social, economic, civil, political, and cultural. There are several factors that are fundamental to achieving a good level of integration for foreign minors, like access to education (Home Office, 2019), having a suitable home (Ager, and Strang, 2008), building social networks (Alba, and Nee, 2003), and having access to local health and social services (Home Office, 2019).

The novelty of the research lies in the analysis of the level of integration achieved by migrant children in two groups of European countries that are totally different in several respects, such as the total number of migrants received, the origin of these people, and overall, the reception and integration systems developed by the Baltic and Southern European countries.

Research problem and questions. Within this research it will be studied how the migration phenomenon impacts the selected four countries – Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, and Spain, analysed; in particular focusing on how foreign minors from a non-European country succeed or not in integrating in the host country. The factors that help minors achieve an ideal level of integration will be highlighted, pointing out similarities and differences within the two groups of countries studied, the Baltic and South European countries. **The research questions** in the Master's Thesis are the following: How is the phenomenon of child integration developing in the European Union,

particularly in the Baltic and Southern European Countries? What are the differences and similarities in the integration of immigrant children in the Baltic and Southern European Countries? What are the factors that help immigrants' children to integrate into the host country?

The theme dealt with in this Master Thesis is the integration of immigrant minors from a third country into the society of their host country in the European Union. The research is developed in four different countries, two belonging to the Baltic countries, such as Lithuania and Latvia, and two located in southern Europe, such as Italy and Spain. The research idea is to analyse the differences and similarities within the different immigrant reception system and policies and identify the level of integration in the host society that foreign minors can achieve.

The research object is the integration of children of immigrants from non-European countries in the European Union.

The research aim is to study the integration of children of immigrants from non-European countries in the European Union. The Master's Thesis purpose is to explore the level of integration achieved by the immigrant minors interviewed in the Baltic and Southern European countries and to analyse the similarities and differences present in the two groups of countries studied.

The **research objectives** of this Master's Thesis are as follows:

1. To explore theoretically the phenomenon of child immigration in the European Union.
2. To analyse the practical issues integrated into immigration policies that help immigrants' children to integrate into the host country, in particular the Baltic and Southern European countries.
3. To study empirically the level of immigrant children integration in the Baltic and Southern European countries.

Research methods. Analysis of scientific literature, documents, and other sources was employed for the theoretical preparation of the research. In theoretical analysis, we use qualitative thematic analysis for materials collection and analysis.

This Master Thesis adopts a qualitative approach to describe and provide a detailed analysis of the level of integration achieved by immigrants' minors and their families inside the countries of the European Union. The target population for this study is young migrants who are currently living in one of the four countries analysed (Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, and Spain), having aged between 10 and 15 years old, and coming from a country not a member of the European Union.

Qualitative research methods rely on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand observation, and semi-structured interviews. That is, the method of semi-structured interviews is used to gather the empirical data in this Master's Thesis survey. The tools of face-to-face and online interviews, as well, as submission of the translated written format, were used in the process of semi-

structured interviews. With regard to the number of interview participants, at least two minors with a parent present were selected from each country studied (Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, and Spain).

Recordings are made in natural settings; later the records are transcribed and analysed. A qualitative content analysis method used in this analysis. Via empirical data systematization, six categories, and fourteen subcategories in total were identified.

The structure of the Master's Thesis. This Master's Thesis is organized into three main chapters and is written as per APA style. In general, the chapters include an introduction, literature review, research methodology, qualitative data analysis, and conclusion. The chapter Introduction provides an overall insight into the research providing background of the study and problem statement which is the level of integration achieved by immigrants minor inside the European Union. Further, this chapter includes the relevance of the study, research novelty, research problem and questions, research object and aim, as well objectives of the study. Chapter one "Children Migration In The Theoretical Framework" is dedicated to the theoretical overview of the immigrants' children integration within the EU. Chapter two "Practical Aspects of Children's Immigration And Integration In The European Union" analyses the process of children's immigration inside the States of the European Union. Chapter three "Research on Immigrants Children Integration In The Baltic And Southern Europe Countries" at the beginning provides the insights into research methodology such as sampling procedures, and tools for data collection, including an interview guide, etc. Further, this chapter provides qualitative empirical data analysis and is finished with a discussion of research findings. The concluding chapter summarises the overall findings of research conducted within this Master's Thesis. At the end of the Master's Thesis, additionally, recommendations, and a list of used references are provided. Finally, at the end of the text, an Annex with the interview guidelines in English, Spanish, Russian and Italian used for the empirical data collection are provided. The Master's Thesis is illustrated with 9 tables and 10 figures.

1. CHILDREN MIGRATION IN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Theoretical approaches on migration

1.1.1. Definition of migration

As reported in the Glossary on Migration (2019), the term “migration” can be defined as: “The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.” (p. 137).

Another definition of “migration” is reported by Page Moch (1997) as: “... a change in residence beyond a communal boundary <...> migration includes moves from one village to another as well as those across national borders and oceans. Temporally, migration may be short-term or permanent <...> such an inclusive view of geographical mobility recognizes the interconnections among regional, national, international, and transoceanic migrations and the necessity of considering them as a whole” (p. 43).

An International Organization for Migration (further in the text – IOM) (2019) reports various categories of migration. A few examples are circular migration, in which people repeatedly move between their country of origin and the host country. Temporary migration is undertaken by people who go to another country with a well-defined goal, and once achieved, they plan the return to their country of origin; family migration, which provides various options for family reunification, including that of a marriage between a migrant and a citizen of the host country.

The migration process is intertwined with various values and issues typical of social work, such as citizenship and democratic rights, laws, schooling, physical and mental health, and the social sphere of the individual (Cox, and Geisen, 2014). According to Geisen (2010), the current society in which we live can be described as a migratory society. The work of the social service in such a society is to manage the problematic factors corresponding to the migration process, both within and outside the country of origin, of people, which are mixed with and in addition to the problems already present within modern societies, such as social problems of interactions with groups of different origins.

The migration phenomenon includes people with various social backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures; such people go through states of mind within this process, such as suffering, emptiness, and loss, but also recovery and hope (Harzing, and Hoerder, 2009). A dramatic example of migration

is that associated with refugees, people forced to leave their country due to wars, persecution, and genocide, a phenomenon that leads to induced displacement of such individuals (Davidson, 2012).

Within the social service world, the migration phenomenon is not studied in depth but is normally associated with support work for migrants and refugees or family reunifications (Treichler, and Cyrus, 2004). Of fundamental importance to the role of social workers is the understanding that factors such as people's social background, the economy, and the political system of their country of origin are vital in order to fully understand the needs of clients (Elliott, and Segal, 2012). Often the characteristics of the person, such as ethnicity, gender, age, and social class, are not considered as factors relevant to the person's helping process, and, therefore, the term "migration" and its relationship to the person's social life are not analysed (Collins, 1991).

It is estimated that over the next few decades, the migration flows will increase because of climate change, poverty, and conflict as the fundamental causes (Fucà, 2019). To deal with the phenomenon of immigration, the European Union has adopted a system defined as an "Integrated Approach", which has the primary objective of involving the country of origin, transit, and destination in the migrant reception system to ensure integration with a global perspective. A fundamental element to guarantee the integration of a migrant in the host country is the possibility of accessing the labour market and thus succeeding in becoming economically independent. One situation that creates a reason to leave one's own country is the research for a job to support oneself and the family; other reasons lead to this decision, such as political changes within the country, climate change that causes environmental disasters, and humanitarian problems. Globalization is another determining factor in the migration of the 21st century. For this reason, a choice of global intervention is the most suitable for safeguarding people; within the Integrated Approach, various issues are considered, like the rescue of migrants at sea, the promotion of sustainable development in the countries of origin of the migrants, and the provision of humanitarian aid to the victims of the mafia.

According to Fucà (2019), the migratory phenomena have consequences not only in the countries of origin but also in those of transit and destination. An example is the one related to the young graduates, who leave their country and find themselves in a new state, where their titles acquired are not recognized, and consequently, they are denied from entering the world of more qualified workers.

In summary, it might be stated that migration is a complex and ever-evolving phenomenon. There are several reasons that lead an individual or a family unit to leave their country of origin, the most frequent of which are those associated with conflict, persecution, poverty, and environmental disasters. The work of the social worker is of necessary importance to guarantee the individual an appropriate reception that considers all the personal spheres of the person.

1.1.2. Voluntary and involuntary migrants

The definition reported in Treccani's Dictionary (n.d.), "refugee" is a person who, for political, economic, and/or social reasons, is forced to leave the state of which he/she is a citizen and resident, to seek refuge status in a foreign country. Ahead of obtaining refugee status recognition, the person is considered an asylum seeker. Generally, entrance into the country is irregular, but once the asylum application has been made, the person is considered automatically legal in the territory.

To highlight the differences between a refugee and a voluntary migrant, we must also report the definition of "migrant". A person defined as a migrant is an individual who has moved temporarily or permanently to a different country for economic or work reasons. There are several categories of migrants, the most frequent are the following: regular – irregular or illegal, permanent – temporal, e.g., seasonal, economic, or climatic (Openpolis, 2021).

The group of regular migrants is composed of those people who, to enter a specific country, have previously passed regular border control, and have a visa or a residence permit. Among them, economic migrants may be mentioned. An economic migrant is a person who moved from his country of origin to improve his/her living conditions, looking for a job (Elliott, and Segal, 2012). This term is often used to distinguish those who move from their country to improve economic conditions from those who move due to wars, conflicts, or persecution. Also, seasonal workers usually stay in the host country for short periods, generally, until the end of the employment contract, and not always have the residence permit (Openpolis, 2021).

Irregular or illegal immigrants, unlike the previous ones, do not have a valid residence permit, associated with the residence permit.

Refugees are involuntary migrants forced to leave home countries because of wars, conflicts, or persecution (Davidson, 2012). Coming to the host country they must go through asylum seeking; the process of obtaining refugee status often takes a long time and involves various bureaucratic actions, which differ from country to country.

The last category of migrants is called "climatic migrants". It is represented by those people forced to leave their homes and the territory where they live, directly or indirectly, due to natural disasters or environmental degradation. Often the climatic migrant is an "internally displaced person", that is, he moves from his territory to another place, but within the country of origin. (Fucà, 2019).

In summary, the concept of migration represents the movement of a person from their country of origin for various reasons, whether economic, political, or humanitarian; due to these reasons, there are different categories of migrants, including voluntary and involuntary migrants. The

latter migrants are categorized as refugees while they hold a legally recognized status in the host country.

1.2. Migration of children

According to data reported by UNICEF (2021), in 2020, 281 million migrants and asylum seekers were reported worldwide, including 36 million children. This number has potentially grown in recent decades. As proof of it, in 1990, the total number was 153 million, of which 25 million were minors; in 2020, there was a general increase in all age categories (under 18, 18-64, over 65), but what important to highlight, the number of migrant minors increases by 6 million in just five last years. (Figure 1)

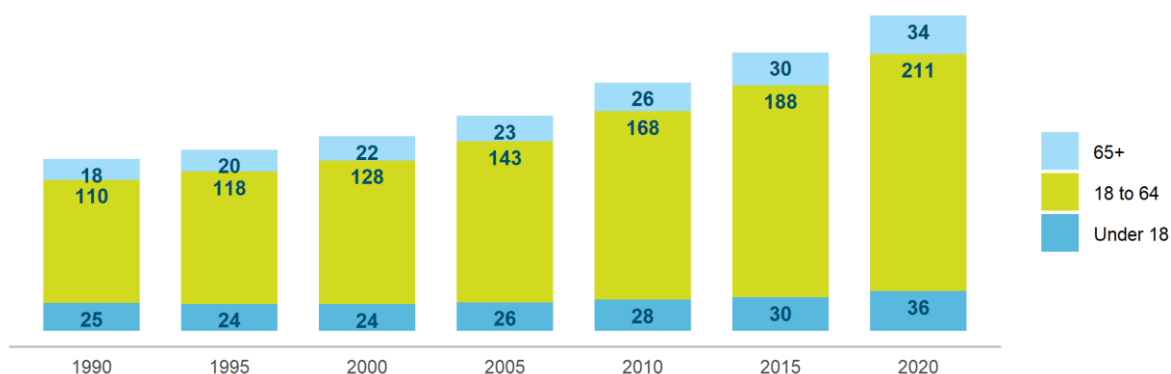


Figure 1. Number of international migrants (people living in a country or area other than they were born) by age, 1990 to 2020 (in millions).

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020); International Migrant Stock (2020).

These numbers contain all the people who have migrated even within their country of origin; worldwide, more than half of migrants have left their residence to move to another city belonging to their country. In 2020, the continent with the highest number of migrants was Asia, with 46 million people born there but currently living in another continent, which, in most cases, offers a better earning potential. Considering immigrant children worldwide, approximately 14 million live in the Asian continent (39 percent of the total number) and tend to move to Europe or North America; the United States hosts 3.3 million minors from other countries, followed by Saudi Arabia (2.3 million) and Jordan (1.6 million). (UNICEF, 2021)

Looking close to our borders, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), since the year 2015, more than 215,000 unaccompanied minors have arrived in one of the member states of the European Union.

The phenomenon of an unaccompanied minor is defined as: “A minor who arrives on the territory of an EU Member unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member State concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person” (Art. 2 (1) of Directive 2011/95 / EU). Searching for a better future for themselves and their families, these children embark on a dangerous journey that often leads them to suffer physical and sexual violence. Some remain at sea for days waiting for the intervention of the Non-Governmental Organizations (further in the text – NGO), but the less fortunate will never reach the European coasts.

The data reported by Eurostat (2022b) underline the young age of these minors, where 35 percent are under the age of 16, of which 10 percent are female. The journey consists of three essential phases, reaching the EU border, reception, and the possibility of detention or being sent back to one’s own country. The report conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020a) in 2019 highlighted some issues in each of these phases. First, it is estimated that around 80 children were missing or died in the Mediterranean during the journey; further, the conditions inside the boats in which people are forced to live are inhumane, from being without food and water to living in poor hygienic conditions. Of these people, more than 780 are children, who have been stranded in the sea for several days, or even weeks, in such situations.

The European continent offers various entrances for immigrants from all over the world. A popular route is the one having entry through the Balkan countries. In these borders, many people are rejected using violence, including minors. According to data reported by the NGO “Save the Children” (UNICEF, 2022b), more than 1,230 children were unable to cross the border. Once they arrive, in a member country of the European Union, the reception phase takes place. The countries that must carry out this passage are especially those of Southern Europe like Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain. The concentration of a considerable number of people in these countries creates several organizational difficulties; for example, the aspect regarding the reception of unaccompanied minors was not adequately managed, and the hygiene standards were not respected in Greece, Croatia, France, Cyprus, Italy, Malta, and Spain. Further, the judicial part is not very quick and effective, thus forcing children to face endless bureaucratic procedures to receive international protection. During the migration process, it is possible that children face moments of detention, which in most cases is used to send the child back to their country of origin; an example is the state of Croatia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden, which have authorized the forced return of unaccompanied minors.

According to data released by “Save the Children” organization, in a total of 9 months (January-September, 2019), almost 1,230 minors were rejected at the borders of the Balkan route: in particular in Croatia (321 children), North Macedonia (212), Bulgaria (158) and Hungary (176). (FRA-European Union agency for fundamental rights, 2020a).

Such pushbacks are perceived as violent action by children, even if there is sometimes no act of physical or verbal violence. The NGO called Border Violence Monitoring Network reports an increase in violent push-back methods, which in most cases include handguns; this method is found frequently in Croatia, where 20 percent of push-back actions involve the usage of guns. Further acts of violence that migrants face are, for example, losing the few possessions they have, like clothes, shoes, and phones.

When an unaccompanied minor arrives in one of the member states of the EU, he/she holds all the rights of the child, such as the right to be reunited with the family, if possible, and to be protected from abuse and violence. Another important fact is that they further acquire the rights of an asylum seeker, for example, the selection of a guardian; this happens because they are highly vulnerable and at-risk subjects (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). A fundamental element in the reception of unaccompanied minors is accommodation; ideally, they should be placed in a safe place, under the care of competent adults, but unfortunately, this is not always possible due to the scarce resources and capacities of the host countries. This phenomenon worsened, especially in 2015 in Greece and Malta, where many minors were left to fend for themselves without a safe home and convenient conditions.

In summary, it might be stated that both worldwide and within the European Union, the migratory flow of minors is increasing over the years. Particular attention is paid to the migratory phenomenon of unaccompanied minors, who quite often encounter various adversities both during the journey and once they arrive in the host country. These minors are frequently exposed to dangers and violence, as first host countries do not always have adequate resources to provide for their protection and well-being.

1.2.1. The causes and effects of children immigration

Europe has always been considered a continent with various pull factors, the most important being political stability and the vast possibility of encountering a better economic situation than one’s own country of origin. In addition to economic, political, climatic, or life-threatening reasons and the protection of human rights, the countries of origin and reception of the family are also fundamental because they provide the push and pull factors (Fucà, 2019).

When talking about migration, we are not referring only to adults. Often, it is the family unit that decides to emigrate. That is, when a minor decides or is forced to emigrate or finds him/herself in the condition to leave his/her own country, it depends in most cases on his/her family and relatives, whom, for various reasons, decide to undertake this journey (Boyden, and De Berry, 2004).

In any case, it is necessary to consider the difficulties faced by children who move with their parents or alone. According to Boyden and De Berry (2004), several factors lead a minor to become a migrant or a refugee; one of the principal reasons is the situation caused by conflicts and wars, which bring children to flee with their families and sometimes also involve a forced and unwanted separation. Numerous children decide to leave home to escape military recruitment or to search for food for themselves and their families. Moreover, there are other situations that lead a minor to become a migrant. The child may find himself alone to face the journey after losing his/her parents or following an abandonment. Frequently, parents voluntarily decide to abandon their children because they are considered too weak to face all the problems and traumas that migration can entail. A situation that takes place frequently is the abandonment of minors in refugee centres or hospitals, as there is the belief that in this way children have a better chance of surviving. On the other side, some minors decide independently to leave their families in search of income, join the military forces of the country or escape from abusive situations in the family or community. This phenomenon implies that there is a high percentage of displaced children alone and separated from their families, who face multiple traumas and problems such as being in situations of labour or sexual exploitation, malnutrition, lack of medical assistance, and deprivation of education (Bruce, 2001).

One of the main effects on the life of migrant children is the impact that this choice of life has on their school education. According to Schnepf (2008), there is a substantial difference between the academic performance of native and migrant students; the principal cause of this phenomenon is the socio-economic background of the family to which it belongs. Another factor that influences the school performance of migrant children is the educational level reached by the parents; it is demonstrated that the children of parents with a high academic level can have a better performance than migrant children with uneducated parents; this happens because educated parents have more possibilities to follow their children in the study and are able to motivate them to reach higher levels of education (Lareau, 1987; Serpell et al., 2002).

According to the study carried out by Schnell and Azzolini (2015), one of the most relevant factors in the gaps between migrant and native students is the economic situation of the family; it is, in fact, highlighted that the education received by migrant parents is often similar to that of the parents of native students, but the substantial difference is at the work level, where migrants usually cover lower employment levels, which correspond to a lower salary. This situation occurs because,

generally, the parent's qualifications obtained in their country of origin are not recognized in the host country. Therefore, migrants are not allowed to work in their sector of specialization with an adequate salary, which is insufficient to cover all the costs necessary for the education of their children. Specifically, this study is based on the comparison of Southern European countries, such as Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. The results show that these countries find a higher gap in the academic performance of migrant children compared to other countries such as Germany or Belgium. Another element highlighted in the research's results is the difference found if the child arrived in the host country before or after the age of six. Major problems appear at the school level if the minor is older than six years old at the time of arrival. Children of migrants, therefore, are considered second-generation migrants, or those who arrive at a very young age, have less difficulty, and reach an educational level almost equal to that of native students.

In summary, it is possible to affirm that when talking about the migration phenomenon, we are not only referring to individuals but also to families with minors. Several reasons lead a child to leave his or her country, either with the support of the family or independently. One of the most important problems is migrants' children's education.

1.2.2. Social-demographic characteristics of immigrants' children

In 2021, there were 6,633,800 foreign children residing in a state other than their country of origin; it represented 8.2 percent of the total children present within the European Union and 17.7 percent of the total foreign residents in the territory (Eurostat, 2022b).

According to the data provided by the Eurostat (2022b) report, the highest number of non-European Union children within the territory is within the age group from 0 to 4 years, specifically 31.3 percent of the total number. In the second place, the category of minors between 5 and 9 years of life (29.95 percent) and those from 10 to 14 (25.4 percent). (Figure 2)

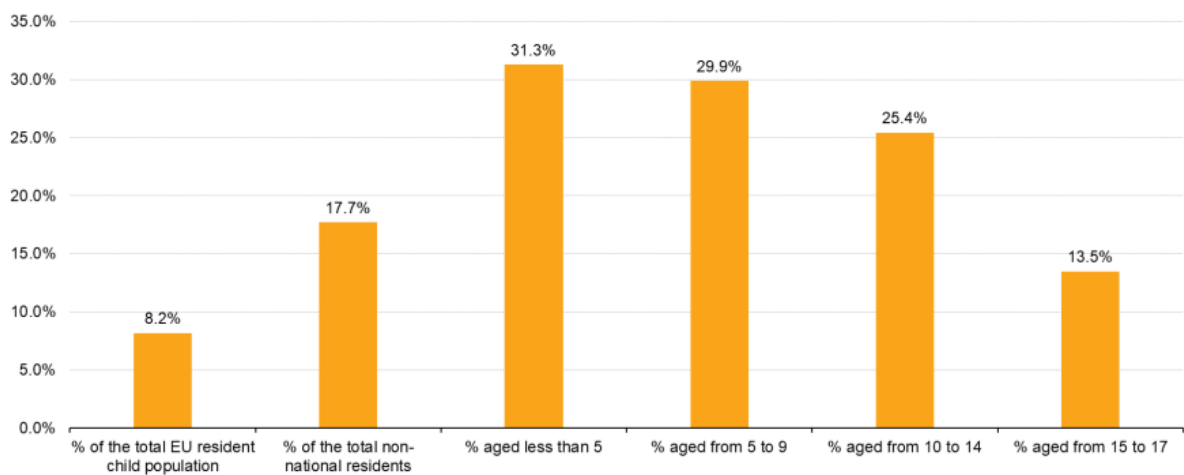


Figure 2. Children who reside in the EU and are non-nationals in their country of residence, 1 January, 2021 (in percent).

Source: Eurostat (2022b), online data code migr_pop2ctz.

These children mostly reside in four European countries such as Germany (26.2 percent), France (16.4 percent), Italy (15.8 percent), and Spain (14.1 percent); the remaining 27.5 percent are distributed within the other Member States. The countries with fewer foreign minors are Lithuania with 3,993 children, Slovakia with 5,261, and Latvia with 6,675. (Eurostat, 2022b)

According to the UNICEF report “Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe” (2022b), the data collected between April and June 2022 among the European Union countries to be analysed the most regarding the number of migrants and refugees received in Europe were six: Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia Herzegovina. In total, more than 447,784 migrants and refugees were registered in the six countries listed, of whom 378,736 came from Ukraine, and 44,956 came from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, and North Africa. These numbers included more than 18,300 children who were unaccompanied or separated from their parents or family unit. In these six countries, 12,800 minors were helped by protection services, 21,350 had access to school services; concerning health services, and more than 2,600 mothers and children had access to health and nutrition services.

To clearly analyse the current migration phenomenon, it is fundamental to study the context in which we find ourselves. As a result of the war that broke out in Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, 7.1 million people, including 2.8 million children, were forced to leave their homes and change their residence within the country; 4.5 million people emigrated to other neighbouring countries, 90 percent of them women and children, applying for asylum and obtaining refugee status in various European countries (UNICEF, 2022c). UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell stated that this war quickly created the highest number of displaced children since World War II. This factor could

have consequences in terms of security, respect for children's rights, and access to services for future generations (UNICEF, 2022d). As a result of this situation, the European Union had to take appropriate measures to accommodate families in need (European Commission, 2022). All children from Ukraine must have access to their rights, psychological support, medical care, education, and a safe place to live. Particular attention is given to unaccompanied minors, who must be immediately registered upon arrival in the host country. It is also essential to assign them an adult reference who can act as their legal guardian; normally, such a person is someone that has the trust of the child and has taken care of him/her before or during the travel.

In summary, the majority of foreign minors residing in Europe are minors of a very young age, who are mainly accommodated in four countries in particular: Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. The war in Ukraine, which broke out in February 2022, has exponentially increased the number of displaced minors.

1.2.3. Child displacement

By the end of 2021, 36.5 million children were displaced globally, 12.5 million were refugees, 1.2 million were asylum seekers, and approximately 22.8 million have been displaced inside their own country of origin due to conflicts and wars (UNICEF, 2022). The total number of children with refugee status has more than doubled if we consider that in 2005 there were 4 million, and in 2021 there were more than 10 million.

According to UNICEF (2022), in 2021, it was estimated that 40 percent of refugees in the world were minors. A further fact that can support this number is that in 2020, 1 in 3 children living outside their country was a refugee (11 million out of a total of 36 million). In the same year, the countries with the highest number of refugee children, which include nearly half of the world's refugee children, are Syria (6.8 million total with 46 percent children), Afghanistan (2.7 million total with 47 percent children), and South Sudan (2.4 million total with 58 percent of children). The countries of destination are, in 79 percent of cases, a state bordering their homeland; for this reason, the two continents with the highest number of refugees are Asia and Africa, with the only European exception of Germany, which in 2021 hosted 1.3 million refugees (32.5 percent of them minors). Turkey is the state hosting the highest number of refugees worldwide, with a total of 3.8 million, 45.4 percent of them children.

Fundamental factors that cause an internal displacement of children and families are the conflicts and violence generated in the country of origin (Beise et. al., 2020). During these conflicts, it is frequent that private houses and buildings used for the services of the population, such as hospitals

and schools, are destroyed; for this reason, people decide to leave their houses. Other factors that can lead to displacement are the lack of respect for the human rights of a minority community and the discrimination that is afflicted on cultural, religious, ethnic, and gender levels. Such discrimination causes territorial tensions that can generate actual conflicts at a national level. Environmental disasters caused by climate change are one of the central causes of the displacement of minors and their families; earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis, which caused 24 million internal displacements only during 2021 (UNICEF, 2022).

Displaced children are protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which has its fundamental objective of guaranteeing the rights of minors, such as education, safety, and health (Beise et. al., 2020). Internally displaced people are safeguarded by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which through existing international laws, provide humanitarian aid and support. A central problem on the practical side of the support of these people is the collection of specific data on what help they need. In particular, the numbers of displaced children are lacking various kinds of help, and the few data that exist are devoid of information on gender and age. This situation causes difficult identification of children, who are exposed to multiple states of violence and abuse, as well as the possibility of not being able to access school, health, and welfare services. When uprooted children are living alone, without the supervision of the family, it's frequent that they face dangerous situations; for example, girls are exposed to become victims of sexual abuse, child marriage, abduction, and murder, while boys are often enlisted in fighting forces or are victims of exploitation. Failing to safeguard the rights of the minor and not sustaining a correct integration entails a loss for the country itself. In fact, poor or non-existent education and weak development of the person will produce adults not very productive and favourable for the society and economy of the country. (Beise et. al., 2020)

In summary, the displacement of a child may take place internally within the country, or externally, which nowadays means into any other country or even globally. The rights of children subjected to such a situation are guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CHILDREN'S IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

2.1. The status of the migrants in the European Union

2.1.1. Current migration situation in the European Union

There are three main migratory routes involving Europe: The Central Mediterranean, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Western routes (Council of EU, 2022). The central Mediterranean route is mainly crossed by migrants from North Africa, who pass through Libya before undertaking a long and dangerous journey in a rubber dinghy or unsafe boat. In Libya, there are many violations of human rights, people are jailed, tortured, and sold as pieces of meat; for this reason, many illegal migrants arrive at the borders of the European Union. Following the increase in the phenomenon of human trafficking in February 2017, the EU agreed to take new measures to reduce irregularity in arrivals and track migrant smugglers. These measures were published in the Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route (3 February 2017). Since 2015, the EU has been committed to combating human trafficking and injustices in Libya; with a total of 700 million Euros, since that year, the EU has implemented various measures, such as the training of coast guards, which aims to improve safety and learn how to save lives at sea. The second action is the protection and assistance of migrants and refugees, which includes assisting people who voluntarily decide to return to their country of origin. Supporting local communities in Libya by providing access to social services for the person; and improving the security and management of Libyan borders, 45 million Euros were spent in 2018 to reach this goal.

The Eastern Mediterranean route comes through Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Turkey, which has different role, as protagonist countries. In 2015, with the war on Syrian territories, this route was particularly used by Syrian refugees, who used to pass through Turkey and illegally enter European countries. In March 2016, with the EU-Turkey statement, the number of illegal arrivals was significantly reduced. This agreement is based on two fundamental principles; the first is if the person who entered the Greek territory does not apply for international protection or this request is refused, he/she must necessarily return to Turkey. The second rule is for every Syrian migrant sent back to Turkey, someone else receives the opportunity to be welcomed into the European Union. This

statement was essential to reduce the number of deaths at sea and identify migrant smugglers. (European Council, 2016).

Turkey plays a fundamental role in the migration path of these people and is considered a country that opens the doors for a better future. This role, withal, involves complications within the country, such as the presence of many refugees who need support and a path to integration. Between 2015 and 2018, the EU and its Member States financed 6 billion euros for Turkey to develop the integration of refugees and their living conditions. (European Commission, 2023)

The latest migratory flows are those coming from the territories of the West African coast. Migrants from the African coast undertake a dangerous journey passing through Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal, and The Gambia to reach the Canary Islands. A secondary way is to head to Spain, passing through Morocco and Algeria (Council of EU, 2022). In 2018 this route was the busiest, but in 2019-2020 the number of illegal arrivals decreased; the most frequent causes were the improvement by Moroccan law enforcement agencies to stop illegal immigration, cooperation between Spain, Morocco, and the European Union, and the sudden arrival of the global Covid-19 pandemic. In 2018, due to the high number of irregular migrants in Spain, the EU intensified its cooperation with Morocco through the EU-Morocco partnership, which included greater border control, socio-economic integration, and protection of the human rights of migrants (European Union, 2023).

According to the statistics provided by Eurostat (2022c), in 2020, 3.3 million people migrated to one of the Member States of the European Union, and at the same time, 2.2 million left the EU. These data represent the total number of migrations present within the European Union; on the other hand, for migrants originating from a third country, 1.9 million people are estimated. The protagonist countries of these migratory flows were mainly Germany with 728,600 migrants, Spain with 467,900, France with 283,200, and Italy with 247,500. In most European countries, the number of migrants far exceeds that of emigrants, except for Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Romania, which reported a higher number of emigrants. As far as the gender subdivision is concerned, there is a minimal difference, 55 percent of male migrants against 45 percent of female migrants. Croatia appears to be the European state that received the highest number of male migrants (75 percent of the total number), and Cyprus – of female migrants (54 percent of the total number).

On January 1st, 2021, it is reported that in the EU, in particular in Germany, Spain, France, and Italy, there are 23.7 million citizens from countries outside the European Union, which represent 5.3 percent of the total European population. There was a disparity in the age of migrants and European citizens; as is well known, Europe is considered an old continent, where the average age of the population is 45 years instead the age of migrants coming to Europe is 36 years. (Eurostat, 2022c)

In summary, the three main routes of migration to the European Union are: the Central Mediterranean, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Western routes. Statistics show that the countries with the highest number of immigrants are Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. Meanwhile, the lowest number of immigrants and the highest number of emigrants are in Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Romania. That is, not all European countries are affected by this phenomenon of migration to the same degree.

2.1.2. *Fundamental rights and legislation*

To acquire a general picture of the situation with migrants' children in the European Union it is necessary to know the fundamental rights guaranteed to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These rights are mentioned in the various legislations present at the European level; at the base, we find the right and duty of the Council of Europe and the European Union to control the entry of people from third countries into the European territory (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and Council of Europe, 2020).

The European Convention on Human Rights (1953) is fundamental to guarantee respect for human rights during border control. Moreover, according to the EU Schengen Borders Code (Regulation (EU) 2016/399), the control measures must be carried out without the use of prejudice and violence (Art. 3), with the aim of respecting human beings' fundamental rights, such as in Article 3 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights the prohibition of torture or inhuman treatment, and the right to life (Art. 2). The use of violence is justified in some specific situations as a last resource, although even, in this case, it must be legitimized by a purpose, and it should never cross the limitations imposed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

When a person arrives at a border of the European Union, he/she is subjected to checks by the authorities, which may deny the person from crossing the border for several reasons. In this situation, according to Art. 14 of the Schengen Borders Code (2016), it is necessary to declare the reasons why the person is not entitled to cross the border; consequently, the person is entitled to appeal (art. 14 (3)).

Considering the situation of asylum seekers, the procedures change slightly, as a matter of fact, in most cases, asylum seekers arrive at the borders without documents and cross the border irregularly. The moment when a person asks for protection as a political asylum seeker entails the acquisition of certain rights; for example, being protected from arbitrary removal, having access to information in one's language, and having legal support (Art. 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights). A fundamental principle that must be respected on any occasion is the one of *non-refoulement*,

found in the Art. 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which prohibits a state from returning an asylum seeker to its own country if such return may involve torture, death, and persecution of the person.

When it comes to minors, the situation evolves totally according to The European Convention on Human Rights (1953). The minor is considered a vulnerable subject, and for this reason, Member States of the European Union must protect them and acknowledge their interests first. In the case of minors, the status of an irregular migrant is not taken into consideration because they are considered at the same level as a legal asylum seeker, even without having made the application for international protection. The minor must be accommodated in the new country with appropriate conditions related to his/her age group, with the aim of not generating additional stress and trauma. In the case of unaccompanied minors, the situation is even more delicate because the minor finds him/herself crossing the border alone, without the accompaniment of a member of his family of origin.

National authorities must accommodate the child in a safe and appropriate place, which may be the home of a host family, with a relative, if present, or in a centre specializing in the reception of unaccompanied children (Reception Conditions Directive, 2013/33 / EU, Articles 19 (2) and 24 (2)); of fundamental importance is the assignment of a legal representative, also called a guardian. Within the Return Directive (2008/115/EC), there is Art. 10, which ensures that before moving an unaccompanied minor from a European Union state, the national authorities must ensure that he travels to a country in which a member of his family is present.

In December 2021, the European Council adopts the EU asylum agency regulation; this agency has the objective of developing and improving existing policies and organizations, dealing with asylum requests as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The Slovenian Interior Minister, Ales Hojs, affirms that this agency will be a beneficial tool for developing cooperation between EU member states and non-European countries.

The EU agency is an essential instrument to guarantee practical and technical assistance to the member states of the EU that face numerous requests for international protection. On January 19th, 2022, the European Union Agency for Asylum is activated and started its work.

In summary, there are several conditions that can be applied to persons arriving in an EU country, however, the respect for human rights as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (1953) remains unchanged. Foreign minors are considered primary risk subjects and therefore every European state must accept them and grant them the same rights as a person with refugee status.

2.2. Integration of immigrants' children in the European Union

2.2.1. The concept of integration

The meaning associated with the word “integration” is highly complex to establish universally in the social sciences (Taljūnaitė, 2004). This concept was mainly used in the political science area and referred to political and economic integration. When we refer to social integration, according to O’Neill (1996), we are introducing the process in which an individual or a particular social group manages to integrate into the host society, becoming a functional part of it. In the integration process, the parties involved must be able to share their resources, such as information, labour, income, and participation. To discuss the process of the integration of an individual into a new society, it is crucial to consider all aspects that contribute positively to this progress, such as political, social, and economic relations.

Occasionally the word “integration” is used as one of the steps to becoming part of society in the host country. There are different levels that a person has to go through to achieve full “approval” from the community: separation, adaptation, integration, and assimilation (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011). These levels do not have a specific definition, as several factors may influence their meanings. The social context in which these levels are considered is as crucial as the social group to which they are referred, be it an ethnic minority, economic migrant or persons holding refugee status. A further aspect to be taken into account when considering the integration of a person is the receiving country at the time, especially its history in managing migration flows and its political orientation in power.

The first level considered is called separation. This level is considered the weakest from the point of view of integrating the person into the new society. The individual undergoes or self-imposes a marginalization from the rest of the community; this isolation frequently occurs through the phenomenon of housing segregation, which tends to enclose a minority in a limited territory or neighbourhood. Such segregation may be caused by laws imposed by the state or may result directly from the country’s prejudices, traditions, and past. (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011)

The adaptation phase is the second step to becoming part of the host society, where the individual establishes the first contact with the community’s members, frequently in the working sphere. Through work, it is possible to have a minimum economic balance, which allows for proper accommodation and the beginning of learning the state’s native language. At the same time, the individual keeps his or her personal and private sphere intact without being subjected to stimuli and changes due to the new social context. (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011)

The third level is called integration and is defined as follows: “Integration means a process and state where immigrant individuals and groups establish relatively robust relationships with members of the host community and take part in diverse aspects of its life, while not abandoning their own national identity” (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 45-46). In this situation, the person possesses a solid network of social relations with the host society, a moderate language level, and minimal economic security. The integration process within the new community requires efforts on the part of both the individual and the state; indeed, society must be open to receiving foreigners and able to facilitate their integration. The state has a fundamental role to play in the integration process of the person into the new environment; if this responsibility is not taken seriously, reaching a successful integration will be very complex.

Regarding the “preferable” stage for defining an integrated person in a new society, there is a dispute of opinion; some authors consider integration to be this level and others believe assimilation to be the most appropriate.

The word “assimilation” was introduced by the Chicago School sociologist Robert E. Park (1864-1940), through his research *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. In this analysis, the scholar described four levels of social interaction as accommodation, competition, conflict, and assimilation. For Robert Park, the definition of assimilation is a situation in which the person fully accepts the culture and values of the host community (Kivisto, 2017). During the assimilation phase, the individual or the ethnic minority tends to incorporate the typical principles of the dominant society, definitively forgetting their own personal and cultural characteristics; in this way, it is possible to see a loss or a radical change in their identity.

One theory formulated from the Assimilation theory is the so-called Segmented Assimilation theory, which identifies the process of assimilation differently for each social group and environment in which they find themselves. This theory states that the assimilation of an individual or a social group can occur within a specific part of the host community without necessarily having to join a limited group (Portes, and Zhou, 1993).

Two fundamental factors for the adequate integration of an individual are capital and social networks understood as those social relations, such as friendships and family relationships, between two or more individuals. Social relations are directly related to embeddedness, which can be classified as social or structural. The first group refers to the relationships between people; the second group is identified as the mechanisms that structure and guide social relationships within society, aiming to reinforce the norms and principles useful for ensuring appropriate social interaction (Alba, and Nee, 2003). As far as social capital is concerned, it represents the ability of people to derive resources from these social networks based on collective trust (Heisler, 2000). Social capital is a relevant tool to

create a welcoming environment and support the person. Several social capital resources are identified, like internalization of values, ambivalent exchanges, mutual solidarity, and trust (Portes, and Sensenbrenner, 1993). A relevant resource to be analysed is the one called bounded solidarity, which emphasises how certain situations and circumstances of an individual can influence that person's attitude in identifying with a particular social group. When a group of people is going through particularly complicated situations, a sense of solidarity is created between them. This sense of solidarity generates a relationship of mutual support between the members of the community, who generally share common goals and a feeling of belonging that will lead them to follow specific values and norms. In some cases, this factor affects the spatial assimilation that the individual may choose to undertake; it is common for a person to go and live in a neighbourhood or building where people of the same ethnicity live, with whom connections have already been established (Alba et al., 1999).

The Theory of Change explains how and why a change can occur at a given time and context (Clark, 2003). This theory was developed in the UK to study the phenomenon of integrating a foreign person within the host community. According to the UK government, this theory should be regarded as a "high-level" theory of change for integration, which has the ability to adapt to a specific research context, while still being able to cover different sectors and policies across the board, thus allowing each local organization to develop its own the Theory of Change that best suits its context of intervention. The aim of this theory is to provide a general view of how certain factors can contribute to the integration process of an individual or social group within the host country. In the Home Office (2019), the indicators of integration that can influence this process are clearly illustrated, these indicators are linked to a related outcome within the Theory of Change. The outcomes are grouped into four main groups, such as Means and markers, Social connections, Facilitators, and Foundation of integration. These Outcomes encompass several Indicators of integrations, as illustrated by Figure 3.

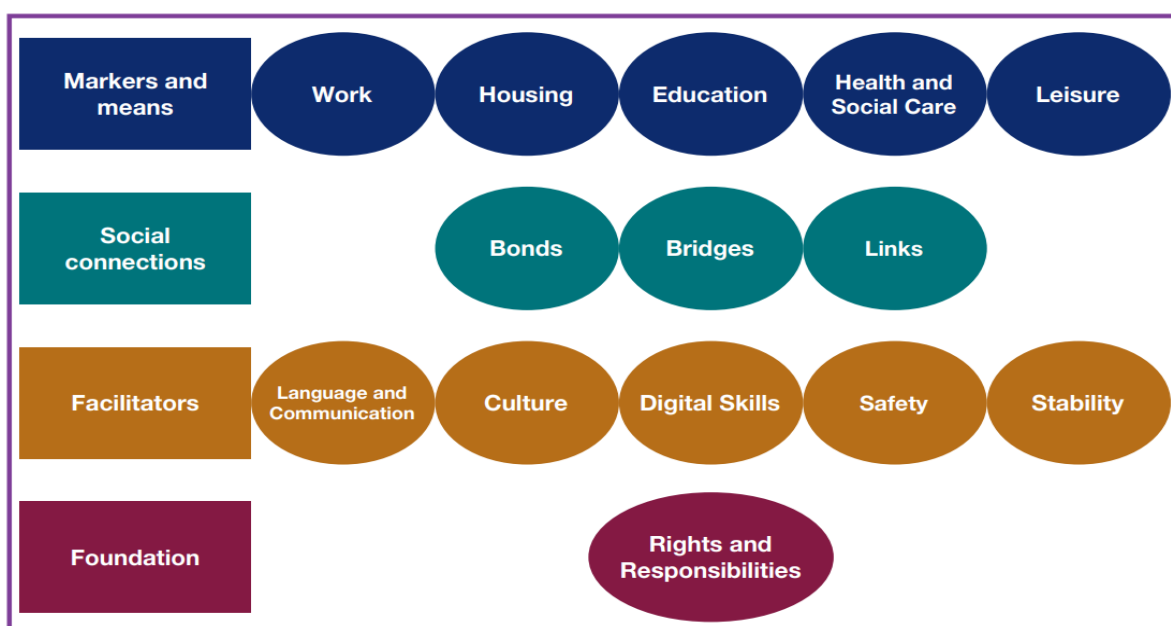


Figure 3. New Indicators of Integration Framework.

Source: Home Office, 2019.

Under the first group “Markers and Means”, the most relevant public areas of a person’s life are identified, which are crucial for achieving a good level of integration. In this group of indicators, we found work, housing, education, health and social care, and leisure as the main important factors. Reaching goals in a single dimension can help to develop progress in a second area, e.g., obtaining a job can lead to the expansion of the social network and the introduction and learning of the host country’s culture and language. For this reason, it was given the name “Marker” because being successful in a particular dimension determines a positive outcome for the integration process; and “Means” because achieving goals in these areas helps to develop a more in-depth integration process (Home Office, 2019).

The second group “Social connections”, emphasizes the importance of social relations within an integration process and specifies which types of relationships are part of it. In this group, social connections like bonds, bridges, and links are defined. The social relations that are established between the individual and the host community are crucial in facilitating change for both parties. Social bonds are formed with people who share a very close and intimate relationship, such as family members or close friends, who do not necessarily belong to the same nationality or ethnicity. In such relationships, people trust and support each other emotionally and practically. Social bridges connect people with different backgrounds, developing a lower level of mutual trust, but still appropriate for sharing resources and opportunities. The social links identify relationships between the individual

and local institutions and services; emphasizing the importance of access to these services provided by the government.

Within the group of “Facilitators”, the factors that are crucial for a person to achieve a positive level of integration within the host community are highlighted. In this group, language and communication, culture, digital skills, safety, and stability are elements that help a person to integrate into the host society. Learning the host language and culture are separated to highlight their respective importance and digital skills are emphasized in correspondence with the need to use the Internet and social media to facilitate communication with friends and relatives, but also to be able to access online information regarding certain social services offered in the area. The importance of personal security and social stability are relevant for a person who newly arrived in a foreign territory (Home Office, 2019).

Finally, in the last group entitled “Foundation”, it is emphasized that individual rights and responsibilities are fundamental to developing a fair and balanced relationship of expectations and obligations between society and the individual. In the fourth group, we found rights and responsibilities. A prime example is the possibility of obtaining citizenship and thus being able to exercise all rights and obligations as citizens of that country.

It is relevant to underline that in the Theory of Change, exists the principle that the integration process is not easily analysed, due to its multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality, not to mention the fact that in order to achieve successful integration it is necessary for the individual and the host community to share responsibility (Home Office, 2019). Within the Theory of Change, there is no hierarchy between the various indicators and outcomes, as they are both at the same level of importance.

In summary, the concept of integration is not universally defined as a complex concept belonging to human nature. There are several factors to consider when assessing whether a person is integrated, such as a good level of economic and political independence, a proper social network and relationships, and the feeling of safety and stability.

2.2.2. Integration policies regarding immigrants' children at a European level

The phenomenon of integration is considered a dynamic, two-way, long-term, and multi-dimensional process (ECRE, 2002). It is defined as dynamic and two-way because it is faced by both subjects. On one hand, the person who arrives in the new country have to adapt to the new lifestyle typical of the native population. On the other hand, the host community, which has to deal with people

from another culture, a factor that can, from some points of view, change the image of the native society. The integrative process is long-term because it begins with the arrival in the new state and ends only when the person passes from being a refugee or immigrant to an active member of society. Finally, it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon because it includes all the possible spheres of a person's life, such as the social, economic, working, civil, cultural, and political ones.

Employment, housing, education, and healthcare are fundamental factors that allow us to analyse the level of integration achieved by a foreign person (Ager, and Strang, 2008). These aspects are considered simultaneously with the so-called "social connections" (social bridges, bonds, and links) and the elements that establish the integration process, such as human rights and citizenship. Other elements to consider are the ones that should facilitate the integration of a person in a new community, such as language learning and the security of the host country. Employment is one of the main factors for good integration; it provides economic stability, creates opportunities to meet native people, plan the future, learn the language, and gain self-esteem. The housing situation is the basis of a person's emotional and physical well-being; it is relevant to the presence of a sense of belonging, the so-called "feeling of home" and safety. In addition to the house, it is essential to create good relations with the neighbourhood. School education is crucial for foreign children's integration, as the school is a focal point of meetings, where children can forge meaningful relationships with the members of the host society (classmates and teachers). Finally, the health situation in the host country is of considerable importance for a good level of integration, which should support the person's physical and psychological well-being, facilitating access to services.

At the European level, the 2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion has as its primary objective the promotion of social cohesion for all people in the area, whether they are native citizens, migrants, or refugees (European Commission, 2020). The values shared by the European treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, such as democracy, freedom of speech and religion, and the right to equality and non-discrimination, are the basis of this supplementary plan. The integration and inclusion of people from third countries are fundamental both for the host community and for the person themselves to achieve long-term economic stability of the society. For the integration process to have a positive outcome, an effort on both sides is necessary; the person has to adapt to the rights and responsibilities of the host country, and consequently, the host country should create opportunities for economic, political, cultural, and social participation.

According to the European Commission (2020), while this integration plan appears to be equal for everyone, it is also mandatory to consider some categories of people who need particular support, such as migrant women and children, who often encounter the most difficulties in the

integration process. Women have to overcome two obstacles, the first being an immigrant, and the second being a woman, a figure that carries with it a series of stereotypes and prejudices. It is crucial to focus on early childhood education and care, which are fundamental tools to ensure a proper level of integration of immigrant children. For this reason, the 2021-2027 Action Plan focuses on this issue, which is more relevant after the Covid-19 era, which highlighted that equal opportunities in education and socialisation are part of the objectives set by the European Union to be achieved by 2025. School turns out to be a fundamental place of integration for foreign minors and their families. It is important that there are specialised programmes in the language and culture of the host country, which foster the integration of these children within the host community. Migrant minors with psycho-physical disabilities are considered subjects to be protected and supported in obtaining the same rights as other children. One of the fundamental points of the European Union's global strategy is to guarantee the same level of protection for all minors, regardless of socio-economic background, abilities, origin, legal, and residence status. One of the goals the Member States have set themselves is to make the most of EU funding, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), and the European Regional Development Fund, to implement new educational, language and skills acquisition-focused programs. It is crucial to not forget to support specific programs for migrant children arriving beyond the age of compulsory schooling and without the accompaniment of a parent or reference adult.

A key area to be analysed regards the laws prohibiting or not prohibiting the detention of immigrant minors. Within the European Union, 14 Member States, including Spain, Italy, Germany, and a former EU member state – the United Kingdom, do not allow the detention of immigrants' children, especially unaccompanied children, regardless of asylum claims or return procedures (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017). Each Member State of the EU has different regulations on the matter. For example, according to Article 74/9 (1) of the Immigration Act, in Belgium, the main objective is to keep the family together even in the case of irregular immigration, thus avoiding forced detention; the family unit should be transferred to appropriate homes or centres. In contrast to Belgium, in Spain, according to Article 62(4) of the Immigration Law, it is not allowed to place a child in a detention centre unless explicitly requested by parents or legal guardians, in particular, and in well-defined circumstances. Where the detention is permitted, it is likely that there are laws prohibiting it below a specific age range; for example, in Hungary, it is permitted if the child is over 14 years old; an age limit is also applied in Latvia and Austria. For such a situation to occur, there must be a law approved by the European Union, the European Court of Human Rights, and the national regulations of each EU Member State. Detention of immigrants' children without a solid political basis would be illegal and against fundamental human rights, such as freedom and security.

In summary, in the EU, a foreign person's level of integration may be evaluated by looking at their employment, housing, education, and access to healthcare. These factors are taken into consideration along with the so-called "social linkages", and the aspects that form the integration process, like citizenship and human rights. The possibility of achieving a good level of integration in the host society is crucial for both the individual and the community.

2.2.3. Integration policies of immigrants' children in the Baltic Countries

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, fall into the category of countries with a migrant population caused by territorial changes of borders and by ethnic minorities (OECD/EU, 2018). In this subgroup, we find mainly the countries of the Centre and East of the European Union; these States have never had a past of heavy migratory flows, excluding the recent migration from Poland for work and economic reasons, and the one connected to the war in Ukraine. At the end of the 20th century, due to changes in territories and borders in the various countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the number of migrants present in the various countries gradually increased according to the specificities of the state; in fact, substantial differences are noted when comparing the percentage of foreigners present in Lithuania (5 percent) with that present in Slovenia (16 percent). In these countries, migrants appear to have a job prospect and possibility equal to, if not superior to, that of native-born; a factor that is however specified is the poor social integration of migrants in the host communities; particularly in the Baltic countries, the sense of belonging and general satisfaction of life is particularly low.

Statistics on the numbers and nationalities of migrants in the Baltic States are not very precise, but it is observed that in total, the number of people from non-EU countries is relatively lower than in other EU countries (Mierina, 2020). As can be observed in Figure 4, the percentage of immigrants in relation to the entire population remains low, e.g., Latvia's rates remain roughly constant at 0.5 over the years (2013-2017). On the other hand, the highest rates occur in Latvian and Lithuanian emigration, which also tend to decrease when compared to 2009-2010 data. In 2018, 10,909 people were registered as immigrants on the territory, 7.5 percent of whom came from other EU member states, 44 percent from non-European countries, and 48 percent were Latvian citizens; the most frequent nationalities of immigrants on Latvian territory are Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian. Considering the years from 1998 to 2018, the data regarding people accepted with refugee status are relatively few; in fact, only 180 people were recognized as refugees, and 538 were able to remain legally on the territory due to receiving subsidiary protection.

The integration of immigrants into the territory has not been easy due to the negative perception that the population had toward such people. They believed that the migratory phenomenon could not bring positive factors to their country, and they felt uncomfortable just at the thought that a migrant could go and live near them. On the contrary, Estonia considered the migration phenomenon a positive factor for the country's economic growth and therefore encouraged the arrival of foreign workers. (Mierina, 2020)

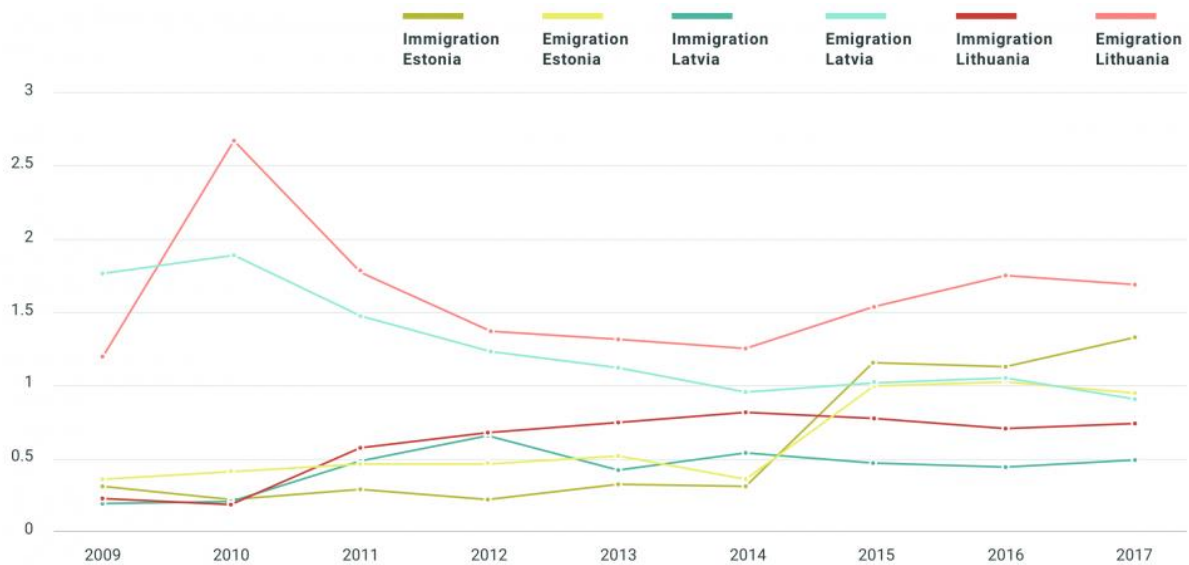


Figure 4. Emigration and immigration rates in the Baltic countries (percent of the population).
Source: Eurostat data, 2023: Emigration and Immigration by age group, sex, and citizenship.

As far as Lithuania is concerned, a total of 78,081 foreigners resided at the beginning of January 2020, making up almost 3 percent of the population (Blažytė, 2020). Since 2004, when Lithuania joined the European Union, the number of immigrants in the territory began to increase; in 2017, 51 percent of immigrants were Lithuanian citizens returning home, unlike in 2019 when people were from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, most of them men between the age of 20 and 39 years. The main reasons why people migrate to Lithuania are two: to find work and for family reunification. Asylum-seeking is an infrequent issue in the territory, which is why the numbers of asylum seekers are relatively low; in recent years, people who have been granted refugee status have come from Syria and Tajikistan. These refugees were, in most cases, sent following Lithuania's accession in 2015 to the European Commission Emergency Relocation Scheme, which aimed to assist Greece and Italy in the reception and accommodation of refugees, subsequently this decision, between 2016 and 2019, 493 people were relocated to Lithuania.

Even if the numbers of immigrants in the Baltic countries are changing to find in up-to-date European databases; however, it is possible to identify the number of asylum seekers, which is

a lower number compared to other EU countries. In Lithuania, there is a total of 3,905 migrant asylum seekers, while in Latvia 580, and in Estonia only 75. Concerning the numbers of asylum-seeking minors present in the Baltic countries in 2021, Eurostat (2022) presents Lithuania as having the highest number (925), followed by Latvia (175) and Estonia with the lowest number (20).

If we look at the Baltic country taking mostly in consideration in this research, Latvia, and Lithuania, we need to consider the integration instruments present in the territory. In Latvia, the Information Centre for Immigrants (Informācijas Centrs Imigrantiem), since May 2016, has been operating in the country as support and dissemination of information for newly arrived foreigners (Informācijas Centrs Imigrantiem, 2017). In the first 20 months of its work, 2514 immigrants from 81 different non-EU countries were helped through live or online consultations by the centre's operators, which operate in various areas of Latvia, such as Riga, the capital, Liepāja, Jelgava, Cēsis and Daugavpils. The consultations dealt in particular with the issues of employability, migration, the possibility of learning the Latvian language, and psychological support; these services were offered and managed by various professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, educational institutions, translators, and various NGOs. Among the many countries of origin of migrants, those most present on Latvian territory are those from Russia, Syria, Ukraine, India, China, Turkey, and Pakistan; for this reason, the presence of a group of interpreters and translators is necessary, particularly for the Dari, Farsi, Urdu, Arabic and Chinese languages.

When analysing the integration of immigrant children in Latvia, it is necessary to focus on the level of integration achieved within educational institutions (Akule, 2013). The number of foreign children in Latvian schools is not high, and no particular integration problems have been detected. With respect to the general attitude of Latvian children and young people toward fellow immigrants, mainly an avoidant behaviour towards newcomers was identified. Immigrants' children have often left alone, and for this reason, are hardly considered and not at all integrated into social relations. This behaviour also occurs at the university level, where exchange students are mostly ignored in the first few months of their stay. An interesting phenomenon also occurs within the country itself among children and young people who refuse to study with peers who do not speak the same language. In particular, this occurs among children who speak Russian and Latvian; 56 percent of young people whose first language is Russian refuse to attend the same school as peers whose first language is Latvian. The national Integration Centre in Riga organised a meeting between different ethnic groups of children, accompanied by their parents, in the presence of teachers, educators, and representatives of the children's schools. This meeting was useful to create an open space for dialogue between the people on the problems encountered in schools and to formulate a plan to improve the education system for the next generations of immigrants arriving in the area in the coming years.

For a long time, the International Organization for Migration (n.d.) considered Lithuania a moderately homogenous country in terms of language, culture, and religion. However, as time passed, the migration phenomenon gradually increased, so the difficulties in integration were no longer only at the language level but also at the cultural level. One problem noted by the IOM was the lack of competence and experience of professionals in intercultural work, where the task was to deal with the reception and integration phase of immigrants. For this reason, it is relevant to formulate integration programs for immigrants and workers who work with them. The IOM has been programming such projects since 2000 when the first integration program for people whose first language was Russian was implemented. Furthermore, another aim of the organization is the training of professionals, such as social workers, police officers, and human rights specialists, with the skills to work with people from foreign countries. The program, called “Assistance to Children and their Families: Building Specialists’ Intercultural Competence”, was carried out, which aimed to raise awareness among professionals to work with different cultures and nationalities, accepting them without prejudice (IOM, 2022).

In summary, data on immigration to the Baltic countries are often not accurate or up-to-date, but it is possible to highlight that these countries receive significantly fewer immigrants than other European countries. The perception of foreign people is not particularly positive in the eyes of the native population and the integration process of adults and minors is not made easy, in particular, a language barrier and racial prejudices are evident.

2.2.4. Integration policies of immigrants’ children in the Southern European Countries

The countries of Southern Europe, such as Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal, are considered new migrant reception countries, usually migrants with a low level of education (OECD/EU, 2018). In the early 2000s, these countries became the main destinations of migration flows for those people looking for a job, mainly a job classified as “low-skilled”. Most immigrants are classified as “low-educated”, although there are also high-educated migrants who have to adapt and accept positions in low-level jobs. Starting from the years 2007/2008, with the global economic crisis that also spread in Europe, the unemployment rate of immigrants in the host countries has increased by 10 percent, a number higher than the unemployment rate of citizens belonging to the state (7 percent). In particular, it is possible to underline the increase in unemployment among immigrants in Greece (20 percent) and Spain (13 percent). Excluding Portugal from the list, it is highlighted that the poverty rate and

poor housing conditions among immigrants are generally higher than that one of the native-born; it is measured to be twice as high.

The countries of Southern Europe are considered as a whole not only for their geographical proximity but also for their very similar migratory history (Schnell, and Azzolini, 2015). In the beginning, these countries were famous for a large number of people who emigrated to Northern Europe countries in search of a more stable and profitable work situation. Starting from the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, the situation has totally changed, and Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal have become host countries for a very high number of people. Several phenomena took place in these decades, such as an increase in immigration at a global level and the demand for labour in Southern Europe, and the aspect of illegal immigration was very present in all four countries. Migration flows have increased abundantly over the years; an example is the total number of migrants present in Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal went from 3.2 million in 2000 to 11.5 million after ten years.

As we have seen, there are similarities in the migratory past of these countries, although there are some characteristics that differ for every Southern European country, like the origin of the migrants hosted. As for the Italian state, in 2021, the three most widespread nationalities of migrants were Tunisian, with a total of 14,887 people, Egyptian, equal to almost half of the previous one (7,313), and with a very similar number (7,036) that of Bangladesh (Varrella, 2021). As regards asylum requests at the end of 2021, there were a total of 56,388, mainly submitted by people from Pakistan, Nigeria, and Afghanistan; within this number, we also find that relating to minors, which is 14.8 percent of the total (8,312), and to unaccompanied minors (3,257) (ASGI, 2022). In Spain, most of the migrants at the end of 2021 came from Morocco (over 59,000 people), followed by Colombians in second place with 39,900 (Romero, 2022). According to the Spanish Ministry of Interior, a total of 65,404 people applied for asylum in 2021, most of whom came from Venezuela (15,995), Colombia (11,567), and Morocco (6,536) (Accem, 2022). In Greece, at the end of 2021, asylum seekers totalled 28,320, mostly from Afghanistan (4,618), Pakistan (4,273), and Syria (3,870); minors, accompanied or unaccompanied, represent 29.8 per cent of the total number (Greek Council for Refugees, 2022). In Portugal, at the end of 2021, there were fewer asylum requests than in other southern European countries; the total was 1,537 people, coming from Afghanistan (664), Morocco (118), and India (82), of which 27 percent represented by minors (Portuguese Refugee Council, 2022). Regarding asylum seeker minors in Southern Europe in 2021, Eurostat (2022) presents Italy with 6,520 children, Spain with 9,185, Greece with 7,035, and Portugal with 330.

Concerning the integration of children in the territory, UNICEF plays an important role (UNICEF, 2022b). In Greece, for example, it cooperates with the refugee reception system in the

Mother and Child Space initiative in Athens and Thessaloniki, providing psycho-social support for children and ensuring appropriate and safe spaces for mothers where they can breastfeed or have private counselling. Also relevant is the focus on the participation and integration of immigrant children in school; the “All Children in Education” program has guaranteed 95 percent of children, including children with disabilities, access to school in the 2021-2022 school year. To ensure a positive inclusion for foreign children developed courses on intercultural learning for teachers and Greek language courses for children.

In Italy, it is possible to highlight the work carried out by UNICEF in cooperation with the “Save the Children” organization, and specific social services for migrant reception. In areas particularly crowded with immigrants, such as Lampedusa (Sicily) and Calabria, around 708 children were helped by providing them with psychological support, carrying out visits to check the conditions of the children and the most vulnerable, and in particular, detecting the criticalities present in the reception system in the area. It is pointed out that conditions are often not the best for receiving people due to overcrowding, poor hygienic conditions, poor nutrition, and slow and complicated access to basic personal services. One of the bodies that deal with immigrant integration in Italy is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, which organizes various projects and programs suitable for such people (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2021). Through collaboration with other public bodies, such as Sport e Salute S.p.A, a project called “Sport and Integration Project-#IOVENGODALLOSPORT”, financed with a total of 1,600,00 Euro from the National Fund for Migration Policies, take place between October 2021 and August 2023. The main objective of this project is to create an open space for dialogue, social inclusion, and anti-discrimination. The areas selected for this program are focused on sports, education, and listening. Sport is the key element to encourage the inclusion of children and young people from difficult economic and family backgrounds, paying appropriate attention to the female gender and those from a migration background. The goal to be achieved is to teach through sports cooperation between different children, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, while, at the same time, developing the basic rules for playing honestly. Another goal for this project is to raise awareness in the world of sport, academia, and the third sector of the importance that sport can play in enhancing diversity and integration. A collaboration activated as a result of this project is the one with the world of football, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), organized initiatives to promote positive cheering and inclusion, such as the Day of Sport and Integration and a social campaign for 6-18-year-olds. Specifically, sports activities have been activated within the reception centres through the sports institutions and local authorities; the aim is to create a sports-educational-training path linking the reception centres on the territory with the sports clubs.

In Spain, an organization that deals with the reception and integration of immigrant families is the Convive Cepaim Foundation. The organization's mission is to promote an inclusive, egalitarian, and intercultural society, which can facilitate the access of the most vulnerable people, especially immigrants, to citizens' rights. This foundation, founded in 1994, is present throughout Spain, from Madrid, the capital, to the region of Murcia, Andalucía, the Valencian Community, and Catalonia, with a total of 37 centres. The areas of help provided to people are various, including first reception and international protection, cooperation, and development, promotion of work and equality, anti-discrimination and intervention with minors and families. Projects concerning children and families have as their central objective the improvement of living conditions and level of integration of the family unit, giving services of information and orientation. Children with difficulties on a social-family-escolar level have particular attention from the organization. One of the projects realized is called "Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children's Transition to Adulthood", developed in Barcelona (Convive Fundación Cepaim, 2022). The project aims to stimulate the exchange of good practices and knowledge between different organizations, particularly those supporting foreign minors and families, paying more attention to the youth living without a family or an adult reference. During this project, 18 participants from distinct European countries, such as France, Italy, Netherlands, and Greece, formulated good innovative work possibilities for migrant youths going through the phase that will take them into the adult world. These work experiences aim to foster the emancipation and independence of young people.

In summary, the Southern European countries are associated with one group because of their common history in the field of immigration and their geographical location. In contrast to the Baltic countries, the number of migrants is very high and for this reason, the reception conditions are not always up to the standard of hygiene and respect for human rights. Immigration in these countries is considered particularly for economic reasons, which is why the stereotype of the immigrant is of a poorly educated person looking for work. As far as the integration of minors is concerned, UNICEF and the "Save the Children" organization are the first to provide psychological support and implement integration programs.

3. RESEARCH ON IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN INTEGRATION IN BALTIC AND SOUTHERN EUROPE COUNTRIES

3.1. Research Methodology

In the research of this Master's Thesis, qualitative research is employed to gather the data from young migration participants and then analyse the data qualitatively. This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the young migrants' experiences about the migration and integration processes and provide a detailed analysis of the problems and facilities of young 15 immigrants in two of the Baltic countries (Lithuania, and Latvia), and two Southern European countries (Italy, and Spain).

The research object of this qualitative research is the integration of young immigrants from third countries within the European Union.

The purpose is to study the integration achieved by young immigrants from third countries within the European Union.

The research objectives are the following:

1. To investigate how the basic life needs, such as education, health care, and having a house, are met due to the process of the integration of young immigrants from third countries within the EU.
2. To investigate the young immigrants from third countries' social life and their problems in the process of integration into the EU.
3. To explore the life stories of the families interviewed.

The research method. Qualitative research relies on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand observation, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, recordings made in natural settings, documents, and artifacts (McLeod, 2019). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the method of qualitative research is the best for giving in-depth and detailed descriptions of a study's findings. In qualitative research, the broader outlines are discussed where the conceptual backing are determined, and also the first-hand quality is extracted through observation and direct engagements with participants.

In the empirical research of this Master's Thesis, the most important benefit of using qualitative research design is to explore the perspective of 15 young immigrants. The qualitative research method is the most effective since the data collected contains the personal experiences of

young immigrants and their feelings and behaviour, with a total of 28 people interviewed (15 children and 13 parents). Also, since the study involved a purposive sample, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in private place setting or online, through a digital platform as Google Meet or Zoom. In this research, approval was received from the home university before starting to conduct the interviews (see Annex 4). The participants who didn't feel comfortable to talk directly answered the questions in a written way in their first language, mostly Russian and Spanish, and gave the documents to the reference organisation, which sent it to me, author of the Master's thesis, directly through email.

Sampling. Sampling is a process of selecting units from the population in order to collect relevant empirical information from it (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this study uses a sampling method to select samples from the population of interest. The target population for this study is young immigrants between the age of 10-15 years old, coming from countries outside of the European Union, currently living in one of the countries selected (Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, and Spain). The selected children were interviewed in the presence of one of their parents; in all 15 cases, the responding parent was the mother figure, in some cases being the only parental figure in the household. The purpose of interviewing the mothers was mainly to analyse in more depth the issues discussed with the minors, and at the same time to create a safe and comfortable space for the children themselves.

In this research, a purposive sampling strategy was incorporated for participants' selections. Creswell and Creswell (2018) proposed that the number of participants in qualitative research should not go beyond a predefined level that should be adequate; otherwise, it leads to redundancy and makes it difficult to get any new information. Based on Creswell and Creswell (2018), highlighted that in qualitative studies, data saturation is often reached with 5 to 25 participants, and a sample of 15 individuals was chosen for an interview. Accordingly, 15 participants were thought to be adequate for this study. It was considered that selected interview participants should meet the sampling criteria necessary for them to fit in. The following sampling criteria were considered in the research: possible participants should be immigrants' children who moved from a third country to the European Union Member State, specifically, Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, or Spain; their identities or legal status should be of a legal immigrant on the territory; should be at the age between 10 to 15 years.

Socio-demographic characteristics of research minors' participants – immigrants' children provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants minors – immigrants’ children.

| Participant’s Code | Age | Gender | Nationality | Host country | With whom lives in host country | Interview conducted: |
|--------------------|-----|--------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| R1 | 10 | Female | Ukrainian | Italy | Mother, grandmother, brother | Face-to-face |
| R2 | 14 | Female | Congolese | Latvia | Mother, sisters | Online |
| R3 | 10 | Female | Congolese | Latvia | Mother, sisters | Online |
| R4 | 12 | Male | Ethiopian | Italy | Mother | Face-to-face |
| R5 | 11 | Female | Byelorussian | Lithuania | Mother, father, brother | Online |
| R6 | 10 | Male | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Mother | Online |
| R7 | 13 | Female | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Mother, brother, sister | Online |
| R8 | 10 | Female | Senegalese | Italy | Mother, father, sisters, brother | Online |
| R9 | 10 | Male | Byelorussian | Lithuania | Mother, father, brother | Online |
| R10 | 13 | Female | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Mother, father | Online |
| R11 | 11 | Male | Georgian | Spain | Mother, father, brother, sister | Online |
| R12 | 15 | Male | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Mother, grandmother | Online |
| R13 | 13 | Female | Syrian | Spain | Mother, father, brother, sisters | Online |
| R14 | 10 | Male | Venezuelan | Spain | Father, mother, brother, sister | Online |
| R15 | 12 | Male | Venezuelan | Spain | Father, mother, brother, sister | Online |

Source: Master’s Thesis author’s elaboration.

The presence of one of the parents was crucial in the interview in order to gather more detailed information and dig deeper into the topics discussed with the children. During the data collection, only the mothers volunteered to participate in the interview. In some cases, the mothers were the only parental figure present in the child's life, in other cases, the mother was simply the closest or most present parent in the child's life. The mothers in the interview had specific questions to answer, but in some situations, they were supportive of the child and created a favourable environment for the child to answer the proposed questions. In certain cases, the mothers also acted as translators for their children who did not know English.

Socio-demographic characteristics of research participants – immigrants – parents are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants – parents.

| Participant's Code | Code of child – interview participant | Gender | Nationality | Host country | Interview conducted: |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| PR1 | R1 | Female | Ukrainian | Italy | Face to face |
| PR2 | R2, R3 | Female | Congolese | Latvia | Online |
| PR3 | R4 | Female | Ethiopian | Italy | Face to face |
| PR4 | R5 | Female | Byelorussian | Lithuania | Online |
| PR5 | R6 | Female | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Online |
| PR6 | R8 | Female | Senegalese | Italy | Online |
| PR7 | R9 | Female | Byelorussian | Lithuania | Online |
| PR8 | R12 | Female | Ukrainian | Lithuania | Online |
| PR9 | R13 | Female | Syrian | Spain | Online |
| PR10 | R14, R15 | Female | Venezuelan | Spain | Online |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration.

Instrument of the empirical data collection. The method of semi-structured interviews was used to collect empirical data from the selected participants – immigrants' children (minors) and their parents. For this purpose, interview guidelines were created for children (see Annex 1) and for their parents (see Annex 2).

For the interview participants minors – immigrants' children in total, six interview guidelines were created. The Guideline "I: Social-demographic characteristics of immigrant children" was detailed by four questions. The Guideline "II: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Housing" was detailed by four questions. The Guideline "III: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Family and friends" was detailed by six questions, one of which required the minor (if younger than 12 years and willing to do it) to draw his/her family, using the drawing technique, which facilitates the exploration of the children's perceptions and point of view of a specific theme (Backett-Milburn, and McKie, 1999). The Guideline "IV: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Education" was detailed by four questions. The Guideline "V: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Integration and social programs" was detailed by two questions. The Guideline "VI: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Access to healthcare" was detailed by one

question. So, in total 21 questions was prepared for the interview with the minors – immigrants' children.

For the interviews with parents, in total, five guidelines were created (see Annex 2). The Guideline “I: Social-demographic characteristics of immigrants – parents” was detailed by one question. The Guideline “II: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Housing” was detailed by two questions. The Guideline “III: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Education” was detailed by one question. The Guideline “IV: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Access to healthcare” was detailed by one question. The Guideline “V: Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Asylum procedures” was detailed by five questions. So, in total 10 questions for the parents were prepared for the interview.

Interview procedure. The interviews have been conducted between October 2022, and January 2023. We have contacted them through different organizations working with migrants on the territory. In the Baltic countries, Save The Children Vilnius, Maltieciai Vilnius, and Caritas Riga accepted to participate in the research, and provided 7 contacts of families, one of which was composed of one mother and two daughters belonging to the age range for the study. In the Southern European countries, the four participants were contacted through the Caritas of Vittorio Veneto and Spanish organizations called “Cepaim Murcia” and “Cepaim Zaragoza”. In total, a higher number of organizations were contacted, but the majority couldn't collaborate to the research because of the lack of young immigrants in the age range selected in their organizations, such as Caritas Malaga or the Pabradė Foreigners Registration Centre, or because no answer were received after multiple contact attempts, as Caritas Treviso or Patvērums “Drošā māja”. The selected participants who meet the sampling criteria were invited for the interview at a place where confidentiality of the information given can be maintained; both face-to-face interviews took place in Italy, one in one of the research centres, in the presence of a translator, and one at the family home. On the other hand, this study is also based on the interviews taken from different participants via the digital platforms as Google Meet, or Zoom, as it was the preferred choice of the participant or because the location of the researcher was different from the one of the participants. In case, the participants bring forth any complaint regarding the whole process of interviewing, we were ready also to conduct these interviews in a different mode or using the tool of a translator, practice implemented twice, once in an online interview and once in a one-on-one. To make the participants as comfortable as possible, the interview was translated in four different languages – Italian (see Annex 10, and Annex 11), Spanish (see Annex 6, and Annex 7), English (see Annex 1, and Annex 2) and Russian (see Annex 8, and Annex 9) – and sent as a written format to potential participants in advance of interview; such method helped different people to effectively participate in the interviews. Finally, the researcher

used face-to-face interviews for participants who are more comfortable and willing to give rich information on the study topic in person.

The length of each interview was around 40-45 minutes, the shortest interview was conducted in 30 minutes, and duration of the longest interview was 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded, and later on transcriptions of these records has been done.

Data analysis. Data analysis is a scientific process employed in a study to add value to the data collected before deductions and conclusions are made (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012). For a qualitative study, the data analysis is customised for each study (Creswell, and Creswell, 2018). The research methodology in this Master's Thesis survey was qualitative in which thematic analysis was applied.

Thematic analysis widely used in qualitative research designs (Creswell, and Creswell, 2018) was applied for the young immigrants who migrated from a third country into one of the four European countries selected for this research (Lithuania, Latvia, Italy, and Spain). Due to this, the transcribed texts of the interviews were organised into themes throughout the analysis stage in order to group together findings according to the themes and make the material more understandable and clearer for further analysis. The six themes developed in the interview guidelines were investigated: reason of migration; relevance of having a proper environment; difficulties in education; importance of social connections; access to health care services; support received in the host country. The data collected from the interviews were also used to identify the primary categories and their subcategories within these themes. Further, interpretations of each theme, category and subcategory were conducted. This way, six categories and fourteen subcategories were identified and explored in total.

Research ethics. Research ethics serve as the norms of conduct for researchers and are regarded as the guidelines for conducting research in a responsible manner. A participant's informed consent, objectivity, respect for the respondent and his/her opinions, integrity, maintaining anonymity, maintaining confidentiality, and non-discrimination are the basic ethical principles in social research (Wagle, 2020). The research ethics is one of the integral components in which the aim is to ensure that no community or an individual is harmed, or any ethical values are violated.

In the research of this Master's Thesis, no ethical values of research were violated, no participants were discriminated or targeted on the basis of a specific personal characteristic, as sex, race, religion, political thinking, or any other discriminative means nor any one privacy was compromised. All the participants, first, the parents, and then the children, were explained and showed the document for the informed consent (see Annex 3), which was signed by everyone before starting with the interview or compilation of the written format. Before the interview, all participants were informed that they can choose whether or not to answer questions that are uncomfortable for

them, also that they have right to end an interview at any moment. Researcher, i.e., author of this Master's Thesis ensured to the research participants that collected information will be confidential, be used only for the direct purpose – for the Master Thesis and will not be passed to third subjects. Researcher, i.e., author of this Master's Thesis declares that it does not violate the university's plagiarism rules (see Annex 5).

Limitations of the research. The study's limits are those aspects of design or methodology that affected or influenced how the results of your research were interpreted. Study limitations are restrictions on making assumptions from the results, further describing applications to practise, and/or related to the effectiveness of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study, the procedure used to establish internal and external validity, or the result of unexpected difficulties that arose during the study. (Price, and Murnan, 2004)

In this research, several limitations were encountered. The main limitation come from a linguistic point of view, as some people did not feel comfortable enough to speak in English or through a translator and decided not to participate. In order to overcome this limitation, voluntary assistance in translation provided by professionals working in the organization or close friends of the research author was accepted. Translations were carried out between English and Russian/Ukrainian languages.

Another factor of relative importance was the lack of cooperation from most of the organizations contacted, which made data collection complex and protracted. With minors as the primary interview subjects, it was necessary to have the parent's consent, and, in order to have more precise and detailed information, it was decided to include the parents in the interview; this decision had pros and cons. As expected, it was beneficial to give parents a voice in order to gain a deeper insight into the migration phenomenon in general; however, in some situations, it created difficulties of expression for the minor, who tended to give more space to the parent or waited for an answer from them. Certainly, the presence of the parent made the children more comfortable answering all the questions calmly; it was sometimes necessary to remind the parents that the question was addressed to the child and not to them.

3.2. Research Results

Data analysis is an integral component of any research activity. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research designs (Creswell, and Creswell, 2018). This chapter is organized according to the main themes that are extracted from the collected information through interviews. In each theme, systematized empirical data in the form of categories and subcategories presented

together with its interpretations. General list of the identified categories and subcategories is presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. List of the identified categories and subcategories.

| CATEGORY | SUB-CATEGORIES |
|--|--|
| Reasons for migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forced situation ● Family’s reunification |
| Relevance of having a proper environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relation with neighbours ● House’s dimension |
| Difficulties in education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication problems ● Conflict with teachers and classmates |
| Importance of social connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintaining relations with family abroad through technologies ● Developing friendships at school ● Importance of sharing a common language |
| Access to health care services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Common access to health care structure ● Easy access to family doctor |
| Support received in the host country | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finding house ● Choosing a school ● Emotional support |

Source: Master’s Thesis author’s elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

3.2.1. Reasons for migration

There are several plausible reasons for an individual or a social group to leave their country of origin (European Parliament, 2020). On January 1, 2019, there were 21.8 million non-citizens living in the 27 Member States of the European Union. The factors that push a person to leave his/her country are called “Push factors”, whereas those that attract a person to a particular country are called “Pull factors” (Fucà, 2019). The most common push factors are related to political problems in the home country, demographic and economic reasons, and environmental disasters. In a politically conflictual situation, a person’s freedoms, rights, and security are put at risk and persecution develops against people with ideals, religions, ethnicity, and other personal characteristics not approved by the political regime in power. Within this group are wars and conflicts, particularly in recent years with

the war in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, in the present day with the war in Ukraine. Demographic changes, such as a sudden increase in births, can cause adverse dynamics within the country for young people looking for work, who are forced to migrate. The pull factors in such a situation are certainly the search for a higher salary that is commensurate with the work performed, and the opportunity to grow professionally and educationally. Natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, and tsunamis, have caused poverty, unemployment, and the loss of a fixed abode, elements that have in turn provoked large migration flows. A different situation that leads people to leave their country is family reunification, which is seen as a migrant’s right. Host countries have a legal responsibility to encourage and facilitate family reunification. (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018)

From the collected empirical data, one category called as “Reasons of migration” was extracted with the two sub-categories (see Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons of migration according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|
| Reasons of migration | Forced situation | <i>Because where we were living there was a war, and it was impossible to live. They broke our house’s door and they entered so we decided to escape... [PR3]</i> <i>I had arrived before my family, because I have escaped from the political persecution in October 2020, so it was an emergency situation... [PR7]</i> <i>We were living a camp for refugees, and we had to go out from there. We told the kids the news very happily because we already tried several times to go out from there, but we were always failing. [PR9]</i> |
| | Family’s reunification | <i>Because we were separated from my husband, he was living in Italy for 22 years and we were living in Senegal... [PR6]</i> |

Source: Master’s Thesis author’s elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

Through data collection, it became evident that almost all the interview participants pointed out that their displacement was caused by a forced and unwanted situation. Meanwhile, participant R8 reports that the cause that prompted her family to migrate from Senegal to Italy was to reunite with her father, who was already living for several years in a small village in northern Italy. The mother states: “*Because we were separated from my husband, he was living in Italy for 22 years and we were living in Senegal. And also, to work. I told my daughters we were going to Italy when we were going to do the documents to leave...*” [PR6]. In this case we can identify both situations, the

reunification with the father was the main reason for the migration, but the search for a good job also contributed to the decision of the entire family.

All the other 14 respondents pointed out that their migration was caused by greater forces, such as political persecution, as R9’s mother states: *“I had arrived before my family, because I have escaped from the political persecution in October 2020, so it was an emergency situation. I actually did not tell my son I was leaving to another country, we just told him I was in a business trip, and after when it turned out they had to leave either, because they started persuading my husband. <...> We stopped some communications with our friends due to the security and safety of them, as we are seen as the enemies and the bad because we escaped, we don’t want to put people under threat, being interrogated...”* [PR7].

Another motivation is conflict and lack of security in their own country; as expressed by R4’ mother: *“We left because where we were living there was a war, and it was impossible to live. They broke our house’s door and they entered, so we decided to escape...”* [PR3]. Similarly, PR1 states: *“We decided to leave because we were very afraid, the bombing was very close, so we decided to leave immediately for a safer place...”*.

In summary, the data collected show that in most cases people do not choose to leave their country but are forced to do so for various reasons that could endanger their lives and those of their families. The ultimate goal of migration is to gain for oneself and one’s family a better lifestyle and above all to live in a safe place.

3.2.2. Relevance of having a proper environment

As said in the literature part, employment, housing, education, and healthcare are fundamental factors that allow us to analyse the level of integration achieved by a foreign person (Ager, and Strang, 2008). These aspects are considered simultaneously with the so-called “social connections”, where social bridges, bonds, and links are included, and the elements that establish the integration process, such as human rights and citizenship.

From the collected data, one category “Relevance of having a proper environment” with the two sub-categories was identified (see Table 5).

Table 5. Relevance of having a proper environment according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------|------------------------------|--|
| | Relation with the neighbours | <i>...We haven’t seen our neighbours never, the building is empty, there are only 1 or 2 people. Is a new flat, and this</i> |

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|--|-------------------|---|
| Relevance of having a proper environment | | <i>is our first month here. Maybe one day we are gonna know them, but we don't know at what time they are home, or they come back, so we don't know!</i> [R2] <i>...we have a park near our house, and we have a good relationship with our neighbours...</i> [R5] <i>...I like the house because is big, but I don't know the neighbours.</i> [R11] |
| | House's dimension | <i>...I would like the house to be a little bit bigger.</i> [R8] <i>I like the house, but I would like to have a bigger house, because we are four and we live in a little flat. I would like to have my personal room...</i> [R5] <i>...I would like to have a room only for me...</i> [R15] <i>...and I would like to have more privacy.</i> [R14] |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

When we talk about having an appropriate place to live, we are not only referring to the housing structure, but also to the area and the relationships with neighbours. Through the data collected, two factors are highlighted, in particular, the size and characteristics of the house, and the relationships established or not established with one's neighbours.

During the interviews, children repeatedly expressed what the problems are within their homes and what they seek to change, for example, possibility of having a more spacious home in general, or at least to have their own bedroom. As reported by R5: *"I like the house, but I would like to have a bigger house, because we are four and we live in a little flat. I would like to have my personal room, but prices they are so high in Vilnius now..."*. Similarly, the two brothers said: *"Yes I would like to change something, I would like to have a room only for me"* [R15], *"I would like to have more privacy..."* [R14].

Another important element to take into consideration, the environment where the family is settled, as R10 says: *"...I would like to have more children to play with, I would like to have a warmer weather and less strange people..."*.

Another key aspect of feeling comfortable and welcome in a given neighbourhood is the relationships one establishes with one's neighbours. As reported by R2: *"We haven't seen our neighbours never, the building is empty, there are only 1 or 2 people. Is a new flat, and this is our first month here. Maybe one day we are gonna know them, but we don't know at what time they are home, or they come back, so we don't know!"*, it is not always possible to develop relationships with people living nearby.

In other cases, as reported by R5: *“I really like my neighbourhood, we had a concert in the winter with the neighbours that live above us, they were renovating the house, we have a park near our house, and we have a good relationship with our neighbours. I really like the park and we have a lot of shops and connection with buses...”*, having a good relationship is crucial for a better appreciation of the place one lives in, without forgetting how the neighbourhood itself can make a difference during an initial period of integration in a new country.

In summary, in order to analyse whether a living environment is appropriate for a child and his/her family, it is necessary to analyse several components, such as the home, the neighbourhood and the social relationships that can facilitate an integration process. It is emphasised that it is important for minors to have a private and welcoming space inside the home and a serene and sociable space outside.

3.2.3. Difficulties in education

Receiving an adequate education is part of the primary rights of children, a right that also applies to immigrant children in the host country. This right is emphasised in the European Pillar of social rights (2017): *“Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”* (p. 11).

Students with an immigration background often experience difficulties in adapting to the new school and classroom system. For this reason, the European Commission has been supporting EU Member States since 2016 to develop multicultural and multi linguistic classrooms and school systems to try to foster the integration of foreign children from early childhood education to higher education (European Commission, n.d.).

From the collected data, one category “Difficulties in education” with the two sub-categories was identified (see Table 6).

Table 6. Theme of difficulties in education according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Education difficulties | Communication problems | <p><i>...We are going to a Latvian school, and we don't speak Latvian, is difficult to communicate for both of us. [R2]</i></p> <p><i>The problem at school is only the language... [R1]</i></p> <p><i>...he has some difficulties regarding understanding the Lithuanian teacher and he got some remarks in his diary school <...> He told me he was not understanding what the teacher wanted from him. [PR7]</i></p> |
| | Conflicts with classmates | <p><i>...with my classmates good, but not with everyone, I have 2, no, 4 classmates who annoy me... [R8]</i></p> <p><i>...everything is okay with the communications with my teachers, but sometimes I had some conflicts with my classmates. [R9]</i></p> <p><i>...I have problems with my classmates regarding the Russia situation after the war in Ukraine. [R6]</i></p> |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

School for children is the main point of socialization and interaction with their peers; however, it is normal for immigrant children to experience difficulties when settling into a new school environment. Knowledge of the host country's mother tongue is necessary for successful integration into the classroom and for establishing effective communication between classmates and teachers. Several participants emphasized their difficulties in communicating in the classroom and understanding the teachers due to the difficult language comprehension, problem that also creates difficulties in understanding homework assignments and lessons in general, e.g., sisters reported that: *"We are going to a Latvian school, and we don't speak Latvian, is difficult to communicate for both of us...maybe I speak like a 3/4 year old baby, I can understand my classmates sometimes. All the class are in Latvian except for English."* [R2], and *"...If I would rate it would be a 2, but definitely I would like to learn it, why not!"* [R3].

R9's mother wished to specify that: *"...he has some difficulties regarding understanding the Lithuanian teacher and he got some remarks in his diary school, she wrote me he was not working in class, and then he got another remark about discipline always with the same teacher. He told me he was not understanding what the teacher wanted from him."* [PR7].

A different situation has arisen for children who, although do not belong to the host country, are able to communicate with the language of the country, especially in the Baltic countries where schools completely in Russian language are very common. The latter simplifies the integration of

children from Ukraine and Belarus at schools in Lithuania as in the case of R5, the mother comments that: *“Our children are going to a Russian school in Vilnius. It was not a problem to find a school, because we have like 3/4 schools that teach in Russian here in Vilnius. I looked for recommendations on the internet, it was in Russian, and it was closed to the house.”* [PR4].

One of the key elements within the school environment is the relationships that are established between pupils and teachers. These relationships are facilitated by various factors, such as sharing a language or common interests. Through data collection, it was highlighted by the children that some of them experience difficulties with their classmates. As R6 states: *“Yes, I face some difficulties at school with my classmates regarding the Russia situation after the war in Ukraine...”*. That is, indeed, possible that for reasons outside the relationship within the class, misunderstandings and conflicts develop.

In some cases, such misunderstandings are normal and are not caused by any particular reason, such as the case of R8 who states: *“I have some problems with science <...>, with my classmates good, but not with everyone, I have 2, no, 4 classmates who annoy me...”*.

In summary, school life is fundamental for the successful integration of immigrant minors. It is essential to find a school suitable for the learning of such minors, in which it is possible for them to understand the lessons and communicate with their classmates and teachers; in this way, in addition to developing their school knowledge, it will be easier to create a supportive social network among both peers and teachers.

3.2.4. Importance of social connections

In order for a person to integrate positively into the host community, social interactions are necessary. This is why we speak of social integration which is only formed after a good level of social cohesion has been achieved (Cruz-Saco, 2008).

Though, family for children is most important, therefore, minors – interview participants, first, were asked to define their family via drawings. From socio-demographic characteristics of these children, it is known that most of them came to host country with mothers and some other family members like brother or sisters. Meanwhile, some fathers are absent in the lives of the children interviewed, due to divorces, moves that have taken them to live in a foreign country, or sudden deaths. Therefore, according to interpretation of such drawing technique (Backett-Milburn, and McKie, 1999), it was expected to find images of families with some family members absent or so.

The results show, that interviewed minors still have sense of the full family with father, mother, brothers, and sister (see Figures 5, 6, 7, 8, 10), independently how far they migrated: from

Venezuela to Spain (Figure 5), or from Ukraine to Lithuania (Figure 6). In the first case, it is 7 thousand kilometres, in the second – around 1000 kilometres. That is, close relationships are much more important for the child.

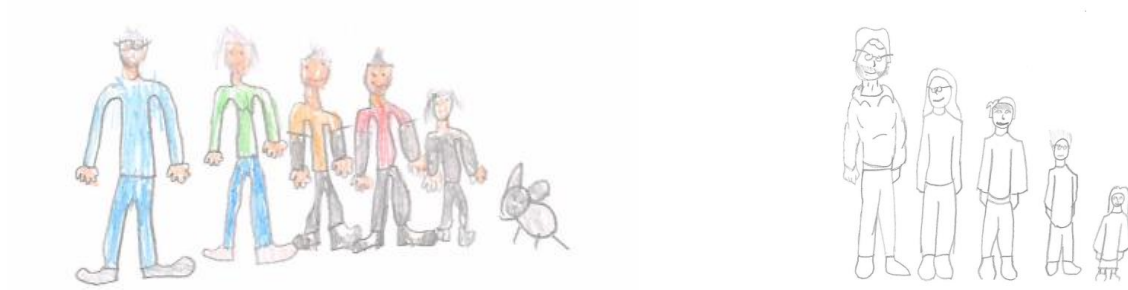


Figure 5. Drawings by brothers R14 and R15 from Venezuela settling in Spain.

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.



Figure 6. Drawing by minor R5 from Ukraine settling in Lithuania.

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

Closeness, and warm feelings we can obtain in some drawings. For example, that show a pet nearby minor in Figure 5, or family in the loving heart in Figure 7. Such drawings let to suppose that

immigrant minors keep warm feelings concerning their families, and likely, in a such warm emotional environment feel safety themselves.



Figure 7. Drawing by minor R11 from Georgia settling in Spain.

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

Some minors include into their drawings not only members of the nuclear family, but also members of extended family, like grandmother (Figure 8). In the latter drawing, grandmother is rather in some distance from the author of the drawing, but still it may be supposed that this child have comparatively big personal network, therefore, have opportunity for numerous social connections.



Figure 8. Drawing by minor R1 from the Ukraine settling in Italy.

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

On the other hand, some drawings reveal incomplete families. For example, in the Figure 9, only mother with three sisters are present. Not say, that migration is cause of this incomplete family, but situation is that integration of immigrant minor from such family is exposed to higher risks in the process of integration in the host country.



Figure 9. Drawing by minors R3 from Congo settling in Latvia.

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

One more drawing show complete family, though this family looks like in move, or in rush, likely, from the war in the Ukraine (Figure 10). Such drawing let to predict inner experience of the minor about necessity to escape from home and look for the safer place to live. That is, minor is with own family, but at the same time memories about war are together with him.

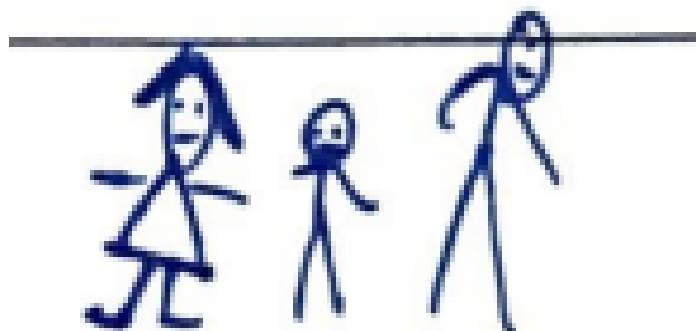


Figure 10. Drawing by minor R6 from the Ukraine settling in Lithuania.

Source: Master’s Thesis author’s elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

In summary, drawings show importance of the nuclear and extended family, as well, others loved like pets, for the immigrant minors. But at the same time, these children have specific experiences, including difficulties of living in incomplete family, or even danger of war.

In order for an immigrant person to be socially integrated in the host country, it is necessary to promote social policies that reduce poverty and economic inequality, thereby promoting the development of the person. Moreover, when we speak of social integration, we refer to the process of creating inclusion and participation of all individuals belonging to the territory, not considering cultural or ethnic differences, or specific experiences. Social integration provides all individuals, regardless of gender, age, religion, existing personal relationships, etc., with equal rights, freedoms, opportunities, and access to services in the area.

From the further collected data, one category “Importance of social connections” with the three sub-categories was identified (see Table 7).

Table 7. Importance of social connections according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Importance of social connections | Maintaining relations with family abroad | <i>...Yes, we do, through phone, WhatsApp especially. Is not so easy to maintain the contacts, my mum talks with them everyday I think; but my sister is going to school and internship so is difficult for her to talk, I think she talks</i> |

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------|---|---|
| | through technologies | <i>with them once per week or sends them a message. For me I speak with my grandparents once per week... [R8] ...I mean we talk sometimes, but our mother more. With phone, videocall, chat <...> for us not so often, but my mother talks with them more often. [R3]</i> |
| | Developing friendships at school | <i>...I met my friends at school, I like playing with them, I like gadget games and computer games. [R9] I made a lot of new friends here mostly at school, and we talk during the break, we also go out together... [R5] ...I met them in the kindergarten, in particularly 3 of them, then I met other friends in my class now, Christian, Mario and the others. We met in the same school! [R4]</i> |
| | Importance of sharing a common language | <i>...it was easier for her to communicate with them in French than in Italian, because when she just arrived, she didn't speak any Italian. Instead, I don't speak French because I didn't go to school in Senegal. [R8] ...We had his credentials from the school in Byelorussia and after 2 weeks of the arrival he started the new school, so he did not lose any years of education. Lithuania has Russian speaking school, so he entered in a school closed to our house... [PR7] Our children are going to a Russian school in Vilnius. It was not a problem to find a school, because we have like 3/4 schools that teach in Russian here in Vilnius... [PR4]</i> |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

Since children are the main subjects of such research, it is necessary to analyse in which areas they can develop relationships, and which factors can facilitate their progress, and which factors cannot. In today's times, having technological capabilities is of paramount importance for various reasons, such as staying up to date on the world situation, for study or work reasons, but also to develop and maintain social relationships. In particular, the data collected showed that access to the Internet and technological devices are crucial for maintaining relationships with relatives living in a different country.

As highlighted by R8: *"Yes, we communicate with them through phone. Is not so easy to maintain the contacts, my mum talks with them every day I think; but my sister is going to school and internship so is difficult for her to talk, I think she talks with them once per week or sends them a*

message. For me I speak with my grandparents once per week... ”; the use of calls and messages helps a lot the communication between the various members of one’s family.

R3 also emphasises the importance of the technological element, stating: “*...I mean we talk sometimes, but our mother more. With phone, videocall, chat <...> for us not so often, but my mother talks with them more often.*”.

As mentioned earlier, school turns out to be the main meeting place for children and it is at school that the first important bonds outside one’s family are forged. For such relationships to develop in a deep and lasting way, it is necessary to share a language, the main means of communication. As emphasised by most of the children interviewed, their friendships usually develop within their own class or within the school environment in general. For example, R4 underlines how their group of friends was formed during their first years at school and is still the same today, stating: “*...I met them in the kindergarten, in particularly 3 of them, then I met other friends in my class now, Christian, Mario and the others. We met in the same school! We usually play football at the park, or we walk around...*”.

Many interview participants emphasised that the relationships between them and the group of friends not only develops from the school environment, but is also maintained within it, during the lunch break or lessons, doing the activities most usually associated with children, such as playing, talking, listening to music, and going for walks. For example, R5 states: “*I made a lot of new friends here mostly at school, and we talk during the break, we also go out together...*”.

Of course, it was emphasised that such relationships must be supported by a good ability to understand and speak the same language. In the beginning, the sister was only able to form relationships with boys of the same nationality, R8 states: “*I met them at school, or my sister has friends with our same nationality, it was easier for her to communicate with them in French than in Italian, because when she just arrived, she didn’t speak any Italian. Instead, I don’t speak French because I didn’t go to school in Senegal...*”.

The possibility of creating relationships at school is only given if the child can communicate with peers and teachers on the same level as the other pupils and this is easier to identify in the Baltic countries due to the ease of finding schools with Russian as the first language. As R9’s mother points out: “*...We had his credentials from the school in Byelorussia and after 2 weeks of the arrival he started the new school, so he did not lose any years of education. Lithuania has Russian speaking school, so he entered in a school closed to our house, and when we changed, he went to another closed to the new flat...*” [PR7].

In summary, in order to be able to analyse the integration of a foreign child from a social point of view, it is necessary to focus on the school environment. School is an excellent meeting point

and provides various possibilities for socialising with peers from the host country, but there must also be suitable conditions for this process, starting with knowing and sharing a language.

3.2.5. Access to health care services

The main goal of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is to make health services accessible for migrants; such a program not only meets the needs of migrants but also facilitates the work of the host country's health system. (IOM, 2021)

The services made available are psychological and physical support to enable individuals to achieve a general level of well-being within the host country, which may also favour the development of independence, particularly economic independence. Having access to health services offered in the host territory is one of the fundamental rights to be respected, which is why the European Community, in cooperation with the organization Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), developed a project in 11 EU Member States in 2005, called "Access to Health Care for Undocumented Migrants". The main objective of this project was to promote and facilitate access to healthcare services for migrants, particularly those who are undocumented. This initiative brought together a total of 19 partners, divided between local authorities, NGOs associated with migrant and refugee work, and care centre workers (European Commission, n.d.).

Having access to health services in the host territory is of fundamental importance for all citizens, especially for those who arrive from another country after a long journey. The most fragile people, such as children, the elderly, and pregnant women, must be considered first of all. For this reason, it is necessary that each member of the household has the appropriate medical support. Accordingly, from the collected data, one category "Access to health care services" with the two sub-categories was identified (see Table 8).

Table 8. Access to health care services according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Health care services | Common access to health care structures | <p><i>...I fell and I hurt my finger, so I had to go to the emergency room... [R1]</i></p> <p><i>...I have been to the hospital twice; I had a cut when we first arrive to Riga. [R2]</i></p> <p><i>When we arrived, we went to the policlinic for a paid service in Vilnius <...> When we moved to this new apartment, we have been to this clinic near to our house and we registered ourselves because we already have the residence permit... [PR7]</i></p> <p><i>...if we can't or we don't wait so long we just go to a private clinic. We use public and private health care. [R5]</i></p> |
| | Family doctor | <p><i>...We have been, and we never had any problems, the service worked very good for us. [PR10]</i></p> <p><i>Yes, we have a family doctor and a paediatrician, we have used this service. We had some problems only regarding the language... [PR9]</i></p> <p><i>Yes, we have a family doctor, we have been several times and we have never had any problems with him, he is always the same doctor as the beginning since 2013. But Mohamed has the paediatrician, now my doctor told me he can change the doctor and come with me with mine... [PR3]</i></p> |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

From the data collected, it appears that the families interviewed often used local health facilities, particularly for their children. As reported by R1 and R2 in fact, this service was used in particular following minor accidents: *"I have been to the hospital once because I fell and I hurt my finger, so I had to go to the emergency room..." [R1]*, *"...I have been to the hospital twice, I had a cut when we first arrive to Riga." [R2]*.

Access to such facilities appears to have been easy and difficulty-free in most cases. In some cases, however, it was pointed out that the public health system is sometimes slow and therefore there was a need to refer to private services. As R5 mentions: *"...if we can't or we don't wait so long we just go to a private clinic. We use public and private health care."*

R9's mother emphasizes also on the importance of having a residence permit to be able to access such services, saying: *"When we arrived, we went to the policlinic for a paid service in*

Vilnius...When we moved to this new apartment, we have been to this clinic near to our house and we registered ourselves because we already have the residence permit...” [PR7].

Another main element in health services is to have a family doctor who can be considered a point of reference for the whole family. With regard to minors, generally at a young age, this role is played by the paediatrician, who later is replaced by the family doctor during the child’s development phase.

According to most of the interviewees, access to the family doctor was relatively easy and free of difficulties, e.g., R4’s mother reports that: *“Yes, we have a family doctor, we have been several times and we have never had any problems with him, he is always the same doctor as the beginning since 2013. But Mohamed has the paediatrician, now my doctor told me he can change the doctor and come with me with mine...” [PR3].*

Some problems arose from the communication point of view, due to a lack of a common language, as R13’s mother points out: *“Yes, we have a family doctor and a paediatrician, we have used this service. We had some problems only regarding the language...” [PR9].*

Some families, e.g., the family of R2 and R3 on the contrary did not yet have the possibility to access such a service, as reported by the mother of R2 and R3: *“No we don’t have a family doctor yet. Today I was also discussion with my mentor about how to have one, because she tried, and nobody answer. This person I think is from the immigration and is part of the mental support...” [PR2].*

In summary, the data collected show that the access to health services in the territory is of crucial importance for migrant families. Most of the minors interviewed expressed that they had gone to a hospital or private clinic at least once, highlighting how private services are more efficient and faster than public health. As far as access to the family doctor is concerned, it appears to be a well-functioning service for almost all the families interviewed, apart from those who have not yet managed to obtain a consultation with the doctor.

3.2.6. Support received in the host country

Within the European Union, there are several funds for the integration of immigrants, at the moment there is one planned for 2021-2027, which consists of several funds in turn. (European Commission, n.d.) For initial integration support, there is a fund called the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which contributes to the reinforcement of asylum policies within the European Union, helps the integration process of migrants and, tracks and combats irregular migration flows. This fund is shared between the EU member states, which are aware of their national

projects aimed at addressing specific issues. In order for this fund to be used in the best possible way and to be relevant on the territory, it is also extended to local and regional authorities to support organisations dedicated to the integrative support of migrants. These organisations, in turn, have the task of helping migrants during the first reception phase, helping them to cope with initial difficulties and trying to give them the independence they need to maintain a sufficient level of integration in the future.

When an individual or a family unit decides to change the country in which they live, they encounter several difficulties on arrival in the new territory, starting with finding appropriate accommodation for themselves and their family. The interviews emphasized that non-profit organizations in the host territory were crucial for an initial integration phase. In particular, for finding a home, a school for one's children, and providing emotional support. In addition to local organizations, a source of support was also provided in some cases by the host population or communities from the same country.

From the collected data, one category "Support received in the host country" with the three sub-categories was identified (see Table 9).

Table 9. Types of support received in the host country according to the interview participants.

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Support received in the host country | Finding house | <p><i>We were helped by a charity organization called X1, it's an organization created by Byelorussians to help fellows Byelorussians that has to leave Byelorussia for political reasons and persecutions. Now I'm part of this organization as volunteer... [PR7]</i></p> <p><i>At the beginning the X2 helped me to find a house... [PR3]</i></p> <p><i>When we arrived in Spain we were staying in the camp of Zaragoza, after 3 weeks there we asked for help to the X3 <...> The organization and the family of my husband helped us to find a house. [PR10]</i></p> <p><i>We got this house thanks to this organization, but I don't remember the name a non-profit organization from America <...> They helped us to get this apartment, they allowed me to choose the apartment... [PR2]</i></p> |
| | Choosing a school | <p><i>X3 thought about it, but I have advised them to choose the school more closed to our home... [PR1]</i></p> <p><i>...when I arrived in the hostel I met this family from Byelorussia with a daughter of the same age of O., and</i></p> |

| Category | Sub-categories | Supporting quotation |
|----------|-------------------|--|
| | | <p><i>the mother gave me the contact of the secretary of the school, for this it was quite simple... [PR7]</i></p> <p><i>Everything was not done by me, yes it took time for them to get a school when we arrived last year <...> The school started at the end of October, but they joined in November. The American organization chose the school. [PR2]</i></p> |
| | Emotional support | <p><i>We found good people, everyone was helping, we found good people in the centre who helped us with all they could, clothes, items for the hygiene and all they could... [PR8]</i></p> <p><i>We feel that people are taking care of us, supporting us and are willing to help us... [R7]</i></p> <p><i>Great people helped us, they treated us as their relatives <...> As we arrived, they accepted us very warmly with understanding and support... [PR5]</i></p> <p><i>When I crossed the border, a volunteer came with a car to pick me up and the brought me to the hostel. They also gave me a mentor, a person local, he is a local guy Lithuanian, he visited me several times, he helped me with the visa matter, because <...> I was also advised about employment, housing, searching for a flat... [PR7]</i></p> |

Source: Master's Thesis author's elaboration based on Interviews with young migrants and their parents, 2022-2023.

The first support provided to the interviewed families was in finding a home, as emphasized by R9's mother: *"We were helped by a charity organization called X1, it's an organization created by Byelorussians to help fellows Byelorussians that has to leave Byelorussia for political reasons and persecutions. Now I'm part of this organization as volunteer..." [PR7].*

R2 and R3's mother also tells how she was helped in the beginning: *"We got this house thanks to this organization, but I don't remember the name a non-profit organization from America <...> They helped us to get this apartment, they allowed me to choose the apartment..." [PR2].*

In the case of R14 and R15, the family was not only helped by an organization but also had the support of their own family members, the mother reports: *"When we arrived in Spain we were staying in the camp of Zaragoza, after 3 weeks there we asked for help to the X3 <...> The organization and the family of my husband helped us to find a house." [PR10].*

An element of fundamental importance for the integration of foreign children is the possibility to access school services. From this point of view, the families interviewed identified that it was not complicated to find a school in which to place their children. Particularly when it comes to sisters R2 and R3, the mother reported: *“Everything was not done by me, yes it took time for them to get a school when we arrived last year <...> The school started at the end of October, but they joined in November. The American organization chose the school...”* [PR2]. The same is reported by R1’s mother who attaches great importance to Caritas, saying: *“The X2 thought about it, but I have advised them to choose the school more closed to our home...”* [PR1].

In addition to non-profit organizations, as we have said, of fundamental importance are also the communities in the receiving area, particularly communities that may have nationality as a common element. An example is the story of R9, whose mother reports: *“...when I arrived in the hostel I met this family from Byelorussia with a daughter of the same age of O., and the mother gave me the contact of the secretary of the school, for this it was quite simple...”* [PR7].

Finally, another very important element that can contribute to the integration of a person is the host community, its willingness to help such a person, and its ability to keep an open mind to what is different. As some interviewees report, there were occasions when the emotional help provided by the host community was of fundamental help. For example, as R12’s mother reports, they were surrounded by good people who also provided them with help in terms of material resources: *“We found good people, everyone was helping, we found good people in the centre who helped us with all they could, clothes, items for the hygiene and all they could...”* [PR8].

R6’s family also enjoyed a warm welcome from the point of view of the host society, the mother says: *“Great people helped us, they treated us as their relatives <...> As we arrived, they accepted us very warmly with understanding and support...”* [PR5].

Providing emotional support, in addition to the residents, as we have already mentioned, are also people from non-profit organizations in the area, which specifically deal with the first phase of migrants' reception; an example of this is R9’s mother, who reports: *“When I crossed the border a volunteer came with a car to pick me up and she brought me to the hostel. They also gave me a mentor, a person local, he is a local guy Lithuanian, he visited me several times, he helped me with the visa matter, because... I was also advised about employment, housing, searching for a flat...”* [PR7].

In summary, the data collected show that once migrant families arrived in the host territory, they received help from local organizations, social services, and the community. In particular, the mothers highlighted how this support has been particularly effective in finding appropriate housing and schooling close to home for their children. The majority of those interviewed highlighted that as

soon as they arrived in the host country, they felt intense solidarity from the host society; therefore, it is highlighted that emotional support is fundamental for a migrant child and his or her family.

3.3. Discussion on Research Findings

As reported by the IOM (2019), there are different categories of migration: circular, temporary, family reunification, etc. that mainly concerns the movement of an entire family unit to a new country. In the Master's Thesis survey, these different types of movement were identified.

There are various reasons that lead an individual to take the decision to leave their home country. In specific cases, people have been forced to emigrate because of dangerous circumstances, such as war, persecution, and genocide (Davidson, 2012). Part of interviewees reported that the decision to migrate was caused by political persecution, particularly for families from Belarus now living in Lithuania; or because of conflicts, particularly that concerning Ukraine. Another reason reported was to seek work, who are defined as economic migrants, as they move from country to country to improve their living conditions (Openpolis, 2021).

One element to consider is the ease in the integration process of the family, and in particular of minors, when family reunification rather than forced migration takes place. This concept was emphasized in the interview with the family coming from Senegal and now residing in Italy; first of all, this family nucleus, unlike the other interviewees, did not obtain any support from local NGOs, since the father of the family had already looked for a house and having a stable job was able to support his family until the mother was also able to start working. This "ease" in starting a new life in a foreign country was not experienced by any of the other interviewed families, who received important support, especially as soon as they arrived, from local organizations and social services.

Among different reasons that drive a family unit to emigrate, there are the security and stability that cannot be found in the country of origin, due to various dangerous situations. As reported by the Theory of Change (ToC) (2019), there are several factors that facilitate a migrant's integration into the host country and among them are safety and stability, which can be also considered as pull factors.

Considering the interviews with migrants living in the Baltic States, it is evident that the leading causes of immigration in previous years were political persecution in Belarus and currently the conflict caused by Russia in Ukraine, which broke out in February 2022. In Southern European countries, we find similarities between Ukrainian families who immigrated to Italy and those who fled conflicts, particularly Syria, who immigrated to Spain. A different element highlighted is how the economic factor influenced such families to immigrate to Southern Europe more than to the Baltic

countries. A facilitating element also reported by the ToC to be taken into account is the communicative and linguistic aspect, for migrants in the Baltic countries there were fewer linguistic problems than for migrants in Southern European countries, as the Russian language is commonly spoken in Eastern Europe; on the contrary, for families who immigrated to Spain and Italy, it was necessary for them to learn the native language of the host country in order to integrate.

After the war broke out in Ukraine, the European Commission (2022) took certain measures to protect Ukrainian families, in particular, the children. The children from Ukraine must have access to their rights, psychological support, medical care, education, and a safe place to live.

These elements coincide with the Indicators of integration reported in “Means and Markers” of the Theory of Change (2019), which are considered the most relevant factors in achieving a level of integration that makes the migrant feel part of the host community. Developing one of these personal spheres may imply the development of a second sphere, such as having the opportunity to attend school. The latter may help a child in his or her approach to peers and may facilitate the development of lasting friendships. This phenomenon was emphasized by most of the children interviewed, who pointed out that most of their friendships developed within school walls. A smaller number of minors reported how they got to know their friends through sports activities outside the school environment, or within their own neighbourhood.

In this respect, no major differences were found within the countries studied, the children stated that it was easier for them to get to know other children at school, which is why school remains the main place where foreign and non-foreign children socialize.

One difference that can be highlighted is the children’s ease in integrating into their class; as has been pointed out above, language is a fundamental factor for integration to take place properly; the same happens in the school environment when the child does not understand the language used to communicate by teachers and other pupils, it is very complicated to make friends and learn on the same level as other students. The research shows that the Baltic countries are flexible enough for Russian-speaking children, with all the children interviewed coming from Belarus and Ukraine, but disadvantageous for all other foreign children not coming from Russian speaking countries, such as the case of the Congolese sisters currently living in Latvia. They underlined how they are struggling with the Latvian language and how difficult it is to understand any class that is not English. With regard to the children residing in Italy, it took more effort to learn Italian, but in two cases out of three, the children were relatively young, so the process of learning the language was fast, and they now possess a level equal to native Italians. The same concept can be applied to families from Venezuela, Syria, and Georgia living in Spain. The children from the first family did not notice any linguistic changes once they were placed in the new school, which is why adaptation was smoother

than for the Syrian and Georgian children, who had to learn the Spanish language slowly before being able to socialize with the classmates and receive a proper education.

According to Fucà (2019), one of the fundamental factors to guarantee the integration of a migrant in the host country is the possibility of accessing the labour market and being able to become economically independent. This factor was emphasized by many of the mothers interviewed, in particular mothers with a job emphasized how having a job makes them feel better about their family and makes their family feel stable in the host country. For some of these women, it was difficult to find a job and the search took a long time and required many changes of job; this is particularly highlighted by the mothers currently living in Italy, who managed to find a job thanks to the help of the local NGOs, which supported them during the first period of reception until they made sure they had a worthy job. On the contrary, families in which the parents are in difficulty from the labour point of view find it difficult to affirm that they feel settled in the host country. A striking example is the family living in Latvia; this family, consisting of a mother and three minor daughters, despite having the support of social services, has not yet found economic stability. The mother repeated several times during the interview how the situation for the entire family is not the easiest from several points of view, first and foremost due to the lack of work, the integration difficulties encountered by the daughters in school, and the housing situation.

Having the possibility to have a home appropriate to the needs of the family unit is important to be able to create a comfortable and familiar environment. The children interviewed often emphasised that they would like to have more privacy in their own home by having their own room, without having to share it with their brothers or sisters or parents. This wish was generally expressed by the children, regardless of their host country; most of the families live in small flats near the centre of the capital in the case of the Baltic countries, which, according to the children interviewed, do not offer enough green areas or space to play with other children. As far as children living in Italy and Spain are concerned, the research was not carried out in the capital, but in small towns, which is why some of the homes are more spacious, suitable for the number of people in the household and inexpensive, but the desire to have more green areas nearby is always emphasised.

One more very important aspect in addition to the house itself is the relationships established within the neighbourhood. Very often the lack of social relations with one's neighbours was highlighted; many minors express how they never had the opportunity to see or meet their neighbours and got to know them. Fewer participants reported that they know their neighbours and get along well with them.

The decision to migrate is generally made by the parents and the children consequently follow the events and suffer the consequences. The impact that this choice has on their academic

performance is one of the major repercussions on migrant children's lives. Schnepf (2008) claims that there is a significant gap between the academic performance of native and immigrant pupils, with the socioeconomic status of the family that the student belongs to being the primary source of this phenomena.

From the data collected from the research, it is important to emphasize that all children interviewed are currently attending school, in a class appropriate for their age group. In most situations, the school selection and integration process was relatively quick and smooth, thanks to the support provided by local organizations, social services, or family and friends in the area. In a few particular cases, such as the Congolese sisters who had to wait four months before starting school, this factor made integration into the class even more complicated. The choice of school was based in most cases on two main factors, proximity to home and the language spoken mainly in the school. As far as Lithuania and Latvia are concerned, there are different school choices. These countries also offer the possibility of enrolling their children in schools whose primary language is Russian. This has facilitated the integration of Ukrainian and Belarusian children, although some parents interviewed in Lithuania pointed out that it has not been possible to find vacancies in such schools and they have been forced to enrol their children in schools with Lithuanian as the primary language. With regard to families residing in Italy and Spain, the selection criterion was mainly based on proximity to home, as a second language other than the national language is not commonly used in these countries.

Students from immigrant backgrounds frequently struggle to adjust to the new school and educational environment (European Commission, n.d.). As mentioned above, one of the two problems highlighted by the minors interviewed was the difficulty in communicating with teachers and classmates in the absence of a common language. Related to this is the difficulty in creating friendship relationships with peers, situations that evolve in some cases even into conflicts and unpleasant moments. On one occasion, a child from Belarus living in Lithuania pointed out how he was unable to get along with his classmates following the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Additionally, some interviewees emphasized a specific school subject as a difficulty in school.

During the interview, the children evaluated their school experience in four basic aspects: communication with teachers and classmates, the content of education, the environment of the school, and relations with teachers and other children. Most of the children gave positive overall feedback on their school experience. Concerning the children living in Italy, a problem of the poor quality of the school structure was highlighted, but they gave positive marks in the other three spheres. The children residing in Spain also gave a very positive overall grade but highlighted more difficulties from the communication point of view. The children living in Latvia gave average marks in all four spheres,

highlighting, in particular, difficulty in communicating with teachers and classmates. The children living in Lithuania gave similar grades to those in Latvia, but in case of communication problems, they also showed a slight dispute with the subjects taught.

Capital and social networks, defined as those connections that exist between individuals, such as friendships and family, are two essential components for an individual's proper integration (Alba and Nee, 2003). The relationships between individuals are considered to be the first group, while the mechanisms that establish and regulate social relationships within society are considered to be the second group. Both groups are responsible for upholding the norms and principles necessary to ensure appropriate interactions in society.

Through data collection, it was possible to note three fundamental aspects of a stable and supportive social network for foreign minors within the host country. The first is maintaining relations with family members living abroad, which is done through the use of various technological means, such as telephones and computers, suitable for making calls and video calls. Most of the interviewed families pointed out that thanks to technology, they manage to maintain stable relationships with their loved ones residing in their home country and beyond. In only one specific case, related to a Belarusian family living in Lithuania, the mother explained how due to political persecution in Belarus, she had to cut off contact with some family members and friends to avoid putting their lives at risk. The interviews revealed that it is predominantly the parents who maintain family contacts, the children in turn communicate with relatives, but to a lesser extent than the parents. As part of the research, the children were asked whether they would be willing to draw their family members, leaving them completely free to choose the mode. Some of the children interviewed agreed to this and drew their own families. Some of the children, particularly those living in Spain, chose to make their drawings using colours, while the other children decided not to use any colours. The peculiarity of the drawings made by Ukrainian children was highlighted, which were in one case more essential and stylized, and in one case more detailed, but dark and grey. In this second drawing, in fact, the child decided to represent the members of her family separated into "boxes" and without a real face, but simply drawing a cross on all the faces, avoiding expressing any feelings of positivity or light-heartedness, feelings that should naturally belong to children.

A second factor that emerged as fundamental in building friendship relationships is interaction at school. School turns out to be the key place for all the children interviewed to meet new friends. Such friendships sometimes extend beyond the school walls, but on most occasions, the children emphasized that they see their friends during breaks at school and spend most of their time playing, talking, and going for walks. During the interviews, the children were asked whether, apart from school, they had other places where they had made friends. Some children reported that they

did not engage in any extra-school activities and had no particular intention of starting one, especially the children resident in Lithuania. All the children interviewed resident in Italy stated that they attended at least one sport activity per week; on the contrary, the children resident in Spain indicated that they did not attend any extra-curricular activity, but that they would like to start one.

As mentioned above, to develop friendships, it is essential to be able to communicate, and to do so it is necessary to share a common language, which is often complicated for a migrant child. If the migration of the family nucleus took place when the child was very young, as in some of the interviewees' cases, the school integration and language learning was more immediate and did not make any difference for the child; in cases where the children started a new school in a foreign country when they were over 10 years old, it was certainly more difficult for them to integrate into their class and make new friends. Such is the case with several of the children interviewed, who still have not managed to develop real friendships.

As the Theory of Change (2019) states, the factor of health and social care is one of the fundamental and basic factors for successful integration within the host community. During the study, the respondents were asked several questions to investigate the family situation from the point of view of health. A high number of the children stated that they had at least once used local health services, either by going to a hospital or to private clinics. In fact, the choice of healthcare facility depends on the urgency of the situation, with some mothers pointing out that sometimes they had to go to private clinics in order to speed up access to the service; in several cases, people always preferred to go to the public hospital or the emergency room. In general, easy access to healthcare services in the Baltic countries as well as in Southern Europe is highlighted.

On more element emphasized by the mothers was the ease and lack of problems encountered in obtaining a family doctor and paediatrician for minors. In fact, several mothers pointed out that they get along well with their family doctors and if they need a consultation, they are frequently available. The social services have in some cases helped these families to get to know the doctor and put them in contact, in other cases such as the Congolese family living in Latvia or two of the Ukrainian families living in Lithuania, the mothers reported how they are still waiting to have an appointment with the doctor. A single case of Syrian family living in Spain reported communication difficulties with the family doctor, which did not always lead to a positive trend in the use of the service.

The role of the mothers in the interviews was to give more detailed and deeper information on the issues discussed. The answers given by the mothers were encapsulated in the last category concerning the support received by the family unit within the host country. The mothers highlighted three cases in which the support they received from social services, territorial NGOs, and the local

community, particularly: in choosing a school for their children, finding housing, and emotional support. One of the first help received by the interviewed families was the search for a house, in most cases this help was provided by the territorial NGOs or the social services of the municipality, this result was found in all four countries studied. In particular, strong support from an organization was found for migrants from Belarus now residing in Lithuania and in general for all migrants residing in the Baltic country. Concerning the South European countries, territorial organizations helped families, but the support received from family and friends also helped people to find appropriate housing. In particular, for the Senegalese family now living in Italy, it was emphasized by the mother that no organization or social services had supported them in finding a house, as the husband had already been living in the country for several years or finding a school for their daughters. On the other hand, there is a substantial difference with the other families interviewed, who, lacking any family or friends' support, found fundamental support from local NGOs, which helped the families both to find a suitable home and a school for the minors in the household.

Finding a school in which to place their children was of paramount importance, as it would allow the children to continue their school education without falling behind their peers. The search and selection of the school were ensured by the family's referral organization on most occasions, except for the families living in Lithuania, who stated that they searched for the school on their own, either by receiving recommendations from other families of the same nationality or by checking online for the most recommended school close to their home.

In addition to the support received from the local organizations and social services, the families interviewed emphasized in most cases that the warm welcome they received at the beginning from the host community was fundamental. All the families underlined their feelings of anxiety, fear for the future, uncertainty, and tiredness as soon as they arrived in the new country; these feelings gradually improved with time and the emotional support received. Families residing in Southern European countries highlighted how grateful they were to the organizations that had welcomed them in the first period of need, specifying in particular that there were prejudices on their part against Italians in particular, but that these negative prejudices disappeared once they arrived in Italy and got to know many Italians. Initial episodes of racism are highlighted by the Syrian family living in Spain, which diminish once the family starts learning Spanish and thus can communicate with locals. Regarding the reception received in the Baltic States, it is evident that the Belarusian families, who were initially received warmly and helpfully, are viewed differently after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, with more hostility and resentment. On the contrary, the families from Ukraine have in most cases met with kind and helpful staff, also providing material aid such as clothes and hygiene products. One family in particular points out that at first, they perceived themselves to be observed

by the local community, and to be perceived as strangers, but over time they say they no longer feel uncomfortable, and that people have become accustomed to their presence.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The first objective of the research was to theoretically explore the phenomenon of child immigration in the European Union. After conducting the research, it can be stated that the European Union is a territory that is highly affected by the worldwide migration phenomenon; therefore, there are both international and national regulations in place, which allow migrants to maintain their fundamental rights and to be welcomed and integrated in a dignified manner within the host country. These reforms and action plans allow the European Union to have standardized basic levels that must be respected throughout the entire territory while leaving each Member State the possibility of integrating different reforms more suited to its own territory. Within the four countries studied, the Baltic and Southern European countries, integrative policies towards migrants, especially minors, were highlighted, demonstrating that there are fundamental NGOs for the initial reception and integration of these people on the territory. However, we highlight the substantial difference in the number and origin of the migratory flow in the two groups of countries studied.
2. The second objective of the thesis is to analyse the practical issues integrated into immigration policies that help immigrant children to integrate into the host country, in particular the Baltic and Southern European countries. Through the analysis of literature reviews and various immigration theories, questions were formulated that could help to highlight factors that help immigrant children to integrate into their new host country. As a result of the data collection, key elements were highlighted that could contribute to the integration process of the interviewed households, especially focusing on minors. The first element identified was the possibility of living in a home appropriate to the needs of the family unit, which could be located in a quiet neighbourhood close to a school. The second fundamental factor for children is access to schooling, which allows them to meet new people and form solid friendships, which can greatly help the child's social skills. Having points of reference within one's family has proven to be fundamental in ensuring that children have a stable social network, which is expanded once the child starts attending school and extracurricular activities, most commonly a sports activity. A very important factor for such friendships to form is the sharing of a common language, which is fundamental both within school walls and in everyday situations. A fundamental aspect of complete integration is the possibility offered to the family to access the health services in the host territory, in addition to all the services belonging to social services or private organizations in charge of hosting migrants.

3. The third and final objective of the research is to study the level of immigrant children's integration in the Baltic and Southern European countries. Following the analysis of the data collected, it can be seen that children who are able to speak the language of the host country are fully integrated into the host community, whereas it is more complicated for those who have recently arrived in the new country and come from a country that has no language in common with the host country. Most of the children still residing in Lithuania are well integrated from an educational and social point of view, there are some complications from the point of view of discrimination and total acceptance by the host community; on the contrary, for the children residing in Latvia, the integration process is far from being achieved because of the language barrier, the unsuitable housing situation and above all the lack of economic independence of the family, due to the mother's difficulty in finding a job. As far as migrant children in southern European countries are concerned, knowledge of the host country's mother tongue is still fundamental, even more so than in Baltic countries. Most of the children living in Italy are well integrated into the host community, as a result of not recent migration, which allowed them to go to Italian school from an early age, thus facilitating the learning of the Italian language. In general, the families are well-integrated and independent. The children residing in Spain also appear to be in the process of integrating, with the exception of one case in which the child states that he or she has not yet formed any friendships 1.5 years after arriving in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To national or / and local level authorities responsible for education:

As a result of this study, it became clear that knowledge of the host country's mother tongue is essential to ensure an adequate integration process. For this reason, free language courses should be guaranteed and made available to foreign children in various schools or specialized reception centres. Such courses could be used not only as a method of learning a language but also as a tool for children to socialize with other foreign children, perhaps of the same nationality and create bonds of friendship.

2. To social workers working in municipalities or NGOs:

Following the analysis of the collected data, it is evident that the role of social workers within NGOs and municipalities is of fundamental help and importance for the reception and initiation of the integration process of migrant minors. A suggestion for social workers is that, in addition to keeping themselves up-to-date on new reforms related to the migration phenomenon, it is important they make the host community inclusive. For this to be achieved, social workers need to work with the host society, sharing information about the migration phenomenon and organizing joint recreational and social activities for the migrant families and the local community. These activities aim not only to bring people from different cultures together but also to break down stereotypes and prejudices on both sides.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants' children

| Interview guidelines | Questions |
|---|---|
| Social-demographic characteristics of immigrant children. | 1. What is your name? How old are you? Where are you from? 2. When did you arrive in the host country? How old were you? 3. Did you arrive alone or with someone? 4. How did you arrive? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Housing. | 5. Where are you living currently? 6. With whom are you living? 7. How do you like your house and neighbourhood? 8. Would you like to change something of your house and neighbourhood? If yes, what? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Family and friends. | 9. Would you like to draw your family? (If the minor is under 12) 10. Do you have any relatives in other countries? If yes, where are they? 11. Do you communicate with them? How do you communicate with them and how often? 12. Do you have any friends in the host country? 13. Where did you meet them? 14. What do you do together? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Education. | 15. Are you going to school this year? If yes: Which grade? If not: Would you like to go? 16. Have you ever been to school in your home country? If yes: How many years did you attend? 17. How would you describe your life at school in the host country? Rate these elements from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 the best. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication with teachers and classmates. - Content of education (subjects). - Environment of the school. - Relations with teachers and classmates. 18. Do you face any problems or difficulties at school? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in | 19. Are you following any extracurricular activities? If yes: which one? |

| Interview guidelines | Questions |
|---|--|
| the EU: Integration and social programmes. | If not: would you like to join any? 20. How would you describe your understanding and speaking level of the host language? Do you like speaking it? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Access to healthcare. | 21. Have you ever been to the hospital or to a clinic to see a general doctor? |

Annex 2.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants – parents

| Interview guidelines | Questions |
|---|--|
| Social-demographic characteristics of immigrant children. | 1. How the decision to come in the host country was done? How did you inform the child/children? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Housing. | 2. How did your family find a place where to live at the beginning? 3. Did you receive any support in the research? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Education. | 4. Was it difficult to find a proper school for your child/children at the beginning? How did you select it? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Access to healthcare. | 5. Does your family have a family doctor here, in the host country? If yes: Do you know him/her? Have you ever needed him/her? Have you ever faced any problems to access this service? |
| Integration of immigrants' children in the EU: Asylum procedures. | 6. What did you do when you first arrived in the host country? 7. How did you feel? 8. Are you and your family settled now? How long did it take to do it? 9. How were you and your family supported at the arrival and nowadays? 10. How did you perceive the people in the host country at first and nowadays? |

Annex 3.

Informed consent

Informed consent

The following is a presentation of how I will use the data collected in the interview.

In order to ensure that projects meet the ethical requirements for good research I promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees have the right to decide whether they will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for the researcher to document what is said during the interview session and helps in the analysis work of the project. In my analysis, some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. The data I collect will only be used in this project.

You have the right to decline answering any questions or terminate the interview without giving an explanation. You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

Student name & e-mail:

Adele Della Pietà

adele.della.pieta@gmail.com

Supervisor name & e-mail:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vida Česnūitytė

v.cesnūityte@mruni.eu

Interviewee name and surname:

Signature:

Annex 4.

Consent to conduct interviews

**MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL STUDIES
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND SOCIAL WORK
DOC. DR. VIDA ČESNUITYTĖ**

To Whom It Might Concern

REQUEST

2022-06-27

Vilnius

I hereby request to allow Adele Della Pieta, a 1st-year student of full-time studies in Erasmus Mundus funded European Joint Master in Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY) to carry out a research project for her Master's thesis on the topic of "Immigrants children: a comparative study between Baltic countries and South European countries" at the institution under your supervision. Aim of the research: to explore the integration of the migrants from third countries' children in European Union countries.

ESWOCHY is implemented by the universities of the Consortium that is Mykolas Romeris University (LT), Riga Stradins University (LV), The Catholic University in Ruzomberok (Slovakia) and ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon (PT).

Supervisor of Master Thesis:



Doc. Dr. Vida Česnuitytė

Director of Institute of
Educational Sciences and
Social Work



Prof. Dr. Valdonė Indrašienė

Annex 5.

Non-plagiarism declaration

Submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Child and Youth:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize and will result in a failing grade in the programme.

Date: 23/05/2023

Signature: 

Name (in block letters): ADELE DELLA PIETA'

Annex 6.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants' children in Spanish

| Directrices de la entrevista | Preguntas |
|--|--|
| Características sociodemográficas de los niños inmigrantes. | 1. ¿Cómo te llamas? 2. ¿Cuántos años tienes? ¿De dónde eres? 2. ¿Cuándo llegaste al país de acogida? ¿Cuántos años tenías? 3. ¿Llegaste solo o acompañado? 4. ¿Cómo llegó? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Vivienda. | 5. ¿Dónde vives actualmente? 6. ¿Con quién vive? 7. ¿Qué le parecen su casa y su barrio? 8. ¿Te gustaría cambiar algo de tu casa y de tu barrio? En caso afirmativo, ¿qué? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Familia y amigos. | 9. ¿Te gustaría dibujar a tu familia? (Si el menor tiene menos de 12 años) 10. ¿Tienes familiares en otros países? En caso afirmativo, ¿dónde están? 11. ¿Se comunica con ellos? ¿Cómo se comunica con ellos y con qué frecuencia? 12. ¿Tienes amigos en el país de acogida? 13. ¿Dónde los conociste? 14. ¿Qué hacen juntos? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Educación. | 15. ¿Vas a la escuela este año? En caso afirmativo: ¿En qué curso? En caso negativo: ¿Te gustaría ir? 16. ¿Has ido alguna vez a la escuela en tu país de origen? En caso afirmativo: ¿Cuántos años fuiste? 17. ¿Cómo describirías tu vida escolar en el país de acogida? Puntúa estos elementos del 1 al 5, donde 1 es lo más bajo y 5 lo mejor. - Comunicación con profesores y compañeros. - Contenido de la enseñanza (asignaturas). - Entorno del colegio. - Relaciones con profesores y compañeros de clase. 18. ¿Tienes problemas o dificultades en el colegio? |

| Directrices de la entrevista | Preguntas |
|---|--|
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Integración y programas sociales. | 19. ¿Sigues alguna actividad extraescolar? En caso afirmativo: ¿a cuál? En caso negativo: ¿te gustaría apuntarte a alguna? 20. ¿Cómo describirías tu nivel de comprensión y expresión oral de la lengua de acogida? ¿Le gusta hablarla? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Acceso a la asistencia sanitaria. | 21. ¿Ha ido alguna vez al hospital o a una clínica para ver a un médico general? |

Annex 7.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants – parents in Spanish

| Directrices de la entrevista | Preguntas |
|---|---|
| Características sociodemográficas de los niños inmigrantes. | 1. ¿Cómo se tomó la decisión de venir al país de acogida? ¿Cómo se informó al niño o niños? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Vivienda. | 2. Al principio, ¿cómo encontró su familia un lugar donde vivir? 3. ¿Recibió algún tipo de ayuda en la investigación? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Educación. | 4. ¿Fue difícil encontrar un colegio adecuado para su hijo o hijos al principio? ¿Cómo lo seleccionó? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Acceso a la asistencia sanitaria. | 5. ¿Tiene su familia un médico de familia aquí, en el país de acogida? En caso afirmativo: ¿Le conoce? ¿Lo ha necesitado alguna vez? ¿Ha tenido algún problema para acceder a este servicio? |
| Integración de los hijos de inmigrantes en la UE: Procedimientos de asilo. | 6. ¿Qué hizo cuando llegó por primera vez al país de acogida? 7. ¿Cómo se sintió? 8. ¿Están usted y su familia instalados ahora? ¿Cuánto tiempo tardasteis en hacerlo? 9. ¿Cómo os apoyaron a ti y a tu familia a la llegada y en la actualidad? 10. 10. ¿Cómo percibía a la gente del país de acogida al principio y en la actualidad? |

Annex 8.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants' children in Russian

| Руководство по собеседованию | Вопросы |
|--|--|
| Социально-демографические характеристики детей иммигрантов | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Как тебя зовут? Сколько вам лет? Откуда вы родом?2. Когда вы прибыли в принимающую страну? Сколько вам было лет?3. Вы приехали один или с кем-то?4. Как вы приехали? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Жилье. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Где вы проживаете в настоящее время?6. С кем вы живете?7. Как вам нравится ваш дом и район?8. Хотели бы вы изменить что-то в вашем доме и районе? Если да, то что? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Семья и друзья. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Хотел бы ты нарисовать свою семью? (Если несовершеннолетний младше 12 лет).10. Есть ли у вас родственники в других странах? Если да, то где они находятся?11. Общаетесь ли вы с ними? Как вы с ними общаетесь и как часто?12. Есть ли у вас друзья в стране пребывания?13. Где вы с ними познакомились?14. Чем вы занимаетесь вместе? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Образование. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">15. Пойдете ли вы в школу в этом году? Если да: в какой класс? Если нет: Хотел бы ты пойти?16. Ходили ли вы когда-нибудь в школу в вашей родной стране? Если да: Сколько лет вы учились?17. Как бы вы описали свою жизнь в школе в принимающей стране? Оцените эти элементы от 1 до 5, где 1 - самый низкий показатель, а 5 - самый лучший. - Общение с учителями и одноклассниками. |

| Руководство по собеседованию | Вопросы |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Содержание образования (предметы). - Обстановка в школе. - Отношения с учителями и одноклассниками. <p>18. Сталкиваетесь ли вы с какими-либо проблемами или трудностями в школе?</p> |
| <p>Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Интеграция и социальные программы.</p> | <p>19. Посещаете ли вы какие-либо внеклассные мероприятия? Если да: какие именно? Если нет: хотели бы вы присоединиться к каким-либо?</p> <p>20. Как бы вы описали свой уровень понимания и владения языком принимающей страны? Нравится ли вам говорить на нем?</p> |
| <p>Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Доступ к здравоохранению.</p> | <p>21. Были ли вы когда-нибудь в больнице или в поликлинике на приеме у врача общей практики?</p> |

Annex 9.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants – parents in Russian

| Руководство по собеседованию | Вопросы |
|---|---|
| Социально-демографические характеристики детей иммигрантов. | 1. Как было принято решение о приезде в принимающую страну? Как вы информировали ребенка/детей? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Жилье. | 2. Как ваша семья вначале нашла место, где жить? 3. Получали ли вы какую-либо поддержку в ходе исследования? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Образование. | 4. Трудно ли было вначале найти подходящую школу для вашего ребенка/детей? Как вы ее выбирали? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Доступ к здравоохранению. | 5. Есть ли у вашей семьи семейный врач здесь, в стране пребывания? Если да: знаете ли вы его/ее? Приходилось ли вам обращаться к нему/ней? Сталкивались ли вы с какими-либо проблемами при получении доступа к этой услуге? |
| Интеграция детей иммигрантов в ЕС: Процедуры предоставления убежища. | 6. Что вы делали, когда впервые прибыли в принимающую страну? 7. Как вы себя чувствовали? 8. Устроились ли вы и ваша семья сейчас? Сколько времени для этого потребовалось? 9. Как вам и вашей семье оказывали поддержку по прибытии и в настоящее время? 10. Как вы воспринимали людей в принимающей стране вначале и в настоящее время? |

Annex 10.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants' children in Italian

| Linee guida per i colloqui | Domande |
|--|---|
| Caratteristiche socio-demografiche dei bambini immigrati. | 1. Come ti chiami? Quanti anni hai? Da dove vieni? 2. Quando sei arrivato nel Paese ospitante? Quanti anni avevi? 3. Sei arrivato da solo o con qualcuno? 4. Come sei arrivato? |
| Integrazione dei figli degli immigrati nell'UE: L'alloggio. | 5. Dove vivi attualmente? 6. Con chi vivi? 7. Ti piace la tua casa e il tuo quartiere? 8. Vorresti cambiare qualcosa della tua casa e del tuo quartiere? Se sì, cosa? |
| Integrazione dei figli degli immigrati nell'UE: Famiglia e amici. | 9. Ti andrebbe di disegnare la tua famiglia? (Se il minore ha meno di 12 anni) 10. Hai parenti in altri Paesi? Se sì, dove si trovano? 11. Comunichi con loro? Come comunichi con loro e con quale frequenza? 12. Hai amici nel Paese ospitante? 13. Dove li ha conosciuti? 14. Cosa fate insieme? |
| Integrazione dei figli degli immigrati nell'UE: Istruzione. | 15. Vai a scuola quest'anno? Se sì: in quale classe? Se no: vorresti andarci? 16. Hai mai frequentato una scuola nel tuo Paese? Se sì: per quanti anni l'ha frequentata? 17. Come descriveresti la tua vita scolastica nel Paese ospitante? Dai un voto da 1 a 5 a questi elementi, dove 1 è il voto più basso e 5 il migliore. - Comunicazione con insegnanti e compagni. - Contenuto dell'istruzione (materie). - Ambiente scolastico. |

| Linee guida per i colloqui | Domande |
|---|---|
| | <p>- Relazioni con insegnanti e compagni.</p> <p>18. Ha incontrato problemi o difficoltà a scuola?</p> |
| <p>Integrazione dei figli di immigrati nell'UE: Programmi di integrazione e sociali.</p> | <p>19. Segui qualche attività extrascolastica?</p> <p>Se sì: quali?</p> <p>Se no: vorresti partecipare a qualche attività?</p> <p>20. Come descriveresti il tuo livello di comprensione e di conversazione della lingua ospitante? Ti piace parlarla?</p> |
| <p>Integrazione dei figli degli immigrati nell'UE: Accesso all'assistenza sanitaria.</p> | <p>21. Sei mai stato in ospedale o in una clinica per consultare un medico generico?</p> |

Annex 11.

Guidelines for the interviews with immigrants – parents in Italian

| Linee guida per i colloqui | Domande |
|---|--|
| Caratteristiche socio-demografiche dei bambini immigrati. | 1. Come è stata presa la decisione di venire nel Paese ospitante? Come avete informato il/la bambino/a? |
| Integrazione dei figli di immigrati nell'UE: L'alloggio. | 2. Come ha fatto la vostra famiglia a trovare un posto dove vivere all'inizio? 3. Ha ricevuto qualche sostegno durante la ricerca? |
| Integrazione dei figli degli immigrati nell'UE: Istruzione. | 4. All'inizio è stato difficile trovare una scuola adeguata per i vostri figli? Come l'avete selezionata? |
| Integrazione dei figli di immigrati nell'UE: Accesso all'assistenza sanitaria. | 5. La sua famiglia ha un medico di famiglia qui, nel Paese ospitante? Se sì: lo conosce? Ha mai avuto bisogno di lui/lei? Ha mai incontrato problemi per accedere a questo servizio? |
| Integrazione dei figli di immigrati nell'UE: Procedure di asilo. | 6. Cosa avete fatto quando siete arrivati nel Paese ospitante? 7. Come si è sentito/a? 8. Lei e la sua famiglia vi siete sistemati ora? Quanto tempo ci è voluto per farlo? 9. Come siete stati aiutati voi e la vostra famiglia all'arrivo e al giorno d'oggi? 10. Come avete percepito la gente del Paese ospitante all'inizio e oggi? |