Supporting migrant students through the pandemic and beyond

El apoyo a estudiantes inmigrantes durante y después de la pandemia

Alessio D'Angelo, Sílvia Carrasco, Roberta Ricucci (eds.)

SUPPORTING MIGRANT STUDENTS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

EL APOYO A ESTUDIANTES INMIGRANTES DURANTE Y DESPUÉS DE LA PANDEMIA

Alessio D'Angelo, Sílvia Carrasco, Roberta Ricucci (eds.)

This issue brings together some of the papers presented at the international online conference 'Learning for Citizenship: supporting migrant students in uncertain times', hosted on 25th and 26th May 2021. The event was organised by the University of Nottingham; the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR); the EMIGRA-CER-Migracions of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; and the University of Turin; co-funded by the UK Social Policy Association (SPA). For further information see the introduction.

Este número reúne las ponencias presentadas en la conferencia internacional 'Learning for Citizenship: supporting migrant students in uncertain times', celebrada el 25 y el 26 de Mayo de 2021. El encuentro fue organizado por la Universidad de Nottingham, el National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIERS); el grupo EMIGRA-CER-Migracions de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; y la Universidad de Turín; y fue co-financiado por La Social Policy Association (SPA) del Reino Unido. Para más información véase la introducción.

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Focus on international migration és una col·lecció d'accés obert promoguda i coordinada pel **CER-Migracions** de la UAB-UB, centre de recerca interdisciplinària per a l'estudi de les migracions internacionals. L'objectiu de la col·lecció és consolidar un espai online de divulgació acadèmica que permeti fer arribar a la comunitat científica i al públic general interessat, treballs inèdits individuals i col·lectius que suposin rellevants aportacions teòriques, empíriques i/o metodològiques per a l'estudi de les migracions internacionals.

Focus on international migration es una colección de acceso abierto promovida y coordinada por el **CER-Migracions** de la UAB-UB, centro de investigación interdisciplinar para el estudio de las migraciones internacionales. El objetivo de la colección es consolidar un espacio online de divulgación académica que permita hacer llegar a la comunidad científica y al público general interesado, trabajos inéditos individuales y colectivos que supongan relevantes aportaciones teóricas, empíricas y/o metodológicas para el estudio de las migraciones internacionales.

Focus on international migration is an open access collection promoted and coordinated by **CER-Migracions** (UAB-UB), interdisciplinary research center for international migration study. The main aim of the collection is to consolidate an online resource for dissemination of relevant individual and collective works to the academic community and the wider public. The collection will include relevant theoretical, empirical and/or methodological contributions for the study of international migrations.

Focus on international migration est une collection d'accès libre promue et coordonnée par le **CER-Migracion**s de l'UAB-UB, centre de recherche interdisciplinaire spécialisé dans l'étude des migrations internationales. La collection a pour mission de renforcer un espace en ligne de divulgation académique à la communauté scientifique et à tout public intéressé, des ouvrages inédits, individuels et collectifs, qui impliquent des contributions importantes au niveau théorique, empirique et/ou méthodologique concernant l'étude des migrations internationales.

Content / Índice

Supporting migrant students through the pandemic and beyond – Introduction to the special issue

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The impact of Covid-19 on migrant and refugee students

The lockdowns and school 'closures' in response to the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic have caused major disruptions to the lives and educational experiences of everyone. As documented by a Eurydice (2022) report, many schools across Europe were "ill-prepared for this unprecedented situation", with staff having to adapt rapidly to distance teaching and, at least initially, students having to rely on their own resources. Thus, the impact of the pandemic and related lockdowns has not been the same for all, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds have faced disproportionate difficulties and widening educational gaps. In fact, since the first lockdowns of Spring 2020, distance learning has proved to be a multiplier of educational inequalities, at the intersection of class, gender, (dis) ability, ethnicity and migration status (Dimopoulos *et al*., 2021). Despite the best efforts of individual teachers, the state of prolonged disruption into which schools were drawn made it more likely for those already overlooked by national policies or local interventions to fall behind even further.

Whilst the first few months of the pandemic have been marked by unprecedented acts of community solidarity, we have also witnessed a reinforcement of divisions within and between societies. Exceptional measures have been put in place by governments across the whole of Europe, but some people seem to have been largely forgotten. Among these are students from migrant and refugee families, and particularly newly arrived migrants.

The public discourses around education and the pandemic hardly mention the experience of migrant people. Once again, migration figured largely as a thing to stop (or control ever more tightly); even as a potential source of viral contagion. Pro-migration stances have concentrated on the role of foreign workers within the economy (with many of them being 'key workers') and on the need to offer them a more stable legal status and to ensure they can access health-care and welfare support (Reid et al., 2021). These are of course fundamental issues that required – and in many cases still require – radical interventions. However, discussion of them has largely ignored the broader issues faced by migrant families; and particularly the right of their children to access education.

As we know from previous research, migrant and refugee students tend to be less familiar with the educational system and life in the host countries; and they often face challenges due to language barriers, limited resources and their traumatic personal experiences of immigration (Jalušič and Bajt, 2022). Targeted resources and interventions can be scarce, and constant changes to policy and funding frameworks make it difficult to sustain successful approaches. At the same time, the diversification and social stratification of many local settings requires interventions which identify such complexities and reject blanket approaches aiming at fixing 'problems' rather than recognising the individual needs of young people.

Moreover, for migrant students (and their families), schools represent not only spaces where knowledge and skills are acquired, but also crucial places for language acquisition and for integrating into the local community. For economically vulnerable migrant families, schools are often the first port of call to access information about public services and welfare support. Such scenario adds to the problems that have crystallised across Europe over the past few years. Whilst, on the one hand, many countries and regions have accumulated experiences of good practice, on the other, the volatility of their social and political contexts has posed continuous challenges. Among these, the emergence of new forms of nationalism, the hardening of migration policies and the redefinition of boundaries between and within national spaces, risk placing schools at the centre of controversies and contestations. Too often the presence of migrant students and families is seen as a potential burden rather than an opportunity for local administrators, school principals and local families who stress the negative impact of migrant pupils on the educational success of their children

All this raises issues for educators and policy makers, not only in terms of supporting migrant students' attainment, but also in terms of emotional support and ensuring that young people are not victims of discrimination and racism and that they can develop as full, active and accepted citizens within their communities (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Schaeffer, 2019). Thus, developing opportunities for joined-up thinking among scholars, practitioners and policy makers becomes a key priority. Whilst some of the challenges are country-specific, much can be learned from international exchange of research and practice.

About this special issue

This special issue stems from 'Learning from Citizenship'[1], an initiative to contribute to the development of international collaborations on "good practice of inclusion, engagement, practical and emotional support for migrant and refugee students". The network was kick-started in 2019 by the University of Nottingham (UK), the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain) and the University of Turin (Italy). The first major activity originally planned should have been a conference at the University of Nottingham in 2020, co-funded by the Social Policy Association (SPA). Because of the lockdown, that 'in person' event – like many others – had to be postponed. Eventually, the conference was re-focused on the impact of Covid-19 on migrant students and took place one year later as an online international event, bringing together scholars and practitioners from various European countries who have been working and continue to work on Education research and practical interventions.

1   https://learningforcitizenship.wordpress.com/

Some of those conference contributions have been further developed and updated into the articles presented within. This introduction is followed by a theoretical contribution by **Luisa Conti** on the 'systematic vulnerabilization of migrant students' and on how a dialogic approach can clear the way for change. The article reflects on the position of structural disadvantage in which migrant children have been finding themselves well before 2020, but also examines how the pandemic has exacerbated the situation. As pointed out by Conti, understanding the source of structural inequalities and the mechanisms of its production is the first step in counteracting its reproduction.

Such conceptual framework is followed by a series of national and local case studies, which make the bulk of this special collection. Firstly, **Silvia Carrasco Pons** and **Marina Pibernat Vila** present some of the findings emerging from a study undertaken in the midst of the pandemic with staff of secondary schools in Madrid and Barcelona. The focus is on the impact of Covid-19 and school closures on these students within the larger context of the transformations and readjustments experienced by all students from disadvantaged socio-economic background. The project presents particularly interesting insights about the differential relationship with technology and digital tools between boys and girls – and how this affected the ability to engage with school during lockdowns.

The next article – by **Roberta Ricucci**, **Tanja Schroot** and **Pietro Cingolani** – is also informed by interviews with teacher and educators, and it explores one primary school and two middle schools in the city of Turin, in Northern Italy. This piece of empirical research contributes to our understanding of the heterogeneous effects of the pandemic and how these are mediated by social and economic capital as well as by the migration status of students and their families. In Italy, as in other countries, the sudden shift to online learning put at risk some of the earlier approaches made to support recently arrived migrant students – including those with limited language proficiency – and revealed the importance of multi-actor interventions.

The role of different actors – including schools, families but also the community sector – is further examined by **Alessio D'Angelo** and **Chiara Manzoni**, who have been looking at the impacts and responses to the pandemic in the United Kingdom. Informed by a review of evidence and insights from two parallel nation-wide studies, the article presents the wide range of local responses that took place since Spring 2020 and highlights the importance of considering these in relation to wider UK discourses and policies around migration and education. In this respect, the experience of the pandemic has also represented an opportunity to rethink education through community collaborations and practitioners' networks.

The next article, by **Rachel Scott**, also uses the UK as a case study, but this time to focus on the specific issue of language and learning loss of pupils using English as Additional Language (EAL). The results of a large scale survey undertake by the Bell Foundation – alongside evidence submitted by teachers during school closures in England – reveal a clear pattern of language loss across primary and secondary school students, with concerns being raised also with regard to the impact on personal confidence. Once again, there is a significant intersection between being of a migrant background and having other types of socio-economic disadvantage.

All this points to the need of targeted educational support, which is the issue examined in the final article in this collection. The case study examined by **Johannes Reitinger**, **Michael Holzmayer** and **Michelle Proyer** is that of young people affected by forced migration and who, at the time of the 2020 pandemic, were living and studying in Austria. Working alongside NGOs, the authors undertook interviews with service-providers and a survey with school teachers, confirming a general need to catch up in terms of digital support, but also the need to develop and maintain support with work beyond the pedagogical – including psychological and social work.

Taken in its entirety, this collection represents an important contribution to address a knowledge gap in academic research that, over

the three years since the peak of the pandemic, remains quite considerable. Some of the studies presented here were developed fairly quickly as a reaction to the pandemic itself – and in difficult circumstances for the researchers themselves – or represented a repurposing of ongoing research activities. Other examples of this were presented and discussed at the 2020 conference of 'Leaning for Citizenship'[2]. This is testament to the determination of the research community and of its ability to draw on long-established networks of collaborations with schools, public and third sector organisations to respond to unprecedented challenges at national and local level. Needless to say, there is still much need for more systematic,

comparative research both on the impact of the pandemic itself and on the long-term effects on the educational outcomes, school inclusion experiences and personal trajectories of those young people who first arrived in Europe around the start of this decade. Even more, there is a need for research that can place the experiences and voices of students and their families at the very centre of the discussion. As usual, this will need time and adequate resources – which, in turn, requires the recognition of the educational needs of migrant, refugees and other marginalised students as an important part of the research and policy agenda, for the benefit of the whole educational system. Also in this respect, the hope is that this special collection can contribute to raising awareness and encourage more people to take things forward.

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2   The conference programme is still available here: https://learningforcitizenship.wordpress.com/2021/04/07/online-conference-supporting-migration-students-through-the-pandemic/

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Systematic vulnerabilization of migrant students. How the dialogic approach can clear the way for a change

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1. Introduction

The pandemic can be understood as a crisis within a crisis. Societies are more than ever facing the inevitable consequences of the pervasive tension caused, not least, by the industrial 'progress' of the so-called 'developed countries', imposed as a model worldwide (Bauman, 2000). The precept of growth accompanying this, together with a focus on capital and not on people and their lifeworld as a whole, produces crisis at different levels (Fotopoulos, 2009). In particular, the Global South, plundered of all kinds of resources since the beginning of colonialism, suffers the consequences (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2017). While migration itself is a constant of human history, in our time it repeatedly becomes a sudden reality and a forced choice for entire generations and communities who liquefy in dehumanized flows navigating a "liminal space" (Turner, 1977) potentially for the rest of their lives. The invention and erection of borders and recent regulations have, in many cases, transformed migration from process into living condition and migrants into immobilised agents trapped in "non-places" (Augé, 1992) at the mercy of the actions and decisions of others. The protection of borders has been given

priority over human rights, the rights of children, and asylum rights, as Lampedusa, Moria or the Poland-Belarus border exemplify in relation to "Fortress Europe" (Rivera, 2016).[3] Borders anyway do not end when the destination is reached: many further borders still have to be overcome on the way to equality which, no matter where, remains a utopia, and inequality a fundamental global problem (Koch, 2018). The pandemic has made these inequalities more and more evident, exacerbating existing ones and creating new ones (Benach, 2021).

This special issue focuses on *migrant students*; children, adolescents and young adults who have a higher probability of suffering from the policies related to the containment of the pandemic, being already in a disadvantaged position (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

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3 On Poland/Belarus border – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/12/press-briefing-notes-polandbelarus-border; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human rights: https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-calls-for-immediate-access-of-international-and-national-human-rights-actors-and-media-to-poland-s-border-with-belarus-in-order-to-end-hu On the implementation of hotspots: https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HOTSPOTS-Report-5.12.2016..pdf.

The question *how to support them?* goes therefore beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, as the main source of their vulnerable position is upstream from it. This chapter aims to shed light on core factors and mechanisms which produce and reproduce the disadvantage of the targeted population and to sketch alternative perspectives and practical strategies that make a real inclusive turn in education and beyond possible.

This paper is organised in two parts: the first one aims to depict the worsening of the situation of many migrant students during the pandemic (section 2) and to identify core causal factors (section 3); the second part juxtaposes the signalled problems to promising solutions (section 4).

Throughout the chapter, interdisciplinary critical theoretical reasoning intersects with empirical data. The meta-analysis carried out for this article corroborates recent cross-national data with data resulting from isolated local studies with focus on Europe. In this way local and global perspectives connect and the article meets the challenge of considering such global phenomena in a glocal way. The theoretical and practical proposals presented in this paper can be validated in and adapted to each specific context.

2. The Problem

The term 'migrant students', which depicts the protagonists of this volume, refers to millions of individuals who have in common two characteristics: they are school-aged and they left the country in which they were raised. In order to identify the reality that a significant part of this population has been facing during the pandemic, I integrate in this article specific data on migrant students with general data on *migrants* and on *students*.

2.1 Vulnerabilization of *Migrants* during the Pandemic

Empirical studies conducted in 2020 and 2021 show that migrants are among the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond education, on which the following sections focus, six main problem areas emerge from the analysis of the literature. Even if presented separately, they must be understood as interlinked:

1. *Work*: migrant workers are over-represented in lower paid, informal and temporary jobs as well as in sectors more affected by the pandemic, such as services – in particular, domestic services – and sales (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021; International Data Alliance for Children on the Move [IDAC], 2021; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020a; Vilá et al., 2021). This same group has, however, also limited access to financial measures introduced to mitigate economic loss (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021). Unemployment and loss of jobs lead to further drops towards and below the poverty line (Dempster et al., 2020; Taran and Kadysheva 2022).

2. *Residence*: As residence permits are frequently connected to employment status, the risk of expulsion has increased. Additionally, further mobility, including voluntary return to the countries of origin, has not been a possibility for many: beyond economic constraints, the closure and militarisation of the borders has made it extremely difficult or even impossible (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021).

3. *Segregation*: The so-called 'securitisation' of borders[4] reduced access to humanitarian support (Global Migration Data Portal, 2021; Priya Morley et al., 2021; You et al., 2020) and possibilities of family reunification, while delays in asylum programmes trap migrants in uncertainty (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021). In general, 'social distance' has strengthened segregation (Bhimji, 2021; Mukumbang 2021) and prolonged isolation increased barriers to access social protection programmes (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021).

4. *Housing*: Social isolation is also linked to housing conditions, and migrants are frequently relegated to remote, peripheral areas with less infrastructure and fewer mobility services, characterised by social and economic hardship (OECD, 2021). The quality of living conditions of migrants is also affected by their reduced possibility of choice which results in frequently overcrowded households (Jaljaa et al., 2022).

5. *Health*: Beside the general difficulties in accessing healthcare services (Hayward et al., 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated health vulnerability (Krist et al., 2021; Zenner and Wickramage, 2021). The infection and death rate due to COVID-19 is particularly high among migrants; the main causes include over-representation of migrants in system-relevant professions (such as the healthcare services), poorer living conditions, and reduced access to information (Hintermeier et al., 2021). Beyond physical health, psychological health is increasingly endangered, while at the same time there are fewer chances to get professional support (Mangrio et al., 2022).

6. *Safety:* The consequences of the pandemic related to the previous problem areas have caused an increased vulnerability to criminal networks: human trafficking, particularly of children, and migrant smuggling have increased, and criminal organizations have successfully taken advantage of desperation, isolation and overwhelmed institutions (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021).

These data show how the pandemic has increased the vulnerability of that segment of society which was already *vulnerable*, i.e. deprived of resources and entitlements – which would allow them to acclimatise, cope, adapt and recover from the effects of hazardous conditions (Gallopin, 2006; Sen, 1991).

2.2 Vulnerabilization of (Migrant) *Students* during the Pandemic

Students, as understood in this publication, are children, adolescents and young adults (henceforth children) – that is people who are usually embedded in family systems and highly dependent on them[5]. How children experience the pandemic and what impact it has (had) on them are therefore interrelated with the experience of their families and the impact it has on them too. The natural dependency of young people on their family has even increased with the closure of schools, as it transformed families – at least in the lock-down phases in Europe – into the only centre of reference for children, solely responsible for the satisfaction of their needs. The vulnerable position of migrant families, which increased further during the pandemic, means therefore a sharper impact of the pandemic on their children.

During the lock-down all children suffered social isolation, which has a host of short-term and long-term consequences (Larsen et al., 2022). The abrupt shifts from school to no school to on-line school have had a negative impact on the social, emotional and mental well-being and

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4   For a discussion on the (in)securitisation of borders see: Bigo, D. (2014). 'The (in)securitization practices of the three universes of EU border control: Military/Navy – border guards/police – database analysts', *Security Dialogue*, 45(3), pp. 209–225. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26292341.

5   In this text we refer to 'migrant students' and relate to them as part of a family system. Even if this corresponds to the reality of the majority of this population, it is important to consider that around 15 % of first-time applicant children in the EU are unaccompained minors (EUROSTAT 2022).

academic achievement of young people (Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2021) and a slowdown or even regression of language development, particularly salient for migrant children (Bathke, 2021).

Some children, and disproportionately migrant children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020), suffered the consequences of school closure during the pandemic more than others (OCR, 2021; Tso et al., 2022; Wilson and Mude, 2020;). It led, for instance, to high anxiety, to (more) hunger and physical and psychological violence (Bhabha, 2020; IDAC, 2021; United Nations Internatioal Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2021; Vilá et al., 2021) and to the lack of specialised support, as in the case of children with learning disabilities (Binkley, 2020; Goldstein, 2020). Besides school closure, the need of family members for support in child-care or financial resources as well as the fear of endangering older members of the family through infections decreased the numbers of children who could enjoy formal education (Zenteno, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021).

Being out of schooling has serious implications not just for the present but also for the future of the children, also considering the fact that a return to school is in many cases not happening (United Nations [UN], 2021): marginalized children have therefore fewer chances than before to emancipate themselves from their socio-economic position (Dorn et al., 2021).

The socio-economic context in which children are embedded has an impact also on their experience of homeschooling. The following factors have played in this regard a crucial role: the availability to the child of the internet and suitable technical equipment, the existence of quiet space, the child's digital competence and that of their parents as well as their ability in general to support their children (Binkley, 2020; Cherewka, 2020; Goldstein, 2020; OECD, 2020; van de Werfhorst et al., 2020; Zenteno, 2020), and the ability and the possibility of the school-staff to develop adequate strategies (Azorín, 2020; Bubb and Jones, 2020; Niemi and Kousa, 2020; Pelikan et al., 2021; Reimers and Schleicher, 2020; Wood, Boone-Thornton and Rivera-Singletary, 2021 Zhao, 2020).

3. Behind the Problem

The meta-analysis presented on the impact of (the management of) the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant students has shown that they suffer a major vulnerability which is linked to the marginalised position of their family. In order to support migrant students, it is therefore fundamental to *understand* the source of this structural inequality and the mechanisms of its production, and to *counteract* its reproduction.

3.1 A Problem of Perception

Lack of language skills, non-existent or reduced local networks and cultural knowledge about

their new context are factors which explain the disadvantage that some migrants might have at the start. However, these factors cannot, even all together, amount to a comprehensive explanation of their social exclusion, of why they "lack effective participation in key activities or benefits of the society in which they live" (Razer et al., 2013, p. 1152). Indeed, language skills can be developed, a local network can be built and relevant knowledge gained, *provided that the system makes it possible*. However, no matter how advanced language skills are, how dense the local network is and how familiar the child is with the implicit rules of the place, data show that social exclusion persists even through generations: the so-called

Second Generation is still disadvantaged – in some countries more than in others – compared to children whose family biography doesn't include transnational migration (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2017; Fernández-Reino, 2020). Being socially excluded – that is, being marginalised from one's own society – means not being accepted and valued in the community, not being in a position to make easily a valuable contribution within it, nor being "able to access the range of services and/or opportunities open to others" (Mowat, 2015, p. 457). It is therefore not just a mere state but encompasses *feelings*, which can be transitory and context related or permanent and identity-forming (Mowat, 2015).

An analysis of the characteristics of migrants trapped at the margin of society as well as of non-migrant marginalised population reveals a wider matrix of inequality, or as Hill Collins (1990) first called it: "matrix of domination". Due to the practice of *doing difference* which permeates the contemporary post-colonial society, the different, intersecting characteristics of each person determine their social positioning and thus the power or powerlessness they have in specific social spheres and social contexts (Budde, 2018, p. 46). Gender, 'race', class, age, disability, religion are some main categories which compose this matrix: they are not simple elements of diversity, they are axes for power distribution.

Particularly relevant to understand the specific exclusion of migrants is the category 'race', as since the beginning of colonialism it has been used to differentiate, homogenise and arrange into hierarchies social groups with different geographical origins. The social practices of "depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization" (Tileaga, 2007) have been used for centuries in order to legitimate colonial abuses. Even if races are proven not to be a biological reality but a social construction, racism is still widespread: it permeates the (not yet de-)colonised world society.

In relation to people considered as *foreigners*, the word *race* is today, at least in Europe, frequently substituted with the term *culture* which seems a more neutral description of difference,

though the same essentialist, fatalist perspective on identity lays behind it. Imagining the world as organised into separated national cultures, understood as inherently homogenous and stable systems, and classifying humans depending on their real or presumed origin foster *othering*. The mechanism of this involves: 1. Separating individuals into an in-group and an out-group; 2. Rendering invisible their individuality; 3. Attributing negative characteristics to 'the others' and positive ones to one's own group[6] (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985). This psycho-social mechanism favors political scapegoat strategies (Dumitrescu, 2022; Wirz et al., 2018).

This categorisation of people in cultures does not consider its dialogic character: identity develops continuously in interaction with others and the environment (Buber, 1965; Layes, 2003). The fact is that the way individuals think, feel and act is influenced by a plurality of local and translocal cultures as well as the experiences of people and the specific situation they find themselves in (Conti, 2012; 2021a, 2021d).

Balibar (1990) calls this widespread use of culture "neo-racism", as it makes it possible to reproduce in a subtle way racist logic and hierarchies. Together with the reinforcement of nationalism and the successful political production of scapegoats, it *produces* and *legitimates* unequal and unjust treatment of migrants. Racism, in its overt individual form as well as in its more subtle, institutional form (Ezorsky, 1991), is therefore a mechanism of *vulnerabilisation* of migrants, as it *produces* their vulnerability and *legitimates* their discrimination.

The unfounded idea that people with different national origins are a priori different from all other millions of national citizens – imagined instead as all alike – freezes migrants in the condition of *foreigners*, as "someone who belongs to a country that is not your own" (Collins Dictionary, 2021). Where should people belong to, if not to the place where they live? 'Foreign' is indeed a mode of being, or better *not* being (yet) in relationship as it expresses "something [...] un-

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6   This third step is not applied to 'cultures' considered as similar and therefore allied.

known", its suggested synonym "unfamiliar" (Collins Dictionary, 2021). Once arrived, contact with migrants *is* possible, therefore they can (and do to many) become known and familiar (Conti 2021b). This stigmatising narrative of unbridgeable and fixed cultural difference is tightly linked to the juridical creation of formal, real differences. While on the one hand, the lack of formal recognition of equality reproduces the mechanism of *doing difference* and legitimates, indirectly, discrimination (Calderón Chelius, 2021), on the other hand a formalised equality is certainly fundamental, though it is not itself enough for neutralising racism (Chitolina Zanini, 2021).

3.2 Problematic Actions

Racism must be recognised and prospectively overcome on the systemic as well as on the individual level. Adverse interactions with institutional, symbolic and individual acts of racism lead to "heightened levels of arousal, hyper-vigilance, and symptoms associated with anxiety and depression" (Henderson et al., 2019, p. 927). Racism is trauma (Henderson et al., 2019).

Considering the strong personal impact that peers and teachers have on the experience of migrant students at school and therefore on their relationship with learning and on their development overall, it is important to increase awareness about the fact that migrant students are indeed frequently victim of racism from peers (Alivernini et al., 2019; Nikolaou et al., 2019; Morales, 2021, Steketee et al., 2021) and from teachers (Artamonova, 2018; Bruneau et al., 2019; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020; Quinn, 2020; Tereshchenko et al., 2019).

As teachers are themselves powerful role models, it is important to pinpoint how such often unconscious perception of migrant students *as migrants* and therefore *as different* and not seldom *as less valuable* can come to expression. Findings based on data collected in the UK, Germany and Italy within the framework of the European project SHARMED (SHARed MEories and Dialogues) shows harm on three different levels (Conti, 2021c):

1. *Affective*: due to the spread of the essentialist mind-set, migrant students, even second generation ones, are exposed to the increased risk of not being perceived in their uniqueness, of being denied their belonging to the imagined national 'we', of having to carry out their hybrid identity development under the pressure of binary logics.

2. *Cognitive*: a lack of openness, curiosity and appreciation of knowledge of other reference systems pushes migrant students into the role of those just in need of learning, which can on the one hand reinforce in the group racist patterns of thought and on the other hand reduce self-confidence. Furthermore, the epistemic authority of migrant students risks being relegated to the peculiar field of knowledge related to the country of origin, regardless of their real knowledge about it and of the knowledge they gain about their new context.

3. *Behavioural*: the focus on the students' migration background causes biased expectations about their abilities and talents. Furthermore, migrant students, in particular those with a low level of language proficiency, suffer the overall underestimation of their competences.

The specific experience that migrant students have in their school environment depends on the reaction of their environment to them, which is influenced by their whole individual intersectional profile which goes beyond the sole categories of 'race'/'culture' and 'language proficiency'. Categories, which are frequently used to read 'the other' and that tend to turn on (un)conscious biases, are:

Class: as the COVID-19 pandemic puts in evidence and reinforces, the socio-economic status of the parents is determinant for the experience of children in relation to education. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the positioning of children in relation to this category influences teachers' perception and behaviours significantly (Autin et al., 2019; Brandmiller et al., 2020).

- *Gender*: while generally boys have more power than other genders, in education there is a general tendency to favour girls (Terrier, 2020) except in mathematics (Brandmiller et al., 2020; Carlana, 2019). Gender and sexual minorities suffer specific discrimination (Bochicchio et al., 2019; Stucky et al., 2020).

- *Religion*: while religious belonging is generally not relevant, except in specific religious educational settings, there are specific religious affiliations which dramatically increase the risk of discrimination of migrant students, as in the case of Islamophobia (Ridha, 2021; van Bergen et al., 2021).

- *Disability*: physical and/or psychological disability increase the risk of marginalisation for the students themselves and their families. It is important to consider that the vulnerabilisation which migrant students might experience can itself become a cause of the development of disabilities, especially psychological ones (Migliarini et al., 2018; Okot Oyat, 2017; Robards et al., 2020; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018).

The intersectional profile of migrant students consists of categories whose enormous *discriminatory power* is inversely proportional to their *descriptive power*: these categories don't say anything about a person but they have the stand of revealing everything or at least 'enough'. Despite being categories, and therefore "relational, changeable social constructs" (Dietze, 2006, p. 8, own translation) which are produced through actions within processes of interaction, they are seldom negotiable and negotiated. They are mainly invisible: some take them for granted, others don't even see them. Indeed everyone is embedded in the matrix, absorbs its logics and it needs a conscious effort to question them and to react and stop being subordinate to them, that is: stop dominating, oppressing and violating others.

4. A new conceptual framework

The matrix of inequality brought to light in the previous chapter stands in contrast to the claim of equality that lies at the heart of the democratic ideal. Its fulfilment requires the deconstruction of this matrix and the development of new promising visions. In this chapter I present a conceptual framework which can orientate such a turn and exemplify it through the description of concrete measures in education.

4.1 A Change of Perception

Characteristic of democracy is that *all* people (*démos*) – not just some of them – share the power (*kratós*) of shaping together their intersubjective reality. In many countries, laws – usually constitutional ones – have been enacted in order to protect the right of every person, not to be discriminated against, enshrining equality as an inalienable right. Moreover, international human rights instruments – treaties and further legal sources for the protection of human rights globally – support this precept by formally guaranteeing basic rights for all human beings and specifically for children, no matter *who* they are and *where* they are.

A particularly meaningful international critical debate on the gap between legislative paradigm and glocal reality has been brought up by the U.N. in relation to the unjust disadvantages that people with disabilities all around the globe

experience (U.N. General Assembly, 2006). In this context, the term *inclusion* has been introduced as a paradigm which aims to counterpose the unjustified *exclusion*.

As disability is not the only category with discriminatory power which prevents people from being equal (see section 3), *inclusion* has become a more general call for pathways to a more equitable, direct and influential participation of all members of a society, no matter what is their intersectional profile.

A great merit of the concept of inclusion is that it focuses on society as a whole, tackling the problem of inequality, by de-legitimising the practice of *doing difference* though embracing individual diversity. It responds to Hannah Arendt's call for recognizing "the right of everyone to belong" and connects it, as she does, with "the right

to have rights" (Arendt, 1958; 1962, p. 298). *Membership* (i.e. being part of a community) and *participation* (i.e. taking part in it) become one.

The discourse on inclusion is extremely fruitful for the fight against discrimination of migrants, as it fights against the construction of the artificial and arbitrary line between who is normal and who is not, what is normal and what is not. It recognizes the heterogenity of society, highlights that all its members are equal and focuses on their right of non-discrimination. In this way it breaks free from category-thinking and in particular from the juxtaposition migrant vs. 'the others' – the recognized members of the "Imagined Community" (Anderson, 1983) – which the concept of *integration* instead still perpetuates, spreading further the illusion of homogeneous national cultures.

Fig. 1: Integration (left) and inclusion (right) (Conti 2022)
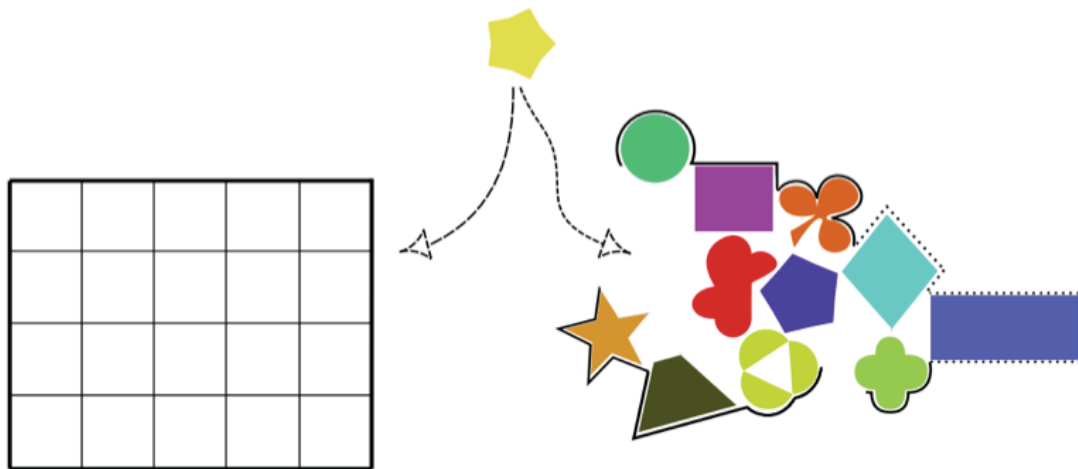
By accepting inclusion as a guiding principle, each institution is required to rethink itself: it must become accessible to all, as access – and thus participation – is a right which institutions must guarantee to everyone. Education must therefore be for the development of all.

However, inclusion has three subtle weaknesses, originating in the emergence of the concept in the context of the fight for the rights of persons with disabilities. The first relates to the focus on nearly *natural* individual peculiarities and does not consider those created by the sys-

tem itself (Printz, 2018); the second is its deficit-focus, as difference is mainly something to be compensated by the system; connected to this is a third weakness, that individuals are not conceived of as more than those characteristics perceived as potential barriers to equal participation.

The concept of *dialogue* can bring forward the transformative vision that inclusion initiates, offering a theoretical framework which overcomes these three blind spots. Indeed *dialogue* and *inclusion* are concepts that overlap: both see participation of all members of a system as a con-

dition and as an aim at the same time. Inclusion emphasises that difference should not be an obstacle to participation, whereas in dialogue difference is precisely the entitlement to participation: on the one hand, because difference is perceived as something positive, extremely valuable for the group, and on the other hand, because people couldn't otherwise really participate as equal members, if they could not be who they are. Difference is related therefore to the uniqueness of a person, whose identity is characterised by an inner heterogeneity which the person should be free to express.

Under the framework of dialogue, *equality* (in opposition to *hierarchy*) is extremely important, as this is seen as a condition for real participation. Dialogue aims to the creation of horizontal transformative processes. Indeed the three core characteristics of dialogue are: 1. appreciative interest for the differences brought forth by individuals; 2. active, self-determined participation of all; 3. ideal freedom from hierarchy (Conti, 2012, p. 112).

In a society where exclusion is performed on a daily basis through the practice of constructing difference along the topography of power relations, the dialogical approach gives individuals the power to negotiate their own difference in interaction with open and curious others.

4.2 Dialogic Actions

According to the above argumentation, a shift towards a fully inclusive society would entail the chance for every member to shape it to the same extent. School itself is the core of the system and should therefore be a space in which its members learn to shape freely and respectfully their own common reality together. The inclusive school is a creative, inspiring space in which everyone engages and takes advantage of the opportunity to participate (Conti, 2021a). An inclusive transformation of school through the dialogic approach is therefore more than about individualising teaching: it is about rethinking education *together* thanks to teachers who are facilitators of learning processes, connecting school with its community. The core characteristics of dialogue applied in the educational context mean: 1) serious consideration, appreciation and involvement of difference (of perspectives; of actors) in decision-making processes; 2) development of strategies and settings which allow everyone to engage in the learning process and in all further relevant activities; 3) constant attention to a respectful, empowering egalitarian interrelation between adults and children as well as among children.

Therefore, in order to support (migrant) students during the pandemic and beyond, the following concrete proposals must be taken in consideration:

1. *Multiple needs:* Schools must implement strategies that consider students in all their being. School is not just about providing knowledge to students but supporting the holistic development of children (Kasper, 2021). Social needs, emotional needs, and mental health needs must be explicitly addressed as well as basic needs such as nutrition, despite the closure of school facilities (United States Department of Education, 2021).
In relation to learning, during the pandemic it is also important to guarantee equity of education, through "adjusting the schooling processes, and providing ample encouragement and support" (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022) as well as developing learning concepts which fit with individual competences, interests, and learning styles as well as the infrastructure at disposal of the different students (Fox et al., 2021).

2. *No-tech, low-tech and high-tech:* If a school wants to adopt e-learning, it must provide digital equipment for children who don't have adequate resources at their disposal (Li and Lalani, 2020) and must support children and parents to develop digital competences, without taking them for granted (Wood, Boone-Thornton and Rivera-Singletary, 2021). To reduce complexity, it is useful to coordinate with other teachers and use all the same media, in particular for communication (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022). In order to support the

use of "devices, tools and platforms made available by the school" tutorials can be developed, which must be accessible and written in a way and/or in a language which children and parents can understand (US Department of Education, 2021). Schools should offer low- and no-tech material (UNICEF, 2020), "such as print packets" (Diallo, 2020) for children who cannot be reached with e-learning. Furthermore, support to children and parents can be given via "online systems, peer support and hotlines" (Choi and Chiu, 2021).

3. *Home-schooling:* The transfer from learning at school to learning at home needs "new content, new pedagogy, and new ways of monitoring and assessment" (UNESCO, 2020). Consistent teaching strategies that foster active participation, collaboration and the development of socio-emotional skills are considered very important (US Department of Education, 2021). Collaborative roles and relationships also with teachers are a positive consequence of the increased autonomy of the students in the context of home-schooling and must be kept long term, in virtual and hybrid models of schooling as well as in presence. Indeed, higher student activity is measured in relation to choice of "learning content, methods, activities, organization, and timeframes" (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022). This allows a major respect for differences, which should be accompanied by a general attention to individualisation (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022). The diversity of ICT gives great support, though it must consciously capitalise on technology (Choi and Chiu, 2021).

4. *Ongoing exchange*: Interaction between students and teachers as well as among peers is the basis for successful learning (Popyk, 2021). In the context of the pandemic, it is even more important as it provides feedback and guidance, both for students and for teachers (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020) and reestablishes the socialisation space, which is so very important to children, in particular those who don't have (many) other acquaintances outside school, such as many

migrant children (Popyk, 2021). Doing so, the well-being of children is favoured and strong school-community relationships maintained (US Department of Education, 2021). Indeed, exchanges can become institutionalised collaborative spaces where students and teachers as well as further stakeholders regularly meet towards potential participatory policymaking – for example, in relation to school practices (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022). Exchange can and should be favoured at different levels and with different aims, during and after the pandemic (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022).

5. *Learning process*: School closure forces society to "reorganize education" (Zhao, 2020), in order to further guarantee quality education under the changed conditions. This is seen as a chance by numerous authors to re-think education as a whole and to make long-lasting changes. Innovative education is described as an education which is driven by students (Wehmeyer and Zhao, 2020), in which teaching goals and learning goals match with each other, in which students can potentially design their own learning, offered maybe at some point from different institutions at once (Kovács Cerović et al., 2022). Learning must shift from reciting, repeating and remembering knowledge that is meaningless for the students into more participative formats, such as project-based learning, which allow them to learn content that is relevant to them and related to their experiential world in a cooperative and problem-centred way (US Department of Education, 2021; Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic makes evident the importance of developing critical, social, emotional and academic skills and to foster "safe and supportive learning" (US Department of Education, 2021).

6. *Teachers' resources*: In order to cope with their tasks, teachers need resources. Some of the most important resources they (should) have at their disposal are their own skills and a supportive network. This being the case, among the most important areas for profes-

sional training are digital competence and trauma-informed care (US Department of Education, 2021), as well as methodologies for facilitating dialogic learning processes (Baraldi et al., 2021) as well as intercultural competence, considered as including anti-racism and reflections on linguistic dominance (Kasper, 2021). Teachers have also made evident, particularly during the pandemic, how they themselves must be supported also in relation to their general well-being, "including rich opportunities for social and emotional learning and physical care – resources they can then model and share with the students and families they serve" (Kasper, 2021). Support is also needed in the direct context of their profession – for instance, through collaboration in multi-professional teams – such as with "school-based mental health professionals, counselors, social workers, psychologists" (US Department of Education, 2021). Resources available for teachers originate also in communities of practice as well as in the wider local network. However, time is a condition for capitalising on resources, in particular for professional learning, community connection, self-care and self-reflection (Kasper, 2021). A re-organisation of the allocation of time and an enlargement of staff might be necessary (Kasper, 2021).

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to propose a theoretical framework which on the one hand can show how migrant students are vulnerabilized, bringing to light the central factors which produce it, and on the other hand can offer a possible strategy to overcome it. The interplay between empirical data and theory in the first part of the article allowed us to tailor the theoretical discussion, enabling a deeper analysis of the problematic issues, embedding them in a broader context evolved over time. In the second part of the paper, recent data has served as illustrative examples and for a test case of the theoretical proposal, making the proposal more tangible.

In this article, it has been shown that behind the discrimination of migrants there is a whole system of power-relations which hinders the fulfilment of the democratic core principle of equality. Furthermore, it has been argued that such a matrix of inequality, which vulnerabilises systematically most of the inhabitants of the planet, could be counteracted by the emergence of the discourse of *inclusion*. The specificity of this concept has been explained and compared first to the problematic concept of *integration* and secondly with the promising concept of *dialogue*. Finally, the potential that dialogue has to fulfill the vision of inclusive education in an inclusive society has been discussed, offering an egalitarian logic suitable for rethinking both interrelated spheres.

Further research is needed in order to understand how a culture of dialogue can be spread both inside and outside school. Considering education to be a key strategy in this regard, important objects of study are learning materials and training programmes for students and teachers/educators.[7] Furthermore, it is relevant and urgent to guide and supervise scientifically the changes made to social and educational practices with a negative impact on migrant students, in order to understand the specific challenges and opportunities of the dialogic turn.

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7 For this purpose, the EU Commission has funded the project KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning) which develops free dialogic learning tools for young people and for their teachers and educators, combining the buddy-system with lifelong learning.

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Exploring the impact of Covid19 school closures among working-class high-school students in Madrid and Barcelona by migration status and gender[8]

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Abstract

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic and social life of children and adolescents continues to be of concern because of the serious consequences it may have for an entire generation of students, especially for those who were in more vulnerable situations for different reasons, particularly for third country national students. Paradoxically, since the beginning of the closure and when schools reopened for face-to-face classes intermittently, the specific needs of this group of students and the effects of academic and social isolation as possible aggravating risk factors have been absent from the public debate on education in the pandemic, beyond general mentions of family impoverishment and the digital divide. Nor have issues that were already alarming been addressed, such as the differences between the school attachment of boys and girls, which intersect with the former ones. This paper presents some of the findings and conclusions of a prospective study within the project IntegratED. Promoting Meaningful Integration of Third-Country Nationals' Children to Education (776143-EU-AMIF). Drawing on interviews with the teaching staff of eight secondary schools in Madrid and Barcelona in autumn 2020, we focus on the impact of the pandemic and school closure on these students from a comparative approach of schools, national origin, and gender, in the larger context of the transformations, readjustments and consequences experienced by all students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Keywords

School closures, educational inequality, immigrant students, Covid19, gender.

1. Introduction

This article presents some results from an emergency study on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on third country national students in Spain, within an InteRED larger project that was interrupted by the confinement (*IntegratED. Promoting Meaningful Integration of Third-Country Nationals Children to Education,* 776143-EU-AMIF). The aim of the study was to explore and analyse the impact of the pandemic and the confinement caused by Covid-19 on high-school students born outside of the European Union, as well as to identify appropriate educational responses to the social and health crisis.

The UNHCR and UNESCO highlighted from the first months of the pandemic that the closure of schools because of confinement would have a serious impact on the education of foreign students who had arrived in the schools in recent years, also affecting their integration process. It did not seem that the conditions for the 2020-21 school year were likely to reverse this. To avoid irreparable setbacks and improve the living conditions of pupils in vulnerable situations, organisations and agencies also took the issue into consideration. In the report Impact of the *COVID*-19 *Crisis* on the *Right* to *Education; Concerns, Challenges* and *Opportunities* (UNHRC, 2020) – for instance, the United Nations Special Delegation on the Right to Education noted that the Covid-19 crisis had revealed the lack of preparedness on the part of governments, non-governmental agencies and educational institutions to deal with it and to ensure student learning in a context that imposed non-formal education, despite the innovative measures they were forced to adopt.

Such concerns emerged in many places, and since the beginning of the confinement several research groups, especially those working in the field of education inequalities and migrations, began to carry out prospective studies. Preliminary results of studies carried out in the first months of the pandemic highlighted the state of shock in which teachers were drowned by their lack of digital skills and the need to acquire them in just a few days. This is the case of what has

been observed by various researchers gathered by the network *Learning for Citizenship. Supporting Migrant Students through the Pandemic*, created to exchange observations from different countries (United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain). For example, in the United Kingdom, the compilation of emergency reports by Manzoni and D'Angelo (2021) pointed to a greater impact of confinement among pupils from migrant and refugee families in the educational, linguistic and social areas. Expert panels, organised by the NALDIC association of multilingualism and education practitioners and researchers and the Bell Foundation in April and May 2020, provided guidance on how to support students with English learning, and free online resources were created in several languages to facilitate support for families and teachers to help students.

In the case of Spain, researchers expressed similar concerns and pointed to the risk of educational inequalities getting worse (see RASE special issue coordinated by Beltrán and Venegas, 2020). Bonal and González (2021) also referred to the opportunity in that exceptional situation to gauge the impact of the cultural and social capital of families and the differential role of schools, especially in terms of the digital divide. Cabrera (2020) reviewed the relationship between the differential implementation of online learning and the increase in inequality of educational opportunities. Some warned, however, of the need to move away from the miserabilist and deficit approach projected onto families when assessing the effects of the pandemic. This was the case, for instance, of Martín Criado (2020) on the classist assumption that families with fewer resources would manage the stress generated by the pandemic less well, recalling that the limitations in terms of resources or family level of education bear no relation to their concern, interest, or effort in their children's schooling. Carrasco in *El Diario de la Educación*, 6/05/2020 (Carrasco, 2020) observed, as a positive counterpoint, how the opportunity had been used to forge a more personalised link between the tutor teachers and

their students in the virtual sphere in some cases, in a follow-up carried out in the first months of confinement in a group of schools affected by the disruption of a project on the risk of early school leaving.

The media paid attention during the months of confinement to what had been pointed out for years by the research on the inequalities of early school leaving. However, although they focused mainly on the issue of connectivity, Internet access and uses of digital resources or, in other words, the digital divide, the specific situation of learners with a migrant background was only tangentially mentioned as part of the general situation of learners. It was naturally assumed that in the case of immigrant students the same inequalities detected would be exacerbated: higher poverty, more affected by the digital divide, fewer academic and cultural resources in families.

González and Bonal in *Diari de l'Educació*, 6/05/2021 (González and Bonal, 2021) concluded, drawing on results of a telephone survey carried out in Catalonia in April and May 2020, that lower connectivity was directly related with lower socio-economic status of families. They also pointed out that 18% of the most vulnerable students did not connect to online classes, compared to 2.8% of all students. Furthermore, only 3 % of students were able to connect to the Internet only via mobile phones, compared to 8.7% of the most vulnerable ones. In an attempt to alleviate disparities in families' access to the Internet and to the devices needed to do it, the Ministry of Education and the departments of education in the regional governments announced the purchase of 500,000 tablets and computers for the students most affected by the digital divide (Aunión and Romero, El País, 6/9/2020). But almost half a year later, these devices had not reached their beneficiaries, and the press reported that they were "lost in the middle of a bureaucratic labyrinth" (Aunión and Romero, El País, 6/9/2020).

Another aspect unpacked by the pandemic was the damage caused by a decade of budget cuts in education after the 2008 economic crisis. Crónica Global (Cañizares, 13/11/2020) reported at the end of 2020 that the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan regional government) invests only 2.8% of GDP in education although the Catalan Education Law stipulates that it should be 6 %. These cuts have undoubtedly conditioned the digitisation of education. In the last 10 years, the Government has cut 700 million euros in education. Currently, only 300 of the 2,987 schools in Catalonia have adequate fibre-optic width, while 1,230 public schools out of 2,800 do not have LAN-wifi. In the rest of Spain, budget cuts in education have been close to 10 billion euros in recent years (Aunión and Romero, El País, 6/9/2020). All the education experts consulted by the journal agreed on the serious consequences of the cuts in education investment.

Before the pandemic began, therefore, the economic situation of the poorest families combined with the effects of budgetary cuts in education had already had a severe impact on the most vulnerable students. On 23 June 2020, a press release by UNESCO of their *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education* warned of the increased impact of the confinement among female students, children with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged, and migrant and minority groups.

However, the media focus on immigration during the pandemic has revolved around labour conditions and migrants being overrepresented in many essential jobs, the need to regularize undocumented migrants, changes in the flow of arrivals or economic remittances to countries of origin. The children of immigrants have received virtually no media attention. Even more shocking is the fact that neither did the central, nor the regional, education authorities in charge of responding to the educational emergency. No mention to specific difficulties and measures during confinement, and immigrant students subsumed in the category of those affected by fewer economic resources and cultural capital of families in general. Likewise, there was no media interest in the differential impact of the conditions of online schooling and confinement among girls and boys.

Between 2020 and 2021, rapid research projects on the impact of Covid-19 on students multiplied, but the focus on and the knowledge about those with a migrant background were still scarce. Less attention was paid to the situation

of recently arrived students, many of which still with a curricular gap and less knowledge of the languages of tuition when the school closures began (in the case of Catalonia, both Catalan and Spanish), even though before the pandemic huge education inequalities between students of national origin and students with a migrant background had been clearly identified. In 2019, the rate of Early Leaving of Education and Training (ELET) in Spain – that is, the share of young people between 18 to 24 without post-compulsory education who are not studying to attain it – was 18%: still the second highest in the European Union, only after Malta. Moreover, Spain leads the greatest polarization by national origin and sex in the ELET rate: among the young women born in Spain or of Spanish nationality the rate is around 10%, while among men of the same age group born abroad or of non-EU nationalities this rate is four times higher. Among young people born in Spain in this age group, the ELET rate among boys doubles that of girls. Although data by income is not available in official statistics, the RESL.eu study on early school leaving in Europe was able to identify large differences by type of school according to social composition of the student body in the rate of lower secondary education achievement and the risk of early school leaving (Carrasco et al., 2018b). The other side of the coin was that, with data from the 2017-18 academic year, the same study identified that, once the lower secondary diploma was obtained, the percentage of students of Spanish nationality who did not remain in education (58.6%) was higher than that of students of non-EU nationalities (50.5%), despite the greatest difficulties encountered to complete it successfully (Carrasco et al., 2018b). Moreover, the educational aspirations of students with a migrant background as well as those of their families play a very important role as protective factors against school leaving in socioeconomic circumstances like those of their national peers (Carrasco et al., 2018a). Given these and other data revealing the uniqueness of the education processes of students with a migrant background it is important to investigate more in depth what schooling in conditions of confinement and closure of schools have been for these students, paying attention to the similarities but also to specificities.

In completely altered educational circumstances where everyday contacts and direct sociability were suppressed and lacking as an essential learning context, the research from which this article arises set out to explore the impact of school experiences characterised by isolation and detachment of learning from school engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris, 2004), the key protective factor against early school leaving.

2. Aims and methodology

The main objective of this study has been to identify the problems faced by students with an immigrant background because of the Covid19 school closures and intermittent resuming of schooling in comparison with Spanish students. Although the results are limited in scope and are based exclusively on the perspectives of the teachers interviewed, they can reveal phenomena and trends of what has happened elsewhere, and complement the outcomes of extensive, quantitative research conducted on the basis of the following questions:

1. How have the schools dealt with the situation created by Covid-19 and with students with a migrant background, especially with those who had arrived in the previous years?

2. What impact has it had on the learning and schooling of students, in general, by migration status and sex?

3. What are the expectations to deal with the impact already observed?

To answer these questions and to identify, analyse and understand the most relevant aspects of the Covid-19 impact on the schools' experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and key data collected from each school on students' migrant status, family languages, curricular mismatch, specific aspects of different mi-

gration flows and countries of origin, as well as support available to students with disadvantages, with a gender perspective applied throughout.

The research was focused on Madrid and Barcelona, the wealthiest urban areas, and the main destinations of immigration in Spain, which had already started to increase again between 2016 and 2019. The fieldwork was carried out in a purposive sample of eight public and state-subsidised schools with a high presence of students of immigrant origin, located in low-income neighbourhoods, in which both the InteRED team in Madrid and the team from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona were working when the pandemic broke out.

Table I. Characteristics of the 8 schools in Madrid and Barcelona.

City	School	Ownership	Digital teaching development
Madrid	M1	Subsidized	Implementation and preparation of teachers prior to the pandemic; full class schedule replicated online.
Madrid	M2	Subsidized	Implementation and teacher training prior to the pandemic; independent students' work.
Madrid	M3	Subsidized	Implementation and preparation of teachers prior to the pandemic; 60% of students without adequate devices.
Madrid	M4	Public	Low implementation until the pandemic; rapid teacher training during first weeks; few cases of teachers with no digital training.
Barcelona	B1	Public	Partial implementation prior to the pandemic; diverging reactions among teachers; daily online tutoring, students' independent work (partially).
Barcelona	B2	Public	Implementation and resources 90% of students in school prior to the pandemic; daily tutoring, students' independent work.
Barcelona	B3	Public	Partial implementation prior to the pandemic; accelerated and thorough adaptation.
Barcelona	B4	Subsidized	Preparation and training of teachers during the first weeks of the pandemic; full class schedule replicated on line.

The main source of data comes from 20 semi-structured online interviews, 3 individual and 5 group interviews face-to-face, supported by a questionnaire administered to the schools to identify their most relevant characteristics concerning school population, organisation, resources, teaching staff and environment. The interviews were conducted with school management staff, who were responsible for interviewing families, managing resources and support services, and

dealing with the competent administration. Interviews were also carried out with teachers with specific tasks related to recently arrived immigrant students, such as teachers who have been responsible for newcomers' classes in Madrid and Barcelona, or general support teachers in schools where these resources have been lost due to budgetary restrictions. The online interviews were carried out using the Zoom digital platform and recorded for further analysis with NVivo11 software.

The results are presented in a realistic narrative style to enhance the teacher's accounts of their lived experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), based on significant and recurrent discursive positions identified in relation to the overarching questions, following a process of iterative analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Schools and teaching staff: between professionalism, vocation, and social commitment.

The interviews revealed that the families found in the teaching staff the only point of support from the administration, being the main social reference point for immigrant families, with the smallest support network in Spain. The fact that schooling was firstly non-attendance-based, and later semi-attendance-based, aggravated the sense of frustration of the family's migration project due to the difficulties in accessing school, a key institution for the optimal integration of their children. This was especially significant in the case of Catalonia due to the lack of daily contact with the language of tuition and, in those cases with a curricular gap, in the process of compensation measures before the pandemic.

Once the confinement began, virtual classes were the main possibility for all students to follow the year. The relationship of schools and families with the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the digital sphere is the first element in shaping the digital education experiences of students during confinement, regardless of their national origin. It is worth noting that the knowledge and use of digital tools and devices is not uncommon for some immigrant families because it allows them to keep in contact with their relatives in the countries of origin.

Confinement encountered a significant diversity in terms of the schools' relationship with ICT, regardless of their ownership, location, or social composition. Some schools were already working in the digital environment, with integrated projects combining face-to-face and virtual classes. The pedagogical coordinator at B2 school highlighted that "*this saved us the first few weeks and allowed us to spend time preparing for the second phase of confinement in order to make progress in our subjects. Our students are already used to working weekly with Google Classroom assignments in all subjects, but this was the management team's decision with the school autonomy programme two years ago! It's just a coincidence that we chose to be trained in ICT!*"

In contrast, in other schools the digital competences of teachers and students had not been developed. The head of studies at B1 school, a highly complex school in Barcelona, regretted that "*our pupils don't even know how to write an email, and many of the new teachers who come every year have no training or declare themselves to be objectors to ICT, it was unthinkable to consider it as a school, and now…*". These differences between schools are the result of political decisions. The Department of Education in Catalonia had transferred the school digitalisation decision to the management teams of each school creating therefore huge inequalities between them, some left with no maintenance of hardware and not even adequate infrastructure, resulting in a clear inequity that affects the most vulnerable students.

The M1, M2 and M3 state-subsidised schools had already made use of digital tools by March 2020.

M3 school head teacher stated that both teachers and students "[have] *their account and work in the Google environment*", using Chrome-

books for some time, with specific training in digital skills. Another situation was experienced by the school M4, where "*a few days before* [the confinement] *there was a meeting to give basic notions of virtual classrooms*", as one of its teachers explained. This basic training was given by the school's technology teachers because the administration did not offer them this type of training although they were even advised not to use any non-institutional platforms. However, the EducaMadrid platform did not work properly until after Easter and, only then, began to offer resources to deal with the situation. But according to this teacher of the M4 school, a member of the management team, the biggest problem was the students' lack of access to electronic devices and network connectivity. The Community of Madrid sent tablets on loan for students in year 4 of lower secondary (ESO) and baccalaureate year 2, but the devices for years 1, 2 and 3 of ESO and baccalaureate year 1 never arrived. She herself assisted 189 families who lacked connectivity. This personalised care was also implemented in the B1 school, a small school in a neighbourhood strongly hit by the successive crises. This school head teacher, also a woman, was approached by mothers looking for all kinds of guidance in the face of the closure of all the services and the collapse of those that were still open due to the increasing needs of the population served.

It was the schools, both the subsidised M1 and M2 and the public B2 and B3, which provided their students with the necessary electronic devices, either thanks to the parents' associations (M1) or to the school's social fund (M2). In these schools, both active and retired teachers were asked to provide and help obtain resources and donations for scholarships or to advance the payment of devices, and even for food and clothing for the students' families. The B3 school mobilised the network of organisations, shops, and businesses in the neighbourhood to raise funds and obtain 40 tablets for pupils without any devices at home, but also for the purchase of food for some families, which was distributed from the school itself. In front of the emergency and the impossibility of having other resources, it was the teachers, regardless of the type of school, who made the greatest effort to solve the problems they encountered. Most of the examples coincide and the scope of the students attended to is important in all schools. The teaching staff mobilised themselves by providing grants for Internet connections, crowdfunding campaigns, by approaching other families in the school, friends or relatives who could donated computers for some pupils who did not have one, taking them personally door to door. In some schools, the management teams and other teachers also followed up and accompanied the families. For example, school M3 maintained almost daily contact with almost all families through social networks in order to prevent students from disengaging from the school.

In the schools of the sample, serving low-income areas where immigrant students are over-represented, the adaptation of teaching to the situation of confinement was only part of the unplanned tasks performed by teachers. According to the M1 school headteacher, they "*have received many congratulations from the families. They are happy because everything has been done with our only available means since the teachers were already working digitally before*".

It is important to remember that all this had an impact on the teachers, because they could not carry out their work properly and because they could not solve the problems of the students with the greatest needs – without guidance, teaching materials, or specific resources from the administration to attend to them; and while they were suffering, as citizens, the same health problems in their families, economic uncertainty, and the effects of school confinement as the rest of society. The most recurrent and coinciding remark on the attention given to immigrant students is the feeling that they have not been able to reach their needs, and even less those of students who had arrived in recent years and were in the process of learning the language, beyond the general "shock response" that they were able to organize.

3.2 Technology and confinement: the relationship with ICT at school and in the family

In a very short time, teachers and schools adapted their teaching to the digital context, using all the strategies at their disposal to ensure that students were not left behind, but they opted for very different strategies. The headteacher of school M1 explained that "*teaching was done through presentations, Google Classroom, forms...*", replicating the standard timetable. The M2 school used the school website, where the newcomers' class teacher uploaded YouTube videos focusing "*on the essential and initial aspects of the language distributed in various sections: communication, mathematics, reading...*". This was the way students had access to the content at any time, as they often accessed the Internet through devices used by other family members to study or work. Mobile phones have also played an important role, being used to send pictures of homework, or even going as far as teaching "*with phone calls with the child writing down while the teacher was explaining*", achieving a "personal and individualised contact so that they could feel they were not left behind as they could have been", as reported by the M3 school, something that also happened in B1 and B3 schools.

Problems around internet access or availability of devices persisted in the 2020-21 school year. The M1 or M4 schools adopted a sort of blended teaching, and the M3 center started a project to finance the acquisition of 30 computers for use by students in ESO year 4 who did not have any and who could attend this way. Instead of intermittent attendance, immigrant students in the newcomers' class of M2 school could attend classes in person during the 2020-21 academic year since they needed face-to-face classes to learn the language and integrate into the school atmosphere.

The situation of the family and its relationship with ICT accounted for a large part of the problems faced by schools, stemming from precariousness and the lack of digital resources. School B3 found higher ICT skills among immigrant students, especially from India and Pakistan, due to usual contact with relatives in their

countries of origin. At the same time, as the headteacher of M1 school explained, many families, especially immigrant ones, found themselves in situations of higher job and salary insecurity, which meant worse conditions of connectivity, less mobile data, and less availability of devices for their children. The schools tried to provide these students with even basic school materials that they lacked, while in wealthier areas one student could have more than one last generation devices, big differences that were pointed out by B2 schoolteachers.

In cases where mobile data were the only connection available, they were all consumed at the beginning of the month. The mobile phone was the last option. Teachers at M3 school, with 60% of students without computers, said that "*in secondary school we wanted everyone to be connected, to keep up with the classes a bit.... We saw that it was impossible. Most of them have mobile phones but many don't even have a connection. So we worked a bit using WhatsApp (...) We have a high percentage of students without a computer, and most of them were simply using their mobile phones. It was very difficult and expensive to work. Despite this, there were students who were very virtuous with their mobile phones and were able to get things done*". The same happened in the case of the M4 school, which encountered many limitations in carrying out with virtual teaching through this device. In some cases, they handed out basic stationary material to around 30 families in a school, some of whom were immigrants, but many were Roma families, both in La Mina (Barcelona) and in Cañada Real (Madrid). Many of these families did not have any digital literacy or used email, which also was excluding them from the virtual parents' meetings and chats.

M3 schoolteachers also mentioned the difficulty for non-digitally literate families to enrol their children online for the following school year and criticised the added problems of bureaucracy in the administration. But teachers were also able to see families from another perspective. As a teacher from the same school explained, "*during the confinement, we have seen that families do care about their children's studies. We made it a point to contact the families once a week. Staying at home, we*

saw that they cared, and we saw that they wanted their children to work. They wanted them to be there, they were looking for ways of helping, within their possibilities, in their studies. More families now want to be on the school council, as if thanking for the accompaniment and offering their participation. It has changed the relationship and they value it positively. The relationship between family and school has been taken to better level because they have reached out to them, whether it is to give them milk or whatever. They have felt listened to and cared for". In almost all the schools in Madrid and Barcelona, this positive aspect was highlighted, confirming from new positions the importance of emotional school engagement as a key factor for student retention in the education system.

3.3 ICT, gender and school: digital leisure interference among boys and further follow-up among girls

The relationship of schools and families with ICT, and the economic situation of the latter, played a major role in the development of education activity during confinement. But so did the students' previous relationship with ICT concerning digital leisure and the consumption of audiovisual products. At this point, the differential audio-visual socialisation of adolescents and young people according to gender has become clear. Several studies (e.g. Viñals Blanco, Abad Galzacorta and Aguilar Gutiérrez, 2014; Pibernat Vila, 2019) have shown that boys play video games much more than girls. Virtual social networks are also one of the main forms of communication and leisure among girls and, to a lesser extent, among boys.

In relation to this, both in Madrid and in Barcelona, almost all the schools noticed important differences between boys and girls during the confinement. "*Boys got lost a lot with video games. (...) They spent more time on the computer because of video games. There have been families with boys who ran out of data much earlier because the boys went online playing video games*", explained a teacher at M4 school. In M3 school, a teacher interviewed said that "*during the confinement this was aggravated by being at home with more video*

games. They [boys] didn't attend online class because they were playing games. Girls did it". This has been a general trend among boys regardless of migrant or socioeconomic status, type of school or urban area. The use of virtual social networks is also widespread among boys and girls, especially Instagram and Tik Tok. However, "*girls are more hooked on Insta[gram], even before the pandemic and as early as primary education*", said a teacher at M3 school, as did teachers in other schools, something that worsened during the confinement as well as in the 2020-21 school year. At the same time, the higher potential of the skills acquired in virtual social networks by girls compared to those of video games by boys was revealed when it came to transferring them to the management of learning in a virtual environment at school.

Teachers' interviews in all schools also concurred in the observation that girls followed the classes to a greater extent during the confinement, attending online classes more regularly. As a teacher from the M3 school said, "*one girl even went online from the Philippines to follow the classes (...) Girls in general are more hardworking, they make more of an effort, they take it more seriously. The boys are less so, they find it harder to adapt, they are very hooked on video games, which the girls are not*". From the M4 school, the teacher also explained that "*in general, what we have seen is that the girls have been more hard-working. In terms of passing grades, it has been equivalent, because during the confinement it was easier to pass. The problem is now [back to face-to-face learning]*", pointing to the consequences of confinement in the 2020-21 academic year. Boys, therefore, disengaged from the classes to a greater extent than girls. The director of the M1 school confirmed that this trend is widespread, irrespective of national origin. In all nationalities, "girls *are almost always better off, despite having to look after younger siblings on some occasions*". The ESO head of studies at B4 school, mostly with students of Latin American origin, explained that she had spoken to some mothers about this burden that works against girls, and that the mothers regretted it, while at the same time they naturalised it.

One school brought about an exception to this trend among girls. The management team

of public school M4 was concerned about the increasing number of cases of girls from Latin American leaving the school and dropping out before completing lower secondary. One of them said, "*we have had to make several referrals to the ASPA project [a social education project for youth at risk] with the feeling that some of them are connecting with Latin gangs; isolated cases, but that they have doubled in number. In the 25 years that I have worked as a teacher, I have come across 2 or 3 cases of students like this. Suddenly, in a single year, this year, I have 6 or 7. The ASPA educator relates it to COVID because of having been in complicated family situations during the confinement and of greater economic disadvantage, as if on returning from the confinement, when they started to free themselves in June and July, there had been an explosion.... [These are] very significant things. Girls of 13 or 14 who told their mother to give them permission to go and live with people of 18. It seemed to me to be an aggravation of the situation which, although still uncommon, is important because it has multiplied. Just like the addiction to video games*".

This and other accounts point to the intensification of previous trends among both boys and girls, as well as in certain groups that share specific situations of family and community. Thus, instead of school disengagement related to confinement and virtual-only relationships, their relative flexibilization can also lead to disengagement from school, in the absence of preventive community intervention work with children and adolescents in the summer of 2020. This shortcoming was pointed out by most of the management teams interviewed.

3.4 Linguistic support, family monitoring and confinement among immigrant students

In general, the effects of confinement on students as a whole and among immigrant students in Spain do not appear to be very different, and reveal the same underlying problems, although in some cases they are accentuated by different educational and socio-economic causes. The sectors in which the adults in the families are employed

and their working conditions are not a minor problem in this respect. As a teacher at the M4 school pointed out, "*[parents] often have less control over their children's timetables because of longer working hours. Above all, because they start working earlier and the children stay at home on their own. This is seen [here] more in Latin families, and there is a high percentage among the students in this school. Many of the demands come from children of immigrant origin, especially Latin American ones. But it is generalised, and it is more noticeable in relation to girls.*"

The most specific problem for this segment of students during the confinement was the issue of language learning, a problem that students of Latin American origin do not have for school integration in Madrid although they do in Barcelona. The education needs of students who were supposed to learn Spanish during confinement were also affected, at risk of forgetting what they had learned. "*Some have lost Spanish completely. If they don't use it, it gets diluted*", according to a teacher at the M3 school. In the M2 school, the newcomers' class teacher elaborated material of his own for a virtual newcomers tuition to continue learning the language, previously ensuring that the conditions of connectivity and the possibilities of collaboration from families were adequate to follow the activities. He said "*What was especially important was to keep up the communicative aspect. They had two hours of online class every day, they connected with me, and we did it as a normal class, learning Spanish as a foreign language. The impact of the anomaly was minimised. They were not left without practising the language (...) There were communicative situations in which they had to participate continuously, and that was maintained. Although it is not the same, they all spoke and participated*" – he was adding that it turned out to be a good solution, even though they lacked socialisation in the school to improve practice in the natural surrounding as well as other skills. He also mentioned that the 2019-2021 academic year was especially problematic for newly arrived students because it had been the first one without further language support after spending time in the newcomers' class. "*For the pupils who have just left the newcomers' class (...) it has been a*

very serious impact. They want to move to the regular classroom. But it is an impact. They experienced two impacts in a row, going out to the regular classroom and then the confinement". For this reason, in the 2020-21 academic year, priority was given to the daily presence of these students over other combinations of intermittent presence that affected the rest of the students.

This was a very serious problem for immigrant students in Barcelona, with the added problem that exposure to the language of tuition, Catalan, is practically non-existent in the working-class neighbourhoods where these students live. The education administration did not design or provide any plan to address the basic language needs of immigrant students, either newly arrived or even in need of further learning support. Only one of the schools in Barcelona, school B3, had retained resources of support similar to the newcomers' class after the drastic cuts applied.

A teacher from school B3 reported the following: "*with other colleagues from other reception classrooms we have designed our own resources, but the means are very precarious, and there is no doubt that these students will experience a serious curricular gap, and in the long term this can lead to a higher disengagement among these students, although they are eager to learn and interact with people of their own age, which they have…. But it is inconceivable how they [the authorities] have left us*".

3.5 Internet and the impact of confinement: digital school bonds versus content

Language learning by immigrant students who have arrived in recent years illustrates well the effects of confinement on learning activities. Digital tools have maintained the students' school bonds but have not been useful for an adequate transmission and acquisition of content for which face-to-face contact is irreplaceable at these stages. The instructions given to teachers at the beginning consisted of assigning tasks but not advancing subject matter. The reduction in the content and knowledge transmitted is one of the greatest impacts of the pandemic and the

confinement, confirmed by all interviewees, who acknowledged that the curricular contents equivalent to half a year were not taught. In the M2 school they acknowledged: "*Digitally they learnt a lot…. In terms of content, they learned less*". The head teacher of M1 school also explained that 5% of the student body "dropped out" completely: "*The impact has been huge (…) many pupils have not been able to connect, tutors have chased families, called social services when there was no way to reach families, a lot of work has been done to get students to connect and work. There have been pupils who have not joined in, or who have joined in and worked very little. There are children whose families can't help them, or don't know how to*". However, the B1 school pedagogical coordinator also commented that "*we have had surprises… students who you would not have imagined have responded well, and others who you expected to respond without problems have become disengaged… And it has not always had so much to do with their academic or social profile, or where they come from*". Many factors still need to be analysed in more depth to understand the complexity of experiences undergone by these adolescent students and the impact of the school closures and the confinement.

3.6 The 2020-21 academic year: new challenges in a new uncertainty

In the school year 2020-21 the teachers interviewed recognized that, rather than teaching content, they had to restore the working capacity of the students, who returned without having written texts and with poorer spelling due to the use of computer and mobile phone language. A teacher in school M4 described the effect of the Covid-19 crisis on the school as a 10-year setback.

These effects have also been seen in the behaviour and habits of students, who became more addicted to video games and social networks, as we have pointed out earlier, which resulted in a lower tolerance for the routine of being in school. They came back "*without rules, without filters. Never at the beginning of a school year we have had to carry out as many interventions as in this school year. They come back with a great attachment to the*

networks, with a lot of aggressiveness derived from the networks or computer games, where they communicate and insult each other... We are absolutely scared. (...) They talk to teachers as if they were their parents, as they have not spoken in previous generations. Now they speak badly to parents and teachers", complained a teacher at the M2 school. The same was noted at school M4, where one of the teachers interviewed said that "*now, the boys more than the girls are finding it very difficult to get back into a routine of work. They are very sleepy, they don't come in good condition, they fall asleep in class, their eyes are closing. This is a problem that parents also tell us about. Now they have to keep to a timetable, especially the first- and second-year students. They are going to bed late because they are 'addicted' [to video games], and they must get up and maybe they come after sleeping for three or four hours (...) There is an increase in absenteeism, which is covered up with the issue of Covid-19, as if they were sick. But often they are in no condition to come to class after having slept*

so little. (...) [The situation of] all the students who were a bit lazy, with this issue, has become worse".

In the M3 school they also observed this general deterioration, although they were able to retain a stronger school bond that keeps students coming to the school. "*They really wanted to go back to school. Now there is no absenteeism. They are happy at school even if they don't do anything. There are some kids who are 18 years old and prefer to be here because, perhaps, they don't have anything else to do outside*". In a similar way, a teacher from B1 school said that "*the administration is not aware of the conditions of the families and the needs of the students. I have students who are so eager to come to school that they come with borrowed masks! They pass them between different family members. The point is to be able to come*". It is worth remembering that, despite the fact that the use of masks is mandatory, the education administrations have not provided students or teachers with masks yet at the time of writing this article.

4. Some preliminary conclusions

This study aimed to contribute to understanding the impact of the pandemic and school closure on students from a qualitative and comparative approach by national origin and gender. From the experiences reported by the teachers interviewed, it seems clear that the use of digital tools to keep up with classes during the confinement did not serve to save the year, but rather to try to maintain a certain bond between the students and the school through the Internet, thus trying to cushion the impact of the confinement. It seems, therefore, that online education can hardly be taken as a substitute for face-to-face education at compulsory stages, and even less so among the most socially vulnerable and non-language proficient students, despite some unique strategies implemented on a voluntary basis. Nor does it seem appropriate to try to maintain the intensity

and level of learning of face-to-face schooling in the virtual environment, reproducing the same intensity and level of learning as in face-to-face schooling, despite having a school routine may be beneficial in many respects, it requires constant supervision by the family, which is simply unrealistic. The testimony of school B4 is enlightening. According to the ESO coordinator: "*during the Easter holidays we started to adapt all the material to be able to teach classes in normal timetable, but via telematics, as we knew that the prestigious state schools were going to do, but it has been exhausting and frustrating for both teachers and students, and not only because of the more frequent precarious conditions of our students in terms of devices and connectivity*".

The months of confinement and the intermittent return to the classroom had a negative

impact on all students in the schools with the most socially vulnerable population and on immigrant students still in the process of learning the language(s) of tuition and/or dealing with their frequent curricular gap among those who have arrived in recent years. The consequences of what has been experienced during these two academic years seem likely to maintain the polarisation in the risk of early school leavers by origin among the cohorts concerned during secondary education. The same can be expected for the polarisation by gender.

The introduction of technology and digital tools in the teaching practices of schools prior to the pandemic had a great differential weight in their non-classroom training capacity and in the monitoring of students during confinement. However, the transmission of content was more difficult even in the best-prepared schools. And more than migration status, the impact of confinement had more to do with socio-economic vulnerability, i.e. access to devices and connectivity. Despite this, no plan could be identified to compensate for these gaps in teaching infrastructure; there were constant delays in the provision of materials, devices, and connectivity to the most vulnerable students between the confinement and the start of the following school year by the education administrations. Nor was any specific plan designed for newly arrived students.

One of the most relevant conclusions of this research was the finding that the differential relationship between boys and girls with technology and digital tools, despite their generational audio-visual socialisation (Pibernat Vila, 2019), also had a differential impact in following the year virtually during confinement, both among immigrant students and among national students. Disconnection from school by girls was lower, and the boys' higher use of the Internet for recreational purposes was identified, which accentuated their higher disconnection during the confinement and in the subsequent school year. This happened despite the fact that girls take on greater family burdens, which are increased by the exceptional conditions they have experienced.

Finally, a higher proportion of both Spanish and non-Spanish students were identified as being highly likely to have disengaged from schooling as part of the effect of isolation compared to previous years when this trend was beginning to decline. In the case of immigrant students in general, but more clearly in the Catalan school context, the risk of falling behind in education in the long term may have been significantly exacerbated by confinement. One of the biggest challenges will undoubtedly be to redouble efforts to successfully bring back into education that sector of the students that has already disengaged from the education system for almost two years.

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Changing educational roles and competences during the COVID crisis. A case study from Turin, Italy

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1. Introduction

Approximately three fourths of the global student population of all school levels was obliged into online learning during the pandemic. At the same time, formal educational institutions, and relative academic staff, were not prepared for the immediate switch to online education. According to international research in 40 countries, 67% of teachers had never experienced online teaching and were thus lacking essential competences to convey learning content in other formats than previously applied in traditional settings (INDIRE, 2020b; OECD, 2020).

Physical school closure during the COVID pandemic and the adoption of distance education had a detrimental effect on students' learning for various reasons: they spent less time in learning; they experienced stressful conditions during their home confinement, which negatively affected their ability to concentrate on schoolwork; they changed the modalities of their interactions and this produced a lack of learning motivation (Di Pietro et al., 2020; Miljković, 2021).

The effects of COVID-19 on students' achievements were not equally distributed but varied according to the student's socio-econom-ic status. The pandemic exacerbated educational inequality (McCrory, 2014), and it increased an already existing learning gap between native students and migrant students (Dustmann *et al.,* 2012; Armitage and Nellums, 2020). Migrant students from less advantaged backgrounds, in fact, experienced a larger decline in learning compared to their more advantaged counterparts. Many of them did not have access to relevant learning digital resources and did not have a suitable home learning environment. Additionally, many of them did not receive as much support from their parents as their more advantaged counterparts did.

During the emergency period, inequality in socio-emotional skills also increased. Children from lower socio-economic status were exposed to a more stressful home environment than their peers from higher socio-economic status and parents from more advantaged backgrounds were better equipped in terms of socio-emotional skills to handle problems emerging during a long confinement period.

While the majority of research focused on the losses suffered by students, the pandemic had an impact also on the relationships between

teachers and parents, on in-family relations, and on the relationships between educational figures in formal and non-formal settings.

The demarcation of formal and non-formal education increasingly blurred during the COVID crisis, which forced a (re)allocation of roles to all players in the educational field, as previously negotiated responsibilities had been completely shifted. Thus formal 'in-family' instruction outsourced schooling and extra-curricular activities mostly to the home context. Roles of caretakers and task descriptions for professional educators were thus altered in a way that taught us about the fast pace of competences and the true necessity of continuous learning (Moroni *et al.*, 2019).

These changes are therefore very important, because the relationship between teachers and parents as well as intra-family relationships and between teachers and non-formal educators had a combined effect on students' learning outcomes, their well-being and their future possi-bilities. All the above-mentioned considerations are enough for considering how exceptional has been the pandemic experience across the globe, in Europe and in Italy too, a context on which the paper focuses on.

Indeed, in our research, adopting the point of view of teachers and educators, we explored how educational relationships with immigrant students changed and how these changes have impacted their cognitive and emotional skills in a specific Italian context. We build our arguments on the data collected in micro case studies carried out in spring 2020 in formal and non-formal educational contexts in Northern Italy.

In the first part we introduce our theoretical references, we present our study context and our methodology, then we discuss the evolved relational dynamics in formal and non-formal settings, and we conclude discussing opportunities for future collaborations among the different actors involved in the daily educational scenario.

2. Schools, families and non-formal education for immigrant children

2.1 The complex parents – teachers relationship

Various scholars have focused their research on the links between school-family relationships, migrant children's well being in school settings and their academic success (Carreón *et al.,* 2005; Mapp and Henderson, 2002).

Teachers and immigrant parents have often divergent ideas on educational relationships and this prevents them from active participation and co-education. Parents may have uneasy experiences with their children's teachers; they do not always feel completely free or entitled to express themselves (Adair and Tobin, 2008; Hadley and De Gioia, 2008); they believe that they are called by the teachers only about their children's behavioural or learning problems, always blamed on faults in the parents. Many parents avoid interfering with school or they choose to stay on the sidelines because they do not have the words to express what they think (Vanderbroeck *et al.*, 2009). Language difficulties and cultural differences sometimes cause trivial misunderstandings; if these misunderstandings are prolonged over time, they produce a parents' detached attitude towards educational institutions and on the other side they confirm teachers' stereotyped image of immigrant parents (Silva, 2004). The teachers, on the other hand, feel frustrated by their relationships with families, they feel vulnerable and they express a sense of helplessness (Saft and Pianta, 2001; Ozmen et al., 2016).

In our study, it emerges that the pandemic has changed these relationships, redefining the role of teachers and of immigrant parents, the modalities of communication and, in same cases, enhanced each other's images. Furthermore, other family members acquired a role in the educational relationship, like older siblings or other cohabiting relatives.

2.2 The formal and non-formal education nexus

The learning outcomes of immigrant students are strictly related to the development of their socio-cultural skills. Validating their competencies and recognising their academic and soft skills within non-formal learning environments ease their integration and participation outside of school hours (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004). Various studies have explored measures that encourage young people to participate in the local community and in wider social work and assessed the roles that organisations play in providing non-formal education (Yeasmin *et al.*, 2022). On the other side, non-formal educational organizations could support schools with various activities, fundamental for immigrant students' integration and wellbeing.

Non-formal educational organizations can be an important bridge between immigrant families and the school because it is often easier for immigrant parents to communicate with educators than with teachers. Often, in these organizations, there are people of the same cultural or religious backgrounds, and parents feel free to share their doubts or their concerns about their children's education. Another important aspect that characterizes non-formal educational contexts is the relationship between peers. Non-formal educational contexts favour interaction with other young people: as essential for the development of positive self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of identity. Youngsters can teach each other and make improvements together. The cooperation principle is also central within the classroom, where the high scores of classmates can motivate the student (through competition or social influence) to work harder (Sacerdote, 2011). Furthermore, non-formal educational activities play a central role in helping young people to acquire social skills that they could transfer within the classroom and which have important implications for their future personal and professional growth (Goodman *et al.*, 2015).

Non-formal educational organizations, as it emerges in our study, acquired a renewed relevance during the pandemic because, during school closures, they continued to provide online and offline assistance to immigrant students and to their families.

3. Our study context and the methodology

In our research we selected 3 public institutions, one elementary school and two middle schools, located in the city of Turin, in the Piedmont Region, in Northern Italy. Furthermore we investigated a parish club, as a privileged learning setting that promotes opportunities combining targeted socialization and education (Garelli, 2007). This parish club collaborated in various ways, during the pandemic, with the 3 state schools.

The Turin case is particularly interesting for the study of educational dynamics that concern migrant student population and that have been affected by the pandemic.

Turin is the third city in Italy for the percentage of foreign residents, after Rome and Milan. As of 1 January 2021, there were in Turin 131,256 foreign residents, i.e. 15.15% of the whole resident population. After the peak in

2012 (142.000), in 2013 the number of foreigners decreased and has stagnated since then, as a consequence of the economic crisis which started in 2008 and has particularly hit the Piedmont Region. At the same time, a growing share of the immigrant residents is increasingly integrating in local society, as demonstrated by the data on the school population. In the last two decades, increasing numbers of immigrant youth have brought about profound modifications in the local educational system. In 2020-2021, there were 19,898 foreign students, 19.13% of the total student population in Turin: with 31.3% of them from Romania, 16.5% from Morocco, 7.5% from Peru, 6.50% from China, and 5.5% from Egypt. The growth observed over the past years is mostly explained by the increasing presence of foreign students born in Italy (13% of the total).

Although there is a predominance of foreigners enrolled in primary school level, their presence in the upper secondary school is also relevant, with significant numbers enrolled in high schools with academic generalist orientation, as well as in technical-oriented schools and in vocational training offered by local schools organized at the regional level (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca – Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per il Piemonte, 2021).

All the educational settings we investigated are located in popular neighbourhoods, characterised by a rather significant presence of newly arrived and long-term migrants with a share up to 33% of foreign students (Ricucci, 2021). In these neighbourhoods we observe an urban super diversity, that is a "diversification of diversity" in the everyday social interactions (Creese and Blackledge, 2018). Recent migrations have brought not only more ethnic groups and nationalities but also a multiplication of significant variables, such as gender, age differences, social class differences, legal status. Education systems and especially schools can be considered micro-images of all these diversities and the social effects of the super diversity play a role in both learning and teaching. The super diversity is still regarded in many Italian contexts as exceptional and education systems are still based on the assumption of homogeneity as normal in a (school) population. Thus, they make difference look like disadvantage or, in the worst case, they turn difference into disadvantage (Gogolin, 2011).

The elementary school is located in Northern Turin, in one of the most diverse and foreign populated neighbourhoods in the city. It has 70 foreign students (33% of the total), and 45 foreign students born in Italy (21% of the total). The first middle school analyzed is not far from the elementary school, 94 foreign students (25% of the total) and 56 foreign students born in Italy (15% of the total). The parish club in also located Northern Turin. Out of school hours it is attended by around 200 children and adolescents, 30% of which are foreigners.

The second middle school is located in Southern Turin, in a popular neighbourhood with medium immigration, mostly long-term migrants. It has 165 foreign students (20% of the total) and 90 foreign students born in Italy (11% of the total).

Between March and May 2020, we met a total of 12 educators and teachers and we focused the interviews on their changing educational roles and competences during the COVID crisis[9].

We asked them to present their educational institutions, the specificities of immigrant students and of their families and to discuss three central points: how their relationship with parents has changed during the pandemic; how intra-family relations changed; what pedagogical tools they have adopted and how their students' learning has been influenced by these tools, in a positive or negative sense.

All interviews were conducted in Italian, recorded and transcribed. We are aware to provide a partial view of the educational relationship, because we did not have the opportunity to

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9   The Italian Ministry of Education has invested a lot of funds to help schools in facing problems generated by the pandemic. Ministerial Decree No. 187 in March 2020 and the following one, No. 155 in November 2020 allocated resources for providing digital platforms and tools, sustaining network connectivity and training school personnel in middle and high schools. In the city of Turin, additional funds were invested in virtual classrooms to allow digital teaching even for primary school students. Electronic devices, books and educational kits were also purchased by teachers and granted on loan to fragile students. All these three schools benefited from these extraordinary measures but the provision of equipment alone did not solve the major problems that emerged during the pandemic.

compare the views of teachers and of educators with those of parents. However, the data collected provide a complex and articulated picture of educators who found themselves at the forefront of managing educational relationships during the pandemic. In further research we intend to complete the picture, exploring also the point of view of immigrant parents.

4. New forms of communication and new relational dynamics

According to the already available literature on the topic, the interviewed teachers referred to two major categories of immigrant parents that represent a continuum from total delegation to continuous interference. They related thus to parents who never interfered with teachers' educational choices, but who were at the same time absent in problem-solving situations. This scenario has been rather often discussed also by educators of the parish club.

On the other hand, teachers reported on parents who acted rather intrusively and continually interfered in teachers' decisions.

The family composition, the socio-cultural and economic background of each nucleus plays a significant role for the relationship established with educational institutions and thus devolved power by parents for the education of their children.

"Many children we see every day are not culturally emancipated, and this forces them into a path that is not in line with their potentials. (…) So, the objective here is to make up for the shortcomings in their families to act as a crutch … they are missing pieces, but it is not their responsibility. Our job is to make up for those shortcomings so they can aim for important milestones in their life like everybody else." (PR, educator oratorio).

This educator provided a description of parents not interested at all in the education of their children and pointed out the compensatory role played by his educational institutions. What the educator defines as a lack of cultural emancipation can rather be traced back to a difficult cultural and linguistic communication between educators and immigrant parents.

Nevertheless, there are parents with a rather stark disinterest about the educational activities of their children and who have only minor concern in discussing their progress or barriers in the daily pre-Covid proceedings – this, in turn, questions the actual role of educators and the actual range of provided educational services.

"We are wondering how we can restore full parenthood to them in order to prevent them from a total delegation to us for the education of the kids. They are their children, they've put them into this world, and they should exercise paternity and motherhood on all levels. Our task should be to act as a support, but not as a substitute." (PR, educator oratorio).

During the lockdown periods and with the introduction of online distance learning *"parents were thus actually constrained for the first time to really watch their children"* (educator oratorio).

One of the major challenges on educational level was represented by the altered spatial conditions, which implied the change of learning methods, contents and instruments. Accordingly, the school context was brought into the homes and private, sensitive issues entered the formal

education sphere. Thus, parents had the opportunity to be present at all the lessons, which altered the two-way student-teacher relationship to a triangle relation that involved also the caretaker.

"Before it was just us teachers with the students. During the pandemic an exclusive educational space was also invaded by parents. And that's not good." (MD, middle school teacher).

Consequently, several teachers reported the gradual development and alteration of expectations and hence even more delegations towards the teaching staff.

"Parents expected us teachers to be able to answer all their fears. They considered school the only safe place in a situation of total uncertainty that they were experiencing everywhere. They feared that their children would have cognitive losses and that, by staying at home, they would waste their time in front of the computer. They asked us: do not abandon our children. They did not realize that we teachers were in a very, very difficult moment, like them." (MD, middle school teacher).

Due to the rising affective bond between families and the schooling institution, the teacher was thus perceived by several families as a rather close figure and often involved in issues that went beyond the academic level of the students, but also tackled everyday family problems:

"We teachers, through the DAD, entered their houses and they entered our houses. They saw us with different eyes and for this reason a more intimate relationship was created. A Pakistani dad asked me to stay close to his little girl because he was afraid of losing her. Another Moroccan father told me to pray a lot and told me that he was praying for me and for our class." (SM, primary school teacher).

According to this teacher, during the pandemic the emotional distances between teachers and parents have shortened and this fact improved not only communication between school and families but also between foreign parents and their children. Foreign parents with low language skills were the most disadvantaged in the online relationships and had the most difficulty supervising their children. In these cases, intermediation by other family members was fundamental. Teachers observed changing relationships among parents constrained to work at home due to lockdowns and thus able to assist their children with school activities.

"There are some students who, during online teaching, even improved because for the first time they had their parents by their side. They gained self-confidence. For example, there is this Romanian girl who had many cognitive problems before the pandemic. Her mother was at home and supervised her very carefully; this mother, whom I had never met at school, talked to me to understand her daughter's problems." (ES, primary school teacher).

Other than improving the communications between teachers and parents, changing in-family dynamics also provided for an increased cooperation between siblings as the older ones often became tutors and mentors for younger brothers and sisters:

"Zebida is a fifth-grade Moroccan girl and the oldest of seven siblings. She understood by herself how to do distance learning, and she taught the two younger brothers who are in second and third grade." (CT, primary school teacher).

The teachers also observed how, in some cases, the parents of different students improved the cooperation between them to cope with the common problems of their children. Immigrant parents, who faced more difficulties in understanding the teachers' instructions, were helped by Italian parents.

"The parents helped each other a lot. They used whatsapp groups to circulate information and to reach parents who risked being left behind. This is something that we did not expect: the pandemic has strengthened the collaboration

and solidarity between different families." (CT, *primary school teacher*).

Cooperation between schools, non-formal education institutions and families has been fundamental in addressing both technological and learning problems.

In order to encounter apparent economic and socio-cultural lacunas of numerous families in need living in Turin a group of devoted educators put in place initiatives to sustain students with their studies during the second lockdown period at the end of 2020.

"Many of them had technical difficulties with the internet or were missing appropriate devices. Moreover, we noticed their closure, almost a refusal, in the face of every school initiative. Maybe also because sharing a house with several other brothers, perhaps as old as them or older, and thus also forced into distance learning. Sometimes they have houses so small that it is almost impossible to manage several people at the same time there. Or even just the stay-at-home mom who is used to clean and be by herself all day, hence there is the vacuum cleaner and the cooking, regardless if children have to follow lessons or not." (ML, *educator oratorio*).

Accordingly, students were provided with technical devices, pedagogic-educational skilled staff and appropriate facilities and grouped with their peers to learning teams. Other than learning benefits and increased motivation to follow their lessons, the educators observed that on the one hand the strong existing socio-emotional needs were further pronounced during the pandemic. However also the competence building of soft skills from the students they had hosted for the distance lessons was apparently stimulated. Accordingly, the involved pupils appreciated the organized, collaborative and co-creative learning context that emphasized respectful, empathic and tolerant relations between the learners.

In this case non-formal educators provided didactic and emotional support, essential to encounter parents' and children's needs. In other cases, non-formal educational organizations coordinated directly with schools to closely monitor pupils most at risk of dropping out throughout the pandemic period. In addition to organizing meetings with students on digital platforms, educators went to visit students at home when allowed, providing material aid and study support, while also maintaining communication with teachers.

5. New pedagogical tools and their impact on the socio-emotional skills and learning outcomes

Online teaching, in the first period of the pandemic, was managed above all through the attempt to reproduce, digitally, the existing educational dynamics. Synchronous lessons were privileged over asynchronous activities and used the approach of frontal lessons above all.

"In the first months of pandemic, our commitment as teachers was not to lose contact with

the students. We did not have time to come up with a new method, we simply moved the classroom online. Our priority was that all students were able to connect, see and hear each other". (SM, *primary school teacher*).

Accordingly to teachers of elementary schools in Turin, collaborative learning at distance at the beginning was very complicated,

as they experienced difficulties in alternating speakers, in sustaining verbal exchange between students and in stimulating all students within the class during the online lessons. It's been evidenced by most respondents that the pandemic had a profound psychological impact especially on fragile students and those with complex family backgrounds. Several teachers noted that students were acting online more passively; they had lost the habit of being together and listening to each other:

"When they returned to school in September I had 22 individuals in front of me, not a group. Everyone felt isolated from the others" (CT, primary school teacher).

Didactic contents chosen for the online learning in the first period of the pandemic prioritised conventional and teacher-centric material, such as textbooks, online contents available from textbooks or own digitally produced material ad hoc for the lessons. Only a very low share of material had been produced or co-created by the students themselves.

The resulting evident and immense clash of needs and according competences entailed a re-definition of hard and soft skill sets needed in the newly and ad hoc created global educational space. It rapidly turned out that hard skills were not in tune with needed soft skills to overcome destabilizing socio-emotional circumstances (Giovanella *et al.,* 2020), especially because social and emotional skills of children were the most affected during the lockdown period(s) throughout 2020.

The interviewed teachers highlighted differences related to the age of the students. According to them, during the distance learning secondary school students showed slight improvements on some soft skills, such as collaboration and self-regulation, while, on the other hand, in the younger student groups, distance interaction led to a worsening of soft skills.

On the other hand, the online teaching brought out skill gaps of students who were continuously penalized by traditional and standardized teaching and learning methods. Accordingly, interviewed teachers confirmed that for instance

students with dysgraphia were more comfortable and advantaged in their learning process when using computers or similar technical devices. Students with migratory background who learned or were used to another literary language or had oral communication barriers instead benefitted from online lessons and a technology-mediated relationship.

"I have a Chinese student, he does not speak Italian well and he is very shy. Before the pandemic, when he was in class, he was always in the shade of the others. However, during the pandemic, he communicated quite a lot in the WhatsApp group, he was much more active and involved." (SV, primary school teacher).

The cooperative learning is one of the opportunities provided by the new technologies. Online sharing environments have been used by some teachers as repositories rather than collaboration spaces; and informal platforms (e.g. WhatsApp) fostered one-way communication flows, rather than relationships. Other teachers, otherwise, have made the most of the potential of this method:

"A nice pedagogical novelty was that of exchanging materials through digital platforms such as classrooms. After the first few months I began to make better use of digital tools. For example, I started to share photographs or films that the students could watch after the end of the synchronous lesson. Thanks to the sharing platforms, for the first time, students have begun to do things together, to cooperate, to exchange materials with each other. This was a positive thing but was important to know how to coordinate it." (SM, primary school teacher).

These and other potential opportunities and chances that derived from the concerning situation in the educational sphere during COVID-19 are indeed corroborated by other researches and surveys that investigated teachers' perceptions on the impact of online lessons (INDIRE, 2020a; 2020b).

Accordingly, the experience with distance learning entailed new possibilities to stimulate student motivation and involvement as well as student autonomy in the learning processes through new forms of collaboration and new roles/responsibilities allocated to students' autonomy. In this vein, a rather interesting finding was the different, actually opposed, perception of teachers on how online learning altered the student motivation. In the INDIRE survey, it emerges that, whereas almost one third refer to a positive effect of online distance learning, similar percentages assessed no or negative effects on the student's involvement in the learning context. This implies that different methods as well as class compositions have significantly determined the potential benefits of this starkly changing learning environment.

Indeed, our interviewed teachers referred to new teaching methods and flipped-classroom models to engage with the rapidly changed learning environment and the evolved opportunities for innovative teaching that provided not only for new tools but also reorganized schedules:

"In the classroom students have to sit for a long time, listen in silence. Many students suffer from this frontal teaching. During online learning they were more relaxed, they did not feel the pressure." (MD, middle school teacher).

Accordingly, newly evolving learning and communication processes may therefore be beneficial if their potential is recognized to renew existing schemes and methods in order to favor a rebalancing of skill gaps rather than accentuating them.

"Online learning requires specific techniques that cannot be improvised. For example, you need to create small working groups and know how to associate students in these groups. You must know the weaknesses and potentials of each student: for example, an immigrant student with language problems, but with great graphic skills, can work with an Italian native speaker colleague, less inclined to work with images… Furthermore, distance learning is cyclical; it is not like frontal teaching. You have to return to the topics several times, you have to involve the students and ask them to bring some materials and then start by the material provided by the students" (MD, middle school teacher).

In conclusion, teachers and educators confirmed that online learning has changed not only relations with immigrant students and their parents, but also has an impact on their socio-emotional skills and learning outcomes. Positive results depend, in the first place, on the ability of teachers to adapt their methods to the new educational contexts.

6. Lessons learnt. Building an educational community is still the key

In the research framework of the lack of opportunities for supporting migrant families in crisis situations (Borgna, 2017; Tjaden and Hunkler, 2017) and the heterogeneous effect of the pandemic on families (Raghuram and Sondhi, 2022), our research showed to what extent the pandemic increased educational inequality, showing as pronounced the interrelation between socio-economic capital and educational performance among students with different backgrounds (such as migration status and the socio-economic position of families).

The results of the investigations that we conducted in the educational institutions corrob-

orated the assumption that immediate action was needed to foster and promote the lifelong right of all learners to access high-quality and inclusive training opportunities (European Commission, 2018). This was particularly true when unexpected events occurred, thus requiring institutional settings to cope with the new challenges as they happened in 2020 with the first wave of the pandemic. The Italian educational context, since the very beginning of the enrolment of migrant students at school, introduced – at least in guidelines and government statements – and invited schools to take into account the emerging needs due to the arrival of students with various ethnic backgrounds, and with low or no proficiencies in English and heterogeneous school experiences (Mascheroni et al., 2021). However, this huge reality has been strongly affected by the unexpected shift from on-site to on-line lessons. Schools have had to react and rearrange their way of teaching, in several cases becoming themselves learners on how to use the new online platforms. In doing this, there was a lack of attention to the needs of those immigrant families more in difficulty due to socio-economic vulnerabilities and lack of language for reading the WhatsApp chat written in Italian as well as the emails.

Educators and teachers adopted various solutions, such as the provision of digital devices, new teaching methods, multimedia lessons, flipped-classrooms. These solutions had very different effects, which can be explained by taking into account the age of the students, their socio-economic conditions, and their family background. Our results confirmed that it was not possible to think of the same effective solutions for every child and in every educational setting, but in a context of such superdiversity it has been increasingly necessary to design educational interventions based on individual needs. One of the most relevant aspects is that the pandemic has promoted new forms of collaboration and new roles and responsibilities. These collaborative modalities involved not only students and educators but also parents and other key personnel. Indeed, the learning opportunities improved week-by-week thanks also to the involvement of social workers from NGOs and young volunteers belonging to various ethnic

associations who served as 'natural cultural mediators' improving a kind of cultural divide between parents and children within families. Children and parents faced problems in coping with the various challenges that emerged during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Among the various consequences, and close to those specifically linked to learning, the development of both social and emotional skills has been negatively affected in the last two years. Furthermore, the pandemic impacted on family relationships (between parents and children, the parental couple and siblings), cross-cultural relationships with peers in educational contexts (the lack of daily physical interactions at school) and relationships between families and teachers and/or educators, even though these peculiar interactions used to be under observation[10] before the Covid-19 experience.

Covid 19 reminded us that migration processes usually involve challenges in inter-generational relations among families: children can interiorize social and cultural values in contrast to what their parents believed or how they behaved. Among these cultural challenges, language played an important role. Furthermore, the diffused use of ICTs and social media to communicate added a new challenge in the field of interactions, even across generations and across countries. Moving beyond the question of whether or not young individuals were highly skilled in using these technologies, the new technologies have been reshaping emotional ties between parents and children. This is typically occurring transculturally and transnationally in families at this time. The focus on immigrant families provides an opportunity to study how being closer and faster in touch than other migrants can hamper cultural distances and define intercultural misunderstanding, especially as far as emotions, feelings and expressions of intimacy are concerned. The empirical study presented here supports the perspective of the crucial importance of not leaving schools and teachers alone in coping with key educational challenges as those related to migrant children are. Indeed, it supports helping them to

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10 Several studies indeed have pointed out the difficulties in involving migrant parents in school activities (Premazzi and Ricucci, 2013; Gabrielli et al., 2021).

be inserted at school and to successfully pursue the educational path presumed as a close collaboration among all actors involved in the educational scenario, and thus an intertwined dialogue at institutional and individual level (Baloche and Brody, 2017). Accordingly, students and families should be actively involved in the organization and conduction of formal and non-formal educational processes and therefore be in constant dialogue with teachers, educators, stakeholders and policymakers.

Additionally, collaboration and interaction within educational scenarios should also be transversal, and thus occur at the same levels. Hence, policymakers with diverse competence fields, teachers from different disciplines, parents of students with highly diversified backgrounds and students themselves should be patently encouraged to share best practices and to work out strategies to develop existing competences and build new ones in order to optimize the educational experience.

These collaboration and interaction patterns should be structured and benefit from different perspectives that may change during the dialogue. Accordingly, all actors should be enabled in order to be both trainer and trainee, to stimulate the acquisition, cultivation and transmission of competences.

Recalling Sayad (1999), the pandemic has had a 'mirror function': the health crisis is still showing critical issues in managing educational opportunities for all students. The lockdown months and the subsequent experiences of school organization in coping with the challenges of Covid infections among pupils are showing – again – the need to revise educational methods and tools for reducing learning inequalities. It is indeed an old issue, which requires to be addressed with much greater attention and updated methods, as well as the need for improving the nexus between formal and informal educational institutions and thus strengthening soft skills for students, parents and educational staff.

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Migrant students in the UK pandemic: impacts, school responses and community approaches.

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1. Introduction

Lockdowns and school closures in response to Covid-19 have impacted on all students in the UK, but have also acted as multipliers of educational inequalities. Among the most vulnerable are newly arrived migrant children, as they tend to be less familiar with the educational system and life in the country. Some migrant and refugee students also face challenges due to language barriers, limited resources and, in many cases, the traumatic personal experiences of migration.

Throughout the pandemic, the specific situation of migrant pupils has received little attention among researchers, policymakers, and the media. This article contributes to addressing the information gaps about: the impact of the UK pandemic on migrant students in primary and secondary schools; the responses and practices implemented by schools and other local actors; the potential ways forward at the level of policy and practice.

This article stems from a research collaboration between NIESR (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) and the University of Nottingham (International Centre on Public

and Social Policy – icPSP)[11]. It is informed by a review of available evidence and by the insight emerging from two parallel studies. First was a research project undertaken by NIESR, building on an earlier report on 'How schools are integrating new migrant pupils and their families' (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). Following the start of the first UK lockdown, additional semi-structured interviews were undertaken with teachers and headteachers across England to explore new challenges and responses. The project was led by Dr Chiara Manzoni and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Second was a study conducted at the University on Nottingham by Dr Alessio D'Angelo[12] on 'Migrant Pupils

in UK schools: the impact of Covid', which in its first stages focused on interviews with third sector and public sector organisations to examine the impact of the pandemic on schools, students and their families, as well as mapping local interventions.

In the next section, we provide an important contextual overview by discussing the situation of migrant students in the UK prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and examining the role of different actors, including national policy makers, schools and third sector organisations. We then focus on the impact of the pandemic – and related lockdowns – on the experience of migrant students, exploring the responses and school and community level. In the concluding section, we consider some overall lessons than can be learned from 2020, identifying some potential ways forward as we re-emerge from the pandemic.

2. Migrant students in the UK: what we knew before the pandemic

2.1 Migrant students in the UK – characteristics and risk factors

Systematic evidence about migrant students in the UK is limited. This is due to the shortcomings and mutability of administrative sources, but also to the human-rights concerns about the collection of migration data in the context of education (see, for example, the campaign by SchoolsABC, 2019). The School Census in England, however, collects data on pupils who speak 'English as an additional language' (EAL). According to the statistics for the school year 2019-2020[13], the proportion of EAL students is 21% in primary schools and 17% in secondary schools. The EAL category refers to a very heterogeneous group and includes children and families from inside and outside the European Union, refugees, asylum-seekers as well as unaccompanied children and those reunited with their families. While pupils from migrant families are included in the EAL category even if bilingual, recently arrived pupils will have more structural

EAL needs (DfE, 2012; Ofsted, 2013). Being an EAL pupil is not in itself an indicator of educational difficulties, as evidence suggests that many EAL pupils perform well and manage to catch up academically with their peers during their time in school (Strand et al., 2015). What is important, instead, is the level of English proficiency (Strand and Lindorff, 2020). A measure of children's 'proficiency in English' level was systematically collected in the January 2017 and 2018 school censuses (DfE, 2017) but the Department for Education discontinued it after that point.

Language acquisition is a crucial route to achievement and integration, with schools playing a key role, considering the classroom is often the sole place where newcomers need to communicate in their non-native language. Pupils' lack of English acquisition can result in an inability to access the curriculum (Strand and Hessel, 2018). For secondary school students, an additional barrier is represented by the lack of access to the academic language needed for examinations (Hutchinson, 2018).

Among all EAL pupils, the term 'newly arrived migrant children' is usually applied to those

13 https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics

who have entered the state education system during the last three years. This is because only this subgroup will attract targeted funding under the national formula, although the needs of some pupils from a migrant background extend well beyond this definition. The very concept of 'migrant students' is somewhat imprecise – and thus potentially controversial – hiding an extremely wide range of backgrounds and conditions. However, having arrived in the UK in recent times can represent a risk-factor for students, alongside the stage in which they enter schooling, the education experience in the country of origin (or lack of it), their socio-economic and cultural background, and the migration status of their parents. Migrant children are also more likely to suffer from socio-economic disadvantage; the poverty rate among children with foreign-born parents is twice as high than among children of UK-born parents (Hughes and Kenway, 2016). Some children in migrant families, including those refused asylum, are affected by the 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) policy, which means they do not have access to the mainstream welfare benefits that are available to UK citizens and those with 'indefinite leave to remain' including Child Benefit, Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance. They may not get access to NHS services free of charge and they have an even smaller safety net than the wider population (Pinter et al., 2020).

2.2 Migrant students in education policy and discourses

The recent history of education policy in the UK indicates that migrant students have not been simply forgotten; rather, they have been largely presented as a problem – and so progressively removed from the list of those worthy of support (D'Angelo, 2020). A turning point of this process was the abolition, in 2011, of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grants (EMAG), a public fund introduced just a decade earlier to support BAME and EAL pupils. Funding has now been absorbed into general school funding and around half of

Local Authorities have no central EAL spending (Hutchinson, 2018).

The presence of migrant students has been described as a potential burden rather than an opportunity – one of the many strands of the 'migrants as scroungers' myth – and as having a negative impact on overall school attainment. This counters all the data we have on the subject. In 2018, the government's own Migration Advisory Committee reported "no evidence that migration has reduced parental choice in schools or the educational attainment of UK-born children" (MAC, 2018).

Thankfully, the views of teachers are often very different. A recent study by NIESR (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019) found teachers were positive about the contribution that migrant pupils and their families make to the life of their schools. This includes not only the motivation and attitude of many migrant pupils and their families, but also the enrichment of the social and cultural school environment through exposure of pupils and staff to different languages and cultures. However, the lack of bespoke funding and nation-wide programmes to support migrant pupils restricts the support schools can give them, as they are not able to hire enough specialist EAL teachers or support staff, to supply equipment, or to translate teaching materials for the newly arrived.

More recently, and in the midst of the pandemic, came the announcement that Ofsted[14] intended to abolish the role of National Lead for EAL, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT)[15]. The national subject association for EAL (NALDIC) has strongly criticised the move, observing: "*the removal of the National Lead is part of a broader 'fight for fairness', as outlined by Liz Truss, Minister for Equalities and Women, in a recent speech. This removes all mechanisms to support specific groups in favour of a single, undifferentiated focus on 'inequality'. It combats a perceived 'soft bigotry of low expectations, where people from certain backgrounds*

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14 Ofsted is the national office in charge of inspecting schools and other educational setting across the country.

15 See: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsteds-restructure-puts-eal-and-grt-students-progress-at-risk/

are never expected or considered able enough to reach high standards.' From our work advocating for EAL pupils, representing specialist teachers, teaching assistants, advisors and leaders, researching and sharing good practice, we do not recognise this. Instead, we see the hard bigotry of no expectations, of pupils whose needs are clearly understood being failed because government departments and the inspectorate no longer think they are worthy of attention" (NALDIC, 2021).

2.3 The role of schools

For migrant pupils, schools are not just places where knowledge and skills are acquired, but also fundamental spaces for the development of their sense of self, belonging and citizenship (D'Angelo and Ryan, 2011; Badwan et al., 2021). Schools also offer mixing opportunities for pupils and parents, which are crucial for promoting integration and cohesion across communities as well as positive attitudes. Ensuring schools are adequately resourced is essential so that migrant pupils can reach their potential quickly, requiring less support in the longer term. Schools often provide support not just to pupils, but to whole (migrant) families experiencing hardship, ending up compensating for the shortcomings of the wider welfare system. For newly arrived migrants, including refugees and asylum-seeking children and their families, schools are often the first port of call providing support beyond education – for example, helping to access information, advice, health-care and benefits. Many schools also support migrant pupils by providing mentoring schemes aimed at improving their confidence and ensuring their wellbeing (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019).

In many UK schools, however, targeted resources can be scarce, particularly where the migrant presence is smaller. When dedicated programmes are available, they sometimes place all newly arrived pupils into one group, restricting teachers' ability to cater for them as individuals. As pointed out in a recent report by Social Scientists Against the Hostile Environment (2020), and with particular regard to parental involve-

ment initiatives, a 'one size fits all' approach can fail to communicate effectively with parents about academic or pastoral issues and risks stereotyping all migrant parents as 'deficient', rather than properly involving them in decision making (SSAHE, 2020).

Still, over the years, many excellent examples of good practice have developed, often in collaboration with a range of local stakeholders. NIESR research funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on integration of new migrant students and their families, has collected evidence on what schools around England are doing to facilitate integration by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment and improving the performance of pupils. Buddy schemes (mainly used in primary schools) or young interpreter and young ambassadors programmes are examples of ways in which a diverse intake can benefit all pupils (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). Pupils are trained to carry out buddying roles or to translate materials, enhancing their own skills. Extra-curricular activities, such as art or drama projects, film-making or storytelling workshops are used to involve migrant pupils in school life. These activities improve pupils' language skills and confidence and, in turn, benefit their schools through increased awareness of the past and current lives of new migrants settling in the UK. One remarkable programme operating across the UK, School of Sanctuary[16], raises awareness among all pupils about the experiences of refugees and those seeking sanctuary, increasing pupils' understanding of migration phenomena. However, many of these initiatives are often hard to sustain because of constantly changing policy and funding frameworks.

2.4 The role of the community sector

As highlighted by international research (Eurydice, 2019) the successful integration of migrant students requires a 'whole-child' approach, i.e. supporting language acquisition and learning the curriculum on the one-hand and supporting

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16 https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/

social and emotional development on the other. Such an approach requires not falling into the trap of group homogenization and recognising individuality (Pamies and D'Angelo, 2020). In turn, this calls for a 'whole-school' approach, i.e. the involvement of *all* students, families and the wider community (D'Angelo and Kaye, 2018) in processes of mutual interaction and exchange.

In this respect, the collaboration between schools, the local public sector and community organisations can be particularly fruitful, with some consolidated good practice of collaboration, particularly with regard to family engagement among ethnic minority and migrant communities (Paniagua and D'Angelo, 2016). This is part of the UK's well-established tradition of migrant-led organisations providing direct community support. The role of migrant and BAME organisations, however, saw quite a reduction in political support from the mid-2000s, in the name of the so-called 'social cohesion agenda' (D'Angelo, 2015), whilst the emphasis on parental and community engagement (Corter and Pelletier, 2005) has often been used as an instrument to progressively reduce the role of local authorities in overseeing education, expanding the role of private actors.

This was part of a wider process of reforms driven by market principles and leading to an increasingly complex and fragmented education system (Benn, 2012).

Still, to this date, newly arrived migrants, including refugees and asylum-seeking children and their families, often rely on supplementary education and voluntary sector services for information, advocacy and support to access their rights (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018). In the education sector, these organisations can provide parents with specialised services and practical information to overcome institutional barriers and help schools develop a more welcoming climate or address deficit views towards poor and culturally diverse families. In terms of engagement, third sector organisations (TSOs) can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture of families and build the basis for active participation through the improvement of relationships among parents and between parents and teachers. Overall, TSOs can help nurturing children's positive sense of their ethnicity and even reframing dominant discursive notions of otherness and schooling (Mirza and Reay, 2000).

3. The impact of Covid-19 on migrant students

3.1 School closures and changes in education delivery

The pandemic has been a global event and, although it has affected countries across the world in different ways, it has forced rapid changes in education delivery almost everywhere. Besides the different political contexts, schools faced similar challenges in supporting newly arrived migrant pupils and their families in this time of crisis, as often the transition to distance educa-

tion was accompanied by insufficient support and experience with such practice. Countries closed schools at different times, following different strategies.

The UK, for example, was one of the last countries in the EU to close school premises. At the start of the first wave of the pandemic, the reluctance of the British Government to close schools seemed to relate primarily to the impact of this decision on economic productivity. However, the role of schools as a place of learning

and socialisation was left – at best – in the background.

Eventually, the decision came into force on March 20th 2020, followed shortly after by the announcement that GCSE and A Level exams had been cancelled. While schools remained open during lockdown for the children of key workers and vulnerable children (including children of migrant parents, many of whom are essential workers), evidence from the Department for Education shows that many did not attend[17]. A decision to allow all children back to school was postponed several times, with some reopening taking place from the start of June, but with regional differences and, in the case of England, for some school years only. In fact, most primary and secondary school students only returned in full in September 2020. The second national lockdown – announced in November 2020 – didn't affect schools; however, with a new resurgence of Covid cases, the pressures to close schools mounted again in December. Eventually, soon after the school winter holidays, a third lockdown was announced. All primary and secondary schools in England had to close their gates to most pupils, once again returning to 'distance learning' as the default option. These partial school closures continued until the 8th of March 2021.

With school closures, virtual connections between teachers and students substituted the physical interaction, as 'distance learning' became the default option for most (both in the UK and across Europe), though the level of preparedness varied considerably (OECD, 2020a). Online platforms were extensively used at all levels of education, with television channels and other distance-learning solutions more commonly used at the primary level (OECD, 2021). The availability of advice, guidance and support has been mixed too; not only between but also within countries. The diverse effects of these measures were also connected to the level of 'digital divide', despite the significant efforts made by schools to reach children via alternative means such as printed work packs or television channels.

An online survey conducted in May-June 2020 with families with school-aged children in England highlighted a digital divide in access to technological devices for home learning during the pandemic (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021). Results show socio-economic gaps in learning time during the lockdown which are larger than before the lockdown. The richest third of primary school children were reported to spend about four and half hours per week more on learning than the poorest third of primary school children. Among secondary school children, the reported gap was one hour a day in learning time between the richest and the poorest third of children. Survey data collected via teachers confirm a similar picture highlighting that only 10% of teachers overall report that all their students have adequate access to a device for remote learning (Sutton Trust, 2021).

To date, the access to an appropriate device and reliable internet connection is still something the UK government is failing to achieve. In response to the first lockdown, in April 2020, the Department for Education announced a plan to support vulnerable pupils with social workers, care leavers and disadvantaged year 10s across England by giving them laptops and tablets. The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2020) calculated that, based on the DfE published criteria to receive the support, only 37% of children in eligible groups could be allocated a device. Whilst the British government has recognised the importance of addressing the digital divide among students, its efforts are still limited and fail to recognise some deeper inequalities.

Overall the dilemma faced by the UK school system has been presented as 'a choice between danger and disadvantage' (D'Angelo, 2020). By treating school closures as a short-term emergency, there has been little room to make longer-term plans and, in the absence of specific governmental instructions regarding educational approaches and standards related to learners with a migrant background, these – together with other vulnerable groups of children – have been affected the most.

17 See: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2021-week-3

3.2 How migrant students were affected

As highlighted by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2021). the Department of Education had "no pre-existing plan for dealing with disruption on this scale" and, particularly in the early months of the pandemic, "it allowed schools considerable discretion in how they supported in-school and remote learning". In the absence of a clear framework and national guidelines, schools and teachers responded proactively to the sudden impact of the Covid-19 emergency on their pupils, including newly arrived migrants. NIESR research conducted with primary and secondary schools in England (as well as Italy, Spain and Switzerland), collected the views of school staff on the challenges faced by migrant students and their families.

In line with other existing evidence, research results indicate a general **lack of technical equipment** for quality online learning, including laptops (or other devices) as well as stable broadband connections. Some pupils only had access to online learning through their parents' mobile phones and in some cases only one device was available for different siblings. In some extreme cases, the lack of basic resources such as pens, colouring pencils and paper excluded children from any type of activity. The conditions for adequate home schooling not only rely on access to technology, but also on whether an appropriate physical space for learning exists at home. The **lack of adequate space** for home schooling was reported by teachers as particularly challenging. Not having a quiet room or a desk at home means that some migrant pupils had difficulty attending online lessons and accessing teaching content.

These results have been confirmed by other studies. Although the above mentioned research by the Institute for Fiscal Study does not specify the home schooling situation of migrants, we know that on average migrant families have lower income, and children in migrant households are more likely to experience **material deprivation** than children in households where all family members are UK-born (Migration Observatory, 2020). Newly arrived migrant children or those with foreign-born parents are also more likely to live in households where the health and economic impact of the wider coronavirus crisis is particularly severe. Office for National Statistics data reveal that, for some migrant and minority ethnic groups, the risk of Covid-19-related deaths is up to four times higher than the average (Public Health England, 2020). The latest ONS statistics[18] reveal that for some migrant and BAME groups the risk of Covid-related death is up to four times higher than the average.

Teachers and practitioners interviewed also reflected on the **impact of school closure on language development** reporting a decrease in pupils' confidence speaking in the host-country language – as well as a decrease in their vocabulary – due to the lack of practice outside the home. Development of English language proficiency is fundamental in building friendships, social inclusion and achieving successful academic outcomes (Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017). In many schools, online learning has had little or no element of pupil-to-pupil interaction, thus depriving migrant pupils of opportunities to socialise and improve their language skills (D'Angelo, 2020).

In a remote learning context, parents become a key resource for education provision as facilitators of learning. However, teachers interviewed report that some **parents were unable to support their children with online learning.** This was due to lack of time, language barriers, limited technological literacy or their unfamiliarity with the educational process. While home learning during Covid-19 has been a challenge for all involved, migrant pupils were reported to struggle the most because of language barriers within their families as parents are less likely to be familiar with the national curriculum and the UK education system, and therefore less likely to feel confident in supporting their children's learning. Other authors also stress that migrant parents are on average less able to support their children because they are unfamiliar with the school culture, organisational structure, and educational standards (OECD, 2020b). Parent language bar-

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18 See: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelated-deathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020

riers also impacted on their ability to understand and navigate government and school guidelines. Parental engagement is therefore likely to be a factor in the effectiveness of distance learning, particularly for younger children who may not be able to access learning activities independently.

Researchers using the Understanding Society Covid-19 dataset show that during school closures, the **time spent on schoolwork at home** was significantly shorter than average for children receiving free school meals, from single-parent households, with less-educated parents, and among some black and minority ethnic groups, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage (Bayrakdar and Guveli, 2020). While the ethnic minority status is not the same as immigration status, there is some significant overlap. According to a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research and the Nuffield Foundation (Sharp et al., 2020), as the new academic year began in September 2020, teachers estimated that their pupils were three months behind in their learning and that the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had increased by 46%.

Overall, primary and secondary school teachers seem to agree that particularly in the case of migrants, the effectiveness of home learning depends on the combination of their ability to access online learning independently and the support they receive from home. Teachers also reported that **engagement and motivation represented a challenge** in distance learning, particularly in the case of newly arrived migrants who are likely to feel isolated and often lack the parental support during the home schooling.

Families also faced a significant amount of **stress and economic hardship** during the pandemic, with the rise in job, housing and food insecurity, so that children's education couldn't always be prioritised. During the interviews teachers reported that those parents on zero-hours contracts or working in industries heavily affected by the pandemic saw a reduction of hours or termination of contracts. In some cases, those who lost their jobs decided to temporarily relocate to their countries of origin making it difficult for schools to keep in touch and support students.

Moreover, government management of the pandemic led to **border closures** as well as travel restrictions which contributed to worsening the condition of many migrants living far from family members and their support network. The uncertainty over Brexit and the new migration policy in the UK is having an emotional as well as practical impact on EU and other migrant families, often unsure about their legal status and about the public services they are entitled to access. Finally, evidence from refugee organisations also indicates that for those young asylum-seekers who have moved to 'dispersal' areas since lockdown began, the assignment to local schools is taking longer than usual.

3.3 School responses

The findings emerging from the NIESR study reveal significant differences in how schools were supporting students during the pandemic, with some doing little to check in with pupils and their families at home, and others offering a full timetable via video calling facilities.

During the pandemic, individual schools and teachers have put in place various forms of **distance learning**, but – as mentioned – the availability of tools, guidance and support has been varied and patchy. NIESR research shows that only some schools have been able to develop specific forms of support for newly arrived migrant pupils facing additional language barriers, although some online resources have been made available by NGOs and educational organisations.

Many teachers in England also struggled to support pupils learning English as Additional Language (EAL) due to the **lack of tailored resources**. They explained that the majority of EAL resources are designed to be used by pupils with the support of teachers and adapting them to the home setting has not always been easy.

The research documented a wide range of **strategies put in place by individual schools**. While schools responded to the emergency by creating and using innovative remote services, teachers reported that migrant pupils were more likely to struggle with online homework because

of language barriers within their families. Teachers offered individualised support through phone or video lessons, to explain tasks or contents. Yet schools soon realised that the access to IT devices represented a barrier, so in some cases offered alternative home learning options, including no-tech and low-tech solutions such as homework packages delivered to the homes of those in need or digital literacy lessons through phone calls and videos.

To overcome language barriers, schools made use of translation and interpreting services and multi-lingual teaching assistants. One way of addressing parents' language barriers was to have parent ambassadors who were able to both communicate parents' needs to schools and give information from schools to parents. In some cases, schools even put in place individualised phone or video lessons for newly arrived migrants and connected migrant pupils with each other to ensure they had some opportunity to interact in their native language too. Opportunities for students to interact through collaborative learning was reported to help keep them motivated. To boost motivation and engage with those at greater risk of isolation schools were also using social media or interactive programmes including drama, storytelling, cooking and crafting activities. Mentoring programmes were also offered to support study skills.

However, most of these initiatives were undertaken independently, in the absence of any national framework of guidance and on top of workloads which, because of the lockdown, have become particularly burdensome for all school staff.

Families already relying on food banks and school meals struggled and for the first weeks of lockdown teachers were overwhelmed supporting families accessing essential needs. In some cases, they were signposting families to charities and food banks while in others the schools became food banks and teachers were delivering food parcels to those in need.

3.4. Community responses

The fragmented nature of the UK voluntary sector makes it extremely difficult to map and assess the impacts and responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, on the basis of the evidence collected as part of the University of Nottingham project, it is fair to say that these responses have been quite patchy and only able to address the needs of migrant students to a limited extent.

One of the most common types of response has been online collections of money, stationary and especially ICT equipment to be distributed to refugee and migrant students by specialised organisations or, more generally, similar collections by charitable organisations to be distributed via the schools to students in need – see, for example, the various initiatives by local 'School of Sanctuary' and STAR (Student Action for Refugees) branches, amongst the many[19].

Many small to medium local organisations, and particular migrant-led organisations which used to deliver supplementary education programmes have been significantly affected. Most of these groups tend to operate on the basis of voluntary work, using community halls or similar premises, and using effective but often 'low-tech' approaches to education. The restrictions imposed by the lockdowns (and particularly the first one) made it impossible for many to continue to run classes, tutorage and parental support. At the same time, the economic impact of the pandemic has led to a reduction of available volunteers. Other migrant and refugee organisations who previously ran externally funded education programmes (as well as other support projects for migrant children and their families) had to close these, with several practitioners made redundant over the course of 2020.

Several organisations – both in the public and third sector – hastily put together online lists and databases of learning resources for EAL and migrant learners. Among the initiatives of the largest, national organisations, notable – though not at all exhaustive – examples include the Bell

19 See: https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/ and https://star-network.org.uk/

Foundation, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and NALDIC, which produced resource lists, guidelines and online seminar.

As for the public sector, in contrast to the lack of coherent responses at national level – discussed in the previous section – some examples of good practice have been registered at the level of local authorities, particularly within the few EAL and Achievement Teams still active across the country. In several instances these have been organising training courses of school EAL coordinators and other teachers and, also in this case,

producing online guidelines and information hubs. In the midst of the national 'policy vacuum' and reduced funding and resources, strategic co-ordination has been quite limited. On the other hand, our ongoing research has recorded many examples of local authority practitioners taking the initiative. This included visiting families to check the well-being of students and provide them with printed resources, meeting outdoor with parents, students and teachers; often in collaboration with other informal networks of community solidarity.

4. Lessons learned and ways forward

Emerging findings from the NIESR and University of Nottingham studies indicate that – amidst the wide range of negative impacts described above – the pandemic has also become an opportunity to make some positive developments in several areas, and to learn important lessons for the future.

The lockdowns and sudden shift to online learning has resulted in:

- wide adoption of online learning tools among schools and education practitioners, with an increase in digital learning expertise which will be kept in future. This includes an increased awareness about online tools that can support learning acquisition for EAL students.

- unprecedented efforts among schools, public sector and community groups to take steps forward to address the digital divide amongst students, and particularly those more vulnerable or with reduced family support.

- increased IT skills and developed capacity for independent learning among students,

with an ability to use a variety of distance learning tools, also among students less familiar with the UK education system or with limited English language proficiency.

For many recently arrived migrant and refugee students, the reduced amount of time spent in school, under 'normal' circumstances, has created a barrier to socialisation, but at the same time, in some cases, it has resulted in:

- a more gradual, 'shielded' inclusion into the school environment, with some practitioners reporting reduced level of victimisation among new refugee students, and more opportunities to access family support during the school day.

- more opportunities to practice the 'home language', developing or maintaining multilingualism and in some case enhancing confidence and a multiple sense of identity.

- some blurring of the boundaries between school, family and community spaces of support and belonging.

The experience of 2020 and 2021 has created the opportunity, by keeping momentum, to:

- reconfigure a better infrastructure for mixed learning, with a better integrated, more accessible use of online tools and other mechanisms of remote study.

- better recognise the diverse needs and positive contribution of all students, including EAL, migrant and refugee students, by taking an intersectional, longer term approach to processes of education and school inclusion.

- promote and support networking among teachers and practitioners working with EAL and migrant students, including exchange of resources and practices, discussion and training opportunities.

- encourage 'whole-school' approaches to education, bringing together schools, families and a range of local stakeholders into communities of practice and learning, underpinned by principles of equality and social justice.

- promote research initiatives that better assess the experiences and needs of migrant and other vulnerable students during and after the pandemic, looking at educational outcomes but also at a wider range of social and personal indicators of societal and individual 'success'. Throughout the pandemic the direct voice of students has been largely missing, and further research involving young people would be particularly important.

With regard to all these aspects, it is important to stress that the current narrative around the need of a 'catch-up' (Este, 2021) focusing almost entirely on 'lost learning during' the pandemic should be reconsidered. Not only because of the danger of not acknowledging the positive opportunities to rethink education, but most importantly because such an approach does not take into account children's social and emotional needs as we move forward. A narrow focus on academic achievement seems to underestimate the broad role of schools – in partnership with third sector organisations and other local actors – as hubs of community interaction and support.

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The language and learning loss of pupils using English as Additional Language (EAL), following the closure of schools to most pupils in England: Teacher Perceptions and Policy Implications

Rachel Scott *(The Bell Foundation)*

1. Introduction

From March 2020 when schools across England closed to most pupils, anecdotal evidence from teachers and others reached The Bell Foundation which highlighted that pupils who use English as an Additional Language (EAL), and particularly those whose families are new to English or at the early stages of English acquisition themselves, were at risk of additional learning loss: language learning loss. Without the teaching of 'standard academic' English in the classroom, and with reduced exposure to social English conversation from both adults and peers, pupils who speak EAL who were developing English skills were at a disadvantage, in comparison to pupils for whom English is their first language (Ofsted, 2020; Government of Jersey, 2020; Education Scotland, 2021).

Given the strong correlation between English language proficiency and educational attainment (Strand and Demie, 2005; Demie, 2011; Whiteside et al., 2016; Strand and Hessel, 2018; Demie, 2018; Strand and Lindorff, 2020; Department for Education, 2020; Hessel and Strand, 2021) language loss will have a significant impact on learning loss. Research has demonstrated that

pupils' proficiency in English explains as much as 22 per cent of the variation in EAL pupils' achievement compared to the typical three to four per cent that can be statistically explained by gender, free school meal status (which is commonly used as a measure of wide socio-economic deprivation) and ethnicity (Strand and Hessel, 2018).

In 2021, schools in England were closed for a second time to most pupils. In all, children in England lost over six months of face to face classroom time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter presents findings from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Teacher Omnibus Survey for Spring 2021 (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2021), which was completed by over 1500 practising teachers and analysed by The Bell Foundation[20]. In particular, it analyses questions that were specifically commissioned by The Bell Foundation[21], that examine teacher perceptions

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20 The National Foundation for Educational Research corroborated The Bell Foundation's analysis as part of the publication process.

21 The Bell Foundation is a charitable foundation which aims to improve policy, practice and systems to enable children, adults and communities in the UK that speak EAL to overcome disadvantage through language education.

of the extent of language loss in EAL pupils and the subsequent effect on learning loss. Survey findings are presented and discussed alongside the evidence that The Bell Foundation received from teachers and schools during school closures, which indicated that pupils who speak English as an additional language were experiencing language loss, in addition to the learning loss experienced by many pupils in England.

2. Teacher Omnibus Survey (Spring 2021)[22]

2.1 Survey Sample

The survey sample (1,535 practising teachers) includes teachers from 1,349 schools which are nationally representative of school-level factors including geographical region and school type and eligibility for free-school meals. Each survey was completed by at least 500 teachers in primary schools (with pupils aged 5 – 11) and 500 teachers in secondary schools (11 upwards). The sample is based on publicly-funded schools in England. This excludes private schools (i.e. fee-paying) and includes 'academies', which are run independently of local authority control. The sample includes teachers from the full range of roles, from class teachers to headteachers.

The sample of primary schools was nationally representative of Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility – however, the secondary schools with the highest rate of FSM eligibility were underrepresented in the sample[23]. It should be noted that this will mean that the findings are likely to be conservative estimates of impact on pupils using EAL in the secondary sector, as there is a link between the proportion of pupils acquiring English and deprivation[24]. In 2018, 41% of pupils living in the most deprived areas were acquiring English compared to 27% living in the least deprived areas (Department for Education, 2020). The highest band of school level FSM eligibility would therefore have a greater proportion of pupils still acquiring English, than schools with lower rates of FSM eligibility.

2.2 Measures

The aim of the research is to identify the extent and nature of English language learning loss for pupils who use EAL across the four skill areas (listening, reading, writing and speaking). Within that aim, the research identifies further specific sub-questions:

- How does language learning loss manifest in the classroom?

- How have pupils using EAL fared in general learning impact (i.e. not language specific loss) and how does that compare to their English-speaking peers?

The survey was administered in March 2021, shortly after schools re-opened following

22 Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey - NFER https://www.nfer.ac.uk/key-topics-expertise/teacher-voice-omnibus-survey/

23 NB Data used in analysis for this report was not weighted for the secondary school or combined samples using FSM eligibility data. As the sample of substantive responses in the highest band of FSM eligible secondary schools was small, weighting would have risked over representing views which may not be an accurate representation of their entire demographic group.

24 https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-programme/research/eal-learner-proficiency-attainment-and-progress-maps/

the second national period of closures to most pupils. The responses therefore draw on observations from the autumn term (first school closure impact), or from the return of all pupils from March 2021 (second closure impact, or both). The survey asked teachers an initial closed question: 'Following school closures, have you noticed a negative impact (learning loss) for pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the following English language skills areas?'. (Listening, Writing, Speaking, Reading, None or Don't Know). Two open-ended questions were used to gather teacher's verbatim responses about learning loss:

1. If you have observed any learning loss in English language skills for pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) please describe your observations giving specific examples where possible

2. Thinking of learning in general, how does school closure impact EAL pupils in comparison to those pupils for whom English is their first language?

2.3 Analysis: Proportions of EAL pupils

As the research questions explicitly require teacher observation of pupils who use EAL it is important to note that, despite national EAL pupil proportions of 21.3% in primary school and 17.1% in secondary school level, 59% of schools do not have any pupils who use EAL (Department for Education, 2019) (TALIS, 2018). Therefore, findings of national samples must be read with this awareness. The regional disparity in the proportion of pupils using EAL has been well documented. For example, in North East England only 8% of pupils use EAL, whilst the figure rises to 49% in London (Department for Education, 2020). Within regions, the variation between schools can also be significant (Strand et al., 2015; Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, 2021). A nationally representative sample, such as the NFER Teacher Omnibus panel,

contains a significant number of respondents who will not have observations of pupils who use EAL in their classroom. In the verbatim responses to the open-ended questions 62 teachers explicitly stated that they did not have EAL learners in their classrooms.

The first question in the survey is used to filter out those from schools who have too few or no pupils using EAL on which to base meaningful observations. In Question 1 teachers were given the option of selecting an English skill area (reading, writing, listening or speaking) that had been negatively impacted, selecting 'none' if there had been no negative impact, or selecting 'do not know/not sure'. It is reasonable to assume that respondents who selected 'do not know/not sure' are likely to have too few or no pupils on which to base observations. 770 out of 1,535 respondents selected 'do not know/not sure'. This is half of the total sample size which is broadly consistent with the data above regarding the proportion of schools in England with few or no pupils using EAL. To further test the validity of this assumption the two subsequent open-ended questions were cross-referenced against respondents who selected 'do not know/ not sure' in Question 1. Typically, respondents either made no further comment, or explicitly noted that they had no or too few pupils using EAL to comment. A very small number of respondents noted that it was too early to judge language loss. The proportion of teachers who felt able to comment versus those who did not has been broken down by geographic region (figure 1 below) - the dark green columns indicate teachers who felt able to comment (stating a loss or no loss) and the light green columns indicate teachers who were not able to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL. This broadly confirms the assumption that respondents selecting 'do not know' are likely to have too few or no pupils who use EAL on whom to base observations. In areas of high EAL pupil proportions (such as London) teachers were more likely to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL than not, whereas teachers in the North East were less likely to be able to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL.

Figure 1: The proportion of teachers able to comment on language loss (loss or no loss) vs teachers unable to comment (do not know/ not sure) by geographic region [N=1535]

The findings below are based on teachers who do provide substantive answers which gives a sample size of 751 (after removing the 'do not knows' a further 14 answers were missing – no response at all). From the 751 substantive responses 491 are from primary schools and 260 are from secondary schools. 518 of those 751 teachers who felt able to comment on the language loss of EAL pupils reported a loss.

The responses to the closed question regarding language loss (Q1) were analysed by school phase (primary and secondary), year group and geographic region. The responses to the open questions (listed in measures section above) were analysed to draw out the common patterns that teachers observed in pupils who use EAL as a result of disruptions to teaching and learning caused by Covid-19. These include the impact on confidence, the role of family in pupil learning during lockdown, the challenges of remote learning for pupils who use EAL, the risk to secondary school pupils, the role of peers, and the link between EAL and disadvantage.

The report also draws on a selection of representative quotes, taken from teachers in different regions and in different school phases[25].

3. Findings

3.1 Evidence of Regression in English Language Learning

Teachers across England were more than twice as likely to report a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils who use EAL than to report no impact as the following quotes illustrate:

"For those who are in the early acquisition stage of Learning English, we have had to go back to the beginning with them, as the progress they had made had not been embedded and a proportion has been lost." Senior leader, primary school, West Midlands

"A lot of my pupils haven't spoken or heard much English during lockdown. Some of the [sic] are now finding it difficult to access the curriculum and have needed pre-teaching intervention of vocab that will be used in lessons".
Classroom teacher, primary school, West Midlands

"Some pupils are more withdrawn, and some whose first language is not English have not returned to school yet. They are being followed up. We have a group of students who are le-arning English in Y8 - these pupils have gone backwards about 10 weeks in their understanding of English."
Senior leader, secondary school, Yorkshire and the Humber

Table 1 shows that over two thirds (69%) of teachers across primary and secondary schools reported a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils who use EAL following the disruption to education caused by Covid-19, compared to only 31% who reported there were no language losses in pupils.

Table 1: Reported loss on language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) [N=751]

Language skill impact	Number	%
One language skill impacted	123	16%
Two language skills impacted	120	16%
Three language skills impacted	108	14%
Four language skills impacted	167	22%
One or more language skills impacted	518	69%
No impact on language skill	233	31%

Across all schools, within the four language skill areas 54% of teachers reported a language loss in writing skills of pupils who use EAL, 50% observed a loss in speaking skills, 41% saw a loss in the reading skills and 36% in the listening skills. Figure 2 below illustrates the spread of responses across the four skill areas broken down by school phase. It is to be expected that primary schools would be more likely to report a negative impact in language learning than secondary schools, as previous research has shown that primary schools have a greater proportion of pupils in the 'acquiring English' phase[26] (Strand and Hessel, 2018; Department for Education, 2020). However, while the figure below shows a greater proportion of primary school teachers reporting language loss (26% said none, 74% said one or more skills showed a loss), the proportion in secondary schools is still significant (41% said none, 59% said one or more skills showed a loss).

26   'Acquiring English' refers to pupils in English proficiency bands A-C using the five-point scale formerly used by the Department for Education in England.

Figure 2: Observed impact on English language learning in pupils who use EAL primary vs secondary [N=751]

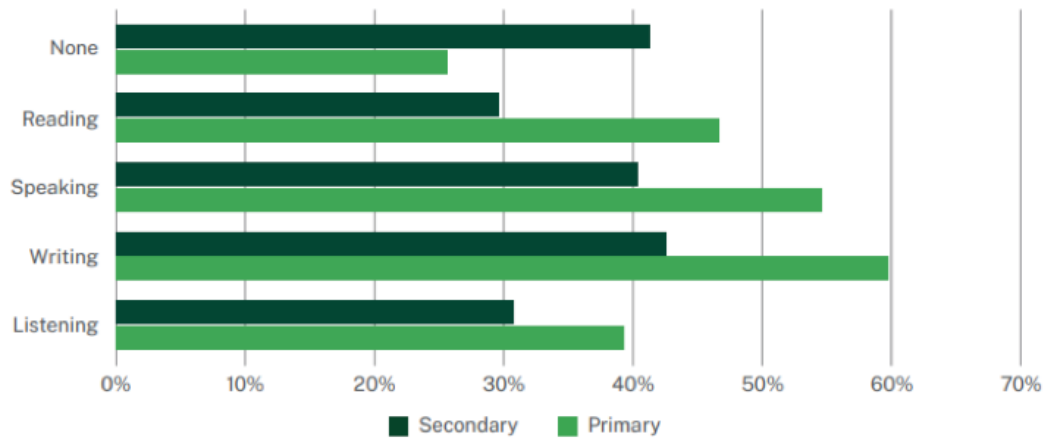

Figure 3 shows the proportion of primary school teachers who were able to comment on the language loss of pupils they had observed, by year group[27]. In secondary schools teachers typically teach across multiple year groups, which makes breaking down the data by year group in secondary schools unreliable. The trajectory of the primary school data does show a slight reduction in language learning loss as the pupils age (except initially in writing and reading which is to be expected as those skills are not acquired until later). However, the decline in loss is gradual and loss is still substantial in Year 6, so additional support will be needed in recovery throughout Key Stage 2 and beyond.

27 It should be noted that the majority of primary school respondents taught only one year group – however, some teachers taught two or more year groups and therefore that could have a small impact on the findings as teachers who teach multiple year groups could be referring to pupils from any year group that they teach.

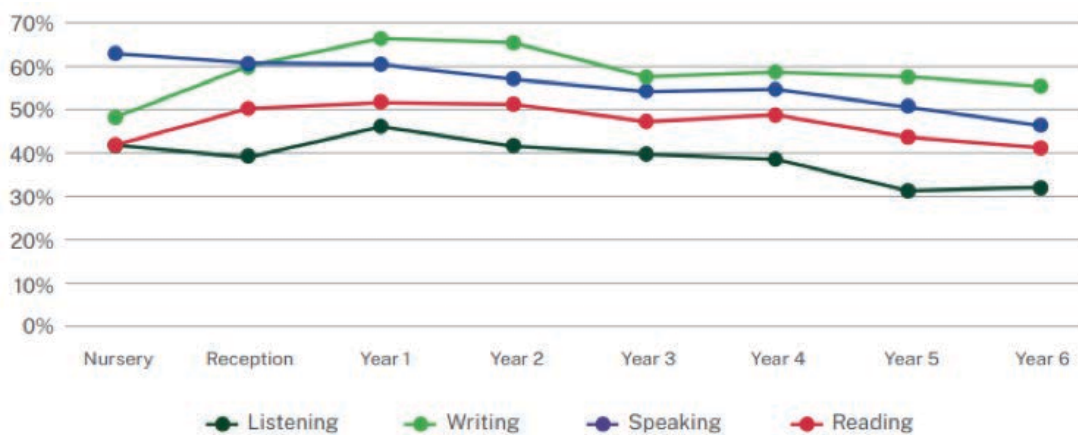**Figure 3:** English language skill impact by primary school year group [N=491]

Figure 4 shows the proportion of primary school respondents by region who reported a language loss, or no language loss. Across all regions, schools are more likely to report a loss than no loss, with the greatest difference in London and the South East.

Figure 4: Primary schools reporting language loss or no language loss by region [N=491]
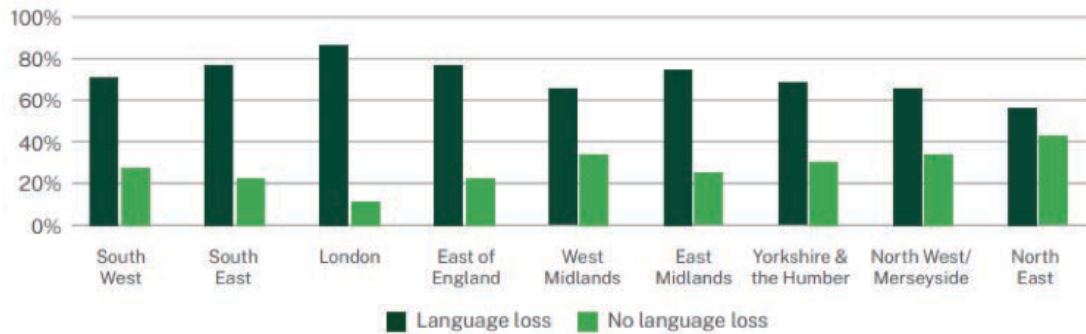

Figure 5 shows the proportion of secondary school respondents by region who reported a language loss, or no language loss. London, Yorkshire and the Humber and North West/ Merseyside are still far more likely to report a loss than no loss. However, in the East of England, the South West and the East Midlands secondary school teachers are more likely to report no loss. This could be due to higher proportions of pupils in secondary schools having reached proficiency in English. Areas of perceived high language loss at secondary school level, such as London, could indicate places with more late arrivals of migrant families who moved to England after their children had started school, and therefore may not have had the necessary six years plus needed to acquire competence if they were new to English (Strand and Lindorff, 2020; Strand and Lindorff, 2021; Hutchinson, 2018; Demie, 2011, 2013).

Figure 5: Secondary schools reporting language loss or no language loss by region [N=260]
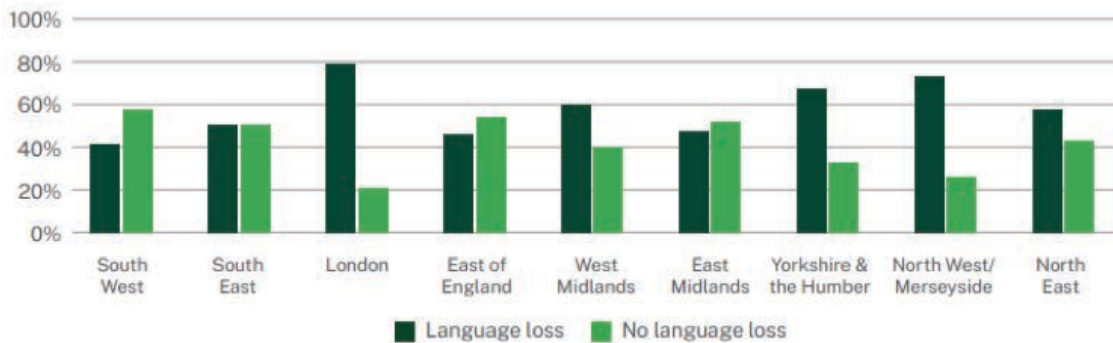
3.2 Hesitant to speak: How school closures impacted pupils' confidence

As the following quotes illustrate there is a consensus among both primary and secondary teachers that school closures adversely impacted on the confidence of EAL pupils:

"These children have arrived back at school, very quiet and subdued, they have lost a lot of

the vocabulary they were learning and some that they were confident with and are lacking in confidence to speak."
Senior leader, primary school, East Midlands

"As they've had no exposure to any English, they have found returning to school very stressful. They have found following instructions hard. They have found mixing with peers

tough. Their receptive skills have been impacted greatly as has their confidence"
Senior leader, primary school, East Midlands

"Lack in fluency particularly in speaking means that some EAL pupils find it more challenging to contribute to and participate in discussions and learning. They feel disempowered and disengaged in subject [sic] that before they enjoyed"
Classroom teacher, primary school, East England

"Students find it harder to start talking in English again as they haven't really practiced speaking it in months. Can affect their confidence, as students that were once confident to answer questions in class are a bit more shy and reserved in case they say the wrong thing"
Classroom teacher, secondary school, London

Of the teachers who reported a negative impact on the language learning of their pupils who use EAL, over one in five (22%) secondary teachers reported that pupils had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class. Nearly one in six (15%) primary school teachers reported that pupils who use EAL had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class. The lower rates in primary school may be because primary school is an environment where all pupils, those who use EAL or those whose first language is English, are learning English. However, it may also reflect a higher susceptibility to self-consciousness in teenagers, and the higher demands of language in the secondary school curriculum. It will be important for the pastoral care providers in secondary schools to be aware of the increased risk for social isolation for pupils who use EAL.

3.3 Children left behind: remote learning for pupils who use EAL

As the following quotes illustrate, whilst useful for some pupils, remote technology did not result in equitable access for all, in part due to language barriers:

"We have observed a significant and tangible loss in learning in the majority of our pupils where English is an additional language. A major factor in this is the inability of parents to support their children effectively due to barriers over accessing resources and technology as a direct result of language barriers."
Senior leader, primary school, South East

"They have been less likely to access online provision due to the fact their parents are unable to help them. They are left behind."
Classroom teacher, primary school, West Midlands

"There is also the difference that EAL students wouldn't have been able to have access to support during lessons or individual support from small class teaching of EAL students together by a specialist who either speaks the home language."
Classroom teacher, secondary school, South West

Of the teachers who reported a language or learning loss in pupils who use EAL, one in twelve reported that pupils who use EAL were explicitly disadvantaged by online learning compared to their English-speaking peers. It is interesting to note that, out of all respondents only three teachers thought that online learning provided pupils who use EAL with an advantage through access to translations, subtitles or the ability to pause and re-watch videos. More work needs to be done to ensure that teachers are provided with training in using technology effectively with the EAL cohort. A number of schools opted to invite pupils who use EAL into school in response to concerns that remote learning could not meet their needs and that they were at risk of being left behind.

"EAL children in the first lockdown were the children least likely to complete home learning and therefore, they were among those invited to go back to school in small bubbles during the latest lockdown"
Classroom teacher, primary school, East England

3.4 The role of family or caregiver in learning during lockdowns

When access to face to face schooling was restricted, schools in England provided lessons to homes (either through worksheets and suggested resources and activities, or through recorded or live lessons) which were in the medium of English. As noted previously (Part 3), remote learning was particularly disadvantageous for pupils who use EAL as it did not readily lend itself to the kind of strategies that schools typically used to support their EAL pupils, and teachers did not have training or expertise in using technology effectively with pupils who use EAL. With more limited capability for individualised support, parents were expected to fill that gap. With schools providing resources, lesson plans, activities and tasks in English, parents who were new to English or at the early stage of English language acquisition themselves were not necessarily able to access or 'teach' those materials.

The following verbatim quotes from primary school teachers illustrate how children in homes where the primary language is not English are affected:

"Children in homes where the primary language is not English have been slow to participate in class and group discussions. As their parents have limited knowledge of English, they haven't been as able as some other parents to support their children's daily learning. As a result their reading can lack fluency and writing mistakes have not been picked up and corrected as much"
Classroom teacher, primary school, West Midlands

"Some parents are less able to support children if English is not their first language, and therefore some children cannot access all the learning opportunities - in reception we rely on parental support to some extent"
Classroom teacher, primary school, South West

"Parents of EAL pupils find the learning more difficult to understand. We have had less engagement with this group. Also the parents of the EAL children we have work more and work shifts so have less time to support their children and have been more difficult to communicate with through phone calls (due to language and availability)"
Classroom teacher, primary school, South East

For teachers who reported an impact on the language loss of pupils who use EAL, the pupils' family's ability to support the home learning due to English language barriers was frequently cited as having had a significant impact on learning and learning loss[28]. The role of family was perceived to be more significant by teachers surveyed in the outcomes of primary school pupils. During lockdown, parents of primary school aged pupils were usually required to provide more support than parents of secondary aged pupils, due to age related differences and independent learning capabilities.

Families having access to technology or the technological skills to access online learning, the family speaking another language at home, the ability to support learning generally, and the socio-economic status of the family were linked, by teachers, to the learning and language loss of pupils who use EAL. Figure 6 below shows the teachers' perception of the role of family in learning by school phase. Amongst primary school teachers reporting a negative impact on the learning of pupils using EAL, 25% cited the barriers for families in supporting learning as impacting loss. Amongst their secondary colleagues the figure drops to 9%. Across both phases it is the proficiency in English (PIE) of the family that is perceived to have had the most marked impact.

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28   Family here was the term commonly used by teachers but refers to the person(s) responsible for caregiving during lockdown and could include one parent, two parents, siblings, extended family or other caregivers.

Figure 6: Family-related barriers for language or learning loss, secondary vs primary [N=518]
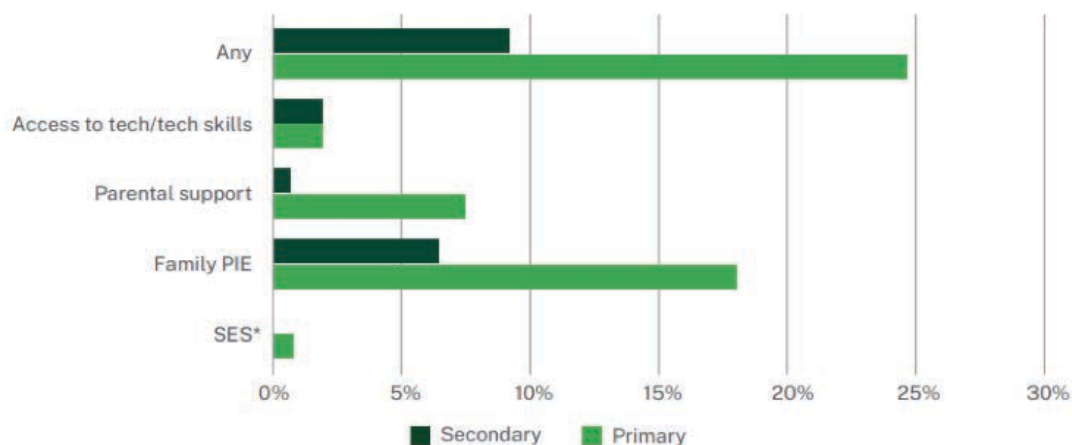
* 0% of secondary teachers said that it was the family's low socio-economic status (SES) that they thought contributed to the language loss

Whilst teachers cited the role that the proficiency in English of the family played in the language and learning loss experienced by pupils who use EAL it is interesting to note that the pupil's emerging proficiency in English was not frequently cited. Of all teachers who reported a loss, 15% attributed it to the family's proficiency in English (18% in primary schools, and 7% in secondary schools) but only 1% cited the pupil's proficiency in English as a factor. This is unexpected given the link between a pupil's proficiency in English and the pupil's ability to access the curriculum and achieve. The findings could suggest that parents were considered 'in loco teachers' and the expectation was on parents to bridge the language gap for pupils in the way that teachers and teaching assistants do in the classroom. Teachers are both proficient in English and in pedagogy; for parents who are new to English or in the early stages of acquisition of English, taking on this role of mediator of a curriculum taught through the medium of English may not have been possible.

It is interesting to note that high fluency in English was, however, cited by 18 respondents as the reason why some pupils using EAL had not experienced language or learning loss:

"I teach only older boys, many of whom are bilingual, and English is not their first lan-

guage, but by the time they are 15+ they are already very fluent!"
Classroom teacher, secondary school, London

3.5 The challenge for EAL pupils in secondary school

The evidence discussed in earlier sections has shown a consistent pattern of primary school aged pupils being more greatly impacted by learning loss associated with Covid school disruption than secondary pupils (one exception was in confidence to speak, where secondary school impact was greater than primary). Nevertheless, it is important to note that addressing any language learning loss is particularly urgent for pupils who are new to English and at the early stages of language acquisition at the same time as they are preparing for the national examinations such as GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education). For some, the timing of exams can mean that the adverse impact of language loss affects outcomes including further and higher education admissions and employment opportunities. As noted in previously published research, late arrivals (those who are still acquiring English at secondary level) are at greater risk of underachievement (Hutchinson, 2018; Strand and

Hessel, 2018; Demie, 2018; Department for Education, 2019b). For late arrivals, as well as being late to begin the acquisition of English necessary to attain in examinations, they have now lost six months (or more) of classroom time and the opportunity to be exposed to academic and social English.

"We have very few EAL students, but they tend to fall into one of two categories: - those with high levels of motivation & English language skills. They tend to thrive whatever happens. - a recent cohort of older (Yr 11) students who have only just joined us after arriving in the UK. They have been unable to access online learning for a complex variety of reasons and our main focus is pastoral support to help them with recent migration trauma."
Senior leader, secondary school, South East

In addition to the risk to new arrivals, teachers raised concerns regarding subject specific terminology which is often required in high stakes exams.

"Struggling with scientific language they previously had a solid grasp on"
Classroom teacher, secondary school, North West/Merseyside

3.6 The role of peers

The social restrictions due to Covid-19 are likely to impact on most children, including those who use English as their first language. However, for children who use EAL, their peers play an additional role: supporting the development of their English language skills. A small proportion of teachers who reported language or learning loss in pupils specifically flagged the lack of peer interaction (4% of primary respondents, 7% for secondary) as a factor in the loss.

"The lack of a role model to speak English […] has meant the children have now reverted to single word answers. The lack of play

with children speaking English has made the return to school difficult socially, meaning the children rely on physical responses rather than explaining how they think or feel"
Classroom teacher, primary school, South West

"EAL students have less opportunities to converse in English, both in lesson and, perhaps more crucially, out of lessons with their peers."
Classroom teacher, secondary school, South East

3.7 EAL and disadvantage

In their verbatim quotes, some teachers tended to conflate EAL with, or as, a type of disadvantage:

"EAL pupils often responded in a similar way to pupils who could be labelled as disadvantaged."
Senior leader, primary school, South East

"Similar to those living in disadvantage. Less opportunities to practice oracy skills."
Senior leader, primary school, North West/Merseyside

As 25% of pupils who use EAL are 'disadvantaged' according to a Department for Education analysis of 2018 National Pupil Database data, this is not surprising, and it is slightly higher than pupils whose first language is English (at 24%). Rates of Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement are identical amongst the EAL cohort as their English speaking peers at 14% (Department for Education, 2020). Overall, 19% of all disadvantaged pupils will use English as an Additional Language and 19% of all FSM pupils will use EAL (Department for Education, 2020). Furthermore, as noted above, 41% of children living in the most deprived areas will be in the early stages of developing English language competence (levels A-C) which is the group at risk of under-performing compared to their English-speaking peers – by contrast, in a less deprived area, only 27% of pupils will be at the early stage of developing lan-

guage competence (Department for Education, 2020). So, there is an intersection of both deprivation and EAL status for a significant portion of the EAL population as there is with their first language English peers.

4. Conclusion

Across England, there was a clear pattern of both English language and learning loss observed by school teachers in both primary and secondary phases. Many pupils at the early stages of English language acquisition did not have opportunities to hear, speak or read in English during school closures. Whilst the primary school teachers were more likely to identify a language loss in their pupils, the limited time left in school for recovery, and the proximity to high stakes examinations is concerning for secondary pupils. Pastoral concerns were also raised regarding the negative impact on the confidence of pupils using EAL to socially integrate and participate in the classroom.

Of all respondents only five thought that pupils who use EAL had actually fared better than the pupils who speak English as their first language, typically citing high proficiency in the pupils and/or families.

The findings demonstrate a need for continued investment in supporting EAL pupils and training teachers to support them to recover lost learning and fulfil their capabilities.

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Highlighting the needs of educational support services working with young refugees in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of service providers and teachers in Austria

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1. Introduction and study background

As has been broadly highlighted, COVID-19 puts a spotlight on educational inequalities. Involving complex dynamics, it is safe to say that educational contexts have changed for almost all children and young people worldwide. For some, the changes have been short-lived, having little impact on their educational biographies, for others the pandemic has resulted in massive and long-standing – sometimes also health-related – disruptions (e.g. Reimers 2022). These have included shifts to remote education settings, phases of school closures to enable and promote physical distance, and an increased use of digital tools. As the impact varies between different groups, and is affected by many factors, we cannot simply conclude that resilience is automatically and inevitably interlocked with e.g. economic aspects or stable family backgrounds etc., as these may also be affected by the dynamics and intersectoral influences of the pandemic. The pandemic challenges our understanding of vulnerability by underlining some of the obvious vulnerabilities, hinting at unexplored ones, but also by pushing some already affected groups even more into the

background (Obermayr et al., 2021). This leads to further and more individualized demands, which educational and other support staff have to meet. Another aspect that is often referenced is that of increasing digitalisation on the one hand and a growing digital divide on the other. Limited access to technological devices shapes educational shortcomings but can also pose opportunities for furthering digital literacies (e.g. Liu 2021). Educational and other support staff have also faced the challenges resulting from familial support being compromised or even removed by the pandemic:

In addition to the learning loss and disengagement with learning caused by the interruption of in-person instruction and by the variable efficacy of alternative forms of education, other direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic diminished the ability of families to support children and young people in their education. For students, as well as for teachers and school staff, these included the economic shocks experienced by families, in some cases leading to food insecurity, and in many more

causing stress and anxiety and impacting mental health. (Reimers 2022, 2)

This paper focuses on children and young people affected by forced migration and how their landscape of demands and provision was affected by the pandemic. Only a few studies have focused on the specific needs of these groups and their scope often remains confined to specific geographical areas (e.g. Santiago et al., 2021 for the US; Mukumbang et al., 2020 for South Africa) and findings have either targeted medical health or remained rather general. Insights into education in a German-speaking context are scarce, even more so for Austria. This study mainly focuses on groups affected by war and crises in e.g. Syria leading to movements of many people to – among other places – Europe in 2015 and 2016. Next to Germany and Sweden, Austria was one of the countries where many people filed asylum, leading to almost 90,000 applications in 2015 (Kohlenberger and Buber-Ennser 2017).

We – the team of authors – were approached by collaboration partners from NGOs and administrative representatives focusing on challenges for the above-mentioned groups, and were asked to support assessment and communication needs for both support staff (social workers, legal and health advisors, NGO workers etc.) supporting everyday questions and needs of refugees in the context of legal, educational and housing-related questions and educational staff. Thus, the findings presented are derived from

the experiences of the two groups, which were collected by means of semi-structured questionnaires. It measured the needs of teachers and support staff, as well as services offered to children and young people affected by experiences of forced migration, including asylum seekers, children and young people under subsidiary protection, and children and young people who have been granted asylum. The study formally spans the ages 0–25 years, but due to its institutional and educational focus, mainly includes people between age 7 and early 20s. The study focus includes formal and non-formal educational settings offering (vocational) training to young people above the age of compulsory education – who are thus not entitled to formal education (Atanasoska and Proyer, 2018) – and additional support services offering educational counselling as well as financial advice and other forms of support in relation to education, health, housing, and legal services. The study was conducted in Austria during the early onset of the pandemic: support staff answered the questionnaire less than 1 year into the pandemic, and the teachers a bit more than 1 year into it. This relatively short period had nevertheless contained a variety of changes, including one hard lockdown with all schools being closed, phases of part-closures of certain school types or levels, systems of pupil rotations, as well as phases of almost no restrictions, due to low levels of contagion. This allowed us to document immediate shifts in types of demand among children, young people, teachers, and service providers.

2. Research interest and intention

The research presented focuses on identifying developments related to educational needs and support structures, as well as possible deficits deriving from impacted services for refugee students and young people during crises. Regarding pandemic-related challenges, our study delivers data

concerning the sufficiency of offers of necessary support, how these may have changed (or needed to change) due to the pandemic, and their accessibility. We reached out to two groups – service providers and teachers of refugee students and young people – that are directly involved with refugee

students and young people and their specific needs in relation to the pandemic crisis. Addressing the two target professions/institutions, our research questions, presented in two separate online surveys, were as follows:

Research questions regarding how service providers' spheres of activity have been influenced by the crisis (survey I).

1. What type of support do the service providers offer?

2. Which specific target groups among refugee students and young people do the service providers address?

3. What additional support demands have surfaced among refugee students and young people in the context of the pandemic?

4. What types of support do service providers themselves need in order to further develop the support they offer throughout and despite the crisis?

5. Has supervision ratio and/or disposability of resources changed due to the pandemic?

Research questions regarding how teachers' spheres of activity have been influenced by the crisis (survey II)

6. Do teachers make referrals to support offered by service providers?

7. What challenges have the pandemic presented among teachers of refugee students and young people?

8. What do teachers need in order to cope with challenges presented by the pandemic?

The empirically validated answers should address the current challenges by suggesting evidence-based changes or strategic adjustments that schools and service providers can implement in their work with the groups under study. Our cooperation partners – the Vienna City School Board and UNHCR Austria – have already received a first analysis of our study in the form of two unpublished research reports and executive summaries (Reitinger, Holzmayer and Proyer, 2021a, 2021b).

3. Study Design

In line with the reach of our project network, our surveys took place in the greater Vienna area, Austria. The data collection process was kindly supported by the Vienna City School Board and UNHCR, who used their contacts with service providers and teachers. The following sections describe the samples recruited in the two surveys and the methodological approach.

3.1 Description of samples

The survey of the target groups took place over two consecutive survey periods. The sample of service providers was recruited from December 2020 to January 2021. The other sample, comprising teachers of refugee students and young people, was interviewed in May and June 2021. The analyses of both samples are based on fully anonymised data sets.

Sample of survey I: service providers.

The online survey addressing service providers was accessed 117 times during the survey period. 71 records had to be excluded due to early dropouts and missed assessments. The decision to exclude records was made on the basis of duration and progression parameters calculated by the online survey service used (cf. chapter 3.2). After this process of data cleansing, N = 46 usable data sets remained for further analysis.

Sample of survey II: teachers of refugee students and young people.

After excluding unusable records (also based on duration and progress parameters) N = 212 complete responses from teachers of refugee students and young people could be used for further analysis. This online survey was visited 218 times in total.

Most participating teachers are primary school teachers ($N_{primary}$ = 111; educating students typically aged 6 to 10 years), followed by secondary school teachers ($N_{secondary}$ = 85; educating students typically aged 10 to 14 years). Two further persons report working in both types of schools. Another seven people work in specific centers for inclusive and special needs education ("Zentren für Inklusiv- und Sonderpädagogik"; Bildungsdirektion Wien, 2021).

3.2 Study approach and analytical methods

Both surveys were conducted using a similar methodological approach. In both survey periods, the data material was collected via the online survey service "Unipark" (Questback, 2021). Since at the time no standardised questionnaires were available for the very specific research questions, we had to create suitable items and question batteries for both surveys. The resulting non-standardised online questionnaires – one aimed at service providers, the other at teachers – were reviewed and revised in several revision processes by all participating project cooperation partners before being used. The questionnaires mainly consist of closed items that represent categorical, ordinal, or interval scaled variables. Some items allow for open answers.[29]

The data were largely analysed descriptively. Group comparisons were tested with inferential statistical procedures (*t*-tests; Field, 2018, pp. 445–452) using the software 'IBM SPSS Statistics' (Pallant, 2020). Open-ended responses were inductively categorised, counted, and ranked (quantifying content analysis; Früh, 1998) with the aim of assessing their relevance.

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29 Example of a question from the questionnaire addressed to service providers: "Hat sich durch die COVID-19-Pandemie in Ihrer Beratungs- bzw. Anlaufstelle das Betreuungsverhältnis bzw. die Ressourcenlage verändert?" [Has the COVID-19-pandemic changed the support ratio or resource situation in your institution?] („sehr verbessert" [significantly improved] / "eher verbessert" [somewhat improved] / "nicht verändert" [no change] / „eher verschlechtert" [somewhat worse] / "sehr verschlechtert" [significantly worse]). „Falls ja, wie bzw. warum?" [If so, how and why?] (open response). Example of question posed in the questionnaire addressed to teachers: "Welche Unterstützung brauchen Sie als Lehrperson, um Ihre Tätigkeit mit Blick auf die COVID-19-bedingten Herausforderungen zielführend weiterentwickeln zu können?" [Considering the challenges caused by the pandemic, what types of support do you need to further develop your educational work?] (open response). We offer open access to our questionnaires an appreciate distributing it on demand. In case of interest, please do not hesitate to contact us (johannes.reitinger@univie.ac.at).

4. Findings

Our research findings are presented in the following sections, sorted around the defined research questions (1) to (8).

(1) What types of support do the service providers offer?

The 46 service providers were invited to mark predefined categories of support services they offer to refugee students and young people

(closed item format). The result for the surveyed categories (educational counselling, occupational counselling, psychological counselling, assessment of competences, learning support, support during visits from authorities, counselling concerning educational media and technologies, and financial support) are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Categories of support offered by service providers.

Support category*	Number of service providers offering this support category**	Rank according to frequency of mention
1) educational counselling	24 (52.2 %)	2
2) occupational counselling	19 (41.3 %)	3
3) psychological counselling	6 (13.0 %)	7
4) assessment of competences	11 (23.9 %)	5
5) learning support	27 (58.7 %)	1
6) support during visits from authorities	16 (34.8 %)	4
7) counselling concerning educational media and technologies	10 (21.7 %)	6
8) financial support	5 (10.9 %)	8

* Service providers in Austria commonly offer educational counselling ("Bildungsberatung"; e.g. getting to know institutionalized opportunities to upgrade one's education) but also occupational ("Berufsberatung"; e.g. counselling regarding interests, strengths, and opportunities concerning occupational orientation) and psychological counselling ("psychologische Beratung"; e.g. support in the context of difficult personal circumstances). Assessment of competences ("Kompetenzerfassung") means support in the course of the application of standardized measurements to find out one's educational attainment. These terms, as well as learning support ("Lernhilfe"), support during visits from authorities ("Unterstützung bei öffentlichen Gängen"), counselling concerning educational media and technologies ("Beratung im Bereich der Verwendung von Bildungsmedien bzw. -techniken"), and financial support ("finanzielle Unterstützung") were not closer described within the used questionnaire as they are self-explanatory in the context of Austrian support facilities.
** Percent values refer to the overall sample ($N = 46$).

According to the descriptive data in Table 1, service providers mainly deal with learning support and educational guidance, while psychological counselling and financial support seem to play minor roles within the service providers' support portfolio.

(2) Which specific target groups among refugee students and young people do the support offered by service providers address?

37 (80.4 %) of the 46 surveyed service providers offer services to young refugees who have been granted asylum; 36 (78.3 %) service providers address children and young people with subsidiary protection status, and finally 25 (54.3 %) care for asylum seekers. 22 (47.8 %) address persons age eleven and over; 17 (37.0 %) also address younger persons (7 responses missing: 15.2 %). In 35 (76.1 %) of our service providers, the direct contact persons are the refugee pupils and young people themselves. 20 (43.5 %) providers are in contact with parents, legal guardians, or caregivers, while 14 (30.4 %) also maintain contact with the clients' teachers. Only 4 (8.7 %) are in contact with youth coaches, and only 2 (4.3 %) correspond with urgent aid bodies.

(3) What additional support demands have surfaced among refugee students and young people in the context of the pandemic?

According to 29 (63.0 %) service providers, additional pandemic-related support needs have arisen among refugee students and young people. Remarkably, 26 of these service providers report that they were able to meet these new support needs at the time of our survey. The sub-sample also provided information about concrete forms of such demands via open answers. By means of a summarising content analysis (inductive approach) of these statements, four categories of additional demands could be extracted and ordered according to the frequency (fq) of the assigned statements (quantification): these categories are a) enhanced offers of (distance) trainings

and counselling (*fq* = 15); b) coaching of students and young people in the course of distance learning processes (*fq* = 11), *c*); adaptation of learning services to the new circumstances (*fq* = 4), and d) technical/digital support and upgrading (*fq* = 3).

(4) What types of support do service providers themselves need in order to further develop the support they offer throughout and despite the crisis?

As before, we identified several categories of support requests from service providers through content analytical data reduction and quantification of open responses. In order of frequency, these are a) financial support (*fq* = 13); b) technical/digital support and upgrading (*fq* = 9); c) expansion of staff and in-house resources (*fq* = 8); d) optimisation of accessibility to clients (*fq* = 7); e) improvement of information flow and co-operation (*fq* = 5), f) trainings and consultations (*fq* = 4), and g) legal protection (*fq* = 1).

(5) Has supervision ratio and/or disposability of resources changed due to the pandemic?

All in all, the care ratio and/or disposability of resources has not changed crucially. The single item used to measure possible change, scaled from 1 ('significantly improved') to 5 ('significantly worse'), gives a mean of $M = 3.09$ ($SD = .85$). As also shown in Figure 1, 19 service providers (54.3 % out of those who rated the concerned item) indicate no change at all.

Figure 1. Changes to supervision ratio and/or disposability of resources
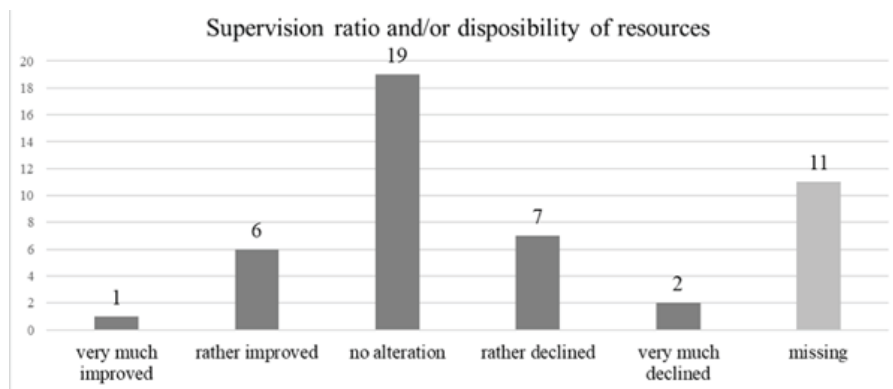
However, a closer view on the apparently normally distributed data reveals differences between specific groups. Looking at the age of the refugee students and young people supported by the surveyed service providers, a significant difference can be observed ($t[33] = -2.262$; $p < .05$). Those service providers who serve individuals aged eleven and older are more concerned with potential changes in the ratio of care and/or availability of resources ($N = 17$; $M = 3.37$; $SD = .68$) than those who also serve younger individuals ($N = 22$; $M = 2.75$; $SD = .93$). In addition, a surpassing calculated effect the size of Cohen's $d = .77$ indicates a clear practical relevance of the difference. Similar results are found with regards to the quantity of support offered by service providers ($t[33] = -3.432$; $p < .05$). Those who give support in three or more service categories[30] assess changes in the care ratio or availability of resources as significantly more problematic ($N = 21$; $M = 3.53$; $SD = .80$) than service providers who do not cover more than two categories ($N = 20$; $M = 2.67$; $SD = .69$). Likewise, the practical relevance (Cohen's $d = 1.16$) of this difference can also be assessed as very high.

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30 As noted along the elaboration of research question (1) the following categories of offers were queried within our study (see also Table 1): educational counselling, occupational counselling, psychological counselling, assessment of competences, learning support, support during visits from authorities, counselling concerning educational media and technologies, and financial support.

(6) Do teachers make referrals to support offered by service providers?

About half of the teachers (111; 52,1 %) make referrals to support services from service providers; but almost as many (94 (44,1 %)) do not (7 responses missing; 2.8 %). They mainly refer to services that provide learning support (38.0 %), psychological counselling (31.5 %), educational counselling (24.9 %), counselling concerning educational media/technologies (17.8 %), support during visits from authorities (8.5 %), or financial support (6.6 %). We also obtained information about how teachers learn from these support services. Using quantifying inductive content analysis, we were able to categorise teachers' information channels into a) in-house conversations ($fq = 35$); b) personal inquiry ($fq = 13$); c) announcements of educational authorities or service providers ($fq = 12$); d) personal networks ($fq = 6$), and e) social media ($fq = 3$).

(7) What challenges has the pandemic given rise to among teachers of refugee students and young people?

Teachers' ratings concerning four single items cited in Table 2 indicate partial overstraining caused by the new circumstances, a slight lack of feasible support, and a clear desire for a variety of support offers.

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions of their work with refugee students and young people during the pandemic.

Item*	'highly appropriate' (1)	'somewhat appropriate' (2)	'less than appropriate' (3)	'not appropriate at all' (4)	Mean and Standard deviation
1) 'I feel overwhelmed by these challenges.'	27 12.7 %	**85** **40.9 %**	72 34.0 %	27 12.7 %	**M** = 2.47 **SD** = 0.87
2) 'I have the feeling that I cannot give sufficient support.'	18 8.5 %	69 32.5 %	**98** **46.2 %**	26 12.3 %	**M** = 2.63 **SD** = 0.81
3) 'I have the feeling that refugee students and young people do not get enough support.'	12 5.7 %	39 18.4 %	**98** **46.2 %**	61 28.8 %	**M** = 2.99 **SD** = 0.84
4) 'I wish I could access a wider range of support options.'	**97** **45.8 %**	78 36.8 %	26 12.3 %	9 4.2 %	**M** = 1.75 **SD** = 0.84
* Missing values: Item 1: 1 (0.5 %); Item 2: 1 (0.5 %); Item 3: 2 (0.9 %); Item 4: 2 (0.9 %).					

Further, we also looked at specific changes in key areas of work that might be challenging for the teachers concerned. Table 3 shows the results of a total of six such areas of work.

Table 3. Changes in major fields of work.

| Major fields of work*	'intensified' (1)	'no alteration' (2)	'decreased' (3)	Mean and Standard deviation
1) work with parents	80 37.7 %	**98** **46.2 %**	30 14.2 %	**M** = 1.76 **SD** = 0.69
2) administrative tasks	**129** **60.8 %**	77 36.3 %	3 1.4 %	**M** = 1.40 **SD** = 0.52
3) relationship work	**109** **51.4 %**	63 29.7 %	36 17.0 %	**M** = 1.65 **SD** = 0.76
4) preparation of education and instruction	**133** **62.7 %**	73 34.4 %	4 1.9 %	**M** = 1.39 **SD** = 0.53
5) educational/instructional work	**105** **49.5 %**	84 39.6 %	21 9.9 %	**M** = 1.60 **SD** = 0.67
6) Individualisation of learning processes	**126** **59.4 %**	60 28.3 %	24 11.3 %	**M** = 1.51 **SD** = 0.69
* Missing values: Item 1: 4 (1.9 %); Item 2: 3 (1.4 %); Item 3: 4 (1.9 %); Item 4: 2 (0.9 %); Item 5: 2 (0.9 %); Item 6: 2 (0.9 %).				

The high frequencies for the attribute 'intensified' (see Table 3) as well as a mean calculated over all six items representing major fields of work (N = 1.55; SD = .39; Cronbach's α = .61) indicate a highly significant shift towards intensification of work (one-group t-test, applying a comparative value = 2; $t(209)$ = -16.558; $p < .001$).

(8) What do teachers need in order to cope with challenges presented by the pandemic?

Considering the challenges caused by the pandemic, teachers were given an open-ended question with no character limit about what kind of support they need to further develop their pedagogical work. An inductive content analysis revealed several repeatedly mentioned demands that were then categorised.

Figure 1: Frequency of claimed needs from teachers
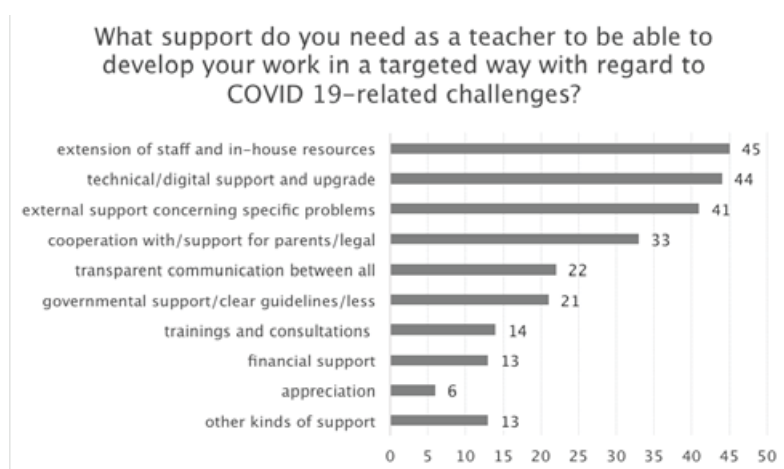
128 of the 212 participating teachers provided open answers, using a blank field in their questionnaire to elaborate on the effects of the COVID-19-pandemic on their daily work. Most entries included several demands, which is why a total of 252 entries could be determined inductively. Teachers demand a similar increase of staff and in-house resources (fq = 45), technical/digital support and upgrade (fq = 44) and external support concerning specific problems (fq = 41). The latter category mainly includes interpreters, social pedagogues, or psychologists from external institutions.

Another main topic for teachers is cooperation with and support for parents and legal guardians (fq = 33). They primarily see the need for financial support, language support, and assistance when dealing with the authorities. The next two categories belong more or less together: requiring transparent communication between all involved (fq = 22) on the one hand and gov- ernmental support/clear guidelines/less bureaucracy (fq = 21) on the other. It looks like teachers are unable to find their way through a wealth of information and are therefore looking for more support and to hand over responsibility. Above all, they criticise the large amount of non-transparent bureaucratic work associated with both refugees and the COVID-19-pandemic, and the combination of the two.

The relatively low demand for training and consultations (fq = 14) could indicate that teachers feel sufficiently prepared experts in their pedagogical work. The entries primarily show the main issues to be bureaucratic hurdles and guidelines, as well as administrative activities, both of which take up too much time. The low demand for financial support (fq = 13) can be explained by the high correlation with other categories, such as more staff and technical/digital support and upgrade, which also require an increase in financial resources. Only entries that explicitly demanded

more money or financial resources were assigned to this category.

And last but not least, it turns out that the desire for appreciation (*fq* = 6) is only sec-ondary. This can be interpreted to mean that the perceived need is so abundant that the desire for recognition does not even arise.

5. Discussion, limitation, and outlook

In conclusion, and recalling the main findings, the following can be carved out as being of specific interest:

a) Firstly, looking at the *service providers,* the need for support that arose from the COVID-19-pandemic are mainly economic in nature, with a focus on the digital sector. These can be seen both at the level of the lack of hardware, but also on the level of the lack of digital competences. This lack of digital skills was evident both among the service provider staff and among the clients. In addition, access to and reachability of children and young people was made particularly difficult by COVID-19. Here, too, the institutions recognise an increase of digital support as a possible solution. Service providers appear to have experienced significant obstacles due to limitations on personal access to clients in times of social distancing.

Service providers are mainly engaged in giving learning support and educational and occupational counselling. They also report the need for further developments of online and distance training and counselling; coaching for students and young people in distance-learning processes, and to further adapt learning services to the new realities and technical/digital support and upgrading. Large differences become apparent when turning to the language offers. For example, 21 institutions state that they provide their services in several – up to 26 – languages. However, 18 facilities provide no multilin-gual services. This shows that there is a great need to catch up on additional language offers.

What is surprising about these results is that the care ratio or the availability of resources did not change decisively during the pandemic for those service providers that focus on the younger target group. The older the clients, the more support needs were identified. Likewise, it became clear that the need for additional support increased in institutions offering their services at many different levels.

The open data well reflect the wide range of support services provided by the service providers, from educational, vocational, and legal counselling to psychological support for those suffering from domestic abuse, as well as physical sports, learning assistance, online computer courses, and intercultural parental work.

b) Secondly, the results of the *survey with the teachers* clearly show that schools face major challenges when working with children and young people with a refugee background in the context of the COVID-19-pandemic. It has proven to be difficult to maintain contact with the students themselves, as well as with their parents, legal guardians, or caregivers. A lack of technical equipment and/or digital skills also leads to problems. The absence of face-to-face contact with the children and the lack of technical equipment present great challenges.

A clear picture emerged from the meaningful inductive categorisation of the open answers to the question of which support options teachers need. In addition to the need for technical and digital support, the desire for additional internal staff and external support options was most strongly reported. Cooperation with parents and guardians, and the need for external (financial) support for parents, which would enable adequate support for the family, was also important to the teachers. The teachers also expressed frustration with increasing administrative requirements and the non-transparent communication between all parties, but especially from the authorities.

More than half of the teachers (53,6%) feel somewhat or significantly overwhelmed by the challenges presented by the pandemic. Our results also show a significant increase in the perceived intensification of work through COVID-19.

Overall, we could identify a general need to catch up in terms of technical/digital support and equipment among service providers and in schools, but also concerning the refugee children and young people themselves. Both teachers and service providers would like to see better and closer cooperation with – and generally more transparent – state support. The central problem for service providers can be identified in the digital barriers created by the lack of face-to-face contact and accessibility to refugees and their parents and guardians. The teachers mainly demand support with work beyond the pedagogical (e.g., psychological and social work, but also administrative tasks) so that they can concentrate on their core task: to teach.

As these findings stem from the earlier stage of the pandemic, when dynamics of sustained impact were probably still lurking around the corner, it would be interesting to follow up in a more mixed-methods manner to learn more about the first-hand experiences of education- and support staff. Additionally, the presented findings are shadowed by a presumable high internal heterogeneity of the investigated young refugees. Hence, further studies will do good to trace the young persons' age – and perhaps further person-specific features – more precisely, making more differentiated assertions possible. Using suitable methodological approaches, it would also be interesting to dive further into first-hand accounts of the children and young people themselves (e.g. in-depth information on refugee families with school-going children, refugee students' demands and issues beyond those directly experienced by teachers and education service providers) in order to better understand the dynamics of the impact of the pandemic on that specific group, presently and in the long term, with focus on the inequalities this situation has, does, and will cause.

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Supporting migrant students through the pandemic and beyond

El apoyo a estudiantes inmigrantes durante y después de la pandemia

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