



INCLUDE ME

**Inclusive educational opportunities for
migrants and refugees with inadequate or
postponed formal education**

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National Reports



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Introduction

This comprehensive report brings together findings from national field and desk research conducted as part of the Erasmus+ project IncludeMe: Inclusive Educational Opportunities for Young Migrants and Refugees with Inadequate or Postponed Formal Education. Drawing on diverse national contexts, the report aims to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by young migrants and refugees, particularly those with disrupted educational experiences, and to identify effective strategies for their integration into host countries' education systems and labor markets.

The project highlights the unique and multifaceted barriers faced by this vulnerable population, such as language difficulties, unrecognized qualifications, cultural adaptation, and limited access to resources. Through a combination of desk research, reviewing national and international policies, and field research, including surveys and interviews with professionals in migration and integration, this report offers a detailed exploration of both systemic gaps and innovative practices across various European countries.

By focusing on real-world examples and country-specific case studies, such as the experiences of young migrants in Portugal, Slovenia, and Italy, the findings emphasize the critical need for inclusive and flexible educational frameworks. These frameworks should address not only academic gaps but also psychological, social, and economic dimensions of integration, ensuring young migrants can access the tools and opportunities necessary for long-term success.

This report serves as a resource for policymakers, educators, and practitioners, offering actionable recommendations to bridge existing gaps and foster educational environments that are inclusive, resilient, and attuned to the needs of migrant youth. The ultimate aim is to support these individuals in achieving their potential and contributing meaningfully to their host societies, while also advancing the broader goals of social cohesion and equity across Europe.

1. Estonia

1.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Estonia has not traditionally been a major destination for refugees due to its small population, recent independence, and geographic location. However, migration patterns shifted after Estonia joined the European Union in 2004, with an increased influx of immigrants driven by economic development, an aging population, and demand for foreign labor. Immigrants mostly come from EU countries and former Soviet territories, with a smaller number arriving from other regions. Most newcomers settle in Tallinn, where the job market is strongest. Notably, the educational level of immigrants is higher than the national average, with about 60% holding tertiary degrees, although many, especially from former Soviet areas, work in jobs below their qualifications.

Estonia's refugee protection policies align with international law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, adopted in 1997, which laid the foundation for granting asylum. Despite this, Estonia has received relatively few asylum applications compared to Western European countries. From 1997 to 2021, about 1,200 asylum applications were submitted, primarily from Ukraine, Syria, Russia, Georgia, and Afghanistan. Of these, 603 were granted protection, including 346 refugees and 257 under subsidiary protection, with Syrians, Ukrainians, and Russians comprising the largest groups.

The refugee situation shifted dramatically in 2022 with the conflict in Ukraine. Over 25,000 Ukrainian refugees arrived by March 2022, and by mid-year, that number had reached 49,000. This influx has had a significant impact on Estonia's demographic and social landscape. Most of these refugees were granted temporary protection under the EU's directive, giving them access to housing, healthcare, and education. Estonia has also prioritized their integration by offering free language courses and employment support.

In 2023, Estonia received 3,950 asylum applications, a 35% increase from the previous year. The majority of these applications were from Ukrainians, followed by asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Belarus, and Russia. Challenges persist, particularly in accommodating non-European asylum seekers, who face more barriers in accessing services and integrating due to cultural, linguistic differences, and discrimination.

Despite progress, the sudden influx of refugees has strained Estonia's social systems, particularly in housing, healthcare, and education. The government, in collaboration with NGOs and municipalities, has been addressing these challenges by providing tailored support, including free language training and cultural orientation. However, obstacles remain for refugees, particularly those from non-European regions, in terms of integration and accessing essential services.

1.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

1.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

1. Language Barriers

The Estonian language is a significant challenge for young refugees, as most of them arrive with little to no knowledge of it. Estonian is a complex language with few similarities to other widely spoken languages, making it difficult for newcomers to learn quickly. While language training is offered as part of integration programs, these courses often do not adequately prepare refugee students for full participation in mainstream education. This language barrier affects their ability to understand lessons, communicate with peers and teachers, and perform well academically. Also, as a small language not spoken widely across the world or even Europe, the language is not included in the popular language learning apps like Duolingo.

2. Interruptions in Prior Education

Many young refugees arrive in Estonia after experiencing prolonged interruptions in their education due to conflict, displacement, or migration journeys. These gaps in schooling leave them with significant academic deficits, particularly in foundational subjects such as math and literacy. This makes it challenging for them to catch up with their peers, especially in a structured and demanding educational system like Estonia's.

3. Limited Access to Specialized Support

Estonian schools are often not equipped to address the specific needs of refugee students. Teachers may lack training in working with traumatized children or students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, there is a shortage of school counselors, social workers, and other support staff who can provide targeted assistance to refugee students. This lack of specialized support can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration among young refugees, affecting their mental health and overall well-being.

4. Social Integration and Peer Relationships

Young refugees often face difficulties integrating socially into Estonian schools. Cultural differences, language barriers, and a lack of understanding among local students can lead to social exclusion or bullying. These experiences can discourage refugees from engaging fully in school life, further isolating them and reducing their motivation to succeed academically.

5. Administrative and Legal Barriers

Some young refugees face delays in accessing education due to administrative hurdles, such as the lack of required documentation or lengthy asylum processes. While Estonia's laws guarantee the right to education for all children, these bureaucratic challenges can result in delays or mismatches in school placement, where students are placed in inappropriate grade levels that do not reflect their age or abilities.

6. Limited Vocational and Higher Education Opportunities

While primary and secondary education is more accessible, young refugees in Estonia often encounter challenges transitioning to vocational training or higher education. Limited proficiency in the Estonian language and a lack of information about available programs and pathways often prevent them from pursuing further studies. Financial constraints and the need to support their families also force many young refugees to prioritize work over education.

7. Lack of Multicultural Curriculum and Awareness

The Estonian education system has historically been homogenous, with limited emphasis on multiculturalism or the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum. This can make refugee students feel that their cultures and experiences are not valued, further alienating them from the school environment. Teachers may also lack training in fostering inclusive classrooms, which can perpetuate feelings of exclusion among refugee students.

1.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

National Integration Policy Frameworks

Estonia has implemented several strategic frameworks to promote the integration of immigrants and national minorities into its society. These initiatives have evolved over time to address changing demographics and societal needs.

Integrating Estonia 2020

Implemented from 2014 to 2020, this development plan focused on adaptation and Integration Measures: Assisting new immigrants in adapting to Estonian society and supporting long-term residents in their integration process. Monitoring and Evaluation: Conducting regular assessments to understand integration dynamics and inform policy decisions.

Cohesive Estonia Development Plan 2021–2030

The current framework, known as the Cohesive Estonia Development Plan, aims to promote Adaptation and Integration: Enhance services that support newcomers in adapting to Estonian society and encourage active participation from all residents;

Programs and Initiatives

1. **Welcoming Programme**
Implemented by the Estonian Ministry of the Interior, the Welcoming Programme offers practical support to newly arrived migrants, including refugees, to help them integrate into Estonian society.

Components:

- Language training at basic levels.
- Cultural orientation courses covering Estonian history, laws, and social norms.
- Specialized modules on education, employment, and family life.

2. **Settle in Estonia Programme**
This program is aimed at providing tailored support for immigrants and refugees, focusing on practical skills and knowledge to navigate life in Estonia. It includes workshops, counseling, and peer support networks.

3. Refugee Support Services

Organizations like the Estonian Refugee Council and Johanniter Aid Estonia play a significant role in supporting refugees through:

- Housing assistance.
- Employment counseling and vocational training.
- Psychological and social support for trauma-affected individuals.

4. Labor Market Integration Initiatives

The Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa) offers targeted support to refugees and migrants, including job placement services, career counseling, and subsidized employment opportunities. These initiatives aim to bridge the gap between refugees' skills and the demands of the Estonian labor market.

5. Education and Youth Programs

Estonia supports the integration of refugee children and youth through:

- Free access to primary and secondary education.
- Additional language support within schools.
- Extracurricular activities promoting intercultural understanding, often organized in collaboration with NGOs.

The Estonian Refugee Council organizes various programs designed to support refugees in Estonia across multiple dimensions:

The **Education and Awareness Program** aims to increase understanding of forced migration and integration, focusing on the opportunities and challenges that come with migration.

The **Economic Well-being** initiative supports displaced individuals and those affected by crises in regaining self-sufficiency.

The **Mental Health Program** provides a range of mental health support activities, including therapy, as well as group and individual sessions.

Social Well-being program focuses on integrating refugees into their new environments.

In addition to these services, the Estonian Refugee Council also actively engages in **Advocacy**. It champions the rights and welfare of refugees at local, national, and international levels. By collecting

ongoing feedback from refugees, the Council identifies best practices, areas of concern, and systemic violations. When it can, the Council takes action to resolve issues facing the refugee community, working to protect and advance their rights in Estonia and beyond.

The goal of the **Counseling Program** is to provide displaced individuals with essential information and needs-based support, assisting refugees in adapting to their new environment and fostering independence. We focus on the personal needs of those seeking help, guiding them to make informed decisions for building their lives in a new country, which in turn contributes to a cohesive society.

The Community Program promotes the development of more cohesive and resilient communities by supporting refugees in adapting to a new society and helping the host community integrate new arrivals. To achieve this, we organize community events, group activities, and camps for children and youth across Estonia.

1.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

Estonia has implemented several best practices in integration, drawing from both national initiatives and international collaborations. These efforts aim to foster social cohesion and support the successful integration of immigrants and refugees into Estonian society.

1. Welcoming Programme: Settle in Estonia

The "Settle in Estonia" programme is a free educational initiative designed to assist newly arrived migrants in adapting to local life. It offers courses that provide an overview of Estonia's societal functions, daily life, and Estonian language instruction. Participants receive information on working, studying, and family-related matters, facilitating a smoother transition into Estonian society.

2. International Conference on Integration

Estonia hosts international conferences focusing on integration, such as the event titled "Cultural diversity - an obstacle or an opportunity in shaping a cohesive society?" held on November 14-15, 2024. These conferences bring together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to share visionary ideas, research results, and best practices for effective integration in diverse societies.

3. Integration Foundation Initiatives

The Integration Foundation in Estonia manages various programs to support integration, including:

Language Friends Program: Facilitates language practice and cultural exchange between native Estonian speakers and newcomers.

Language Training for Citizenship: Provides language courses to help immigrants meet the language requirements for Estonian citizenship.

Cultural Diversity Events: Organizes events to highlight and preserve the multifaceted culture of Estonian communities and peoples.

4. International Collaborations

Estonia engages in international research cooperation projects to compare integration contexts and share best practices. For example, a project between Tallinn University in Estonia and Bergen University in Norway examined the integration and acculturation attitudes of Russian minorities in both countries, providing valuable insights for policy development.

These initiatives reflect Estonia's commitment to fostering an inclusive society by implementing effective integration practices and learning from international experiences.

1.3 Survey Results and Analysis

1.3.1 General Information

The survey was designed to gather insights from professionals working directly with young refugees and migrants, particularly focusing on their integration into education and vocational systems. A wide range of professionals participated, including youth workers, educators, social workers, and other specialists involved in supporting refugee and migrant youth.

Among the respondents, 40% work in NGOs that focus on refugee and migrant support, including language and vocational training, psychosocial services, and legal aid. These organizations are critical in providing specialized, community-based services and are often the first point of contact for refugees and migrants arriving in Estonia. Their work is focused on addressing immediate needs and supporting long-term integration goals through tailored programs.

In addition, 35% of the respondents are employed in formal educational institutions, such as schools, universities, and vocational training centers. These professionals play a vital role in supporting young refugees' educational progress, from offering language courses to helping students navigate the Estonian education system. Their work also includes providing additional learning support, fostering social integration, and addressing educational gaps that may exist due to prior disruptions in schooling.

By involving professionals from both NGOs and formal educational institutions, the survey captures a comprehensive view of the support systems in place for young migrants and refugees, helping to identify both strengths and areas where improvements are needed.

1.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

The survey results confirm that the primary challenges young migrants face are:

- **Language Barriers:** Over 80% of respondents cited language as the most significant obstacle to successful integration.
- **Interrupted Education:** Many refugee youth face significant academic gaps due to their displacement, particularly in subjects that require foundational knowledge.
- **Social Integration:** Approximately 70% of respondents noted difficulties in social adaptation, with young refugees often facing exclusion due to cultural and linguistic differences.
-

1.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

The survey highlights the following needs:

- **Language Proficiency:** Intensive language courses to ensure refugees can participate in mainstream education and the labor market.
- **Vocational Training:** Tailored programs to provide skills that meet the needs of the Estonian labor market.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Mental health services addressing the trauma experienced by refugee youth, which can affect their academic and social integration.

1.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

The survey identifies several programs designed to support refugee youth, including:

- **Language Support:** Various free language programs offered through schools and community centers.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Organized by NGOs, these activities aim to foster intercultural understanding and social integration.
- **Vocational Training:** The Unemployment Insurance Fund offers career counseling and job placement services specifically for refugees.

1.3.5 Services that has been found the most effective

According to the survey, the most effective services are:

- **Language Courses:** 85% of respondents identified these programs as the most critical for academic integration.
- **Mental Health Services:** Providing emotional and psychological support was deemed equally important for successful integration.

1.4 Gaps in services identified in the survey

The survey found several service gaps, including:

- **Limited Vocational Training:** There is a lack of programs that provide specific, marketable skills for refugees, particularly those who have limited formal education.
- **Insufficient Support for Higher Education Access:** Many young refugees are unable to pursue higher education due to financial constraints and language barriers.
- **Inadequate Specialized Support:** Refugees from non-European countries and those with higher educational backgrounds face challenges accessing appropriate services.

1.5 Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis examines the alignment and discrepancies between the findings from the desk research and the field survey conducted with professionals working directly with young refugees and migrants. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of the key challenges, opportunities, and gaps in supporting the educational integration of young refugees and migrants in Estonia.

Both the desk research and the survey results highlighted **language barriers** as one of the most significant challenges faced by young migrants and refugees. The desk research pointed to Estonian language complexity as a major hindrance to academic success and integration into Estonian society. The language is not only difficult to learn but also has limited resources available for learners, making it harder for refugees and migrants to access mainstream education. The survey findings corroborated these points, with **80%** of the respondents identifying language as a top obstacle in the educational integration of young refugees.

However, while the desk research emphasized the general lack of adequate language training programs, the survey results provided specific feedback from practitioners. Respondents indicated that while there are free language courses available for refugees, these programs often fall short in addressing the varying levels of language proficiency among students. Moreover, the **limited capacity of language courses** to cater to the volume of refugees, particularly those who require intensive support, was cited as a major challenge by many professionals. There was also concern about the **limited availability of advanced language programs** for young refugees who need to catch up in areas beyond basic conversational skills, such as academic language.

The desk research outlined how **interruptions in prior education** are one of the core challenges for young refugees, with many arriving in Estonia after experiencing prolonged disruptions due to conflict, displacement, or migration. These interruptions often result in **academic deficits**, particularly in subjects such as math, literacy, and other foundational knowledge.

The survey results closely mirrored these findings, with **over 70%** of professionals reporting that young refugees often have significant gaps in their education. The survey revealed that these gaps were particularly evident in **younger refugees** who had been displaced at an early age, as well as in those from conflict zones with disrupted educational systems. A significant portion of respondents (about **60%**) noted that **refugees from non-European regions** experienced the most severe educational gaps, as they often faced extended periods of displacement and fewer opportunities for formal schooling.

A key difference between the two research methods was the focus of solutions. While the desk research emphasized the structural challenges within the education system that hinder refugee integration, the survey respondents pointed to specific initiatives, such as **remedial education programs** and **accelerated learning courses**. These programs are designed to address educational gaps, but respondents indicated that the resources available were insufficient, especially for larger groups of refugee students.

Both research methods identified **social integration** as a crucial barrier to the success of refugee youth in their educational settings. The desk research noted that cultural and linguistic differences often lead to **social exclusion**, bullying, and a sense of isolation. This was echoed by survey participants, with **65%** of respondents reporting that young refugees frequently face difficulties in building peer relationships due to differences in cultural backgrounds and language barriers.

However, the survey respondents also highlighted some key efforts being made to foster **intercultural understanding**. Many respondents emphasized the importance of **extracurricular activities** and **youth clubs**, which were identified as crucial in helping young refugees build friendships, develop social networks, and gain a better understanding of Estonian society. This practical aspect of integration was less detailed in the desk research but emerged as a vital area in the field survey.

While the desk research mentioned the importance of **multicultural curriculum development**, survey respondents specifically pointed out that **teachers' training** in handling cultural diversity was often inadequate. A substantial portion (around **40%**) of the survey respondents highlighted that teachers, while well-meaning, often lack the necessary skills to effectively engage with and support refugee students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The desk research pointed to the **lack of vocational training opportunities** as a major gap in the integration process. Refugee youth, especially those with interrupted education, find it difficult to transition into the labor market due to the lack of relevant skills, language proficiency, and recognition of previous qualifications. The research also emphasized the challenges of integrating refugee youth into **higher education** due to these barriers.

The survey results showed a similar trend, but they provided additional insights into the specific **vocational training gaps**. **50% of respondents** pointed out that there is a lack of specialized vocational programs designed specifically for refugees. Those who are enrolled in general vocational programs often struggle due to **language barriers** and a mismatch between their prior skills and the training provided. Moreover, the **limited availability of career counseling** and guidance for refugees wishing to pursue vocational or higher education was another gap identified by survey respondents. Many youth workers noted that the refugees are often unaware of the available training and employment opportunities, which worsens their chances of finding meaningful work.

The desk research emphasized the role of **national policies** and **programs** such as the **Welcoming Programme** and **Settle in Estonia Programme** in providing services that support refugees, including language training, housing, healthcare, and employment assistance. However, it also highlighted that **refugees from non-European countries** face greater challenges accessing these services due to bureaucratic hurdles, cultural barriers, and discrimination.

Survey respondents confirmed these challenges and added that refugees from **non-European regions** often face difficulties in **navigating administrative processes** or understanding how to access the available services. Interestingly, the survey also showed a stronger emphasis on **community-based support networks** provided by **NGOs**, which were often cited as being more accessible and responsive to the specific needs of refugees. These networks are seen as vital for providing **informal support**—such as **mentorship, peer support, and practical advice**—that is sometimes lacking in more formal service provision.

1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The comparative analysis reveals that while both the desk research and survey results align in identifying the major challenges faced by young refugees, the survey adds a practical, on-the-ground perspective of how these challenges are being addressed. The desk research provides a broader understanding of the structural and systemic barriers to integration, while the survey results highlight the specific needs and responses of professionals working directly with refugees.

One of the key takeaways is the **need for more comprehensive and targeted language programs, remedial education initiatives, and vocational training opportunities** to help young refugees overcome their educational deficits. Additionally, the importance of **social integration programs** and **teacher training in cultural competency** was a critical insight from the survey.

The comparative analysis underscores the importance of combining national policies and formal programs with **community-driven efforts** to ensure that young refugees receive the tailored support they need for successful integration into Estonian society.

In conclusion, while Estonia has made significant progress in refugee integration, challenges remain, particularly regarding educational and vocational support. The following recommendations are made:

1. **Expand Language Programs:** Increase the availability and intensity of Estonian language courses, particularly for young migrants with little prior knowledge of the language.
2. **Improve Vocational Training:** Expand vocational training programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of young refugees and align with the Estonian labor market.
3. **Enhance Mental Health Support:** Strengthen the availability of psychosocial support services to help young refugees cope with trauma and better integrate into society.
4. **Promote Intercultural Understanding:** Develop more programs aimed at fostering social cohesion and understanding between refugee youth and their Estonian peers.

5. **Strengthen Research on Long-term Integration:** Invest in longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of integration programs, focusing on employment stability, educational success, and social mobility.

2. Greece

2.1. Country Context and Background

In the past few years, Greece has experienced substantial changes in migration patterns, becoming a transit and destination country for refugees and migrants who are fleeing conflict, poverty, and persecution. Given its strategic geographical location, it has served as a primary entrance point into the European Union, particularly during the 2015 refugee crisis, when thousands of individuals arrived via

the Eastern Mediterranean and Mediterranean Sea routes. The EU was compelled to implement a "hotspot approach" to assist Greek and other countries' authorities with identification, registration, asylum applications, and return operations, as the influx of refugees strained Greece's resources and capacity to manage the situation.

Greece continues to encounter obstacles as a result of persistent conflicts and economic instability in regions such as the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Africa, despite the temporary reduction in departures that resulted from the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement's ban on the Western Balkan route. The number of asylum seekers recorded in 2023 increased considerably, about 48,721. This represents a 159% increase from 2022. Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) and Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) continue to be afflicted by overcrowding and substandard conditions. These centres frequently confine refugees, including unaccompanied minors, for extended periods, resulting in restricted access to essential services. Their vulnerability is further exacerbated by bureaucratic delays, which extend their stays in unsafe accommodations.

Systemic issues hinder access to asylum on the mainland, such as a frequently inaccessible online appointment platform for scheduling applications and limited registration centres in Malakasa and Diavata. Numerous applicants have been denied access to their rights and protection as a result of persistent delays and technical malfunctions. Furthermore, international human rights organisations have raised concerns to recent pushbacks at sea, which involve the interception of boats and the refusal to process the asylum applications of refugees.

These systemic challenges have a profound impact on the education and social integration of young migrants and refugees.

2.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

2.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

Young refugees in Greece face significant challenges in accessing and integrating into the education system due to a variety of barriers:

- **Language Barriers:** Many young refugees struggle with Greek, the primary language in schools, as Greece is often seen as a transit country. Programs to teach Greek, such as DYEP and ZEP, are limited to urban areas, leaving rural and island refugees unsupported.
- **Restricted Access to Education:** Bureaucratic delays, asylum processing, and de facto detention in Reception and Identification Centres often prevent children from enrolling in school.
- **Psychosocial Challenges:** Refugee youth frequently face trauma, social stigma, and inadequate mental health support, making schools unwelcoming or overwhelming.
- **Limited Resources:** Overcrowded camps, discontinued accommodation programs like ESTIA, and insufficient NGO support hinder access to education, especially in remote areas.
- **Teacher Training Deficits:** Greek teachers lack specialized training and resources to effectively address the unique needs of refugee students, including language and psychosocial challenges.

- **Age-Related Barriers:** Refugees over 18 face significant obstacles in accessing secondary or tertiary education due to practical and administrative hurdles. Vocational training participation is also low despite recent prioritization.

These challenges highlight the need for expanded programs, infrastructure, and teacher support to ensure inclusive and effective education for refugee youth.

2.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

Greece has implemented several policies and initiatives to support the integration of young refugees into the education system, focusing on language learning, access to resources, and teacher training. These efforts are guided by **Law No. 4636/2019**, which ensures refugee children are enrolled under the same conditions as Greek citizens. Key programs include:

- **Reception Classes (DYEP):** These classes, held in the afternoons, help refugee children integrate into mainstream education by focusing on Greek language skills.
- **ACE Project (All Children in Education):** This UNICEF-led initiative provides non-formal education, including language learning, homework support, and vocational training, across six regions in Greece. It also emphasizes social and emotional learning, life skills, and readiness for formal education.
- **Accelerated Learning Program (ALP):** Designed for refugee adolescents, this program condenses the secondary curriculum into one year with simplified materials and multilingual glossaries to help students transition into Greek schools.
- **Digital Learning Initiatives:** The Akelius digital program supports Greek and English language acquisition through interactive exercises and supplementary materials, enhancing both language and digital literacy skills.
- **Teacher Training:** Programs such as *Teach4Integration* train educators in trauma-informed approaches, cultural sensitivity, and multilingual classroom management, improving outcomes for refugee students.
- **Supporting Materials:** The Institute of Educational Policy provides tailored resources in multiple languages to assist students whose mother tongue is not Greek.

These initiatives reflect Greece's commitment to fostering inclusion and addressing barriers faced by refugee youth in education.

2.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

Research and international practices highlight key strategies for improving refugee integration:

1. **Language and Bridging Programs:** Intensive language immersion, followed by gradual integration into mainstream classrooms, has proven successful. Germany's model of a year-long

focus on language and cultural acclimatization before mainstreaming students has yielded positive results in both Germany and Sweden.

2. **Psychosocial and Trauma-Informed Support:** Programs like Canada's Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative support refugees by training teachers to address trauma and build resilience. Greece could benefit from peer mentorship and community support to aid refugees' cultural adaptation.
3. **Vocational and Life Skills Training:** For older refugee youth, vocational training is essential. Norway and Sweden's vocational programs provide practical skills and certifications that help refugees enter the workforce. Greece could adopt similar programs, especially in collaboration with NGOs, to offer pathways to employment for refugee youth.

2.3 Survey Results and Analysis

2.3.1 General Information

The majority of respondents are male (60%), hold a bachelor's degree (100%), and work predominantly in the non-profit or educational sectors. Their professional roles are primarily as educators and ICT trainers, with varying levels of experience. Most respondents (60%) have 1-5 years of experience working with migrants, primarily in the 18–30 age group.

Notably, over half of the respondents (60%) have not received training in intercultural competency, with only 40% having attended a short seminar on intercultural education. Similarly, 60% reported a lack of access to mentorship programs within their organizations to support their work with young migrants and refugees.

There is a clear demand for continuous professional development, with respondents highlighting the need for structured courses and seminars on topics such as migrant support and trauma management.

2.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

According to the respondents, young migrants and refugees face several significant challenges:

- **Language and Communication:** Difficulty in acquiring the Greek language and communicating effectively is a primary obstacle. Additionally, understanding Greek social norms and navigating public systems pose considerable challenges.
- **Cultural Barriers and Discrimination:** Cultural differences, along with experiences of discrimination and xenophobia, further complicate their integration.
- **Employment Challenges:** Entering the job market is particularly difficult due to language barriers, a lack of necessary skills and knowledge, or the non-recognition of their qualifications. These are further exacerbated by discrimination and exploitation by employers and undeclared work.
- **Economic Hardship and Education:** Financial struggles limit access to educational resources, often leading to school dropouts and a sense of isolation among young migrants.

2.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

The primary educational and vocational needs of young migrants include:

- **Greek Language Acquisition:** Mastering the Greek language is a critical need, as it serves as a foundation for integration into the educational system and the workforce.
- **Professional Skills Development:** Vocational counseling is essential to guide young migrants toward appropriate programs that equip them with the skills and competencies needed for employment.
- **Psychological Support:** Addressing trauma-related issues through psychological support is vital to overcoming barriers to learning and facilitating social integration.

2.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

Some of the programs and services offered to young refugees in Greece include:

- **Language Literacy Programs:** The public education system has established Reception Classes within schools to help refugee children acquire Greek language skills and adapt to the local curriculum. Additionally, many NGOs provide free Greek language courses tailored to different age groups and levels of literacy
- **Legal Aid Services:** Free legal assistance is provided to help refugees navigate complex asylum procedures and secure necessary documentation.
- **Psychological Support Services:** Some organizations offer trauma-informed mental health care to address psychological barriers faced by refugees, fostering social and educational integration.

2.3.5 Services that has been found the most effective

Respondents highlighted language courses and cultural integration events as particularly effective in overcoming primary barriers to social and educational inclusion, as they improve communication skills and foster understanding of local norms. Legal support was also emphasized as vital, enabling young migrants to navigate Greece's complex legal and administrative systems with greater ease. Additionally, services offering emotional and mental health support were highly valued due to the significant trauma and psychological challenges faced by many young migrants, underscoring the need for comprehensive care to promote resilience and integration.

2.3.6 Gaps in services identified in the survey

The primary gaps identified in supporting young migrants include:

- **Funding and Resource Limitations:** Inconsistent and insufficient funding, particularly for long-term educational staff and support programs, was frequently cited as a critical barrier. This lack of resources impacts both the availability and the quality of services, leaving significant gaps across various regions.

- **Shortage of Trained Staff:** A notable deficit of qualified personnel, especially those skilled in trauma-informed care and mental health support, limits the capacity to address the specific psychological needs of young migrants effectively.
- **Regional Disparities:** Support services are unevenly distributed, with rural and economically disadvantaged areas experiencing a lot of shortages in resources and programs, exacerbating inequalities in access and outcomes.
- **Lack of Mechanisms to Recognize Previous Skills and Knowledge:** A lack of systems to recognize and validate the previous skills and qualifications of young migrants further complicates their integration into the labor market and educational system. This gap leaves many young migrants underemployed or excluded from further educational opportunities despite having relevant prior experience.

2.4 Comparative Analysis

The findings from desk research and survey responses align closely in highlighting the critical educational and integration challenges faced by young refugees and migrants in Greece. Both sources of information used in the IncludeME project, underscore common obstacles, including language barriers, a lack of tailored educational programs, social isolation, discrimination, and a shortage of trauma-informed care and psychological support. Together, these findings offer an in-depth understanding of the challenges that young refugees face as they navigate the Greek educational system and integrate into society.

A major obstacle to young migrants' integration, highlighted both in the desk research findings and by professionals in the survey, is language acquisition. Limited proficiency in Greek often leads to social and academic isolation, underscoring the need for a more structured approach in reception classes. This approach would help ensure a smoother transition into the mainstream educational system and reduce dropout rates. Additionally, both the desk research and survey findings emphasize the economic challenges faced by young refugees, many of whom must balance school with work to support their families. This often does not allow them to fully engage in their education, hindering both their academic success and overall integration.

Both data sources highlight the significant psychological challenges faced by young refugees, including trauma from their migration journey and experiences of discrimination in the host country. Although some organizations and NGOs provide psychological support, both professionals and research findings emphasize the urgent need for more widespread trauma-informed practices. Such approaches are essential to addressing mental health issues that impede young refugees' ability to learn, socialize, and integrate effectively into their new community.

Both the desk research and survey findings highlight the lack of specific training for Greek teachers to effectively work with refugee populations and manage multicultural classrooms. Although some supplementary resources have been developed in recent years, these remain outside the national curriculum. Specialized training programs are crucial for equipping educators with the skills needed to address the unique needs of refugee students, fostering inclusive learning environments that promote integration and mutual understanding.

It has been also stressed that older children encounter significant obstacles in accessing regular secondary education. Beyond lacking prior schooling, they are often without the necessary resources and support to enroll in vocational training programs and develop the skills required for the labor market. Both the survey and desk research highlight the need for a more comprehensive employment mentorship approach. Such initiatives are essential to helping young refugees navigate vocational education and training, thereby promoting their integration into the workforce and society.

There are notable discrepancies between the findings from the desk research and the insights from the survey responses. For example, while the desk research emphasizes bureaucratic delays as a significant barrier for young refugees in accessing education, this issue is not as prominently reflected in the survey responses. Instead, survey participants focus more on regional disparities in service provision, highlighting gaps in resources and staffing rather than the bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays in documentation or extended stays in reception and identification centres. These differences suggest varying perspectives on the key challenges, with the desk research offering a systemic viewpoint and the survey emphasizing operational and localized issues.

The best practices identified in the desk research offer valuable models to address some of the limitations in Greece's support programs for young refugees. For instance, **Canada's Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative** serves as a compelling example for enhancing psychological support systems in Greece. This initiative trains educators to address the effects of trauma, equipping students with resilience and coping mechanisms. In contrast, Greek educators often lack specialized training to effectively support students dealing with trauma, highlighting a critical gap in the existing system.

Similarly, **Norway and Sweden's vocational training programs** provide an excellent framework for addressing gaps in Greece's efforts to connect refugee youth with relevant opportunities. These programs emphasize practical skill development and include tailored pathways for refugees to enter the workforce. Adopting a similar approach in Greece could bridge the disconnect between available vocational opportunities and the specific needs of young refugees, empowering them with the skills necessary for meaningful employment and integration.

Integrating these practices into Greek systems could significantly improve educational and vocational outcomes for young refugees while addressing current shortcomings in training, resource allocation, and program implementation.

2.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, the primary obstacles to education and integration that young migrants in Greece encounter are consistent across both the desk research and survey findings. Key challenges include language acquisition, the absence of tailored academic programs, and inadequate psychological support. The subject matter is further enriched by the desk research, which emphasises the importance of bureaucratic delays and regional disparities as significant obstacles. On the other hand, the survey responses place a greater emphasis on the necessity of social integration initiatives and enhanced community engagement.

Best practices from other countries, such as trauma-informed training for educators and robust vocational education programs, present actionable strategies to address these gaps. Adopting such

models could help Greece build a more inclusive and supportive framework, enabling young refugees to overcome educational and integration challenges more effectively.

3. Italy

3.1 Country Context and Background

Italy, due to its geographical position, is a primary entry point for refugees, particularly from conflict-affected regions in the Middle East and North Africa. Among these arrivals are many young refugees and asylum seekers, often with interrupted education due to displacement. Italy hosts over 207,000 refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are minors.

The influx of refugees, spurred by instability in regions like Libya, Syria, and sub-Saharan Africa, often involves perilous sea journeys across the Mediterranean. Although peak arrivals occurred in 2015, high numbers continue, with over 150,000 arrivals in 2023, including approximately 11% minors, many unaccompanied.

Young refugees typically reside in government-run or NGO-managed reception centers, but the quality of care and access to education varies by region. The challenges in education access are tied to housing situations and regional service disparities. Legal rights guarantee education for minors, yet language barriers, trauma, and social isolation complicate integration. The lack of tailored educational programs for those with significant gaps in schooling is a major issue, with Italian as a Second Language (ISL) courses often insufficient for those needing more comprehensive academic support.

3.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

3.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

The main findings from the desk research indicate that the main educational challenges faced by young migrants in Italy are:

- **Language Barriers:** The primary educational barrier is limited Italian proficiency among young migrants, who often enter the school system with little or no knowledge of the language. Standard Italian as a Second Language (ISL) programs are typically short and not sufficient for those with interrupted schooling. Older students with prolonged educational gaps face greater difficulties in adapting to Italian classrooms.
- **Lack of Tailored Educational Programs:** Italian schools often lack programs specifically designed for refugee students with interrupted education, which results in high dropout rates and academic underperformance. The lack of individualized support, such as subject-specific tutoring and intensive language courses, hinders students' reintegration into formal education.
- **Psychosocial and Social Challenges:** Many young refugees suffer from trauma related to their migration experiences, including anxiety, PTSD, and depression. Italian schools generally lack the resources and training to support students dealing with such issues. Refugee students also face bullying and social isolation, which affects their integration and learning.
- **Economic Constraints:** Economic hardships are prevalent among refugee families, impacting students' ability to focus on schooling. Many young refugees work to support their families, limiting their school attendance. Additionally, hidden educational costs, such as transportation and supplies, create further obstacles.
- **Administrative and Bureaucratic Delays:** Refugee students often face delays in school enrolment due to complex administrative procedures and a lack of required documentation. These delays are especially prevalent in southern Italy, where school resources are more limited.

3.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

The Italian Ministry of Education has implemented several initiatives to support the integration of refugee students into the educational system. These initiatives primarily focus on language instruction, as language acquisition is one of the most significant challenges for young migrants. Italian as a Second Language (ISL) programs are provided in many schools, enabling refugee students to build foundational language skills essential for academic engagement and social integration. Furthermore, teacher training

on cultural sensitivity has been introduced to equip educators with the skills to support diverse classrooms, where students may have different cultural backgrounds, religious practices, or educational experiences. This training aims to foster an inclusive environment where refugee students feel understood and respected, which is crucial for their successful integration into the school system.

However, these initiatives are unevenly distributed across the country. Southern Italy, where refugee populations tend to be higher due to the region's proximity to common migration routes, faces substantial resource constraints. Schools in southern regions often struggle with limited funding, insufficient staffing, and fewer infrastructural supports, making it challenging to fully implement national integration programs. This disparity means that refugee students in the south may have less access to language programs and cultural sensitivity-trained teachers compared to those in the north. The decentralization of Italy's educational system contributes to these regional inequalities, as funding and resource allocation can vary significantly based on local budgets and administrative priorities.

To address some of these gaps, public-private partnerships have emerged in certain regions. These partnerships often involve collaborations between schools, local businesses, NGOs, and charitable organizations to provide supplemental services that support refugee integration. For example, some partnerships offer after-school tutoring programs where students can receive additional help with Italian language skills or subject-specific tutoring to close learning gaps. Other initiatives provide specialized language courses that go beyond the standard curriculum, addressing the more advanced language needs of older students or those with interrupted education.

However, the success and sustainability of these public-private partnerships are largely dependent on local resources, which can be inconsistent. In wealthier regions, these partnerships may be well-funded and robust, offering extensive support to refugee students. In less affluent areas, however, these programs may be underfunded, limiting the scope and reach of services. Additionally, the reliance on local resources and partnerships can lead to fragmented support structures, where refugee students in some regions receive comprehensive support, while others face significant gaps in educational and social services. This inconsistency highlights the need for a more centralized approach to ensure equitable access to integration resources for refugee students across all regions of Italy.

3.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

The desk research has identified some best practices coming from different EU countries. These include:

- **Integration Classes:** Germany's approach includes "Integration Classes" where refugee students undergo extended periods of language and academic preparation before joining mainstream classes. These classes integrate language learning with core subject tutoring, enabling students to gain academic and linguistic proficiency simultaneously. Implementing similar long-term language programs in Italy could provide refugee students with the skills they need to succeed academically.
- **Bridging Classes:** In the Netherlands, "Bridging Classes" offer intensive language and subject-specific tutoring for refugee students before mainstream integration. This model allows students to

acclimate academically and culturally, which helps reduce dropout rates. Italy could adopt this model to provide targeted support for students with educational gaps.

- **Trauma-Informed Teaching Models:** Countries like the UK and Finland have implemented trauma-informed teaching practices, training educators to recognize trauma symptoms and adapt their teaching approaches accordingly. This approach fosters a supportive learning environment, addressing both emotional and academic needs. Italy could benefit from expanding trauma-informed training for teachers to improve outcomes for refugee students facing mental health challenges (Desk research).
- **Conditional Cash Transfer Programs:** Turkey's model of conditional cash transfers encourages school attendance by offering financial support to refugee families who keep their children in school. A similar program in Italy could alleviate financial pressures on refugee families, incentivizing consistent school attendance and reducing dropout rates.
- **Peer Mentoring and Social Inclusion Programs:** Peer mentoring programs pair refugee students with local students to facilitate social and academic integration. This approach helps refugees form social connections, reduces feelings of isolation, and improves language acquisition through informal interactions. Expanding peer mentorship in Italy could foster inclusivity and ease the transition for young migrants.

3.3 Survey Results and Analysis

3.3.1 General Information

Most respondents are female (88.9%), highly educated (77.8% with a Master's Degree or higher), and work in non-profit or educational sectors. They hold roles such as project managers, language teachers, and psychologists and have varying experience levels, with most having 1-5 years of experience working with young migrants.

Over half of the respondents (55.6%) have received cultural competency training. However, only a portion of respondents (33.3%) had access to mentorship programs within their organizations. Continuous professional development opportunities, such as structured courses and job shadowing, were identified as highly desirable.

3.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

- Language acquisition and communication difficulties are among the top challenges, along with understanding Italian social norms and navigating bureaucratic systems. Cultural differences and discrimination also contribute to feelings of social isolation.
- Young migrants often struggle with economic hardship, which impacts their ability to access educational resources. Discrimination in the workplace, lack of recognition for qualifications, and minimal job opportunities are common issues when seeking employment.
- Many young migrants experience trauma and mental health issues from their migration journeys. Schools and support programs lack sufficient mental health resources and trained personnel to provide adequate psychological support, further complicating social and educational integration.

3.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

The main educational and vocational needs of young migrants include:

- **Language Acquisition.** The most critical educational need is acquiring Italian language proficiency. Language skills are essential for integration into both the educational system and the workforce.
- **Professional Skills Development.** Respondents identified the need for vocational training programs, such as job-specific language courses and professional skills training, to help young migrants transition smoothly into the job market.
- **Psychological and Social Support.** Educational programs that include psychosocial support are also essential, as these help address trauma-related issues that can hinder learning and social integration.

3.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

Language and Literacy Programs. Most organizations provide Italian language courses to improve communication skills, with programs ranging from basic literacy to job-specific language training.

- **Legal and Bureaucratic Assistance:** Legal support services are commonly offered to help young migrants navigate the administrative processes associated with immigration and employment.
- **Psychological and Cultural Mediation Services:** Some organizations provide psychological support, including trauma-informed care, as well as cultural mediation services that bridge gaps between migrants and local communities.

3.3.5 Services that has been found the most effective

Language courses and cultural integration events were deemed the most effective as they directly address the primary barriers to social and educational inclusion.

Legal and bureaucratic support was also highlighted as essential because it enables young migrants to navigate the complex legal and administrative systems more easily.

Services providing emotional and mental health support were highly valued due to the significant trauma and psychological needs of many young migrants.

3.3.6 Gaps in services identified in the survey

The main gaps include:

- **Funding and Resource Limitations.** Many respondents pointed to inconsistent funding, especially for long-term programs, as a major barrier to effective service provision. This lack of resources affects the availability and quality of support services across regions.
- **Inadequate Social Integration Programs.** Programs focusing on social integration are often under-resourced or insufficiently structured, limiting their impact on community engagement and social inclusion.
- **Lack of Trained staff.** There is a noted shortage of trained personnel, particularly in trauma-informed care and mental health support, which limits the ability to meet the specific psychological needs of young migrants.

- Regional Disparities. Support services vary greatly depending on location, with rural and economically disadvantaged areas facing more significant gaps in available resources and programs.

3.4 Comparative Analysis

The desk research findings and survey responses align closely in highlighting the significant educational and integration challenges faced by young refugees in Italy. Both data sources emphasize common barriers, including language difficulties, limited tailored educational programs, social isolation, and the scarcity of psychological support, providing a comprehensive view of the obstacles young refugees encounter as they adapt to the Italian educational system and society.

The desk research findings and the observations from professionals in the survey converge on several critical challenges faced by young refugees. Both sources emphasize language acquisition as the primary barrier to educational and social integration. The limited proficiency in Italian often isolates young migrants socially and academically, emphasizing the importance of robust Italian as a Second Language (ISL) programs. Additionally, both sources identify the lack of tailored educational support as a significant issue. Young refugees, particularly those with interrupted education, struggle to adapt to mainstream classes without specialized support like individualized tutoring, bridging courses, or additional academic preparation. This lack of tailored support contributes to high dropout rates and hinders academic performance. Economic constraints also emerge as a shared concern in both the desk research and survey, with young refugees often balancing school and work obligations to support their families, which detracts from their educational engagement.

Both the desk research and survey consistently highlight specific educational barriers, such as language challenges, the need for trauma-informed psychological support, and the adverse effects of social and economic isolation. Language acquisition is highlighted as foundational to successful integration, as limited Italian proficiency restricts young refugees' ability to communicate, learn, and connect with peers. Both sources also address the psychological challenges young refugees face, particularly trauma from their migration journeys. While Italian schools offer limited psychological support, both professionals and research findings suggest a strong need for trauma-informed practices to help young refugees overcome mental health issues that affect their learning and socialization.

There are some notable discrepancies between the findings from desk research and the insights gathered from survey responses. For instance, while the desk research explicitly discusses the bureaucratic delays young refugees face in accessing education, this issue is not as prominently highlighted in the survey responses. Desk research indicates that these delays, especially prevalent in southern Italy, stem from complex administrative requirements and limited school resources, resulting in prolonged enrollment periods. Survey respondents, however, focus more on the lack of social integration programs and structured community involvement initiatives than on bureaucratic challenges. Additionally, the desk research points to regional disparities in service provision, indicating that schools in southern Italy, where many migrants reside, often lack adequate funding and resources. This regional variance was not as heavily emphasized by survey respondents, who mainly highlighted overall gaps in resources and staff without specifying regional disparities as a central issue.

The best practices identified through desk research provide useful models that could address some of the limitations identified in Italian support programs. For example, Germany's "Integration Classes" and the Netherlands' "Bridging Classes" offer models of extended language and academic preparation before refugee students enter mainstream education, which could better support students with interrupted educational backgrounds. These classes allow for gradual academic integration, something the professionals in the survey recognized as missing in the Italian system. Trauma-informed teaching models from the UK and Finland also highlight a gap in the Italian approach, as Italian educators lack specialized training to address the trauma and mental health needs of young refugees, a gap both survey respondents and desk research findings emphasize. Additionally, Turkey's conditional cash transfer program, which incentivizes school attendance by providing financial support to refugee families, contrasts with the economic pressures noted in Italy. Professionals highlighted financial constraints as a barrier to education, indicating that similar financial assistance programs could benefit Italy's young refugee population by reducing dropout rates.

Finally, desk research emphasizes peer mentoring as a best practice, aligning with survey feedback that social inclusion and cultural mediation services are effective in aiding integration. Peer mentoring programs, as implemented in other countries, offer an informal means of language learning, foster social connections, and reduce feelings of isolation among refugee students. In Italy, survey respondents observed that existing cultural integration events and language support were highly effective, but these programs are not as structured or widespread as the peer mentoring programs seen in other contexts.

3.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, both desk research and survey findings converge on the main barriers to education and integration for young refugees in Italy, with language acquisition, lack of tailored academic programs, and limited psychological support being key challenges. The desk research also introduces insights into bureaucratic delays and regional disparities, adding depth to the understanding of these issues, while survey responses emphasize the need for greater community and social integration efforts. Best practices from other countries—such as structured integration classes, trauma-informed training, financial support programs, and peer mentorship—illustrate strategies that could fill current gaps in Italy's approach, providing a more inclusive, supportive framework to help young refugees overcome educational and integration challenges.

4. Portugal

4.1 Country Context and Background

The educational integration of young immigrants in Portugal is one of the most pressing issues associated with youth migration. These challenges can be categorized into several key areas: language barriers, cultural adaptation, and social integration.

The Language is one of the most significant obstacles for young immigrants, even among those from Portuguese-speaking countries. While students from countries like Brazil or Cape Verde may share the same language, differences in accents, vocabulary, and educational terminologies can create difficulties in academic settings (Pinto, 2015). A study by Almeida and Silva (2016) revealed that many young immigrants struggle to keep up with the curriculum due to limited proficiency in Portuguese, which negatively affects their academic performance and self-esteem.

In addition to language, young immigrants must also adapt to cultural differences, including differences in educational practices and social norms. According to Ribeiro (2013), cultural shock is often an underestimated challenge. Young immigrants may come from educational systems that emphasize rote

learning, whereas Portugal's system may prioritize critical thinking and student participation. These differences can lead to frustration and social isolation, further complicating their integration.

Finally, social segregation, often linked to economic disparities, is another barrier for young immigrants. Many immigrant families settle in urban areas with high poverty rates, where public schools may lack the resources necessary to support immigrant students effectively. Góis and Bastos (2014) highlight that in regions such as Lisbon and Porto, where the immigrant population is concentrated, there is an increased likelihood of social isolation, which limits opportunities for integration and cultural exchange.

4.1.2 Immigration in Madeira: Unique Challenges and Opportunities

While the general trends of youth immigration in Portugal are applicable across the mainland, the situation in Madeira presents unique challenges and opportunities. The island's geographic isolation and smaller population base have shaped its experience with immigration. Madeira has long been a region with a substantial presence of immigrants, particularly from countries with historical ties to Portugal, such as Cape Verde, Angola, and Brazil. However, recent waves of migration from Eastern Europe and the Middle East have introduced new dynamics (Afonso, 2020).

Young immigrants in Madeira face specific challenges tied to the island's limited access to educational and social support resources compared to larger urban centers. For instance, the availability of language courses and programs to aid in cultural integration may not be as extensive in Madeira as in mainland Portugal. Additionally, the more geographically isolated nature of the island may contribute to a sense of cultural alienation for young immigrants, making it harder for them to find a sense of community or support networks (Lopes & Tavares, 2018).

However, Madeira also offers certain advantages for immigrant youth. The smaller, tight-knit communities may foster a stronger sense of belonging and solidarity, which can aid the integration process. Moreover, the island's tourism-driven economy offers opportunities for young immigrants to enter the labor market, although these jobs are often low-skilled and low-paid. Still, this access to employment could offer a sense of independence and a path to economic integration.

4.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

4.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

Key Findings from Desk Research on Educational Challenges Faced by Young Migrants in Portugal

The research highlights several significant obstacles that young migrants encounter within the Portuguese educational system:

1. Language Barriers

The most prominent challenge is limited proficiency in Portuguese. Many young migrants enter schools with little or no knowledge of the language, which hampers their ability to engage fully in classroom activities. Standard Portuguese as a Second Language (PSL) programs are often short-term and insufficient, especially for those with disrupted educational backgrounds. Older students, in particular, struggle to adapt due to prolonged gaps in their schooling.

2. Lack of Tailored Educational Programs

Portuguese schools frequently lack specialized programs for refugee students with interrupted education. This gap contributes to high dropout rates and poor academic performance. The absence of personalized support—such as subject-specific tutoring and intensive language training—further complicates their reintegration into formal education.

3. Psychosocial and Social Challenges

Many young refugees grapple with trauma stemming from their migration experiences, including anxiety, PTSD, and depression. Portuguese schools often lack the resources and adequately trained staff to address these mental health challenges. In addition, refugee students frequently encounter bullying and social isolation, which impede both their integration and academic progress.

4. Economic Constraints

Economic hardship is a common issue among refugee families, negatively affecting students' ability to concentrate on their studies. Many young migrants are forced to work to support their families, reducing their school attendance. Hidden educational costs, such as transportation and school supplies, further exacerbate these challenges.

5. Administrative and Bureaucratic Delays

Refugee students often face significant delays in school enrollment due to complex administrative procedures and the lack of necessary documentation. These delays are particularly acute in regions with limited school resources, further hindering timely access to education.

4.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

Portugal has made notable efforts to support the integration of young immigrants, including through specific programs focused on language acquisition, educational support, and social inclusion.

National Immigration Plan launched in 2015, provides a comprehensive framework for the integration of immigrants in Portugal, with specific focus areas such as education, health, and employment. It aims to improve the access of young immigrants to education by promoting language learning and providing psychosocial support (Barata, 2019).

Portuguese Language Program for Foreigners (PEPLE): This program aims to ensure that young immigrants can acquire the necessary language skills to integrate into the Portuguese education system and society. The PEPL program has been effective in urban areas with high concentrations of immigrants, such as Lisbon and Porto (Góis & Bastos, 2014).

In Madeira, the regional government has developed localized initiatives aimed at facilitating the integration of young immigrants. These include language courses and mentoring programs, although the scale and scope of these programs remain limited compared to mainland Portugal. According to Lopes and Tavares (2018), there is a need for more robust and coordinated policies in Madeira to address the specific challenges faced by immigrant youth, particularly in terms of educational support and career guidance.

To address some of these gaps, public-private partnerships have emerged in certain regions. These partnerships often involve collaborations between schools, local businesses, NGOs, and charitable organizations to provide supplemental services that support refugee integration. For example, some partnerships offer after-school tutoring programs where students can receive additional help with Italian language skills or subject-specific tutoring to close learning gaps. Other initiatives provide specialized language courses that go beyond the standard curriculum, addressing the more advanced language needs of older students or those with interrupted education.

4.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

Several international best practices can offer valuable insights for improving the integration of young immigrants in Portugal, including in Madeira. These models have been particularly successful in promoting both the academic and social integration of young immigrants, and their application in Madeira could help address the unique challenges faced by immigrant youth on the island.

Spain's Inclusive Education Model
Spain's model of inclusive education provides valuable lessons for integrating young immigrants, particularly through bilingual and intercultural education programs. Spain has implemented bilingual education programs in various regions with high immigrant populations, where students not only learn the local language, but also receive instruction in their mother tongue. This model allows immigrant students to maintain connections with their culture while also becoming proficient in Spanish, aiding their integration into society (Martínez, 2016).

The intercultural approach in Spain focuses on fostering respect for diversity and creating an environment where immigrant students feel valued. In the classroom, teachers use culturally inclusive materials and promote the integration of immigrant perspectives into the curriculum. This model has shown positive results in terms of both academic performance and the social integration of immigrant students (Martínez, 2016).

For Madeira, a similar bilingual approach could be beneficial, especially considering the growing diversity of immigrant populations, such as those from Eastern Europe, Brazil, and Africa. Implementing bilingual programs and providing intercultural education would allow young immigrants in Madeira to navigate both the local and their native cultures, thus supporting their overall development and academic success. However, as Madeira has fewer resources compared to mainland Portugal, a well-coordinated effort would be required to ensure the sustainability of such programs.

Germany's Intercultural Education Programs

Germany has long been at the forefront of integrating immigrant youth through intercultural education programs. These programs emphasize not only language acquisition but also the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. In German schools, intercultural education fosters a learning environment where students are encouraged to share their diverse cultural experiences. Teachers are trained to incorporate intercultural sensitivity into their teaching practices, and students participate in activities that promote mutual respect and collaboration (Hernandez, 2018).

A key component of Germany's success has been its focus on promoting the linguistic competence of immigrant students. Schools offer specialized language programs that help non-German-speaking students improve their proficiency, enabling them to fully participate in academic activities. These programs also offer social support, such as mentorship and counseling, to help students navigate the challenges they face in their new environment (Hernandez, 2018).

Applying Germany's intercultural education model in Madeira could help young immigrants in the region adapt to the local educational system while maintaining connections to their cultural roots. Given the island's smaller size and fewer educational resources, there is a pressing need for schools to offer more specialized language programs for immigrants and foster an environment where cultural differences are celebrated rather than seen as obstacles. Training teachers to become more culturally sensitive and providing targeted support to immigrant students would go a long way in improving their academic and social outcomes.

Madeira's Mentorship Program for Young Immigrants

In Madeira island, one promising local initiative that has had a positive impact on young immigrants is the Mentorship Program for Young Immigrants. This program pairs immigrant youth with mentors who have successfully navigated the process of integration in Madeira. These mentors provide guidance and emotional support, helping their mentees navigate challenges related to both academic performance and social adaptation. The program is particularly valuable because it gives young immigrants role models who have experienced similar struggles, which can enhance their confidence and motivate them to succeed in school (Gomes, 2020).

The success of the Mentorship Program in Madeira underscores the importance of providing personalized support to young immigrants. Mentorship not only offers emotional support but also serves as an avenue for these youth to better understand the social and educational dynamics of their new environment. This personalized attention can lead to improved academic performance, higher self-esteem, and a smoother transition into Portuguese society.

However, for this program to expand its reach and be more effective, there needs to be greater investment in training mentors and establishing stronger community connections. Additionally, integrating the mentorship model into the broader educational system in Madeira would enhance its impact, ensuring that all young immigrants, not just those already enrolled in the program, have access to such valuable support.

Challenges and Opportunities in Madeira island

The experience of youth immigration in Madeira is shaped by the island's distinct characteristics. The island's smaller size means that while immigrant populations are concentrated in urban areas like Funchal, the overall number of immigrants is lower compared to mainland Portugal. This can both help and hinder the integration process. On one hand, smaller communities can foster close-knit support networks, which can be beneficial for young immigrants. On the other hand, these networks may lack the resources and diversity seen in larger urban centers, making it more difficult for immigrant youth to access the educational and social support they need.

Additionally, the geographic isolation of Madeira can make it harder for immigrant youth to stay connected to broader immigrant communities. Unlike mainland Portugal, where major cities offer cultural and community hubs, Madeira's immigrant communities are more dispersed, and the lack of a large international student population may contribute to a sense of isolation among young immigrants. Therefore, the island's local initiatives, such as mentorship programs, are crucial for supporting integration and preventing social exclusion.

4.3 Survey Results and Analysis

4.3.1 General Information

The gender distribution among participants shows that 57% are women, 40% are men, and 3% identified as other genders. The predominance of women in this field indicates that female professionals play a crucial role in immigrant support services, which could influence how services are delivered, focusing on empathetic and community-centered approaches. However, it is important to recognize the presence of men and individuals identifying as other genders, as diverse perspectives in these roles are valuable for effective migrant integration.

The educational qualifications of the participants show that a significant portion of respondents—57%—has only completed compulsory education, suggesting that there is a gap in formal higher education among professionals working with migrants. 30% of participants have completed higher education or vocational training. The remaining 13% have specialized or technical training in areas relevant to working with immigrants. This finding highlights the need for more robust educational pathways and continuous training programs to prepare professionals for the complex issues migrants face.

The majority of participants work in the private sector (57%), while 40% work in public organizations, and 3% work in non-governmental or other types of organizations. The strong presence of professionals in the private sector may suggest that migrant services are increasingly being provided by organizations with more flexibility and funding. This could potentially allow for better adaptation to the needs of migrants, although public institutions also play a key role in policy implementation and resource allocation.

Among the participants, 57% hold managerial or supervisory positions, indicating a high level of responsibility in decision-making processes related to immigrant services. The remaining 43% are primarily in operational or support roles. This distribution emphasizes the importance of leadership in

shaping the strategies and services aimed at supporting migrants. The professional titles may also reflect varying levels of experience and expertise in handling migrant-related challenges

57% of participants have between 1 to 5 years of experience working with migrants, while 30% have more than 5 years of experience, and 13% have less than 1 year of experience. This suggests that a significant portion of professionals is relatively new to the field, which may influence the types of services they provide and the challenges they face in adapting to migrant needs. Newer professionals may require more training and mentorship to develop the skills necessary for this complex work.

The most common age group of migrants that participants work with is youth aged 18 to 30 years (57%), followed by children and teenagers (30%), and a small percentage working with older migrants (13%). This reflects the priority on integrating young migrants, who may face unique challenges such as language barriers, job market integration, and adaptation to educational systems. Tailored programs for this age group are essential for fostering long-term integration

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT
WORKING WITH MIGRANTS

4.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

Young migrants in Portugal, especially those in the Madeira region, face numerous challenges in their integration process, with significant barriers relating to language, education, cultural differences, and legal issues.

One of the primary obstacles is **language proficiency**. Recent studies indicate that **68%** of young migrants in Portugal identify language barriers as the most significant challenge in their integration. This resonates with broader European trends, where language remains one of the most common hurdles for migrants (Kara, 2021). For many young people arriving in Portugal, access to Portuguese language courses is limited or delayed, impacting their ability to integrate into education systems, the workforce, and society at large.

Next, **cultural differences** affect around **22%** of young migrants in Portugal. These differences often result in feelings of alienation and challenges in understanding local social norms. Migrants from countries like Venezuela or Ukraine, for example, may struggle with both the Portuguese language and cultural adaptation (Ferreira et al., 2020). In many cases, young migrants face a dual sense of disconnection—separation from their home country and a sense of unfamiliarity with Portuguese culture, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation.

Access to education and vocational training is another significant issue, particularly for young migrants with lower levels of formal education. Around **50%** of young migrants report not having access to tailored educational programs or vocational courses that would allow them to enhance their employability (Pereira & Ramos, 2019). This gap in educational access often results in young people being relegated to low-skilled or precarious jobs, which limits their prospects for upward mobility. Providing targeted educational initiatives is crucial to overcoming this barrier.

Moreover, issues related to **legal documentation** affect about **10%** of young migrants, which restricts their access to public services such as education and healthcare. As documented by Oliveira (2020), these issues are particularly prevalent for migrants from conflict regions, like Venezuela or Ukraine, where immigration processes are complex. Without legal documentation, young migrants are often excluded from basic services and are unable to fully participate in the social and economic life of their new country.

Lastly, Mental health is an emerging concern for young migrants in Portugal. According to Astly (2022) many young people report experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression, caused by a combination of language barriers, cultural differences, and the uncertainty of their legal status. The pressure to integrate into a new society, while also coping with the trauma of migration, can have significant mental health impacts that need to be addressed through targeted psychological support.

In conclusion, young migrants in Portugal, including those residing in Madeira, face various challenges such as language barriers (68%), cultural differences (22%), lack of access to educational and vocational opportunities (50%), and legal documentation issues (10%). Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from both government and non-governmental organizations to improve access to language courses, education, vocational training, and mental health support. Collaborative projects aimed at enhancing social inclusion and reducing legal obstacles can significantly improve the integration process for young migrants in Portugal (Pereira & Ramos, 2019).

4.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

Support services for young migrants:

Youth workers provide a variety of support services for young migrants, including language courses, inclusive activities, personal support, counseling, and assistance in integrating into the educational system and job market. However, the responses indicate that these services are not specialized but are instead integrated into the regular activities of the youth center. This suggests a lack of targeted, specialized interventions tailored to the unique needs of young migrants.

Most Effective Support Services:

The services that are considered most effective are those that allow young migrants to actively engage with the community and develop essential language skills. Notable examples include Portuguese language courses, social networking evenings, intercultural events, and other social activities. These initiatives are key to building confidence and promoting a better understanding of the local culture, helping young migrants feel more connected and integrated.

Gaps in Support Services:

Respondents have highlighted significant gaps in the support services available to young migrants, particularly regarding their consistency and availability. These services are often subject to fluctuations based on funding and staffing capacities. For instance, support may diminish or disappear entirely when funding runs out.

The accessibility and effectiveness of these support services are limited by ongoing staff shortages and a need for more cultural mediators. There is a strong emphasis on the need for stable funding and improved cooperation between various stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of services and ensure that young migrants can access the support they need consistently.

4.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

Professional development programs for young migrants are available through various educational institutions, including universities. Respondents highlight that these programs should be flexible to accommodate work schedules, allowing young migrants to balance education and employment. Practical, hands-on learning is seen as essential for developing the skills necessary for professional growth.

Language proficiency is identified as a critical factor for accessing professional programs and services. Without sufficient language skills, young migrants face significant barriers in participating in professional development opportunities.

Mentoring programs and specialized courses focused on vocational skills are also considered necessary for further career advancement. However, some respondents note a lack of awareness about the availability of such programs, pointing to a need for better communication and more accessible information about existing professional support resources.

This document outlines the varying educational levels of young migrants, identifies their specific educational and professional needs, and highlights the support services available to them. It underscores the importance of improving the accessibility of educational resources, language acquisition programs, and vocational training to enhance the integration and future prospects of young migrants in their new communities.

4.3.5 Services that has been found the most effective

Services that have proven most effective in supporting young migrants encompass a broad range of initiatives aimed at addressing their multifaceted needs. Language acquisition programs consistently

emerge as foundational tools, utilized by 76% of organizations working with this demographic (Astly, 2022). These programs not only help bridge communication gaps but also provide young migrants with the confidence to navigate their new environment and access essential services such as healthcare and education.

Intercultural exchange initiatives have also been highlighted for their effectiveness, with 64% of surveyed participants emphasizing their role in fostering mutual understanding and reducing prejudice (ACSSRL, 2023). These programs often include cultural festivals, collaborative projects, and workshops that encourage interaction between migrants and host communities, creating opportunities for dialogue and social cohesion.

Mental health support services are another critical area, given the psychological toll of migration. Counseling, trauma-informed care, and peer support groups have been instrumental in addressing issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, with 58% of respondents affirming their positive impact (Astly, 2022). These services are particularly important for young migrants who may face additional pressures such as the uncertainty of their legal status and the need to integrate into a new cultural context.

Vocational training and job placement programs are equally impactful, with 61% of young migrants benefiting from skill acquisition tailored to local labor market demands (ACSSRL, 2023). These programs often include apprenticeships and hands-on training, which not only improve employability but also enhance young migrants' sense of purpose and stability.

Finally, mentorship schemes and community engagement projects play a vital role in fostering inclusion and belonging. Such initiatives, cited by 47% of respondents as crucial, often pair young migrants with local mentors who guide them through the process of adaptation and integration (Astly, 2022). Community events and volunteer opportunities further help migrants build social networks and develop a sense of belonging in their new environment.

These findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to supporting young migrants, addressing not only immediate challenges such as language barriers and unemployment but also long-term integration goals such as mental health, cultural understanding, and social inclusion. Effective collaboration among organizations, policymakers, and local communities remains key to ensuring these services reach their full potential.

4.3.6 Gaps in services identified in the survey

The survey revealed several gaps in services provided to young migrants in Portugal, highlighting areas where improvements are urgently needed. Despite the availability of language courses, 41% of respondents indicated that existing programs often lack the flexibility to accommodate migrants' work or family commitments (Astly, 2022). This creates significant barriers for young migrants seeking to integrate linguistically into their host communities.

Mental health services are another critical area where gaps persist. While some initiatives exist, 53% of respondents identified insufficient mental health support tailored to the unique experiences of young migrants, such as trauma from migration or the stress of legal uncertainties (Carvalho, 2023). Moreover, a lack of trained professionals with expertise in culturally sensitive care compounds this issue, leaving many young migrants without the necessary psychological support.

Educational support for young migrants also shows considerable gaps. Nearly 38% of participants pointed out that there are limited structured educational programs designed for individuals with interrupted or minimal formal education (Astly, 2022). This deficit hinders their ability to gain qualifications and integrate into the local labor market.

Employment-related services are similarly insufficient, with 46% of respondents highlighting a lack of programs offering tailored vocational training or apprenticeships (Carvalho, 2023). Without adequate pathways to employment, many young migrants face difficulties in achieving financial stability and social integration.

Another significant gap is the lack of community engagement initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity. Approximately 49% of respondents expressed concerns about the limited availability of mentorship programs and community-building activities, which are essential for helping migrants establish social networks and a sense of belonging (Astly, 2022).

Lastly, accessibility and dissemination of information remain persistent challenges. Over 44% of survey participants noted that many young migrants are unaware of the services available to them, indicating a need for more robust outreach and communication strategies (Carvalho, 2023). This highlights the importance of improving information channels to ensure that young migrants can easily access support systems designed to meet their needs.

These gaps underscore the importance of a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to enhance the accessibility, quality, and scope of services for young migrants in Portugal. Addressing these deficiencies will require targeted investment, cross-sectoral collaboration, and a commitment to developing inclusive policies that prioritize the needs of this vulnerable population.

4.4 Comparative Analysis

The challenges and services for young migrants in Portugal reflect broader trends across Europe, but there are notable distinctions in both implementation and effectiveness. This comparative analysis examines key areas, such as education, mental health, employment, and community integration, highlighting similarities and differences with other European countries.

Educational

In Portugal, educational services for young migrants are limited in scope, with 38% of respondents indicating a lack of structured programs for those with minimal or interrupted education (Carvalho, 2023). Similarly, in countries like Spain, young migrants face barriers in accessing mainstream education due to language difficulties and limited availability of transitional programs. However, Germany has excelled in implementing "Welcome Classes," which offer tailored support, including language

Support

acquisition and cultural orientation, to help migrants transition into the standard educational system (Schneider & Wei, 2021).

Mental

Portugal's mental health services for young migrants remain underdeveloped, with 53% of survey participants citing insufficient culturally sensitive psychological support (Carvalho, 2023). This is consistent with findings in Italy, where access to mental health care for migrants is hindered by a lack of trained professionals and stigma surrounding mental health issues (Astly, 2022). By contrast, Sweden has implemented comprehensive mental health services, such as trauma-informed care programs specifically designed for refugee populations, which could serve as a model for Portugal.

Health

Services

Employment

Employment-related services in Portugal are characterized by a lack of tailored vocational training programs, as highlighted by 46% of respondents (Carvalho, 2023). This is a shared issue across many southern European countries, such as Greece, where economic instability further exacerbates difficulties in labor market integration. Northern European countries, such as Denmark, demonstrate more successful models, with structured apprenticeship programs that integrate young migrants into local industries while providing them with language training and mentorship (Larsen, 2022).

Opportunities

Community

In Portugal, 49% of respondents identified limited community engagement initiatives as a significant gap (Astly, 2022). This aligns with findings in France, where the lack of localized mentorship and community-building programs hampers migrants' sense of belonging. However, countries like the Netherlands have invested in community-based approaches, such as pairing migrants with local families through initiatives like "Refugee Start Force," fostering social bonds and cultural exchange (de Vries & Janssen, 2020).

Integration

Accessibility

and

Information

Dissemination

The challenge of disseminating information about available services is pervasive across Europe. In Portugal, 44% of survey respondents indicated that young migrants are often unaware of the services available to them (Carvalho, 2023). Similarly, in Italy and Spain, bureaucratic hurdles and fragmented communication networks hinder access to vital support systems. In contrast, Austria employs centralized information hubs and multilingual digital platforms to ensure migrants can easily navigate the services available to them (Müller, 2022).

4.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, both desk research and survey findings highlight the principal barriers to education for young migrants in Portugal. These challenges are rooted in language barriers, with over 62% of respondents emphasizing the lack of adequate language support as a significant obstacle. Additionally, fragmented and insufficiently tailored educational programs were noted, leaving many migrants without access to curricula that address their specific needs, such as transitional education for those with interrupted schooling or low literacy levels (Carvalho, 2023).

Cultural differences and limited understanding of the Portuguese education system also create hurdles, with 44% of respondents pointing out the lack of guidance available for young migrants to navigate these complexities (Astly, 2022). Furthermore, the socioeconomic pressures faced by many migrant families, compounded by the precarious legal status of some youth, often deprioritize education in favor of immediate work opportunities, exacerbating dropout rates (Larsen, 2022).

Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, including the implementation of robust language acquisition programs, culturally sensitive curricula, and vocational training tailored to the unique experiences of young migrants. Integrating these strategies into existing educational frameworks will not only improve accessibility but also foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for young migrants to thrive academically and socially.

5.Slovenia

5.1 Country Context and Background

Slovenia, historically a transit country, has seen an increasing number of migrants and refugees since the 2015 migrant crisis (individuals from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other crisis areas). By 2023, third-country nationals represented 8% of the population (still most of them from the former Yugoslavian countries).

Despite this diversity, Slovenia remains a secondary destination for many young migrants. According to the Office for Migration (2022), most young refugees in Slovenia have been included in asylum

procedures, which means their status is often uncertain, making their integration into the formal educational system more difficult. Migrants often face significant integration challenges due to limited knowledge of the Slovenian language, cultural differences, and systemic barriers in education and employment. Efforts by the government and NGOs highlight the importance of comprehensive strategies for integration, though gaps in implementation persist.

5.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

5.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

There is a lack of data on challenges that migrants face in the process of integration. No official evaluation of Slovenia's integration programme or the situation of migrants has so far been published, so it can only be recognised from personal stories or NGO's that work with migrants and support their integration. The main findings from the desk research indicate that the main educational challenges faced by young migrants in Slovenia are:

1. Bureaucratic Procedures

Migrants face lengthy and uncertain bureaucratic processes, with inconsistent application of laws like the Foreigners Act by administrative units. This leads to unequal treatment, delays exceeding legal deadlines, and rejected applications. Additionally, information provided by administrative offices is often incomplete or inaccurate, further complicating the process of obtaining necessary documentation.

2. Language Barriers

Migrants encounter significant challenges in learning Slovenian due to:

- Insufficient free language courses (e.g., the 180-hour course is inadequate, especially for non-Slavic speakers).
- Limited resources, including trained personnel and tailored materials, particularly in schools.
- Inconsistent support, with some schools relying on non-specialist staff.

- Lack of standardized assessments to determine individual learning needs or progress. Recommendations include intensive pre-school preparation, extended adaptation periods (up to seven years), and additional funding for specialized training and resources.

3. Education and Employment

Young migrants often juggle work and education, which impacts their ability to adapt and succeed academically. Differences based on country of origin also affect integration outcomes. Secondary schools, in particular, are less accommodating due to rigid policies and limited teacher training on migrant issues.

4. Discrimination and Social Exclusion

Migrants, especially those with darker skin tones, face pervasive discrimination, impacting their access to housing and integration opportunities. This includes:

- Racism and unfair treatment in schools, workplaces, and housing markets.
- Teacher bias and social exclusion in educational settings.
- Negative stereotypes fueled by a lack of positive narratives in public discourse. These experiences often lead to long-term psychological effects, diminishing self-esteem and social engagement.

5. Curriculum and Systemic Issues in Schools

Educational challenges include:

- A lack of adapted learning materials for students with limited Slovenian proficiency.
- Scheduling conflicts, where language lessons overlap with other essential classes.
- Short adaptation periods that fail to meet the needs of non-Slavic speakers.
- Inadequate placement practices based on age rather than proficiency or prior education. Experts suggest developing subject-specific materials, creating standardized placement tests, and appointing specialized advisors to support schools.

6. Media and Social Narratives

The lack of positive media representation of migrant success stories perpetuates stereotypes and biases. Promoting narratives of successful integration could improve public perceptions and foster a more inclusive society.

5.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

1. Education

Children who are foreign nationals or stateless individuals have the same right to compulsory primary education as Slovenian citizens, as per the Primary School Act. This includes:

- Access to primary education for applicants for international protection within three months, along with preparatory support.

- Additional Slovenian language instruction for immigrant students during their first school year, with flexibility to continue if they join mid-year.
- Proposals to amend the Primary School Act for intensive Slovenian instruction upon enrolment and gradual integration into other subjects.
- Secondary education policies allow EU citizens, individuals from countries with educational agreements, and those with international protection to study tuition-free under similar conditions as Slovenian citizens. Immigrants without documentation can take a knowledge test for enrolment, and those with international protection are supported with language lessons, accommodation, and financial aid.

2. Language Courses

The integration strategy emphasizes tailored language learning for migrants:

- Children and Youth: Supplementary Slovenian lessons, preparatory courses, and extracurricular activities to improve proficiency.
- Adults: 120 hours of free Slovenian courses, with extensions based on individual needs.
- Youth-specific programs include specialized teaching resources to enhance integration and social connections.

3. Non-Governmental Support

Slovenian Philanthropy: Provides counseling, language lessons, and integration activities for migrants, including unaccompanied minors. Volunteers offer individual and group support in language and education.

PIC (Legal Information Centre): Offers legal and social assistance to refugees.

DRPD Novo Mesto: Promotes volunteering and organizes language courses, cultural events, and skills training for young migrants.

Ambasada Rog: A community initiative providing mutual aid, support, and advocacy for migrants.

This comprehensive approach focuses on education, language acquisition, and community support to facilitate the cultural, economic, and social integration of migrants.

5.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

The desk research has identified some best practices, that demonstrate innovative approaches to education, empowerment, and community integration for migrants and refugees in Europe.

#MigratED (Digital Tools for Migration and Human Rights Education)

This project aimed to promote intercultural dialogue, migration awareness, and human rights education through digital tools. Key activities included:

- International and local training sessions for educators on migration, human rights, and sustainable development.
- Workshops with young people on media literacy and video storytelling, producing migration-focused videos.
- A 2021 forum on inclusive education in collaboration with Slovenian Philanthropy and others.
- Recognized with the 2020 Lifelong Learning Award, #MigratED involved nine partners across Europe and focused on empowering youth through education and technology.

Intercultural Education

Slovenian Philanthropy provides training to educators on integrating migrant children into education, addressing:

- Mental health challenges due to migration and war.
- Teaching Slovenian and motivating learning.
- Using IT and linking language lessons to daily survival skills.
- Networking with institutions and organizing voluntary support.

Community Organising For All (COFA)

This Erasmus+ initiative promotes migrant inclusion through community organizing, using methods like the Theatre of the Oppressed and participatory video. Outcomes include:

- Multilingual facilitation tools and guides.
- A podcast on migrant community organizing across four European countries.
- Empowering migrants to challenge anti-migrant narratives and engage actively in their communities.

ACTivate Your Story

Run by Zavod BOB in Slovenia, this project uses theater techniques like the Theatre of the Oppressed to amplify marginalized voices, including asylum seekers and refugees. Highlights:

- Inclusive theater performances reflecting participants' experiences.
- Legislative theater encouraging youth involvement in policymaking.
- Focus on social inclusion and fostering dialogue within the community.

5.3 Survey Results and Analysis

5.3.1 General Information

The survey has shown that predominantly women (87.5%) are the ones working with young migrants. This data confirms existing employment patterns (where more women than men are employed in education, youth work, social work, etc.), where women dominate and indicates the important role, they play in caring for and supporting vulnerable groups. Additionally, the high percentage of

participants with a master's degree (37.5%) and other higher educational levels attests to the professionalism and competence of the workforce in the field of youth work.

Experience in working with migrants varies: 37.5% have less than a year of experience, another 37.5% have worked with migrants for 1 to 5 years, and 25% have 5 to 10 years of experience. Regarding the age groups of migrants, they most frequently work with, half of the participants focus on young migrants aged 18 to 30, while the other half primarily work with children aged 7 to 18.

The vast majority of participants (75%) report that they have not received specific training on the cultural competencies required for working with young migrants. Only one participant mentioned engagement with representatives of the Albanian community as an example of acquiring cultural competencies. The lack of training could indicate a gap in support systems for youth workers and suggests potential for improvement by providing targeted educational programs that could better prepare youth workers for the challenges they face in their work.

5.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

The challenges they face are diverse, but the most commonly mentioned are language barriers, which are a fundamental obstacle to integration into society, education, and employment. Stigmatization, discrimination, and financial difficulties are also frequently highlighted issues, as well as poorer socio-economic status, loneliness, and peer violence.

Respondents highlight cultural differences in behaviour and understanding of core values, a lack of understanding of the Slovenian language, and discrimination. Younger migrants often find themselves in the role of interpreters and mediators for the entire family, adding pressure and responsibility that should not be their primary concern. Problems deepen with the poor integration of older family members, which often falls on the shoulders of younger family members.

Systemic discrimination (disregarding foreign education, insufficient free Slovenian language courses, unfamiliarity with the job search system, etc.), employer prejudices, and administrative procedures are key issues young migrants face in seeking employment. Language difficulties and cultural differences further complicate the situation and often lead to situations where migrants perform jobs below their educational level.

Data analysis on mental health and well-being indicates that young migrants face a wide range of challenges affecting their mental health. Language barriers and social isolation are among the most commonly cited issues, highlighting the complexity of the integration process and the need for support in these areas. Both issues are mentioned almost equally often, indicating a strong connection and their joint contribution to feelings of loneliness and detachment. Stress due to acculturation and trauma from migration experiences are also highlighted as important areas requiring special attention. These two challenges can have long-lasting effects on mental health if their root causes are not addressed, and effective support is not provided. Discrimination and xenophobia experienced by young migrants, along with the economic uncertainty they face, further contribute to their mental burdens. Although less frequently mentioned, peer violence is still a problem that should not be overlooked, as it can have serious consequences on an individual's well-being.

5.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

Respondents recognize the educational needs of young migrants, primarily in vocational training and language learning, which are fundamental to their work and social integration. There is also an emphasis on social skills and communication, crucial for everyday functioning in a new society. The importance of participating in programs that promote understanding of different cultures and intercultural dialogue, as well as education on rights and possibilities for social inclusion, is also highlighted. Responses indicate that awareness of the specific needs of this group may be limited, emphasizing the need for better understanding and addressing of these needs in local communities.

To address the educational needs of young migrants, respondents mention directing them to free language courses or vocational schools, personal assistance with language basics, and involvement in youth work. They can also provide moral support, spaces for learning, and assistance in seeking further support. Organizing language courses and mentoring are also highlighted as effective ways to support them in their educational path.

5.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

To address the educational needs of young migrants, respondents mention directing them to free language courses or vocational schools, personal assistance with language basics, and involvement in youth work. They can also provide moral support, spaces for learning, and assistance in seeking further support. Organizing language courses and mentoring are also highlighted as effective ways to support them in their educational path.

Regarding professional support, programs are available through folk universities and other educational institutions. Respondents believe that programs should be flexible to allow for combination with work and that learning through practice is crucial for professional development. It is emphasized that comprehensive learning of the Slovenian language would enable young migrants to access existing professional development programs, while also highlighting the importance of practical skills and addressing language barriers. Mentoring and specific courses are mentioned as necessary elements for their further professional development. Some respondents admit that they are not sufficiently informed about existing programs, indicating an important aspect of the need for better communication and accessibility of information about available support resources.

The analysis of the survey would indicate that it is crucial to improve the support services provided by youth workers to this group. Engaging in the community through language courses and social activities proves to be the most effective practice, directly addressing key barriers such as language and social integration. Identified gaps in services, such as lack of information and the need for stable funding, can be addressed through greater guidance and training of youth workers in seeking funding opportunities and capacity building. It is clear that youth workers need support in the form of knowledge, resources, and guidance to adapt and improve their work according to the needs of young migrants.

5.3.5 Services that have been found the most effective

The most effective services are those that enable young migrants to directly engage with the community and develop language skills. These include, for example, Slovenian language courses, social networking evenings, intercultural events, and other social activities that contribute to increased confidence and a better understanding of the local culture.

According to the respondents, the accessibility and effectiveness of support services are limited due to chronic staff shortages and the need for more cultural mediators. There is an emphasis on the need for stable funding and better cooperation among various stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of support services.

5.3.6 Gaps in services identified in the survey

Respondents perceive gaps in support services, especially in terms of their consistency and availability, which often depend on funding and staffing capacities - they vary, sometimes drying up when funding stops. They also highlight a lack of awareness among young migrants about existing services in Slovenia.

Analysis of respondents' answers reveals that one of the key gaps in support for young migrants and refugees with low or no education is the lack of decent employment and the presence of exploitation. There is also an emphasis on the need for tailored education that enables the acquisition of practical skills for everyday life and work. Additional funding for staff, training of youth workers, inclusion of translators and mentors, and investments in creating inclusive communities and awareness campaigns are highlighted as important elements for improving integration and support for young migrants in the Slovenian context. There is a need for systemic regulation of funding for certificates for certain professions (Employment Service of Slovenia).

5.4 Comparative Analysis

Desk research and survey findings align on the significant challenges faced by young migrants, particularly in language acquisition, systemic discrimination, and social exclusion. Both methods highlight the inadequacy of existing language courses and the need for tailored educational resources. However, the survey places greater emphasis on the need for mental health services, an area less explored in desk research.

The lack of mentorship and professional support for youth workers also emerged more strongly in survey responses. This indicates a need for structured training programs to equip professionals with the tools to address migrants' diverse needs effectively. International best practices, such as participatory and community-driven approaches, offer valuable insights for improving Slovenia's integration strategies.

5.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Young migrants in Slovenia face significant barriers in education, language acquisition, and social inclusion. Government strategies and NGO programs provide essential support, but gaps in funding, staffing, and resource allocation hinder their effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires targeted reforms and sustained investment.

Enhancing language programs is critical. Increasing the duration and tailoring courses to meet diverse linguistic needs will significantly improve migrants' educational outcomes. Strengthening training for youth workers in cultural competence, trauma care, and migrant legislation is equally important. Raising awareness among migrants about available services through targeted campaigns can bridge existing information gaps.

Stable funding and increased staffing are necessary to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of support programs. Scaling up successful models from the field of youth work and fostering inter-organizational partnerships can enhance service delivery and address systemic barriers. By implementing these recommendations, Slovenia can create a more inclusive society where young migrants have the tools and opportunities to thrive.

6. Cyprus

6.1 Country Context and Background

The refugee situation in Cyprus has been shaped by a mix of geopolitical factors, local challenges, and policy responses. In 2023, Cyprus continued to face a significant influx of asylum seekers, mainly from conflict regions such as Syria, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many refugees enter Cyprus by crossing the "green line," a buffer zone separating the northern, non-government-controlled area of the island from the south, which is under the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). Most of these entries are irregular, as migrants do not pass through official checkpoints but rely on smugglers to cross the line.

There has been a marked increase in arrivals by sea, especially from countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. In early 2024, arrivals by boat became more frequent than crossings via the green line, indicating a shift in the routes used by migrants. Cyprus has struggled with managing these flows due to its geographical position and small size, often acting as a frontline state in the Eastern Mediterranean migration route (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).

As of August 2024, Cyprus continues to see a significant number of asylum seekers, reflecting its position as a frontline state in the Eastern Mediterranean. By the end of August 2024, there were 5,354 new asylum applications for the year, with a total of 22,408 applications still pending at the Asylum Service. Additionally, 6,469 appeals were awaiting decisions at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC). The main countries of origin for asylum seekers include Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2024).

In 2023 1,015 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), registered at the Pournara First Reception Centre, and 500 UASC applied for asylum from January to August 2024. Furthermore, Cyprus has also been a destination for refugees fleeing the Ukraine crisis, with 22,948 Ukrainian refugees applying for temporary protection in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) (UNHCR, 2024).

Cyprus ranks high within the EU in terms of asylum application returns. In 2023, it was first among EU states for the percentage of returns of new asylum applicants, reflecting a robust policy focus on repatriation. The government has also sought to strengthen border controls and introduced various measures, such as employing border guards and erecting barriers, although these measures have faced criticism and proved largely ineffective (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023). Additionally, the government implemented pushbacks, a practice where boats are intercepted and turned back without allowing migrants to apply for asylum. These measures have raised concerns among international human rights organizations, including the UNHCR, which has expressed alarm over the lack of proper screening for asylum seekers before their deportation (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).

6.2 Desk Research Results and Analysis

6.2.1 Findings of educational challenges faced by young migrants

Young refugees, particularly those with low or interrupted educational backgrounds, encounter numerous obstacles to integrating into the Cypriot education system. Key challenges include:

- **Language Barriers:** The primary language of instruction in Cypriot schools is Greek, which is a significant challenge for refugee children who often arrive with little or no knowledge of the language. Although language support is available, it may not be sufficient to help them catch up quickly, especially in secondary education where linguistic and cultural obstacles are more pronounced (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Spaneas et al, 2018; UNHCR Cyprus, 2017).
- **Interrupted Education:** Many refugee children have had their schooling disrupted due to conflict and displacement, leading to gaps in their academic progress. This makes it difficult for them to integrate into age-appropriate classes, and to new learning environment and teaching methods (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Spaneas et al, 2018).
- **Lack of Systematic Monitoring and support:** There is no comprehensive system to monitor school registration for asylum-seeking children. This leads to cases where children remain out of the education system for extended periods, sometimes over three months, due to issues like difficulties accessing certain schools, lack of information, and capacity limitations within schools (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Spaneas et al, 2018). Parents or guardians of adolescent children are responsible for ensuring their enrollment in the local education system. However, the role of the state in facilitating this process is not clearly defined (Spaneas et al, 2018).
- **Limited Access to Specialized Support:** For children accessing necessary treatments such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy is often delayed due to financial and logistical constraints. Additionally, there is a lack of consistent follow-up to ensure that the special reception needs identified during the reception phase are adequately addressed once children exit reception centres like Pournara (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).
- **Age-Related Barriers:** Children close to or over 18 years of age face difficulties enrolling in regular schools. Even though the Refugee Law ensures access to secondary education beyond 18, practical access remains restricted. New students above 18 wishing to start secondary education are often denied free public schooling, limiting their opportunities for further education (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).

6.2.2 Policies, programs, and initiatives to support integration

Cyprus has implemented several policies and programs to facilitate the integration of refugees into its educational and social systems, but gaps and challenges remain.

- **Policy document by Ministry of Education in Cyprus:** The policy document outlines the approach of the Ministry of Education in Cyprus to integrate students with a migrant background into the educational

system. It emphasizes the need for coordinated measures to ensure smooth integration, with a focus on language acquisition, teacher training, and anti-racism policies. The policy supports providing Greek as a second language, structured reception and adaptation programs, and developing intercultural educational practices. Key priorities include mapping the needs of migrant students, addressing language barriers, and fostering an inclusive educational environment (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).

- **Reception Guide to Cypriot Education:** The initiative focuses on welcoming newly arrived children with a migrant background to help them adapt and become familiar with their new school and social environment. The goal is to support their integration into the educational system and inform both the students and their families about their rights and responsibilities. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Education has published "Reception Guide to Cypriot Education", a detailed manual about the Cypriot educational system, special support provisions for migrant students, and educational pathways. It is available in nine languages: English, Arabic, Bulgarian, Georgian, Greek, Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, and Turkish (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).
- **Training educators in intercultural education and teaching Greek as a second language:** The Pedagogical Institute, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has organized various training activities, including workshops, conferences, and seminars, to raise awareness and enhance the skills of primary and secondary educators in integrating students with a migrant background. The training focuses on managing diversity, implementing anti-racism policies, and effective language teaching. Since 2008, the Institute has also provided annual support to teachers in the Greek as a Second Language Program and developed a website offering educational resources and support materials for teaching and promoting inclusive practices (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).
- **Language Support Initiatives:** To address the language barrier for students in Gymnasium and Lyceum, the Ministry of Education has established transitional and short classes to help non-Greek-speaking students learn the language. For instance, transitional classes offer 14 hours of Greek per week, while short classes provide 5 hours. For students aged 15 and older, the Ministry of Education offers evening Greek language courses within the community. These are part of lifelong learning programs provided through Adult Education Centres and State Institutes of Further Education, as well as through other EU-funded initiatives (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Spaneas et al, 2018).
- **Integration Programs in Reception Centers:** Although the Refugee Law allows for education within reception centres, children residing at the Kofinou Reception Centre attend regular community schools. However, children at Pournara do not have access to formal education during their stay, which has extended to two months or more since 2020 (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).
- **Provisions for Children with Special Needs:** The Ministry of Education offers different arrangements based on the severity of a child's needs. These include placement in regular classes with additional support, special units within regular schools, or specialized schools for more severe cases. However, these services can be difficult to access consistently, often requiring intervention by NGOs (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).

- **Collaboration Between UNHCR and Local Institutions:** UNHCR has partnered with the European University Cyprus to enhance educational opportunities for refugees, offering scholarships and organizing community-based activities that promote integration. This collaboration underscores the importance of education as a means for refugees to become self-reliant and integrated into society (European Commission, 2019).
- **DRASE program:** The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has implemented initiatives like the DRASE program. The program focuses on promoting the well-being of economically disadvantaged students and enhancing social cohesion. Its objectives include minimizing the risk of social exclusion by improving academic performance, reducing instances of school failure, delinquency, and dropout rates (Spaneas et al, 2018).
- **State Institutes of Further Education:** Children entering UASC shelters during the school year, as well as those approaching 18 years of age, are not typically enrolled in regular schools. Instead, they may be guided towards evening courses at the State Institutes of Further Education, where subjects like Greek, English or French, math, and computer studies are offered. These institutes, under the Ministry of Education, focus on lifelong learning (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).

6.2.3 Best Practices from international and national programs

Based on previous research and successful initiatives in Cyprus and other EU countries, several best practices have been identified for improving the integration of young refugees:

- **Code of Conduct Against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents:** This best practice focuses on the effective integration of students with a migrant background in the Cypriot educational system through the implementation of anti-racism policies. The Ministry of Education's "Code of Conduct Against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents" aims to combat discrimination and foster a safe, inclusive environment. This policy aligns with international and European conventions ratified by Cyprus and reflects the state's official stance against racism. Consistent application of these measures across schools has proven effective in raising awareness, reducing racist incidents, and promoting a culture of peace, non-violence, and social justice. Evaluations from the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years have shown positive outcomes, highlighting increased awareness among school communities, better reporting of incidents, and effective implementation of educational measures to address and prevent discrimination (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).
- **Assessing Language Needs for Migrant Students:** the systematic collection and analysis of data to address the educational needs of students with a migrant background. It includes mandatory Greek language proficiency assessments for these students at the start of their schooling, with placement based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (K.E.E.A.) developed specialized diagnostic tests for both primary and secondary students to support their integration into Greek language programs. These tests, which assess reading, writing, and speaking skills, have been continuously updated and adapted. Recently, K.E.E.A. introduced a pilot program using these assessments in primary schools in Larnaca, with results

recorded on an electronic platform to monitor progress and provide targeted support (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).

- **Comprehensive Language Support:** Programs that provide dedicated language education tailored to the needs of refugees, including intensive courses at the beginning of the school year, have been successful in other EU contexts. Similar programs in Cyprus have been beneficial but require expansion to reach more students (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Spaneas et al, 2018).
- **Community and Family Engagement:** Programs that involve parents and community members tend to be more effective in supporting young refugees. Engaging families in the educational process helps bridge cultural gaps and ensures a holistic support network for the child (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; UNHCR Cyprus, 2017).
- **Vocational Training and Bridging Courses:** For older youth who may have missed several years of education, vocational training can provide a practical pathway to employment and self-sufficiency. Bridging courses that combine academic learning with skill-building have been identified as a way to address educational gaps while preparing refugees for future employment (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023).
- **Guides for Integration: Supporting Migrant Students in Cypriot Schools:** The Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus has developed a series of comprehensive guides to facilitate the integration of children with a migrant background into the educational system. These best practices include the "Reception Guide for Newly Arrived Migrant Children" (2020), which provides steps, ideas, and materials to help primary and pre-primary schools welcome new students. Another guide targets secondary education, offering strategies for the smooth reception and integration of migrant students. Additionally, the "Parent Mediator Guide" includes suggestions for fostering collaboration between migrant families and schools, as well as translations of essential educational terms in languages such as Arabic, Russian, Georgian, and Ukrainian. Lastly, the "Guide for Managing Sociocultural Diversity" presents articles with strategies for the linguistic and cultural integration of migrant children. Together, these guides promote inclusive education and enhance the school community's ability to address diverse needs effectively (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2024).

6.2.4 Gaps in Research

There is a lack of systematic monitoring of school registration for children, resulting in cases where some children remain out of the education system for extended periods, sometimes over three months (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023). Furthermore, there is an absence of official data on dropout rates among asylum-seeking children, making it difficult to assess the scope of this issue (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2023). For asylum-seekers over the age of 16, accessing educational activities is challenging, with language lessons being the primary educational support available. These lessons, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and provided through partnerships between municipalities and NGOs, are typically offered in larger cities, limiting access for those in rural or suburban areas (Spaneas et al., 2018). While asylum-seekers can enrol in both public and private

universities, the number who do so remains low, primarily due to language barriers and, in the case of private institutions, prohibitive costs (Spaneas et al., 2018).

6.2.5 Conclusions

The educational integration of asylum-seeking children in Cyprus faces several challenges, highlighting gaps in monitoring, accessibility, and support. There is no systematic approach to tracking school registration, leading to prolonged periods where some children are excluded from the education system. Additionally, the lack of official data on dropout rates makes it difficult to understand the full extent of the issue. While there are language support programs for asylum-seekers over 16, they are often limited to urban areas, leaving those in rural regions without access. For tertiary education, barriers such as language and cost further limit opportunities for asylum-seekers, with very few managing to enrol in public or private universities. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to improve monitoring, expand educational support across different regions, and lower barriers to higher education.

6.3 Survey Results and Analysis

6.3.1 General Information

The survey participants predominantly represent professionals actively working in social work or non-profit sectors. The majority of respondents are female (62.5%), hold at least a bachelor's degree (87.5%), and occupy roles such as youth workers, educators, or community facilitators. Most have over three years of experience (75%) working with young migrants and refugees, with a primary focus on the 16–30 age group.

Despite their experience, 62.5% of respondents reported having no prior training in intercultural competency, and 50% mentioned limited access to mentorship programs within their organizations. This lack of structured professional development limits their ability to address the complex needs of young migrants effectively. Notably, 87.5% of respondents expressed a strong demand for professional development, emphasizing the need for structured courses on topics such as migrant support, trauma management, and navigating bureaucratic systems

6.3.2 Challenges faced by young migrants

Young migrants face a variety of interconnected challenges, with language barriers reported by 100% of respondents as the most significant issue, affecting their ability to access employment, housing, and healthcare. Economic hardships, noted by over 75%, exacerbate these barriers. Young children, in particular, struggle with educational adaptation and identity formation due to interrupted schooling and cultural differences.

For female migrants, 50% of respondents identified gender-specific challenges such as limited access to contraception and vulnerability to gender-based violence. Additionally, 87.5% of respondents highlighted discrimination and social exclusion as major obstacles, often compounded by cultural

unfamiliarity and limited language proficiency. Employment challenges are particularly severe, with 75% of respondents citing unacknowledged foreign qualifications and employer discrimination as significant barriers. Other factors include racism (62.5%), inequitable compensation (50%), and lack of understanding of local economic and legal systems (50%).

6.3.3 Educational and vocational needs of the young migrants

The educational attainment levels of young migrants were reported to range between 5 and 8 years of schooling, highlighting the need for tailored programs for those with low or no prior education. 50% of respondents mentioned that language acquisition—particularly in both Greek and English—is the most pressing educational need. Other key areas include basic literacy (37.5%) and communication skills.

Vocational education and training (VET) programs were noted as essential for career development. However, only 50% of respondents confirmed the availability of structured training programs specifically for migrants with low education levels. Among these, curricula typically focus on language skills, basic literacy, and legal rights. The remaining respondents either noted a lack of such programs (25%) or expressed uncertainty about their existence (25%).

Respondents emphasized the need for increased resources, with 62.5% citing a lack of funding and dedicated personnel as a critical gap in addressing the educational and vocational needs of young migrants.

6.3.4 Programs and services offered to support the young refugees

Support services in Cyprus for young migrants include government programs, non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives, and EU-backed projects like ERASMUS+. These services aim to provide educational opportunities, vocational training, and cultural orientation. Tools such as language learning apps, life skills training, and mentorship programs are commonly employed by youth workers, as noted by 87.5% of respondents.

Despite these efforts, 25% of respondents stated that there are no specific programs targeting young migrants in Cyprus, while 50% expressed uncertainty about the availability of structured curricula. This underscores the uneven accessibility of programs and services across regions. Government-supported community schools and VET programs were highlighted by 62.5% of respondents as key resources for career development.

6.3.5 Services that has been found the most effective

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that public social services and immigration services are the most effective in supporting young migrants, with 100% of respondents highlighting their importance. These services address not only basic needs like food and shelter but also offer critical support for legal and political status, which contributes to a sense of security and integration. Additionally, mentorship programs and psychological support groups were highlighted as effective tools by 75% of respondents, particularly for addressing emotional and social challenges. Programs that combine practical support with emotional guidance were deemed to have the greatest impact.

6.3.6 Gaps in services identified in the survey

Several gaps in services were identified. In detail, 62.5% of respondents mentioned a lack of funding and human resources as a major limitation, particularly in countries like Cyprus, where a significant immigrant population strains existing support systems. Furthermore, 25% of respondents noted the absence of specific programs for young migrants, while 50% expressed concerns about the accessibility and effectiveness of those that do exist.

Tailored vocational training and mental health resources were highlighted as critical gaps by 75% of respondents, who also pointed out the challenges of navigating complex bureaucratic processes. Respondents emphasized the need for systemic changes, including policy reforms (50%), increased collaboration among stakeholders (62.5%), and better allocation of resources (87.5%). These measures are essential for improving the effectiveness and reach of support systems for young migrants.

6.4 Comparative Analysis

The desk and field research findings on the challenges and support systems for young migrants in Cyprus present both overlapping themes and unique insights, highlighting areas of alignment as well as gaps between reported policies and actual experiences.

Challenges Faced by Young Migrants

Both desk and field research emphasize language barriers as the most significant obstacle for young migrants. According to desk research, the lack of Greek language proficiency limits access to education and integration opportunities, a finding echoed by 100% of survey respondents in the field research. Both sources also identify the challenges posed by interrupted education due to conflict and displacement, which hampers academic progress and makes integration into age-appropriate classes difficult.

A key divergence arises in the monitoring of school enrollment and attendance. Desk research points to systemic gaps, such as the absence of comprehensive systems to track school registration for asylum-seeking children, leading to prolonged exclusion from education. However, this specific issue was not explicitly highlighted in the field research, suggesting a potential lack of awareness or focus among respondents on the structural aspects of educational access.

The desk research also highlights age-related barriers, particularly for migrants over 18, who face limited opportunities for secondary education. While the field research identifies employment-related challenges as significant, such as unacknowledged foreign qualifications and discrimination (noted by 75% of respondents), it provides less direct commentary on the impact of age on access to formal education.

Educational and Vocational Needs

Both desk and field research emphasize the importance of language acquisition as a cornerstone of educational integration. Desk research notes initiatives like transitional and evening Greek language classes, but these efforts are described as insufficient, particularly for older students. Field research reinforces this finding, with 50% of respondents identifying language acquisition as the most pressing

educational need. Both sources agree on the need for tailored educational programs, particularly for those with low or interrupted educational backgrounds. Vocational education and training (VET) programs are highlighted in both research streams as critical for career development. However, while the desk research identifies initiatives like the State Institutes of Further Education, the field research reveals a gap in their effectiveness, with only 50% of respondents confirming the availability of structured vocational training for migrants. Additionally, 62.5% of respondents in the field research cited a lack of resources, including funding and personnel, as a barrier to addressing these needs, which complements the desk research findings on capacity limitations.

Support Services and Programs

The desk research provides an overview of various policies and initiatives, including the Reception Guide to Cypriot Education, anti-racism policies, and training programs for educators in intercultural competencies. These policies align with the field research findings, where 87.5% of respondents reported using tools like language learning apps, life skills training, and mentorship programs to support young migrants. However, the field research also reveals a disconnect in implementation, with 25% of respondents stating there are no specific programs targeting young migrants and 50% expressing uncertainty about the availability of structured curricula.

The effectiveness of public social services emerges as a common theme in both research streams. Desk research highlights the role of the Refugee Law and collaborations with NGOs, while field research underscores the importance of public social services and immigration support, identified by 100% of respondents as the most effective tools for supporting young migrants.

Gaps Identified

Both research streams highlight significant gaps in services, though they differ in focus. Desk research emphasizes structural issues, such as the lack of systematic monitoring of school enrolment and dropout rates, and the limited educational opportunities in reception centres like Pournara. Field research, on the other hand, draws attention to operational challenges, such as limited access to mentorship programs (50%) and insufficient intercultural competency training for youth workers (62.5%).

Mental health support is another area where gaps are identified. While desk research briefly mentions the need for follow-up care for children with special needs, field research emphasizes the importance of tailored psychological support programs, which are highlighted by 75% of respondents as critical for addressing social and emotional challenges.

Alignment and Divergence

The desk and field research align closely in identifying key challenges, such as language barriers, interrupted education, and vocational training needs. Both streams highlight the importance of language acquisition and public social services as critical areas of focus. However, the field research provides a more granular perspective on the experiences of youth workers and the practical challenges they face in delivering support, such as the lack of training and limited resources. Conversely, the desk research offers a broader view of systemic and policy-level issues, such as gaps in school monitoring systems and educational provisions for children in reception centres, which are not as prominently featured in the field research. This divergence suggests that while policies and systemic gaps are well-

documented, their practical implications may not always be fully recognized or prioritized by frontline workers.

6.5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The comparative analysis of desk and field research underscores significant alignment in identifying the challenges faced by young migrants in Cyprus, particularly around language barriers, interrupted education, and economic hardships. Both research streams emphasize the importance of public social services, mentorship programs, and vocational training for facilitating integration. However, while desk research highlights systemic gaps, such as the lack of school enrolment monitoring and limited provisions in reception centres, field research provides a practical perspective, informed by the direct experiences of youth workers. These frontline professionals highlighted critical operational barriers, including resource limitations, insufficient training, and gaps in mentorship programs, which further exacerbate the difficulties young migrants face.

The recommendations provided here are rooted in the responses of youth workers, whose insights shed light on the real-world challenges of supporting young migrants. Their experiences reveal the urgent need to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that systemic efforts align with the practical realities of frontline service delivery. To continue, language support emerged as the most pressing educational need, cited by both research sources and youth workers. Current programs in Cyprus, while helpful, lack the intensity and reach required to address the needs of young migrants adequately. Expanding these programs to offer intensive Greek and English language courses—integrated into mainstream education—would significantly improve integration outcomes. Tailored options for older youth with interrupted education would also address gaps in their academic preparation and future opportunities. Access to vocational education and training (VET) is another area that requires urgent attention. Youth workers emphasized the importance of structured training programs to equip young migrants with the skills needed for employment.

Collaborations with local industries could establish dual apprenticeship models, combining education with workplace training to improve career readiness and address the barriers young migrants face in entering the job market. Education within reception centres, such as Pournara, is another critical gap identified by youth workers. Children residing in these centres often lack access to formal education during their stay, leaving them further behind academically. Establishing temporary schools or mobile education units within these facilities would ensure continuity in learning and better prepare children for transitions to community schools.

Training for educators and youth workers is crucial for addressing the intercultural and psychological needs of young migrants. Youth workers themselves highlighted their lack of training, with 62.5% reporting no prior experience in intercultural competency programs. Comprehensive training initiatives should focus on managing diversity, addressing trauma, and fostering inclusive learning environments to ensure professionals are equipped to meet the complex needs of their students. Finally, youth workers emphasized the importance of mental health support for young migrants, particularly in addressing issues like social isolation and trauma. Developing accessible psychological support programs, integrated into broader social services, would provide the emotional foundation needed for

young migrants to thrive. Enhanced collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities would also allow for pooling resources and expertise to address gaps in service provision effectively.

Conclusions

This document highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by young migrants and refugees across Europe, underscoring their shared struggles with educational access, language acquisition, social integration, and psychological well-being. Despite the diversity of national contexts, several commonalities emerge, providing a comprehensive understanding of the barriers faced by this vulnerable population and the pathways to effective integration.

Language barriers consistently surface as the most significant obstacle, limiting access to education, vocational opportunities, and broader social participation. The insufficiency of existing language programs—whether due to limited intensity, accessibility, or scope—is a recurring theme across all national contexts. Tailored, intensive language courses integrated into mainstream education and vocational training are critical for addressing these gaps and promoting successful integration.

Educational disruption and gaps in formal schooling further exacerbate the challenges faced by young migrants. Many arrive with interrupted education, leaving them ill-prepared to engage with their host countries' academic or vocational systems. Best practices from countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, including bridging classes and integration programs, highlight the potential of tailored interventions to address these deficits effectively.

The psychological impact of migration, particularly trauma and social isolation, represents another critical barrier. Access to culturally sensitive mental health support and trauma-informed educational practices is limited, yet essential for fostering resilience and enabling young migrants to thrive. Training educators and youth workers to address these needs is a priority across all surveyed countries.

Economic barriers, such as limited access to vocational training, employment opportunities, and financial resources, restrict the long-term integration and mobility of young migrants. Programs that combine vocational training with practical work experience, as seen in successful models from Scandinavia, offer valuable frameworks for equipping migrants with the skills and stability needed for economic independence.

Gaps in policy implementation, including regional disparities, bureaucratic delays, and insufficient resources, hinder the effectiveness of existing support systems. These systemic challenges underscore the need for harmonized approaches, stronger collaboration among stakeholders, and increased investment in integration initiatives.

The findings also highlight the importance of fostering social inclusion through intercultural programs, mentorship schemes, and community engagement activities. Such initiatives not only combat

discrimination and isolation but also promote mutual understanding and cohesion between migrants and host communities.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges faced by young migrants requires a multi-pronged strategy that combines policy reform, community engagement, and the implementation of best practices. By investing in inclusive education, vocational training, and comprehensive support systems, host countries can empower young migrants to overcome barriers, achieve their potential, and contribute meaningfully to society. Collaboration between governments, NGOs, and local communities remains essential in building a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

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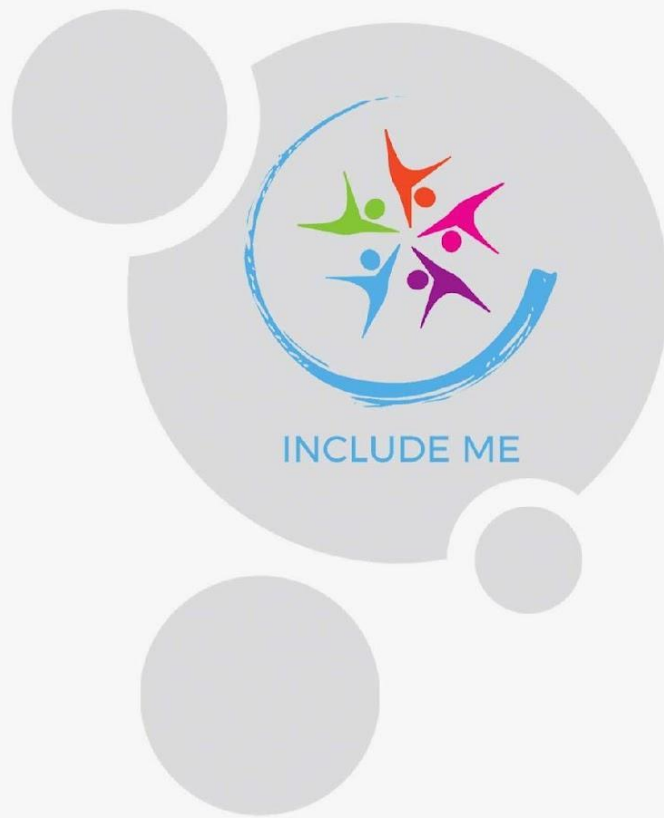
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