



PARENTable  
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# PARENTABLE

Communication between newly  
migrated parents and school  
educators in Europe

INTERESTING PRACTICES AND INSIGHTS FROM GERMANY, ITALY, SWEDEN, AND TURKEY

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# INTRODUCTION TO PARENTABLE

## INTRODUCTION TO PARENTABLE

PARENTable project team

*When I first entered the school in Germany, my first feeling was, I was kind of afraid from this place. But I told myself, I was determined to go through this because my children have the right to have a decent education and they deserve a chance like everybody else. (Parent, Germany)*

With migration movements to Europe and beyond, not only children enter new schools, but also their parents who are eager to support their children in their new educational path. However, parents are often overlooked by school officials and politicians who focus their efforts on the immediate integration of children into schools. Moreover, different misunderstandings, biases, and communication challenges might hinder the full participation of parents in schools. In our previous Erasmus Plus project "Enable/Tamkin. Self-Learning for Arab refugee children", we worked together with Arabic-speaking teachers and tutors to support refugee children from the Arab regions more broadly in their re-orientation in new schools by using tools of self-regulated learning such as developing a positive self-concept and intrinsic learning methods. Talking to different actors from schools, institutions, NGOs, and individuals during this project, we came across the question "What about the parents?". It was common sense that parents had to be included and addressed more adequately, if we aim to support migrated children more holistically in their new learning paths.

To learn more about Enable, visit our website: [www.enable-tamkin.com](http://www.enable-tamkin.com)



The quote above of a parent who migrated from Syria to Germany is just one of many examples of parents, who were eager to get involved yet also feared misunderstandings and biases, and had difficulties in expressing themselves in new languages such as German or beyond. We thus discussed with our team to develop a new Erasmus Plus project to address parents and schools alike and at the same time make sure that the often-overlooked perspective of newly migrated parents would get addressed more adequately.

Having Enable in mind, the idea of PARENTable was born. PARENTable is about the communication between newly migrated parents and school educators. The project is an Erasmus Plus strategic partnership for innovation in the school sector and aims to build communication bridges between newly migrated families and schools. For this, we brought parents and teachers together in Berlin and Schwäbisch Gmünd (Germany), Gävle (Sweden), Muğla (Turkey), and Rende (Italy).

In three years (that haven't been as foreseen because of the Corona pandemic and its impacts on schools and beyond), we organized four 3-days-workshops in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Turkey, in which we brought newly migrated parents and teachers, school counselors and other educators together. In and through these workshops, we developed and re-developed an inclusive training that is targeted towards educators and parents alike, and contains different modules on identities and self-esteem in parenting, attitudes and mutual expectations, communication techniques, multilingualism, counseling, trauma and coping, and on anti-bias, and how to prevent and combat discrimination.

You can find our E-Learning platform in English and Arabic here: [www.parent-able.com](http://www.parent-able.com)



Before the workshops, we moreover gathered broad interview material by interviewing 36 educators and 43 newly migrated parents throughout Europe about their perspectives on the communication between schools and families and challenges and opportunities for newly migrated children in schools. And we closely followed and monitored the discussions between parents and school educators during our 3-days workshops.

This booklet, which gathers the perspectives of newly migrated parents and school educators alike is the result of our efforts. What was striking for us was that, despite differences between our case studies in South Italy (Rende),

Southwestern Turkey (Muğla), Central Sweden (Gävle), and Germany (Schwäbisch Gmünd and Berlin), many challenges and solutions turned out to be similar. Other aspects closely depended on integration and education policies and migration in the respective country, as well as the overall economic and sociocultural position of the respective locations.

We hope this booklet serves schools, NGOs, institutions, and individuals well to develop a deeper understanding of the situation of newly migrated parents in schools, to get inspired about new ways of communication between parents and school educators, and to find innovative solutions how to support every child, every teacher, and every parent so nobody feels misunderstood, misjudged or left behind.

The core of the project is basically about the following questions:

1. How can communication between schools and parents be created without prejudice?
2. How can newly migrated parents make themselves better listened to in school contexts?
3. How can teachers and other educators develop a deeper understanding of the backgrounds and need of families of newly migrated children?
4. How can parents support children's learning in new environments through their own attitude?
5. How can parents and teachers work as a team to provide the best education possible for children?

## THE PARENTABLE TEAM

Our team consists of more than 20 individuals that are located in four universities and one NGO. Everyone contributes to PARENTable with different expertise in regards to the context of migration, families, and schools. In the following, we present you our partner organizations.



### PH Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany

The University of Schwäbisch Gmünd is a dynamic university with a long tradition in teacher training, namely since 1825. The university has an established profile in interculturalism and hosts the two master programs "Interculturality and Integration" and "Intercultural German studies and multilingualism". For PARENTable, the PH Schwäbisch Gmünd combines different areas of expertise such as communication with parents, conflict resolution, and psychosocial development support for children and adolescents (Department of Educational counseling, Psychology, and Intervention), research on forced migration and anti-discrimination (Department of Cultural Studies) and multilingualism and second and foreign language acquisition (Department of German Studies).

[www.ph-gmuend.de](http://www.ph-gmuend.de)

*Prof. Dr. Miriam Stock (project leader) | Prof. Dr. Gernot Aich | Prof. Dr. Daniel Rellstab | Luise Ganter, M.A. / Pauline Wetzel, B.A.*



### University of Calabria, Italy

The University of Calabria was established in 1968 to root a strategic resource for the development of Calabria, a region in the South of Italy, capable of creating prospects for cultural, social, and economic growth for its students and their families. Research and teaching activities are entrusted to 14 Departments, and about 800 professors from all the areas of the National University Council work in these departments. The Laboratory Occhiali is a center of studies regarding the Islamic Mediterranean Countries, in the Department of Cultures, Education and Society (DiCES) of the University of Calabria (UNICAL). It implements research regarding the MENA region, Turkey, and the Balkans and the topic of Islam in Europe. The Laboratory members are specialized in different disciplines like the Sociology of Islam, Migrations, the History of Islamic Countries, Pedagogy, and Middle East as well as north African languages.

[www.unical.it/portale](http://www.unical.it/portale)

*PhD student Sara Mazzei | Dott.ssa Valentina Zecca | Prof. Alberto Ventura | Dott.ssa Prof. Valentina Fedele | Khalid El Sheikh*



### University of Gävle, Sweden

The University of Gävle has approximately 16 000 students and more than 50 study programs and second-cycle programs. 350 courses are offered in the fields of Humanities, Social and Natural Sciences, and Technology. The University of Gävle was environmentally certified according to ISO 14001. This certification comprises education and research in collaboration with the surrounding community. We are at the forefront when it comes to working with sustainable development and we are immensely proud of this fact!

[www.hig.se](http://www.hig.se)

*Kia Kimhag | Bengt Söderhäll | Emelie Aune*



### Muğla University, Turkey

Psychological Counseling and Guidance is an undergraduate and graduate program within the Department of Educational Sciences at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Faculty of Education. The program aims to train psychological counselors to work at public and private schools, counseling and research centers, psychological counseling centers in universities, psychological counseling, rehabilitation centers for military troops, and so on. The main focus of the program is the prevention of mental problems and helping people grow. The field is dedicated to working with groups with disadvantages in a humanistic manner helping them achieve their full potential.

[www.mu.edu.tr/en](http://www.mu.edu.tr/en)

*Prof. Dr. Ayşe Rezan Çeçen Eroğul | Assoc. Prof. Dr. Raşit Avcı | Res. Assist. Dr. Senem Ezgi Vatandaşlar*



### Back on track e.V. Germany

Is a charity organization that was founded by Germans and Syrians living in Berlin in 2016. The aim is to help Syrian and other Arabic-speaking children who were forced to seek refuge abroad to cope with the school system in their host country. The approach is based on modern teaching methods composed of applying self-learning material and building children's self-confidence through interactive games and art.

[backontracksyria.org](http://backontracksyria.org)

Petra Becker | Mariam Zughbi | Vaclav Vavrycuk | Noor Flihan

## OUR APPROACH FOR THE CASE STUDIES AND THIS BOOKLET

For PARENTable, we collected seventy-nine qualitative interviews that were conducted by our partners in their local environments. For the interviews, we used a common guideline that entailed questions about communication with schools/families but also about experiences with newly migrated children.

We moreover collected data during our four three-days-workshops, which brought 27 school educators and 24 parents together. For this, we wrote field notes.

We then structured and analyzed all data to trace important subjects that came up in the interviews and during the discussion.

In this booklet, we will present first every case study in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Turkey on its own by

- (1) giving background information on school integration and parental involvement in each country
- (2) portraying the experiences of newly migrated parents with schools
- (3) illustrating the perspective of teachers and other educators
- (4) summarizing our experience in the PARENTable workshop

Second, we will portray important topics throughout Europe that came up during all our workshop discussions and beyond in regards to communication between schools and families, namely (1) Language Learning and Multilingualism, (2) Family Dynamics after Migration, (3) Stereotypes and Discrimination: Experiences of Newly Migrated Parents, Coping Strategies and Prevention (4) Experiences in different school systems, (5) Diversity in Classrooms and at Home and (6) Challenges in Communication and Strategies for a better Mutual Understanding.

Finally, instead of a conclusion, we decided to print a personal report of our project member Emelie Aune who entered PARENTable as a teacher and describes her experiences in the project.

We want to thank all parents, teachers, psychological counselors and other educators in Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Turkey for the time, commitment and passion, they put into this project during our interviews and workshops. We learned so much from you all.

Furthermore, we would like to thank our web designer Tony Khoueiry, who always has fabulous ideas on how to illustrate and design our gathered knowledge to attract a wide audience and who was also very supportive in creating this booklet. And finally, we thank the European Union Erasmus Plus program for co-funding PARENTable and the "Pädagogischer Austauschdienst (PAD) of the Kultusministerkonferenz in Germany for supervising our project on behalf of the EU.







## CASE STUDY IN SWEDEN (GÄVLE)

*Kia Kimhag, Emelie Aune, Bengt Söderhäll*

At the University of Gävle, Sweden, we decided to take part in PARENTable as a continuation of two previous projects: one was about the education for newly migrated academics to become Studiehandledare (helpers for migrant children from preschool to upper secondary school) and the other one was the above-mentioned Erasmus + project Enable, in which we trained Arab speaking tutors working with refugee children. For PARENTable, we have conducted interviews with school employees and newly migrated parents/legal guardians.

We arranged a workshop for three days in November-December 2021 at the University of Gävle for and with newly migrated legal guardians/parents and teachers. The workshop made it possible to share experiences and work with the PARENTable modules.

In the following, we will portray our case study in Sweden by

- (1) giving background information on school integration and parental involvement
- (2) portraying the experiences of newly migrated parents with schools
- (3) illustrating the perspectives of teachers and other educators
- (4) summarizing our experiences in the PARENTable workshop in Gävle

### SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SWEDEN

In the Swedish school law and curriculum, parental involvement and organization for mother tongue education are institutionalized. In Sweden, we have a long history of migration, particularly since the second world war. Education in the mother tongue has been in the curriculum for decades. Preparation classes for newly migrated children in different forms according to the child's situation and background socially, cognitively, and academically are at hand after a mapping of these aspects. According to the curriculum, every employee at school shall cooperate with the legal guardian/parent of the children and continuously inform and keep a dialogue about the child's development and school situation. Once per semester, a development interview with the legal guardian/parent is due to be performed. If needed there should be an interpreter at hand. An Individual Development Plan will follow the child to the end of class six.

For many years, the cooperation between schools and homes has been scheduled in the Swedish school. There is at least one meeting with all parents for reciprocal information every semester in primary and secondary schools. Every child together with a parent/legal guardian has a personal talk with the teacher about the academic and social situation of the child. If needed an interpreter is at hand.

Traditionally, there has been an organization among parents to support the school and the local popular organizations. Sports clubs, cultural movements, and others have been welcomed to school to take part for the best of the children. This is aligned with legal and international conventions. Since the 20th of November 1989, a child convention is part of Swedish law Sweden ratified the Salamanca Declaration in June 1994 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the first of January 2000.

We had different periods of migration to Sweden, which had an impact on a change towards a bigger diversity in our school system. Before the 1950s, Sweden was a country of emigration, but with the high grade of industrialization and modernization, Sweden became a country of immigration. Migrants mostly came from Finland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. During the seventies, a lot of migrants came as political refugees from Chile and other countries in Latin America. In the middle of the '80s asylum seekers from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Eritrea, Kosovo, and Somalia came to Sweden. In the '90s, as a result of the war in post-Yugoslavia, more than 100 000 migrants arrived in Sweden,

most of them from Bosnia<sup>1</sup>. In 2015 more than 162 000 people sought asylum in Sweden, many of them from Syria. Lately, Sweden has become more restrictive towards foreigners, being now at the EU minimum level of immigration<sup>2</sup>.

A student, who attends a preparatory class (maximum in two years), receives partial teaching in a different teaching group than the pupil's regular class. The purpose is to give newly arrived students the knowledge they need to participate in the regular teaching group (built to full-time as soon as possible). This support measure is neither an additional adaptation nor a form of special support and should not be documented in a program of measures<sup>3</sup>.

The principal can decide if pupils will receive part of his teaching in a preparatory class (newly arrived students in primary school, primary special school, special school, or Sami school). For the principal to decide on teaching in the preparatory class, the school must first assess the student's knowledge: "If the school judges that the student does not have sufficient knowledge of Swedish to be able to take part in the teaching in his regular teaching group, he can receive teaching in a preparatory class"<sup>4</sup>.

All asylum-seeking children and young people have the right to attend preschool and school. Municipalities have the responsibility that children and young people get to attend school under the same conditions as others. This applies to preschool, comprehensive school, and upper secondary school. To have the right to attend upper secondary school, young asylum seekers must begin their studies before they turn 18<sup>5</sup>.

## EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY MIGRATED PARENTS WITH SCHOOLS IN SWEDEN

In the following, we have chosen to publish quotes from the interviews we held during our project. We want to point out that, from our own teaching experience, the concept of "migrant parents" is diminishing the diversity among people that migrated. We have met many newly migrated individuals with higher education than ours and more illiterate migrants with knowledge of five languages. An example is a teacher-student who was born in Morocco. Being in his late twenties, he was fluent in four languages: his mother tongue Berber, French, English, and Swedish, his mother could not read or write. When he summed up his ideas about education, he said: - In Berber, there is a saying that you become as the one you walk with.

We interviewed six parents, three in Gävle and its surroundings, one in Ljusdal, and two in Tierp. Three of them are from Syria, one from Eritrea, and two from Turkey. Three parents have experience from school and have worked as teachers in their home countries. This allowed them to have an additional perspective on the Swedish educative system and practices, not only as parents but also as teachers from other countries.

Meeting teachers and communicating with them seems to be a topic that all the parents had deeper thoughts about. In general, the communication from the beginning was positive. One parent described the first experience with an educative institution in Sweden as very positive.

*I first met a teacher when I went to apply for kindergarten for my child. They asked me about my child's allergies, what she eats and the language she speaks. It was very detailed, and this was very impressive for me. (Parent, Sweden)*

<sup>1</sup><https://www.migrationsverket.se/0m-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Asyl.html#Text1>

<sup>2</sup><https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/languages/english-engelska>

<sup>3</sup>3rd chapter 12 f section of the School Act. bill 201415:45/, Education for newly arrived students - reception and schooling, page 44

<sup>4</sup>3rd chapter 12 a-c and f §§ of the School Act

<sup>5</sup><https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Education.html>

Also, another parent who came from Syria and was a teacher herself described her positive experience at school which was very reciprocal.

*I really remember the first time when I met a teacher practicing at school and it was normal to me as I am used to it, but I do not forget how kind the teacher was to me and all others. My experiences with teachers were very wonderful and I could assimilate with them easily and quickly. I used to meet teachers during breaks and at lunch and discussions about the differences between the curricula in my country and in Sweden and about other different issues. The teacher's behavior was completely normal to me and I could not see any odd behavior. Sure, I communicated with parents and legal guardians and most of them cooperated with the school. (Parent, Sweden)*

In general, communication with teachers seemed to differ depending on the school, their structure, the age of their children, and each headmaster's and teachers' way of communicating. With some teachers, communication was better, with other teachers, there could be less communication. Because of this diversity, parents were very satisfied with the institutionalization in Sweden that ensured them having steady feedback on their children's development:

*It depends on which school the children go to, in general you meet the teachers twice a year in a "Utvecklingsamtal" (development talks), during Corona it was on the phone which is not the same as when you meet teachers. In development talks, people talk about how things are going at school for my child, and they usually hear «Your child is doing very well» «He / she is very good», what I think you need to hear is also how to get even better. I mostly am the one that ask the questions to the teachers. (Parent, Sweden)*

This quote shows that parents are eager to engage more closely with schools to support their children in their educational path. Thus, steady and honest communication depends also on the initiative of parents and on asking and re-asking. Another parent had a good experience with this:

*When I meet the teachers, I ask about knowledge development and the Swedish language development. The teachers tell me about the difficulties and the development of my children. They tell me how my girls develop and what they need to develop for the future. Sometimes I also ask about food habits and if the girls have been alerted the whole day etcetera. When I take contact teachers they answer in a straight way. I see it as I have a good relationship with the teachers. (Parent, Sweden)*

One aspect that turned out to be one of the biggest challenges in communication was the language, as this parent described further:

*I remember that the Swedish language was hard at the beginning. When I got help and support from teachers I began to take up/to learn the Swedish language. To know the Swedish language takes very long time. Because of this you need support from teachers and other school personnel. I have good contact with teachers now. (...) Sometimes there are misunderstandings between me and the teachers because of language difficulties, but we try to solve this problem as good as possible. (Parent, Sweden)*

Here, it becomes clear that because of multiple languages, it is even more important to have a closer and reciprocal interaction between family and schools.

Regarding the school system, parents in the interviews mentioned that the system was different, but that they also adapted to it quickly. One parent from Syria said the following:

*The school in Sweden is different compared with the Syrian, but this has not meant any problems. Rather, it has given us as parents and our children a broader view of education – and to us education is central! (Parent, Sweden)*

This said some parents mentioned some improvements that could be added to the school systems, namely, to have more clear roles and rules.

*Instead, I have different thoughts of own experience and “missings” and what would be good for change: Sometimes I miss rules at school and what my duty and responsibility is. I wonder about the activities of my children at school. It would be great if the schools meet the parents or legal guardians one by one or in groups and teach how to raise children that come from different countries as it is not easy to adjust to another culture, a new society and weather (climate). (Parent, Sweden)*

This interview partner would even like closer and more official monitoring and involvement of parents/guardians in the legal system. This was also mentioned by another parent who said it would be good to receive more knowledge about the school system from the beginning. Besides, some parents even wished for more intense lessons so children would be more motivated e.g., to read a lot in Swedish. Here it becomes obvious, that many parents wanted their children to succeed in their education and pushed them to get better.

Another aspect that was often mentioned in the interviews, was the danger and feeling of being misjudged by others in the school system. This counts both for parents and children. Regarding children, a parent said:

*Sometimes they are misjudged by the teachers, unfortunately. When they get a new teacher, we see that their grades are lowered immediately, then they get their grades again or right by the same teacher who has lowered them. (Parent, Sweden)*

Another parent told us about two concrete situations where they felt they had to insist to be treated correctly. These examples are quoted in the following:

*Example 1: My son who was 12 years old and was called racist words by another student, a teacher was there but did nothing, his Swedish friends got angry and there was a conflict between children, then the teachers got involved. We received no information about what happened until my son came home and told me. I called the school and booked an appointment with the teacher, I needed to read on the National Agency for Education’s page his rights and school obligations, we went with a Swedish retired teacher to a meeting and when the teacher saw that we were loaded, then we solved the problem. (Parent, Sweden)*

*Example 2: my daughter was 8 years old, and her best friend moved out of school. She cried every night and did not want to go to school, we told her previous school about it and asked for their help, a “skolkurator” (school counselor). They did not take us seriously and I did not get an answer by email or phone either, I went to school without a scheduled time, the teacher arrived and meant that maybe there is something at home that bothers her. There was no interest to discuss with me, so I did not get an answer. Meanwhile, my daughter met a psychologist at the hospital, her doctor talked to the school nurse and told them that she (the psychologist) should report the school if they choose to do nothing at the school to help her thrive again, then I got a phone call from the school and an update on her situation, she got to meet the counselor as well. It turned out that someone was bullying her, and it got worse when her friend moved away. (Parent, Sweden)*

This parent was very reluctant that they as newly migrated families would have to fight and read so much about what

should be done. because it should be their usual right to receive this information from the school. Besides, these incidents could have had a direct impact on children’s feeling of belonging. In the latter example, the daughter started to feel labeled as a “migrant” and didn’t want to go out sometimes. So here it is very important to intervene from the school’s official position. Besides, another parent told us that it would help a lot if the school staff would be more diverse and there would be more role models from different backgrounds, and the possibility to handle these incidents differently. Finally, the parents we interviewed told us about how school cultures would have an impact on their family dynamics at home since many questions about identities and cultures would arise. In general, parents supported their children in learning new languages and cultures but also wanted them to not lose their family background, as one interview partner told us:

*There have never been any difficulties with the relation between school and home, not even at the beginning. In the family, we decided that we should not speak Arabic outside of home but at home only Arabic. To me, it is very important that my children adapt to all the new but also learn about the long civilization of our home country. (Parent, Sweden)*

What was difficult, was that parents observed a gap that children would learn faster than themselves. This also led to new questions that they couldn’t follow so quickly:

*They, the children, start learning the language better than me, so sometimes I cannot really answer her questions. She learns, my child, about the Swedish culture and she starts questioning our culture. (Parent, Sweden)*

A mother finally told us that she also appreciated this questioning, because it led to new dialogues within the family. However, she also realized that this would take time and a lot of effort.

*As parent and teacher at the same time I try to organize things and time for children and help them to learn more than one language. If there is polemics about the old and the new, the dialogue sometimes takes time, but finally we will reach a conclusion. (Parent, Sweden)*

In general, the interviews showed that parents supported their children to the best to adapt quickly to the Swedish school systems and were satisfied with the communication. Sometimes they even wished for more information about the school and the performances of their child in education and how to support them more. A large issue was the fear of being misjudged, which should be tackled more broadly in Swedish schools. A more diverse staff in schools could be a great help in this aspect.

## **EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS WITH NEWLY MIGRATED FAMILIES IN SWEDEN**

We held interviews with teachers who have broad experience with migrant pupils and classes with many children with different cultures and languages. Hereby, many central issues arose from methods of communication over different observations of migrated families to what problems could occur and how to solve them. In the following, we decided to present the answers of two teachers, one with a long experience in multicultural schools at a primary school, and another teacher with a long experience in secondary school.

What was interesting for us, was that there were different answers from a teacher from primary and a teacher from secondary school regarding the first contact in school with a newly migrated pupil and thus the contact with the family. Regarding the first contact with a newly migrated pupil, the one from primary school noted the following:

*Most of the time, I only receive information that I will be allowed to when I receive a new pupil. The pupil usually spent*

a few weeks at a reception class/school unit where, among other things, mapping of the pupil's school background, literacy, and mathematical knowledge takes place. Sometimes I meet them and their parent at a meeting before they start with me, but not always. If necessary, an interpreter is booked, usually by phone (a cost issue) so that we can communicate as well as possible about practicalities around school, schedule, which days it is sports and which equipment is required, need for free time, and other routines that have to do with the child's everyday school life. (Teacher, Sweden)

Another teacher with long experience in a multicultural school at secondary school however stated:

Most often, parents come to the school spontaneously, often with a relative who is fluent in the Swedish language. In formal meetings, an interpreter is booked. Sometimes it is about forming an idea of how the school is working and which adult has responsibility for the pupil during the school day and how the child's situation is experienced at school. From time to time, misunderstandings, conflicts, etc. that deal with cultures are sorted out, but on the whole, I feel that the contact is positive. (Teacher, Sweden)

The result shows that teachers in primary school have more regular contact and a need of explaining details to the parents. The teacher in the secondary gave shorter answers in these matters. This might be connected to the fact that older pupils can communicate and take greater responsibility.

In general, both teachers had very different experiences regarding regular contact with parents. The teacher from secondary school told us, that she felt like there was not a lot of initiative from the parents:

My experience is that the parents very rarely try to reach me. It is often the child/student who communicates questions from home with me. When the parents get in touch, often by phone but sometimes by e-mail, it is usually to ask something about the child's school day. They may want help understanding the absence system/how to report their child sick or answer a survey. Sometimes they have questions about the child's school progress or have opinions about the amount of homework.

I think they avoid making contact, partly because they come from a culture where the school is seen as an «authority» that manages the school, i.e. what happens to the child at school is the school's job. I don't feel that they are interested/accustomed to being involved in their child's school and work. We as a school are expected to take care of that without the involvement of the parents. But I also think that many parents do not make contact because they cannot communicate well with the school due to a lack of language skills. Many parents who would be helped by an interpreter often refuse to use an interpreter when the school offers it as if needing the help of an interpreter is something bad. (Teacher, Sweden)

Here, it shows that there might be very different reasons for a lack of communication such as language skills or different educational systems. So behind the first idea of "not being interested" or being "culturally different" might lay a lot of different factors. One aspect could be that parents sometimes feel ashamed not to be able to express themselves and their perspectives due to a lack of Swedish skills as it is mentioned here.

The teacher from the primary school explained to us that in general communication was good and that they normally talked regularly with parents of newly arrived children, particularly how they work in school, class, and in the lessons to ensure that pupils have good opportunities to learn Swedish. At her school, they intended to give a clear picture of the pupil's skills. Challenging was that they would not know how many children can express themselves in their mother tongue. This would give a more complete picture.

Regarding the challenge of communication in different languages, she told us that she uses different tools and languages:

If the conversation takes place on-site at the school, I always try to have concrete material to show and look up web pages that can be helpful or otherwise try to make the communication as clear as possible. In written communication, I also use some image support. I think sometimes it can be easier with written information because then parents can use some digital translation tool, provided their language is included in one. In some cases, it works to communicate in English, and then we do it. If it is a conversation concerning their child's development or if the child is having difficulties with something at school, I always recommend an interpreter, both so that I and the parents can communicate unhindered and minimize misunderstandings. (Teacher, Sweden)

These are very good examples of a language-sensitive approach, such as the use of more visual tools and integrated interpreters. Also, the other interview partner told us that she would prefer to share information in an email because then the parents would have the possibility to translate the information at home with the help of translating programs. Finally, before the pandemic they included some larger informative meetings at schools:

We tried for a period to have parent meetings of an informative nature in the main languages at the school. It didn't worked that way, I thought, because the meetings became large and rather impersonal. It wasn't us class teachers or mentors who held the meetings and talked about the situation in the class etc. but it was about more general things that apply to all students and parents. I don't know if this was evaluated by the parents, to get their perspective on the matter. Due to the pandemic, we have not had any physical meetings with parents for several years now. (Teacher, Sweden)

Here it shows, that if a meeting becomes too impersonal it may not necessarily add to a more transparent communication. In general, both teachers felt the most important was to be available, that you as a teacher are there, to take your time, and show that you are open for communication.

Regarding aspects of discrimination or misjudgments against parents/guardians at school, both teachers told us that they don't perceive anything from the side of school officials and employees because both schools try to be open-minded. A teacher told us that she was insisting to have a diverse approach in her classroom:

I'm the first to preach that it doesn't matter where you come from or how you look/dress. «Look at me; I'm from Storvik "a small place" and it's not always so fun». Then my students and their guardians usually laugh. A girl who is the only light-skinned person in her family said that she was questioned by her countrymen if she was really from that country. She felt very bad about it and then the school stepped in with the help of the mother tongue teacher and talked to her and her family. (Teacher, Sweden)

Here it shows that sometimes also teachers observe incidents but she felt here that they were handled in a good way. However, what both our interview partners noticed was the marginalization and exclusion from social activities:

As far as social inclusion is concerned, I think there is a lot to do. My students and their families are seen meeting and socializing with others from the same language group. Many are excluded from club life, cultural schools and leisure activities both for financial reasons but also because several activities have not adapted to a multicultural society. (Teacher, Sweden)

A broader sense of being socially excluded was also mentioned by the other teacher who felt like this was a large challenge for newly migrated families. Still, she saw that they also have hopes, that things will go well for the family in the new country.

What both observe were diverse challenges newly migrated families faced, such as keeping in touch with relatives in the

home country, visiting authorities, and so on. Besides, post-traumatic symptoms are not uncommon. This could also have a large impact on the families. Both thus recognized that being a newly arrived parent/guardian could be incredibly complex. However, it is also different from family to family. As the teacher from the secondary school said, it may depend on how you approach the new society/language, what caused the move to the new country, whether you see Sweden as your new homeland or whether you live with the dream and longing to sooner or later move home. All these questions are often reflected very clearly in the children.

Despite these challenges, both interview partners noted that parents/guardians would support their children in adapting fast to the new society. The teacher from primary school told us:

*When it comes to language skills for their children they want to know if the child is developing their knowledge of the language and usually encourage their children to borrow books and read in their spare time or try to make «Swedish» friends. (Teacher, Sweden)*

Sometimes, however, the effort could go very far. A challenge, both our interview partners mentioned, was the vast expectations from the parents/legal guardians' that their children should become doctors, dentists, or lawyers. At the same time, some families would struggle to learn the Swedish language so they couldn't support their children adequately.

This would also have effects on school-family communication since children often become the mouthpiece for the family because they learn the language faster, they enjoy it every day, while the parents may not be employed and lack Swedish contacts.

*When the children learn the new language faster than their parents, insecurity and a strange child-adult relationship are also created, where the child, who should be the one dependent on his parent, is now the one who has to take «adult responsibility» in contact with the authorities, healthcare or the like and makes the parent/guardian dependent on their child. (Teacher, Sweden)*

This relationship could thus have an impact on family dynamics. Both also perceived that children would not necessarily share their situation at home. As our first interview partner mentioned, some students never talk about difficulties they have at school since they don't want to worry their parents. This was often noticeable for her when she met parents or guardians, realizing how much they have taken part in the child's everyday school life. For her, it would be important that parents involve more deeply in the child's everyday life.

Also, our other interview partner saw the problem that unfortunately many newly arrived pupils must manage their school life by themselves.

*It can also be difficult to talk about things you have learned in your new language, skills you only have words for in Swedish, in your mother tongue. I think it can contribute to difficulties in talking to your parents about school and what you learn. I believe, and notice, that some children have high expectations from parents. Perhaps the parent has not been given the same educational opportunities as their child and has (much too) high hopes for what the child should be able to achieve. It can also be difficult for parents to accept that their children have different learning difficulties. (Teacher, Sweden)*

Finally, teachers mentioned that some children could be in transnational constellations which also affect them, such as a parent who is still in the home country or has disappeared, not knowing what happened to them, or having the option to talk to them. Some children come alone and live with a relative instead of their family. They can carry sadness

and a longing for their parents. In general, both teachers said that it is very different how easy or difficult it is for the children to adapt to the new surroundings and the whole school situation. Some children are placed in a lower grade than their age and may have difficulties with social interaction. Some have no school experience and must acquire «school knowledge», language, and subject knowledge. The teacher from primary school also described that her work with newly arrived children has changed over the years. When she started, those children came from countries where the parents had a high level of education and had the opportunity to go to school. They attended a preparation class for a shorter or longer time with a lot of focus on language learning but also on how things work in Swedish society. The children were slowly transferred to their «regular» class. These students often quickly learned the school's codes, largely due to their parents' familiarity with them. They also had the opportunity to learn the new language in a smaller group.

*After a few years as a teacher, I started meeting students whose parents had very little or no schooling background. Some parents were illiterate. I feel that these students still had greater access to language support in their mother tongue. As a teacher, I could apply for this and the student could depend on the language level, have access to more or less support each week. (Teacher, Sweden)*

However, it has to be said that in recent refugee migration, many highly educated families arrived in Sweden such as from Syria. So it might be that interviewed teachers here also have a misperception of newly migrated families as it was often perceived during the PARENTable project. Finally, it is to be said that we must look at each pupil as an individual: Individuals handle their situations differently.

To conclude, for both teachers, communication and exchange were sufficient but could be even ameliorated regarding transparency, the share of knowledge, and so on. The teacher from the primary school finally concluded with some suggestions for Swedish schools:

*Our school could be better than it is today in our school. I would like parents to get a better introduction to the Swedish school system. Preferably in their mother tongue. I would like them to understand that together, at home and school, we contribute to the child's knowledge development and that if we work together, it makes things easier for the child. The school is not an independent entity. However, I think that many parents generally appreciate the Swedish school system. (Teacher, Sweden)*

This common share of knowledge was then tried out in a workshop that brought teachers and parents together.

#### **PARENTABLE-WORKSHOP IN GÄVLE, NOVEMBER 2021**

Our workshop took place in Gävle November 2021 at the University of Gävle. In the three days of the workshop, we gathered in total 13 newly migrated parents and teachers/Studiehandledare. For the later we chose mother tongue teachers and mentors since they had a mediating role in school. The workshops were held by our European PARENTable team in the following sessions: identity and self-esteem in parenting, mutual attitudes and expectations of teachers/parents, multilingualism, successful communication, stress, trauma, and coping, and a session about anti-bias. The workshops were highly appreciated by the participants, and all described the need of working together.

During the workshops, we could see that the participants shared their stories because they felt that were listened



to. The self-confidence was flowering from day to day, and you could see they became more awake and the level of discussion increased. Parents felt that single stories gave them a wider perspective and understanding. One example is one participant who said

*“to feel that no one see you and no one listen to you change after 3 days that you understand that they do listen to you it becomes a meaning to tell the story and to have a voice”.*

school system and how this disappeared over time and gave room to diversity. When talking with our colleague, we came to understand how also we, born in 1981, 1961 and 1951 have experienced a change in depth of the context, the school’s system and the society. Of course, we came to talk about how Sweden now, more restrictive in migration policy, will tackle the situation and see the incoming guests and ourselves as partners in humanitarianism and diversity.

### FINAL REFLECTION

While working with problems and possibilities over quite many years related to cultural encounters, help from friends is needed. These friends from different countries and cultural habitus, have helped us to emphasize the necessity of trying to understand the complexity of contexts. When saying contexts, this is a multifaceted concept – and a tangled issue. To get help to formulate around this, we investigate the work of the United Nations and more: UNHCR – the UN Refugee Centre. The UNHCR’s commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, and Gender Equity is like an umbrella to the multifaceted and tangled concept of context, quote:

UNHCR values inclusiveness, diversity, and gender equity and will continue to strive to achieve full adherence to these principles in its policies and organizational culture.

Diversity is critical to protecting our people of concern and to finding innovative solutions in response to humanitarian crises.

UNHCR is committed to achieving and maintaining gender parity at all grades and to having a workforce that is diverse, inclusive, and representative of all regions.

Taking this down to our here and now, we need to see historical, political, language-related, cultural, religious, class-related, gender-related, LGBTQI+ related, economic, and more facets of contexts, connected to education to be able to perform ideas of attention and recognition in praxis. An example we experienced when putting this text together, was when a colleague of ours from Ukraine came to visit us. Our colleague, established in 1984 and raised during the rule of the Soviet Union told us about the liberation she experienced as a child remembering the quite one-sided school system and how it disappeared over time and gave room to diversity. When talking with our colleague, we came to understand how also we, born in 1981, 1961, and 1951, have experienced a change in depth of the context, the school’s system, and the society. Of course, we came to talk about how Sweden now, more restrictive in migration policy, will tackle the situation and see the incoming guests and ourselves as partners in humanitarianism and diversity.

## CASE STUDY IN GERMANY (BERLIN/SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND)

Petra Becker, Miriam Stock, Pauline Wetzel

In Germany, we decided to engage with PARENTable in two areas, first in Berlin, where our partner, the NGO Back on Track e.V. is located, and second in South-Western Baden-Württemberg, at the location of the University of Schwäbisch Gmünd. In both areas, we conducted interviews with newly migrated parents as well as teachers and other educators. In Berlin, we moreover conducted a three-day workshop in March 2022 bringing newly migrated parents and teachers together who had the opportunity to exchange their experiences and views.

In the following, we will portray our case study by:

- (1) giving background information on school integration and parental involvement
- (2) portraying the experiences of newly migrated parents with schools
- (3) illustrating the perspective of teachers and other educators
- (4) summarizing our experience in the PARENTable workshop in Berlin

### SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN GERMANY

Germany is a diverse migration country that has experienced very different forms of migration in the last decades, such as students, job-seekers, or refugees (often, in reality, intentions can go together). Much attention has been paid to refugee migration from the Middle East and African countries since 2011. Between 2010 and 2019, 790.000 Syrians settled in Germany<sup>6</sup>. Besides, many Iraqis, Eritreans, Afghanis, and Somalians among others applied for asylum. More recently, many Ukrainian refugees sought shelter in Germany. Besides, there is strong immigration from South and East European countries among others<sup>7</sup>.

Migration has been a major driver of development in the two federal states of our PARENTable project, the city of Berlin in the East and Baden-Württemberg in the South West. Berlin has a migration background of 36,6 % in 2022<sup>8</sup>, and the small town of Schwäbisch Gmünd in Baden Württemberg is even higher, reaching 38% in 2017<sup>9</sup>. So not only in metropolitan but also in more rural areas, migrants are an inherent part of society.

All new migrants bring diverse resources and knowledge with them, however, they have often been forced not to work in their previous qualifications due to a lack of both official and informal recognition of their diplomas or experiences in Germany. This is also the case for immigrant teachers from Syria and elsewhere who hardly get the chance to work in German schools<sup>10</sup>. Only recently with the Ukrainian crisis, school authorities started to open up schools for the integration of foreign teachers. Before, the education system stayed firmly closed for newly migrated teachers, although there had been a general lack of teachers in Germany for years.

The integration of newly migrated children into the school system differs from region to region, since school authority is in the hand of federal states. Both Berlin and Baden-Württemberg follow a segregated schooling model for newly

<sup>6</sup><https://mediendienst-integration.de/migration/flucht-asyl/syrische-fluechtlinge.html>

<sup>7</sup><https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/157446/umfrage/hauptherkunftslaender-der-zuwanderer-nach-deutschland2009-/>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/berlin-migrationsanteil-steigt-auf-366-prozent-li.209995>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.schwaebisch-gmuend.de/zahlen-daten-fakten.html>

<sup>10</sup>See e.g. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/lehremangel-warum-darf-eine-gefluechtete-in-deutschland-nicht-unterrachten-a67-ece0-405b49-61ef8854845341-8710-f6>

migrated children. Children are registered into “welcome classes” or “preparatory classes” for up to two years where they learn German intensively before they enter regular classes. However, the system is also fluid, since some courses, such as music, sports, or arts are taught to all children from the beginning, and children who learn German quickly can be partly integrated into some other classes at an early stage.

When it comes to parental involvement, there has been increasing effort to engage parents in schools in recent years since this has been understood as fruitful for the educational success of children. Berlin and Baden-Württemberg have different regulations on how to ensure that parents take part actively, such as in the forms of teacher-parent conversations or a mandatory parental assembly in every class<sup>11</sup>. However, studies also show that there is often a bias in schools towards migrated families that are wrongly portrayed as “different”, “not interested in education” or “not able to follow discussions in parents’ meetings” so they are sometimes not adequately addressed in schools<sup>12</sup>. This wrong perspective is also one of the reasons why we decided to fo the PARENTable project in Germany to strengthen communication between newly migrated parents and teachers. For this, first, it is important to look closer at the perspective of both newly migrated parents and school educators.

### EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY MIGRATED PARENTS WITH SCHOOLS

In Germany, we interviewed in total eighteen parents, most of them in Berlin and two in the surrounding of Schwäbisch Gmünd. Moreover, our partner Back on Track e.V. conducted weekly parental cafés during their children’s mentoring program with newly migrated parents. In addition, notes were taken by the consultants at Back on Track e.V., who advise migrated parents in case their children face problems at school were included in our work. The parents we interviewed came from Syria, Jordan, Ghana, and India and had been in Germany for 3 up to 10 years.

In the beginning, we asked about their feelings when entering a German school for the first time. Some of the parents we interviewed had been teachers themselves in their respective home countries. One mother that had a vast teaching experience in primary school and secondary school in Syria told us:

*Whenever I enter a German school I have two feelings: The first one is, that I remember my own days at school. How I liked to go to school. The second one is, I remember, how it was like to be somebody responsible at school. Both feelings are positive. The first day at school with my daughter was indescribable. Awesome. A new step in our life and the life of our daughter. (Parent, Germany)*

Another mother, who had been a teacher of mathematics, physics, and chemistry and used to work at UNRWA schools and before that in public schools, had very different feelings related to the entry of the German school. She said:

*My first feeling was, I was kind of afraid from this place. But I told myself, I was determined to go through this because my children have the right to have a decent education and they deserve a chance like everybody else. (Parent, Germany)*

Sometimes the process of getting enrolled in school is also connected to structural problems. One mother told us, that she had to enroll her daughter in a school far away from their home. She still brought her there every day to guarantee the education of her child:

*In October, my children got access to the education system. My son in kindergarten and my daughter in a so-called “welcome class” (language preparation class). Unfortunately, we could not find a school close to our place. We were living in Lichtenberg. I had to take my daughter to Neukölln every day in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. It took me between 3½ and four hours every day to get her there and pick her up. (...) Later we moved to a refugee shelter in Neukölln to stay there until my daughter finishes her welcome class there. (Parent, Germany)*

The so-called welcome classes that the mother spoke of are separated classes in regular schools only for children that have migrated to Germany recently. The idea behind it is to guarantee special support, especially in terms of language learning. But they are controversial. One mother who had been a teacher of English at the Institute for Teachers Education in Syria and after this taught English and didactics of English at Damascus University, was very unhappy with the progress that the daughter of her partner made in a welcome class:

*She has been to a welcome class for two years now. Yesterday she brought her marks. Her reading skills in German are still on A2 level. She has been to this class for two years and within these two years, I did not see her read for 5 minutes. She comes back from school and we ask her, do you have homework. She says: „No, I don’t. They did not give us homework.” She does not bring her books home.*

*When her father goes to ask the school they say: „She is excellent. No problem at all. She is doing fine, she does everything demanded from her.”*

*But within these whole two years, she did not learn German well. She speaks ok, but when it comes to reading, writing, grammar she does not have a good level at all. I even think that she got her B-1level by copying it from her friends. (Parent, Germany)*

Also, she mentioned that she felt isolated from the rest of the parents and the school activities that were planned for parents:

*We were not invited to a parent’s assembly or other activities in school even once. They have cultural events sometimes. I guess, that parents in general are invited. We asked her: Didn’t you get an invitation for us to attend? She said: No. Then I heard other parents were invited. I don’t know if she was hiding this from us or we were really not invited. (Parent, Germany)*

This was more often the case that parents told us that they felt marginalized in cultural evenings or during parent’s assembly.

Other parents we interviewed had a productive, friendly exchange with the teachers of their children. A Gambian father of three children in Baden Württemberg mentioned that the teachers communicate in a friendly and understanding way with him:

*They’re really decent people and they’re there because it’s not easy to fit in and often when I have questions, they know I don’t understand a lot so they help me with a lot of things. So, I find that they take the time to help me to behave well, to understand well, for example the children’s homework, because with the language it’s not easy. Also, with some children we realized that there is a program at kindergarten or at school, it’s nice to have people walking in and talking, really nice. (Parent, Germany)*

Usually, parents and teachers meet at regular parent assemblies. There is also the possibility to ask for special teachers’ appointments to discuss the development of the child. Many of the parents we interviewed were very eager to contribute to and be up to date on the development of their children. One mother told us, how she actively asks for appointments:

<sup>11</sup><https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule/gute-schule/mitwirkung-von-schuelern-und-eltern/>

<sup>12</sup>Gomolla, M. (2009). Elternbeteiligung in der Schule. In: Fürstenau, S., Gomolla, M. (eds.) Migration und schulischer Wandel: Elternbeteiligung. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. [https://doi.org/2\\_9-91487-531-3-978/10.1007](https://doi.org/2_9-91487-531-3-978/10.1007)



*For my son, I stay in contact with the teacher. That means in each semester I ask for an appointment with the teacher – in addition to the appointment the school organizes for the parents every semester. I want to follow up how he does. And of course, if I meet the teacher alone I can understand more about his situation. She knows that my German is not so good so she tries to speak slowly and when there is an expression I do not understand we look it up on the internet. The second teacher has some empathy for me but the first one did not at all. The first one, even she did not want me to attend parents' assemblies. She told me, I will write you, about what we discussed and what was the outcome. (Parent, Germany)*

Unfortunately, she was not the only mother that felt excluded from her child's development in school by one of the teachers. A mother that has got a bachelor's degree from the faculty of Education with a specialization in class teaching and English and has worked in schools for four years and in private tutoring at home for three years felt similarly:

*Every mother wants her children to be very good and their grades to be high but unfortunately because of Corona we are not allowed to meet the teachers even to be in school. We have to wait outside when we want to bring our children also because of the language sometimes I feel they don't like to speak with us or maybe they have the feeling that I am a mother who can't teach her daughter or doesn't care about her. This thing is wrong. I think they (sorry for telling you that) they mean we don't understand anything and this education is not ours and we are still not able to explain it to our children. (Parent, Germany)*

Another mother was very happy to present herself in the parent's meetings because her daughter has become very successful in school:

*And now when I attend a parents' meeting in her school, I feel proud to introduce myself as her mother. I feel respected, because she is successful. And now that I learned some German I introduce myself I say: I am a teacher of physics and chemistry and I can feel their astonishment and how this changes their view towards me. (laughs). I would like to go back to my son's school and have an internship there so they could see I am not less than they are. Their view on us was wrong. I can be in the same place like you and your son could be in my son's place. And I would ask them, would you like your son being treated this way? But they did not accept me. (Parent, Germany)*

There are also challenges for parents related to understanding the new school system. Confronted with this some cannot accompany their child as they would like to. The mother and philosophy teacher told us that for her this was very stressful:

*My daughter does not have any problems at school, neither learning problems nor social problems. (...) Only we need to understand some things related to marks. It's very different here. At the beginning when my daughter entered school I was very stressed. I wanted to control everything and I couldn't. Here the first grade is mixed with the second grade. I did not understand, how they learn, because they have different levels. (...) (Parent, Germany)*

What was also mentioned in the interviews was the anger parents felt, when teachers tried to convince them that their children would never make it to high school but should rather go for vocational training – even years before approaching the 10th grade in the first place.

In the final event, which was held in Stuttgart in June 2022, one of the parents who also participated in a workshop said:

*My son did not finish school. We did not understand the school system and after some months he spent in a welcome class, he was sent to tenth grade right away, because he was already 15 years old. He is very intelligent but he had*

*missed four years of education in Syria. So he was not prepared. But nobody asked us about that. So he did not pass the exam and dropped out of school. We were in shock. (...) I wish I had known more about the school system back then. (Parent, Germany)*

This was underlined by the head of Back on Track e.V. who had made similar experiences with schools. Not only once, she recalled, she was invited to explain the school system to parents of migrated children in middle school (7th to 10th grade). When starting to explain the high school system (the so-called 'Oberstufe or Sekundarstufe II), i.e. 11th to 12th grade, she was stopped by the teacher.

*There is no need for that. The children of these families will not make it to high school anyway. (Teacher, Germany)*

She recalled one teacher saying.

*What does this teacher know about the school system in our home country to decide that? (Parent, Germany)*

one of the parents who attended said.

It seems that there is a gap between the impressions parents and teachers have about the prospective educational careers of newly migrated children particularly from Syria and beyond and this has an impact on the communication between each other. This said, our interviews also highlighted that it depended highly on the individual teacher how much transparent interaction there was between teachers and parents.

## **EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL EDUCATORS WITH NEWLY MIGRATED FAMILIES**

In general, in Germany, teachers, parents, and schools work together to integrate children into schools as fast as possible. A teacher in preparatory classes explained her experience as follows:

*So far, like from the social worker as well as from the school there was always a lot of effort put in, that the children quickly come to school, Mr. XY was at that time still principal and Mrs. XY as a secretary, there was always a lot of (...) appointments – not like the everyday business but these were then like extra appointments, where they take time, sitting down with the parents, that was then also often like that one still had a second appointment, when I was still working as a social worker at the district office, the preparatory classes (VKL) were being prepared and the VKL teachers sat down together and made an appointment, which was usually in the first week, how long did your child go to school, what kind of school did your children attend, what is their previous knowledge, in Arabic for example, or does your child know English, or then they looked accordingly, what is the appropriate class, where is the child then in good hands. (Teacher, Germany)*

She also stated that it was important for them as educators to know about the previous education of the child and she explained that they exchanged the information in appointments with the parents before the start of school. In these appointments, they asked about the child's life story and which school the child went to so that they could individually support the child. She was very in favor of this procedure. She emphasized the importance of these meetings because the children's previous experiences very much impacted their performance at school:

*Okay, so that was very much dependent on their pre-school education, so what kind of school they had been to before, young people or children who had already been to school in Syria, for example, and perhaps had also attended something like a secondary school there or had graduated from high school or had been to high school or were about*

*to graduate from high school, they then naturally, so I'd say, so I always said they were rockets (laughing), they always progressed very quickly, for example, I didn't have them in class for long, they were very ambitious, wanted to progress very quickly and wanted to achieve a lot here, so it always depended on that you always noticed that there was always a lot of motivation at home and the parents also called again and again and asked how it is going, how is my child's progress and is it going well and so on. (Teacher, Germany)*

The children's experience of multiple school systems is not just a challenge for the teachers and students to overcome. The differences, for example in the student-teacher relationship, bear chances or advantages for teachers. As an example, the teacher said that in her time in the preparatory classes, she and her colleagues were treated with lots of respect, compared to the teachers in the regular classes:

*And as far as the teachers are concerned, well, that was always so funny because I always said to my colleague that we have the advantage that all the students in our school here, in our class were very respectful towards teachers and so I'd say concerning our German students whether with migration background or without there you could notice that the teacher often, our colleagues, had to fight, like this yes let's say, respect or decency towards the teacher that was sometimes difficult, we were also a "hotspot school" and you noticed this sometimes. [...] That had somehow become a part of everyday life that teachers were partly insulted or problems gave or like you have nothing to say to me, who do you think you are, like that, well, I wouldn't say every day, but that's pretty much the way it was sometimes and in our classes it was like it, I got a flower to the day of the teacher and I did not know at all that there is a day of the teacher and yes those were things like we are so grateful and you give us so much and there was already this respect for the teachers was already there, that one could not compare now with our normal pupils, exactly. And also from the parents. (Teacher, Germany)*

In Germany, the common procedure for communication between parents and the school is the organization of parent meetings. In these meetings teachers and parents communicate about the child's development in school, their behavior, and eventually problems. A teacher reported about the procedure in her school:

*So with students where there were problems, there were of course then appointments, but so standard were every four five months, one has made an appointment to report about the current status, and then so I'd say sometimes as it is also with our German students so, if there were reports to the half-year or to the final year then these quite normal parent meetings, as it just runs, but there were in between as far as I can remember that were so four or five appointments in the year already, that we then discussed with the pupils, the change, what's different as now in normal classes, so if there now a pupil was quite diligent and after three months one has noticed for example, he comes now in the "preparatory class" 2, then one has called the parents, one has made an appointment and one has said okay now her child will come in the next stage, in the next class, it will work like this and that. Or if you had a student, where you noticed, there is just not much happening, who has been with us in class for a long time, then you also made an appointment to see, what could it be, so not only problems, but simply also difficulties, as far as the grades are concerned or that you noticed, the students are not progressing, so as far as the performance level is concerned. (Teacher, Germany)*

In her specific school, they had few problems communicating between multiple languages. There were teachers with multilingual backgrounds. Also, they had interpreters at hand, from the city administrations as well as from NGOs. According to the teacher, one or two weeks ahead of the meeting it was always manageable to get an interpreter in the required language.

Sometimes the communication between parents and teachers is influenced by different school systems that parents have experienced. An Arabic-speaking teacher from a preparatory class, that has a lot of insight into the school systems in Arab countries, especially Syria said:

*Well, basically in the Arab countries [...] I give my child in school and then like the teacher takes care of everything and in Arab countries, for example, school system is called education, so the child is also educated in school, so to speak, and then the teacher has a very big burden, so to speak, and that is quite different here in Germany and that is what also collides a bit, I'd say, where you have to look, we have a different mission here in Germany than in Syria, for example, but the parents were able to adapt very quickly and say okay we think that's great but that's just the way it is, this image of teachers is very different in the Arab countries, so they have a lot of respect for teachers and they are very highly regarded and there are also so many proverbs and so you can just see that, you would never dare to just answer the teacher stupidly or something. (Teacher, Germany)*

In school activities, some teachers would like to have more involvement from the migrated parents. One teacher, who was working in a practice-oriented secondary school, told us that parents would only intervene if there were difficulties:

*I think that some people from the countries of origin have already noticed that it is simply usual for parents to have contact with the school, because it is about problems and not about advice, support or other stories. That was for me a realization of where a lot is at. That parents don't even have the idea of communicating with teachers about normal things; what can be done to help my child learn to read better or anything else, and what support options are available. (Teacher, Germany)*

Moreover, a teacher from preparatory classes observed that in her school there was only a little networking between the parents. Asked for the reason, she assumed:

*I think it's a bit of convenience, it's working you know on its own, um, yes, so I think it's also a cultural thing because this school system simply runs differently here, so here you demand the parents, you expect the parents to get involved or so, for example, with parent representatives or parent speaker and so on, that doesn't exist at all in Syria, for example. So the parents send their children to school, they do their thing at school, come home, do their homework, then you look after it and then it's good, so you don't have to get involved as parents to any great extent or network or whatever and I think it's simply the case that they have brought this with them and I don't know whether this will perhaps be better with the next generation or that they will then be better because they went to school here, but at the moment it's the case that this is not the case. (Teacher, Germany)*

Besides, one obstacle might be cultural barriers or stereotypes. In Germany, we heard some preservation from teachers that migrated families would be "culturally" very different. A teacher for example said the following:

*Yes of course, there are worlds colliding, depending on where the parents and the children come from. We see that. So in the first years there were a lot of refugees from Syria, parents with children, the whole families or from Afghanistan and so on and there are of course big language barriers. And of course, there are also cultural barriers. So there are quite a few things that are first scanned there and then. Yes, but then you also get into conversation. (Teacher, Germany)*

All in all, we had positive reports on the relationship between teachers and newly migrated parents. The preparatory class teacher said that her key to a productive relationship was to be solution-orientated in communication situations:

*I think we always found good solutions quickly when we sat down with the parents and showed that we accept the culture and that we understand the parents and how we can help them, you now find a solution, so this solution-oriented way has always been very good, it was always appropriate and has always contributed very well to a solution.*  
(Teacher, Germany)

In general, we concluded, it is very much dependent on the teachers and their openness and commitment to include refugee parents. But it must also be said that resources have of course an impact. If teachers and schools are overwhelmed with additional tasks like corona management and an additional inflow of students, the school system is not prepared for, this openness and commitment may fall victim to sheer exhaustion.

But in a system that is under stress, children and their parents drop out of sight. Throughout the project, this could be seen clearly. While there was a lot of interest by schools, teachers, and other school-related institutions at the beginning of 2020, the willingness to take part in workshops and training two years into the pandemic and with the influx of more refugee children from Ukraine, this interest was almost reduced to zero – although the need for improved instruments in teacher-parents relation was as high as ever.

### PARENTABLE-WORKSHOP IN BERLIN

Our workshop took place in Berlin in February 2022 in Refugio in Neukölln, which is an encounter place run by the Berliner Stadtmission where students and refugees live and work together. The workshop took place from Thursday 17th to Saturday 19th<sup>13</sup>.

For the workshop, we gathered 7 newly migrated parents and 4 teachers. Moreover, our European PARENTable team was present. Due to the vast contacts of Back on Track e.V. to newly migrated families, it was easy to find parents who were interested in taking part in the three-day workshop. Most of the parents who took part came from Syria, with 4 women and 3 men. All of them had come from Syria to Germany in 2015 or later and all of them had experiences with welcome classes and the transition into regular classes. Most of them had children of different ages and therefore also had different experiences in different schools and grades.

We reached the teachers through contacts with local schools and through the “Institut für Sprachbildung”, which is attached to the Berlin administration, and spread the invitation for the workshop among teachers working in welcome classes. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, only four teachers were able to attend.

The workshop in Berlin consisted of different sessions such as identity and self-esteem in parenting, mutual attitudes and expectations of teachers/parents, multilingualism, successful communication, stress, trauma, and coping, and a session about anti-bias. The workshop turned out highly successful. Parents and teachers shared many stories. The most impressive story maybe left most of the participants in tears, as one of the parents shared her experience of losing her 7-year-old boy on his way to school to a sniper in the city of Homs. She mainly talked about this, because she wanted to explain, how she overcame this trauma, but also that it took her a long time and that she was not always able to support her other children, because she was not stable herself. This had a deep impact on teachers, who said, that they often tend to think, that parents are not interested in school but they hardly know about the hardships parents go through.



Another interesting experience was about bias when participants were asked to exchange views on the children's books they read when they were children and the impact they had on stereotypes. In one group a teacher told the parents, that she did not know if this was possible, because she supposed they did not have any children's books anyway. This led to an outcry from the Syrian parents who had read almost the same books the teacher herself had read, like “Robinson Crusoe” or books by Enid Blyton.

But also the parents had new information about the situation of teachers, who they thought to be economically well off. Talking about basic needs they learned, that some of the teachers had only limited contracts and did not at all feel economically safe.

Accordingly, both parents and teachers felt positive about the workshop. One of the most impressive remarks was, that some parents said, that they felt relieved because this was the first time in Germany they felt listened to.

<sup>13</sup><https://refugio.berlin/>

## CASE STUDY IN ITALY (RENDE)

Valentina Zecca, Sara Mazzei

In Italy, we ran the PARENTable project's research in the region of Calabria (South Italy). It is an area characterized by small and medium-sized towns in which the policy of reception of foreigners is characterized by being spread throughout the territory, often in small villages. That's why we conducted our research in different areas of the region. We conducted some interviews in Rende, the city in which the university is located, and Cosenza, which is one of the bigger cities in the region. We also addressed a school in the city of Catanzaro, known for its focus on the integration of newly migrated children. In addition, we interviewed other migrated families living in small villages in the province of Cosenza.

We held our workshop in Rende at the University of Calabria in April 2022. It was attended by people coming from these different places.

In the following, we will portray our case study in Italy by

- (1) giving background information on school integration and parental involvement
- (2) portraying the experiences of newly migrated parents with schools
- (3) illustrating the perspective of teachers and other educators
- (4) summarizing our experience in the PARENTable workshop in Rende

### MIGRATION, SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ITALY

Italy is a new immigration country with an integrated and non-systematic support model for newly migrated pupils. In the last twenty years, Italy has become a country of immigration after having long been a country of emigration. This has profoundly changed Italian schools, which until recent decades, did not know the presence of migrant students (Catarci 2015)<sup>14</sup>.

The first refugee community to arrive in Calabria from the Middle East was the Kurdish community in the 1990s, with whom the first experiences of reception and inclusion were built, for example, in the small Village of Riace. Starting with experiences like this, a public national hosting system called **SIPROMI**<sup>15</sup> was built. When refugees arrive on the South-Italian coast, as in all the territory of the country, they enter asylum seeker centers, where they stay until their asylum claim is accepted or rejected. Reception centers are also responsible for providing social and educational support for refugees, aiming to find them housing and jobs. In 2011, the Italian government declared the so-called "North Africa Emergence" to cope with the high number of people arriving in south Italy through sea routes following the political turmoil in the MENA region. The emergency plan provided for the opening of extraordinary asylum-seeking centers (CAS), run by privates, since the public system for asylum seekers was under pressure. These centers often do not provide the same services as the public ones, creating inequality between refugees.

Today, Calabria is not the region with the highest number of refugees in Italy or Europe, despite the image given by the media, which often present the migration phenomenon as an emergency when in fact it is not. This is not to say that there are no logistic problems, but very often migrants arriving in Italy are just passing through and heading to other European countries. Many African people landing by sea, instead, do not obtain refugee status and have to leave the

<sup>14</sup> Catarci, Marco 2015, *Intercultural Education in the European context: Theories, Experiences, Challenges*; Ashgate Publishing.

<sup>15</sup> The system's name was SPRAR until 2020, therefore in the interviews it is possible to find both denominations.

country<sup>16</sup>. Most of the newly migrated pupils in the Italian schools came from East-Europe (46, 28%) and Arab countries, particularly Morocco (18%)<sup>17</sup>. In our project, we focused on migrants coming from Arab countries: Moroccans, who have been present in the area for longer, and the more recently present migrants from Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt arriving as asylum seekers.

The main challenge experienced in school inclusion policies and school-family relationships is that of language. The Italian law provides that pupils with a foreign background have to enroll in normal classes for up to 16 years, with their peers or at most in the next lower or upper class (Miur 2014)<sup>18</sup>. This inclusion in regular classes is not accompanied by systematic language support organized by the state, but each school tries to manage it, for example with additional Italian lessons provided during the hour of religion or other subjects. It is worth saying that this is not mandatory for the schools, so it depends on single headmasters and teachers. In the case of refugees, the reception centers often offer a service of cultural mediation and language support for pupils and families, but it is not a duty neither of the scholastic institution nor the centers. Pupils and families hosted by centers that do not provide this service, and newly migrated pupils outside the system of asylum hardly can benefit from cultural and linguistic mediation, except when voluntary associations or migrant communities themselves act for free to provide them. On their side, teachers try to relate with families through periodical meetings, using new communicative tools, some of them official, such as scholastic online platforms, and others more informal, such as WhatsApp groups.

### EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY MIGRATED PARENTS WITH SCHOOLS

In Calabria, we interviewed seven parents before the workshop. They came from different countries, mainly from Syria and Morocco, and arrived in Italy between five and ten years ago. Some families had left their home countries a couple of years before, and lived in Libya in between but then decided to migrate to Italy due to the civil war that started in 2011, mainly to allow their children a better future. In Italy, they registered with the reception centers CAS and SPRAR and then later settled in small towns and villages in Calabria, while their children started to go to school. We managed to organize the interviews also with the help of volunteer associations that work with them.

From these interviews emerged, in general, that the first contact with the school was good, as an art teacher and a mother of four children from Syria told us. However, due to language issues they needed a translator:

*The first meeting we had was when we registered our children at school. I did not know anything, I did not understand Italian, but there was a person from the CAS reception organization that hosted us and she was the one who talked to the teachers. (Parent, Italy)*

Indeed, language was one of the largest challenges in the communication between newly migrated families and schools. For this, the operators of the reception centers CAS and SPRAR (now called SIPROMI) intervened in schools and helped with translation. Most of the parents told us how helpful cultural mediators working for CAS and SPRAR were in all aspects of interpretation and orientation in their beginning in the Italian school system. The mediators, moreover, encouraged parents to study the Italian language themselves as a Moroccan mother of three children explained:

*And also the SPRAR project workers helped us a lot, not only with school. They encouraged me to study; I took the A1 and A2 level of Italian language. That I learn the language is important not only for me but also for my children. So I can help them with their homework. I studied French in my country, I got my diploma and I did one year of university. (Parent, Italy)*

Like her also other parents learned sufficient Italian to communicate in school, instead, others do not succeed in this task, as a father of four children, who fled from Syria in 2012 initially to Libya and then in 2017 to Italy, told us:

*No, to tell you the truth, I don't know so much Italian. And, with work, I don't have time to learn the language. And then I didn't study in school a lot. (Parent, Italy)*

It is possible to note the difference with the mother of the previous quote. She has already studied in her country at a university and already knew a Romance language as French. Her background helped her to cope with the challenges of learning Italian when she arrived there. The father of the last quote instead did not have this personal preparation, and, in addition, he needed to work most of the time. It is possible to argue that the asylum system does not offer the same possibility to all refugees regardless of their status, but instead the possibility to succeed or not depends highly on personal resources. This said, he also said it was difficult for him to meet Italian people:

*You know who is a foreigner and arrives in a European country, it takes time before people know him well, talk to him. In Arab countries, it is different. It takes less time. People are more socially open. (...) Here, you cannot stabilize in one or two years, it takes longer before people know you, know that you are a good person. (Parent, Italy)*

This was also mentioned in other interviews. Parents reported that their contact with other Italians was limited. Neighbors in the villages in which they lived were generally friendly but kept a distance influencing the learning of the language, as it is more difficult to learn a language that one does not practice regularly. However, there were also a few exemptions and some parents told us that they had close contact with other mothers from schools, who would even give them a ride sometimes and so on. For parents, thus it would be fruitful to have more exchange between newly migrated families and Italian-speaking families.

Concerning the contact with teachers, parents gave us overall positive feedback. However, the kind of involvement they had was different. One parent said that they talked to the teachers twice per year and did not feel addressed very often, others reported that they had very good contact, particularly before and after the pandemic as another interview-partner told us:

*Every day, before the pandemic, I went to bring them and pick them up for school, and I met the teacher who told me what they had done, what their homework was. She was a very nice teacher. She tried to make us understand, to help us. (Parent, Italy)*

The time of the Pandemic was a big challenge for newly migrated parents since they already had more difficulties in contacting due to language barriers. But it also brought with it new ways of communication which made it easier for newly migrated parents. Many reported about WhatsApp groups that were formed between parents and in which our interviewed parents felt more at ease to take part in the conversation, as another mother, whom we interviewed during Corona, explained:

*Now with the corona crisis, communication takes place through the internet, through the parents' group on WhatsApp. Whatever, whatever problem, we inform the parent class representative we elected, and she/he is responsible for informing the teachers of our communications. (Parent, Italy)*

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/dati-statistici> <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/pubblicazioni>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/2223566/20182/linee\\_guida\\_integrazione\\_alunni\\_stranieri.pdf/5e41fc3-48c2-68a-17ae1-75b5da6a5566?t=1564667201890](https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/2223566/20182/linee_guida_integrazione_alunni_stranieri.pdf/5e41fc3-48c2-68a-17ae1-75b5da6a5566?t=1564667201890)

Moreover, parents told us that they had often phone numbers from teachers and talked to them on the phone.

An aspect that deserves consideration is discrimination and stereotypes, which were reported quite frequently in the interviews we did. A mother of three daughters from Syria told us that she had to deal with many stereotypes when she entered an Italian school:

*Both parents and teachers. They always observe me; they observe how I behave with my daughter. They think we are from another universe. (...) When we say: "we come from Syria," they think it is another world, they think we go on camels, we come on camels. They have the wrong idea about us, really. They think we come from a backward country... Thank God, we have seen so many things but they think we have come on camels, that we do not know anything. I remain silent, I prefer to remain silent, I don't need to speak...but if I knew the language well I would answer in detail. (Parent, Italy)*

In the opinion of interviewed parents, these stereotypes mainly come from media coverage about the Muslim world, since people in South Italy are often not used to a multicultural environment. In a way, it is also paradoxical because foreign parents of Arab origin have often emphasized that their culture is quite similar to the one in Italy, but when they communicate, they do not always have the words to express what they think. Stereotypes would not only be limited to parents but also had a direct effect on children. This is what a Moroccan mother and cultural mediator told us:

*The child is given the label of the one who has to adapt, who is lacking and therefore at a disadvantage. The things he brings with him are not valued. His experience abroad is not valued. Instead, it is necessary to know it, give it the right value and integrate things together. (Parent, Italy)*

Like her, many parents wished to include more diversity aspects in the classroom and even to include and value the knowledge of other cultures.

Regarding the Italian educational system, parents seem to be quite satisfied. In general, they often felt that the system was easier than in their country of origin, for example in Syria and Morocco where school puts more pressure on children. What they portrayed positively was that parents would be more involved in school, as a mother from Morocco explained:

*In the Moroccan system, the teacher doesn't establish a strong relationship with the parents. (...) Here, I always ask the teachers how my daughters are doing, but even without asking, it is the teachers that inform me, they follow the children at home, they talk to the mother on the phone. (Parent, Italy)*

Despite these examples, in general, parents were satisfied with a regular relationship with the teachers, something to which they were not used in their countries of origin. The biggest challenge for them, however, was not the education system in general, but the difficult economic situation in the Italian region where they lived, as another mother told us:

*It is a good system, yes. But unfortunately for the Italian people, there are few work opportunities... you find a population that thinks of nothing else but emigration. And many people stop studying because they think about leaving. (Parent, Italy)*

Refugee parents experienced the same problem as local parents such as the lack of job opportunities and the difficulty in improving one's economic condition in the future. This challenge sometimes slowed down the integration process, as parents think that maybe they would like to move on to other places in Italy or Europe after receiving their documents, so they do not engage a lot in socializing and settling in. In general, however, parents said that their children were quite happy in school, especially after one or two years, when they learned the language better and got used to the new

environment. The language of origin however was not valued in school contexts. For parents, this was not necessarily important, as we can see from the answer a mother gave us when we asked if she wants that her children speak more Arabic:

*No, on the contrary. We want them to succeed in life. As for Arabic, it is enough that they can speak it with us. (Parent, Italy)*

It is worth saying that a scholastic environment that does not value pupils' knowledge of different languages could have affected their attitude towards their language of origin. Parents wanted their children to succeed particularly because they have lived through many difficulties, and the only languages that seem to be useful to succeed are the European ones.

Parents invested their hopes in their children's future, sometimes overloading them with expectations. A Syrian mother with three children told us:

*I mean, we've been through all these things, living abroad, the hard days, just for them, just for their children, so that they could achieve their goals, have a beautiful future, that's what we wish them. Just for them. For us it has gone, we do not have the chance to achieve anything anymore; our age does not allow us to do so. But they have the future ahead of them. They can do something. (Parent, Italy)*

Despite the difficulties, the limits of the scholastic system, and the problems and misunderstandings they face with some teachers, parents showed a very positive attitude towards schools and teachers. They appreciated the efforts made by the school staff to overcome the difficulties in including children and communicating with the family and tend to value their experience and that of their children positively. In general, parents shared educational goals with teachers and aimed for good social inclusion and preparation for the professional world for their children. They thus were willing to look over limitations and shortcomings to focus instead on the positive aspects of the educational experience of their children.

## EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL EDUCATORS WITH NEWLY MIGRATED FAMILIES

The teachers and educators we interviewed came mostly from a full-time school in Catanzaro, which offers support for pupils to study in the afternoon, the possibility to eat in the canteen, and to have accommodation. We interviewed also a teacher of the Italian language who worked first in reception centers and the CPIA (center for adult education) and then in school. A focus group was carried out with the teachers of a school in Rende and we had meetings on the topic with four headmasters in different localities.

Overall, educators expressed to have a positive relationship with the migrated parents as well as with the pupils and they have a feeling of respect towards each other. However, one teacher had concerns that there are many students with diverse needs, and that it was difficult to meet all of them.

Teachers' expectations towards parents mainly concerned the involvement in school-affairs and the preparation and education of children to participate in active communication. In Italy, schools use unofficial messenger groups to communicate with parents and also for communication among parents themselves. Participation in these messenger-groups is expected. A daily opportunity for communication between educators and parents is created by the fact that there is a legal requirement for the teachers to hand the pupils over directly to their parents as an educator in the afterschool states:

*At the end of the day, when we deliver the children to the families, we have this moment of exchange, of dialogue with the parents. Therefore, we can say that instead of waiting for the meeting with the parents, we have it almost daily with everyone. Those who come first can come to class to talk, so there is this continuous exchange within the boarding school. (Teacher, Italy)*

During the pandemic, teachers even realized that they had a more important role in the education of newly migrated children, as a 52-year teacher explained:

*We did distance learning with them, then telephone support and via WhatsApp, because, especially for a child whose mother speaks Italian but she didn't read and write it... The first thing she said to me at the meeting,: "Teacher, I rely on you because I can't read and I can't write in Italian, so I'm not able to help my child at home. And so I ask you for more attention, because if he comes home with something to do, I am not able to make him do it". And so even during the lockdown, there was this phone contact and via WhatsApp to help him with his homework. (Teacher, Italy)*

This teacher has taken up the request for help of a mother who admits her limits in helping her children with homework during the pandemic. Therefore, the teacher made a special effort to keep in touch with her, by all the means available. This is why, in general, teachers saw communication between them and the parents as crucial to react to the children appropriately, as a young educator from Catanzaro says:

*On all children [...] it is always good for us to know something more so that we can act better. The reality of families escapes us, or at least we know what they tell us. It would be better to have a °360 view of the children, not only what we see at school but also what is behind it. This is the only way to intervene. School is effective when it intervenes on everything, not only on the teaching part, but also on personal growth, on everything. (Teacher, Italy)*

This educator complained about the lacking knowledge they have about the daily life of newly migrated pupils and their families. Surely, a lack of communication can lead to misconceptions about the other. A common misconception of teachers is the conclusion that parents would not be interested in the success of their children in school, because they seem not to be involved as much as required.

This is what another teacher also told us:

*Look, for some people I think it is frustrating not being able really to have an exchange of views, a dialogue with the school and having to recourse to their children often, but these are the parents who care the most about their children's education. There are other parents who do not live it with particular concern, in the sense that they do not have... they are not particularly interested in their children's education, but not because they do not care about their children, because of a forma mentis, they are not used to it. (Teacher, Italy)*

As the interviews with parents have shown, there might be various reasons for the absence of parents, among those language difficulties that often leave parents speechless and ashamed because they can not adequately address teachers as they would in their languages of origin.

The better way to solve this problem and have successful communication was, for many teachers, to rely on the help of a cultural and linguistic mediator. Mediators are specialized pedagogics that is trained in mediation in different scholastic situations. They function as a bridge to overcome the communication gap between educators and parents. For example, they can explain the teachers' point of view to the parents; help them understand the new scholar system, and requirements, and help convey the standpoint of the parents to the teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers reported that there were no mediators in their schools, due to a lack of financial resources. Moreover, even teachers were often

in precarious employment situations, where they feared for their contracts not to be prolonged. In many situations, where there are students or families in need of support, the support depended on single people. Teachers individually committed to helping families, without getting extra financial resources from the state:

*But, as external help, we don't have any. In school there is no mediator, the mediator is private, we don't have anything... we don't even have help from politics, from local authorities, zero zero zero my dear ones... that is if we succeed only with our strength, with conscience and common sense, this is what sends us forward, otherwise nothing would be done... (Teacher, Italy)*

Teachers did thus their best to deal also with situations that multicultural school contexts bring up but felt like they can only scratch the surface and deal with the biggest issues. This is because they had so many different topics to deal with and no support from the State. A retired teacher from Catanzaro who worked in primary school for over 40 years talked about the efforts that teachers make to deal sensitively with diversity in schools:

*We often do research on books and talk about them with the children, about the differences with other countries. We talk about it at their level, but it is clear that this is basic information like this...for example we say "we live in one way, they live in another, but we are all here together, a small society, a small community". We do it spontaneously. However, a mediator would be an important figure, of course, and we do not have one! (Teacher, Italy)*

This said, we also observed some preconceptions of teachers against migrated parents. We observed that certain visible cultural markers such as the headscarf were seen as indicators of a perceived higher or lesser education of the parents. In addition, there was a tendency to interpret certain behaviors or situations through the cultural lens, dismissing other reasons, such as economic, social, or personal ones. In general, you could see many fears that may result also on media portrayals e.g. about Muslim families as a teacher states:

*As far as expectations are concerned, I would like a total integration of these people, of these families, that is to say, just as an enrichment, because in my opinion diversity is an enrichment, it should not be seen as an exclusion. Their culture, way of doing things, food, should also enrich our Italian culture in some way and it would be beautiful. My fear is at the same time precisely this culture, that they have a closed mentality (...). (Teacher, Italy)*

Despite the positive attitude, this teacher showed towards cultural diversity, in the end, she was worried about a mentality that she did not clearly understand and considered closed. Another teacher also mentioned that she would like to receive more information about the families:

*Especially their culture and traditions, so as to be closer and understand the child more. Also at family level, what is the relationship between husband and wife, if there is a relationship of prevalence of one over the other or if it is an equal relationship. (Teacher, Italy)*

In general, we observed in the interviews that the focus was on the gender roles in couples since there might be the stereotype that couples from regions outside of Europe would be less equal regarding the woman-man relationship. This was however contrasted by the many experiences that Italian teachers had with immigrant mothers who engaged quite strongly in schools.

Finally, a good knowledge of Italian is seen as the key element to communication. An educator that studied law and works in a school since 2008 states:

*We do not want them to speak Italian for better or worse, but because living here in Italy all doors open if you can communicate. You have to know Italian, because it is transversal to all disciplines. So if you do not understand Italian, you don't even understand the text of a problem, and this is the problem, if you don't understand... It is not limited only to one subject but to living [...] While in a fifth grade I can relate directly to the child for some things, in a first or second grade I need the parent, so if the parent does not have this fluency with the Italian language it is clear that the problem will arise. (Teacher, Italy)*

Some interview partners saw the different family language as a key-deficit of the migrated children, as an obstacle to their success in school rather than an advantage as this educator that worked in various schools:

*They realize that they are not on a par with the others, especially the language, the language barrier. Because at home, unfortunately, parents speak the language of origin, so they live these two worlds... I think this is a difficulty, this separation in the language; living 8 hours at school with one language, living 8 hours at home in their own language. (Teacher, Italy)*

An attitude like this could influence parents to pressure their children to speak only Italian at home, but it could not lead to the desired results and also be counterproductive. Children could feel forced by teachers and parents to abandon their language, with a negative consequence on their general learning. Aware of this, other teachers emphasized the advantage that migrated children had in language lessons, compared to children who spoke only Italian:

*I think I do not know, they are more advanced, even with English, they immediately absorb it and yet little children should assimilate English, but they have this predisposition in the language, in pronunciation. (Teacher, Italy)*

Finally, a teacher from the CPIA perceived a very high motivation in children.

*They certainly have the motivation to study, which others may not have, because they, especially those who have difficulties like this child, and like another child, feel the difference from others. So, when they receive a prize, like saying "you were very good, you read very well, the task you did is perfect", they are very happy, they jump for joy, because a little bit, having difficulties, they realize that they are not on a par with the others, maybe because of language barriers. (Teacher, Italy)*

In this quote, it becomes apparent, that teachers also realized that children are perceived as different. Here the teacher puts it mainly on language, but it might also have to do with stereotypes that we have discussed before.

When we came to the final question of what could be done to render communication with newly migrant families better, teachers again mentioned language as a key factor. A teacher had the idea to offer Italian language classes for parents at school even though he knew this was more a dream since it was hard in Italy to add some resources in the schools:

*Well, one thing that immediately came to my mind when I read about your project, is that the school must also do courses for parents, language courses, make our constitution to be known, know what country they are in, what is planned by us, what is forbidden, what is offered to them. And the language above all. Their request is to help these children because they are not successful with language at home. So if we can make them know the language, teach them to read and write, I believe that for them it would be an immense source of income, of integration in society, because they would have less differences with children who run fast in learning and, at the same time, less difficulties in the field of work, for anything, even to read a simple work contract that is done to them, to be able to understand what is offered to them. So, language courses for families, yes, and I believe that the school could succeed in this, help them. (Teacher, Italy)*

As we have seen, no one of the teachers and educators interviewed showed an openly and declared racist or discriminatory attitude towards foreign pupils and their parents. They consider themselves open-minded and tolerant and were often extremely engaged in assisting the parents. Some however might have had unconsciously discriminatory behaviors, on which they could work if the educational institution offered them professional training courses on the topic of multiculturalism. We have seen their goodwill in deal with foreign pupils and parents, therefore, the major limit is found in the lack of the necessary resources to improve inclusion in schools. There are no training courses for teachers to acquire the specialized knowledge to address the question. We have as well seen the lack of resources for internal cultural mediators specialized in education, or for suggested language courses of newly migrated parents. In general, the following will emphasize that a workshop bringing newly migrated parents and teachers together could also be a first step.

#### **PARENTABLE-WORKSHOP IN RENDE, APRIL 2022**

Our workshop took place in Rende in April 2022 at the University of Calabria. For the workshop, we gathered 7 newly migrated parents and 4 teachers and 3 other informal educators (students/interpreters).

We got in touch with the families (four mothers and the brother-in-law of one of them) through the associations that took care of their reception and integration in the area. They come from 3 different countries: Syria, Libya, and Morocco. Three teachers from two schools (one from Cosenza city and one from a surrounding town) participated in the workshop. The workshop in Rende consisted of six sessions regarding the following themes: mutual attitudes and expectations of teachers and parents, identity and self-esteem, how to establish successful communication, what is multilingualism and how it can be improved, how to cope with stress and trauma, what is bias and how can we improve an anti-bias school environment.

Parents and teachers shared many stories. They discussed episodes that happened in the school context, regarding in particular the relationship with other children and that with teachers and other parents. They discussed communication between children-parents-teachers, especially when the child is in a difficult or stressful situation, to maintain a positive attitude towards the child, which will support them and enable them to react to unforeseen events and difficulties.

The topic of multilingualism appeared to be a center of interest: the possibility of improving the mother tongue skills of children is felt to be an important opportunity that children should not miss and that would enrich the school context. The need to increase knowledge of different cultures in the school context also emerged as a topic strongly felt by both teachers and parents. One of the mothers in our workshop recounted a nice initiative taken by one of her daughter's teachers: each student had to present a lullaby from their culture of origin. In this way, an exchange was created that allowed the children to share something from their cultures. The desire to make oneself better known and to overcome stereotypes was another important focus of the workshop. This theme emerged in several sessions and was particularly deepened in the session about bias and anti-bias.

One of the teachers pointed out the importance of the topics addressed during the workshop underlying that, unfortunately, they are rarely the subject of specialized training inside the school context. The workshop took place in a very collaborative atmosphere and was successful in highlighting some issues of great importance and in raising awareness of the perspective of families of foreign origin, whose collaboration with schools – once the language barrier has been overcome – is an invaluable resource.





## CASE STUDY IN TURKEY (MUĞLA)

*Ayşe Rezan Çeçen Eroğul, Raşit Avcı, Senem Ezgi Vatandaşlar*

In Turkey, we engaged with PARENTable as Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University in Muğla, a city in the south-western corner of Turkey. Here, we conducted interviews with newly migrated parents and other family members as well as school counselors working with newly migrated children. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all but one of the interviews online.

Furthermore, we conducted a three-day workshop in Muğla in May 2022 bringing newly migrated parents and school psychological counselors together who had the possibility to exchange their experiences and views.

In the following we will portray our case study in Turkey by

- (1) giving background information on school integration and parental involvement
- (2) portraying the experiences of newly migrated parents with schools
- (3) illustrating the perspective of teachers and other educators
- (4) summarizing our experience in the PARENTable workshop in Muğla

### SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN TURKEY

According to the UNHCR<sup>19</sup>, Turkey hosts 3.685.839 million Syrian, 4.565 Iraqi, and 4.219 Afghan refugees and 162.760 Iraqi, 125.104 Afghan, and 24.300 Iranian asylum seekers as of February 2022. As for foreigners living in Turkey with a residence permit, 150.441 are Iraqi, 119.782 are from Turkmenistan, and 107.517 are Syrian, followed by Iran, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine respectively as of August 2022<sup>20</sup>. Muğla city center and its districts host migrants and refugees from all over the world due to their touristic as well as occupational opportunities. As of July 2022, 11.790 Syrians reside in Muğla<sup>21</sup>.

According to constitutional law, migrant and refugee children have the same educational rights as local children. It is therefore compulsory for all school-aged children to attend school. To support migrant and refugee children's school attendance, the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies provides a Conditional Cash Transfer for Education in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Red Cross, and UNICEF, funded by the EU, Norway, and the USA<sup>22</sup>.

Migrant and refugee children are included in the same schools and classrooms as Turkish students. If these students have some previous education from their country of origin, they take a test to determine which grade level they will be assigned to. Formal preparatory language education is usually unavailable. They are expected to learn Turkish as they attend the classes.

Turkish Ministry of National Education reported that there are 35.707 kindergartens, 442.817 primary schools, 348.638 elementary schools, and 938.138 high school students from Syria studying in Turkey as of June 2021<sup>23</sup>. In total, 938.138

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/03/2022/14/UNHCR-Turkey-Factsheet-February2022-.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izinleri>

<sup>21</sup> <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://ekoik.com/04/2022/turkiyedeki-cocuk-multecilerin-egitim-yoluyla-entegrasyonu-mumkun-mu/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>.

students attend school and 432.956 do not attend school even though they are school-age<sup>24</sup>. Nonattendance is caused by obstacles such as language barriers, difficulties in initial school registration, trauma, and discrimination<sup>25</sup>.

It has been reported that Syrian parents whose children are attending primary school believe that their inclusion in their children's school life is necessary; however, they have difficulties in taking part due to the language barrier, cultural differences, differences in educational systems, difficult work conditions, and financial problems<sup>26</sup>.

Parental involvement is perceived to be quite important in the Turkish education system but several drawbacks may prevent parents, especially migrant parents, from participating in their children's education. Even though there are several official incentives to bring schools and parents together, there are also obstacles caused by parents, teachers, schools, and the system. Some examples are parents being very busy with work and not having enough time to spare for communication with schools; teachers not trying too hard to contact parents, thinking this may damage their status as a teacher; schools not having room to host solely parent-school communications; the system not providing a standardized plan for parent-school communication<sup>27</sup>. Newly migrated parents might have additional difficulties caused by not speaking the language spoken at school, or having different cultural beliefs about their participation (such as the fear of being perceived as disrespectful). In this way, for us, it was important to learn more about the experience of newly migrated parents.

## EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY MIGRATED PARENTS WITH SCHOOLS

In Turkey, we talked to and interviewed 12 parents (7 mothers, 3 fathers, 1 uncle, and 1 elder sister) before the workshop. Most of them came from Syria and some of them came from Iraq; 5 to 8 years ago (as of 2020, when the interviews were conducted). We conducted all but one of the interviews online via Zoom and with translation assistance from ASAM (The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants). The parents that we interviewed in Turkey were very interested in the wellbeing of their children, their relationship with peers, and their development in school. They emphasized this on many occasions and showed their interest in different ways. One participant stated that they may have conflicts with their friends from time to time while the children are playing. She stated that her younger child did not understand this conflict, while the older child experienced distress and sadness. A father stated that he usually participates in the school-family interviews, the teacher has good communication with the student, the student talks with the psychological counselor, and there are occasional disagreements between friends, but this is due to daily routine problems (such as sharing the playground). It is seen that the teacher protects and supports them in these interactions, as one parent stated:

*Approximately %70 of the children at school are from Syria. When there is a problem, the teachers try to solve it immediately. There is no problem between teachers and children because the teachers communicate really well with the children. It is more often that the students have problems among each other. Even children from Syria have problems within each other at school, they have fights etc., at which point the teacher interferes immediately and tries to solve the problem. (Parent, Turkey)*

One participant stated that the student felt discrimination from time to time and this was mostly related to the language difference. A Syrian mother, who studied Literature and English and has got a very sensitive daughter, focused on the relationship between her daughter and her classmates:

<sup>24</sup> <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://archive.is/fFX5z>

<sup>26</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1441305>

<sup>27</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1627803>

*For me, the most important is her relationship with other children in her classroom. She is a really sensitive girl, she gets offended easily. So I try to solve these small issues between children like you know... I don't have any example in my mind but the other thing I ask her is how she is doing in her classes I mean, for example, I always ask the teacher to encourage her for studying, reading, homework, and stuff. Education in general is the most important issue. (Parent, Turkey)*

Another father also said that his top priority is the education of his children. He came eight years ago from Syria and works in every job that he can get. He was very satisfied with his children's education as he told us:

*This is the most important thing for me. I ask the children everyday what they have done that day and how they have been treated at school. For this, I am very thankful. There is nothing that I can complain. I'm very satisfied and happy about this. And when I ask for help about something the teachers are always very helpful and they do their best to help me. (Parent, Turkey)*

Many parents we interviewed gave the education of their children a very high priority. One participant stated that he liked the Turkish education system and that his children's academic success was good. He stated that there are overcrowded classes and interaction problems in Syria. He added that his children speak Turkish well and that he sometimes does not understand Arabic when communicating with his children, and that they get along better by speaking Turkish. A Syrian mother of seven children specified, what her motives were to concentrate on education:

*I want them all to be successful at school and graduate so that they do not experience the difficulties that we have experienced. (Parent, Turkey)*

Some parents did not like some aspects of the Turkish education system when compared with the Syrian one.

*School hours are very long in Turkey as compared to Syria. Here they go to school at 8 o'clock in the morning and I don't see them until 4 pm. When there are extra courses, they stay until 17:30. They are very confused, they don't have time to study, they go to sleep immediately. In Syria, students go to school at 07:30 and come back home at noon. They sleep and rest. The kids have time to study/work and rest. (Parent, Turkey)*

Most of the parents told us that they have a good relationship with the teachers. Also, some mentioned that they appreciated the way that teachers support their children and that many have a solution-orientated approach. This was also the case under pandemic- restrictions, as the single mother of an eleven-year-old girl told us:

*For example, teachers tried a lot to keep in touch with the children in corona time, so we have a good experience. And teachers, they are always sending us some homework, and encourage children to work and study at home. All the teachers, they are doing this in a really effective way I think. Even if it's not really, really effective like I mean in class lessons but still they keep in touch with the children which is really good. (Parent, Turkey)*

She was especially satisfied with a female teacher who she felt understood her condition as a single mother best. They had a friend-like relationship:

*For example, the first teacher was a female so she was always trying to support me more than the male one. She can understand how hard it is to be a mother and study at the same time and I am single. So she really supported me and she helped me a lot sometimes I feel that she is the mother of my daughter when I'm not here. I mean when she is in the school. She is a great person. (Parent, Turkey)*

The personal relationship between parents and teachers is very important for a successful collaboration. Many parents reported that teachers had a lot of empathy and personal involvement, but some parents have stated that they or their children have not been treated fairly by certain teachers. The single mother with the 11-year-old daughter told us the following story that happened in her daughters' class:

*One day, my daughter came and because of the political issues happening in that time in Turkey, the teacher talked about something and it's not appropriate to talk with children, for example, about Syrian children. And yeah, I found it really strange, like, how a teacher, you know he is a teacher and they are children and they know nothing about politics and he was talking about that in front of them. My daughter was really affected and she was crying "why we are Syrians, why we have to live here, why we have to hear such a thing from a teacher" because he is a teacher. If someone else, you can understand it but he is a teacher. And I found it really really weird. And I avoided talking to him in this issue because maybe things will take a different way and I didn't want to do this for my daughter, she is so sensitive and she gets offended easily as I told you. So I just ignored it. [...] Actually he said that.. it was a history lesson, he said like in the war the Turkish stand together against the enemy not like the Syrians who run away from their... And I was... My daughter asked me "mom why did we run away and why we are..." and she was really offended by this. (Parent, Turkey)*

She stated, that she didn't want her daughter to be labeled as "the Syrian" but recognized by her identity:

*Discrimination issue is the most important for me. I don't want my daughter to be discriminated by other children or by parents in the school. "okay this is the Syrian" I don't want this label, you know, "Syrian, Syrian". No I don't want this, for example. But actually it is widely used. I don't want my daughter to be known as a Syrian. I want her to be known by her name, by her own identity. Because you know between the children, this is not.. for me it must be not acceptable, even between grown-ups. But when it comes to children, it must be, like, we have to be more careful about this. (Parent, Turkey)*

A mother of five children, that came from Syria due to the war wished for more information about the situation of the Syrian people. She felt like the lack of knowledge led to a lot of problems for them:

*About the problems at school, when people talk about Syrians, how Syrians are, what they did; how do they know what a Syrian is and what they have gone through? This is what causes us trouble. (Parent, Turkey)*

One participant stated that it would be beneficial to improve family-school interaction a little more. She stated that she had to work and her husband was taking care of the little child, so they could not go to school enough, but some steps could be taken from school. He added that it would be good to support the quiz show with his eldest child and to accompany him or his wife. In another case, the little boy had to pay to take the exam, and they did not know about it. He stated that it would be better to give information about this and strengthen the interaction so that such a situation would not happen again.

One participant mentioned that their child had difficulties in online education after the Pandemic. She stated that she could not attend online classes, so she could not progress in her classes. She, who understood the subjects in face-to-face education before the pandemic, explained that when children stay at home, language problems increase and they start to fall behind in their lessons.

Other parents wished for more preparation for their children, especially in terms of learning Turkish before entering regular classes. Many parents told us also that they would wish for their children to be able to get language lessons in their mother tongue. The single-mother who studies literature thought that the school could also be helpful in the communication between migrants and locals:

*I would love my daughter to get Arabic classes, even if they are optional classes. It would be a really good idea. For example we can, in the school, maybe we can make some workshops for the parents, for example, to have a good communication between the migrants and the locals. Because sometimes there is kind of sensitive issues between the migrant parents and the others. The school can make a big role in this, to talk about the issues about immigrants in the school. (Parent, Turkey)*

## PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

In Turkey, our interviews were held with psychological school counselors. Seven Turkish school counselors participated in the educator interviews. Four of these psychological counselors work in primary school and three in secondary school. They have been working as school counselors for 5 to 24 years and stated that they have been working with refugee children for 1.5 to 8 years. They currently had 2 to 36 refugee children in their schools. They work in schools as sort of mediators in case of difficulties. The perspective is thus particular as one school counselor told us:

*Children are referred to me only when there is a problem so I know when they experience problems but about the positive things the teachers do not come to me and say "these students are so bright and their parents are supportive". (School Counselor, Turkey)*

One of the counselors stated that newly migrated parents sometimes hesitated to talk to the school counseling service:

*It's very rare, yes, it's really rare that they have educational concerns about the child and come to the interview about it or fall on these issues. Or maybe they also have a trust problem, of course. They are being invited by, you know, an official institution and think that maybe this is a very bad thing. They see us as an organ of the state as an official institution. They wonder if something they would say will lead to something about immigrants, yes, trust is very difficult. That's why they usually come and talk about the issues that need to be discussed. For example, I am calling to meet. I'm introducing myself; I'm talking about myself. For example, I ask if they have anything to add. They do not add, they do not make a request. I mean, we usually don't see it, say thank you, and go without a question. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

School counselors observed that children had difficulties learning Turkish. In their view, learning Turkish is related to adapting to school, and especially high language skills increase students' level of adaptation to school, and when they were low, they caused various behavioral problems at school and in the classroom. For this reason, it was stated during interviews that learning Turkish is a fundamental variable. It appeared that the Turkish level of the students is supported by the courses organized in schools and within the body of public education. One of the interviewees stated that they gave support lessons for literacy to some students during the school lunch hours.

Regarding language challenges, school counselors reported that they communicated with students who did not speak Turkish through another student who spoke Turkish. They also stated that they communicated in school through a teacher who was fluent in Arabic and that some counselors even used the Google Translate program to communicate. At this point, it is noteworthy that there was no translator for communication in schools, maybe also since Syrian immigrants began to arrive in 2011. Remarkable was, that many families and students in Turkey could not learn Turkish during this period which might have different reasons.

It was stated that students who did not have a good foundation in Turkish skills were bored with the lessons. For this reason, school counselors observed that they showed aggressive behaviors in different ways, which reduced their school adjustment. Similarly, some students who had language problems would tell them that they were introverted and could not express themselves. One of the counselors in the interviews mentioned that he witnessed a situation of girls being more introverted.

Many of the school counselors told us that it was sometimes difficult to communicate with parents that don't speak the language well. Often bilingual students are asked to translate between teachers and parents. A school counselor that provided psychological counseling when needed told us that she couldn't be sure if her message is correctly conveyed because she couldn't tell the parents directly. She told us about her routine when contacting parents who don't speak Turkish:

*We cannot communicate with all these parents, we have a huge language problem. For students, we sometimes even do not understand that they are of Syrian origin, we communicate so easily but when it comes to the parents, this is always a problem. I can say that most of them do not speak Turkish, it is very rare that a Syrian parent speaks Turkish. When we want to invite a Syrian parent to the school, we ask a student who speaks both languages for help. We first tell this student the situation and then call the parent and this student talks to this parent about the situation on the phone. They really, help us, especially the students in higher grade levels. When the parents come to the school, we either ask these students for help or the parents come with a relative who can speak Turkish. But it's really hard to communicate with these parents on the phone so we have to invite them to school. [...] So far, I have not come across a Turkish-speaking parent. Another problem is that I cannot know how much the translator-student really conveyed my message to the parent and their message to me. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

The need to have a student translate hinders the school counselors from communicating much with parents who don't speak Turkish. So many school counselors expressed that one of the biggest needs is for translators working within schools. Although there are challenges, the school counselor that provided psychological support reflected positively on the overall situation:

*I think the situation seems positive so far, that's my observation. I think that maybe children will start to teach their parents Turkish in the future as they become more fluent. If the family is also willing. I think we can improve further if this happens. Also, the current project that the Directorate of National Education is doing right now to teach the students Turkish seems very promising. Therefore I'm hopeful for the future. We will at least be able to communicate. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

Another big topic the school counselors mentioned was the financial situation of families. Especially recently migrated families would often be in precarious life situations as one school counselor told us:

*Except for the language, I can say that there are refugee students with financial difficulties. Maybe not those who have lived here for a long time but especially those who have arrived recently, like 3-2 years ago. There is a factory close to school and fathers mostly work there. Mothers stay at home. They generally have multiple children. Therefore, financial difficulties can be added to language difficulties. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

This was even more observable during the pandemic when there was a need to have electronic devices for the children to attend classes.

In general, counselors stated that they felt there was good communication between them and the parents and that they felt like the parents appreciated the work they did, as this counselor stated. But she thought that parents lacked some information about school activities:

*I think they are aware of the fact that we are trying to do our best to support them. Because this cooperation with the Public Education Centre was unique to our school, the other schools didn't do this then. I'm sure they are aware of our effort because we always get their permission when we do these things. But I'm not sure whether they are informed*

*about all the opportunities of the school. For example, we have cultural and sportive activities and facilities, like theatre etc. It is important that they come to school and try to communicate to be informed about these. Unfortunately, not all parents come. And the children might be not sure as to whether their parents would support them in taking part in these activities. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

She said that her strategy in communicating with the parents was to call them when problems were occurring with their child. On most occasions the collaboration was positive as she added:

*[...] when there is a problem, I call them and talk with the help of a student and invite them to school. Whether it will work or not depends on the issue. For instance, when I call the parents of an introverted child and talk to them about this, they start to show more interest in the child. Also the child gets to know that I care about him/her so s/he opens up to me. The family trusts me, too. It works a little in that sense. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

The relationship between migrated parents and native parents was mostly smooth and friendly. Still, the counselors reported that some parents discriminated against newly migrated parents and their children. A participant stated that some parents did not want Syrian students in their children's classrooms. She stated that it happened in the first days when Syrian students started to take part in the classrooms. Other parents stated that they had the belief that Syrian students carried contagious diseases and that they think that they would infect their children.

A participant mentioned that while introducing a Syrian student, some Syrian students could label them as Syrian without being aware of it. Similarly, another example was expressed about the fact that some parents did not want their students to sit next to Syrian students and similarly marginalized them in the classroom environment. Another psychological counselor stated that some Syrian students were labeled as having aggressive behaviors, which created an expectation from the Syrian student to show these behaviors and they also showed these behaviors. As a result, it is seen that students may encounter stigmatization by both students and other parents in their class, for being Syrian or having different personality traits.

When we asked the counselors about their wishes to have better communication between schools and newly migrated parents, they mentioned that they would love to have more involvement from the teachers. They would wish not to be involved only when problems already occurred but to be more informed about the children in general. For this it would be useful to have more school counselors in one school and that they know more about the circumstances in which the children lived. A school counselor answered as follows when asked what she would like to know about the family background of the children:

*I would like to know how crowded the family is. I would like to know who in the family is the child closest to. I would like to learn whether their home is suitable for studying. I would like to know whether some of them have to work after school. I would like to know whether they can financially afford their needs. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

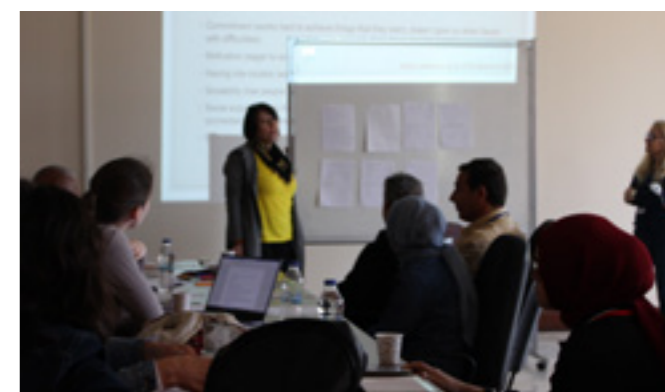
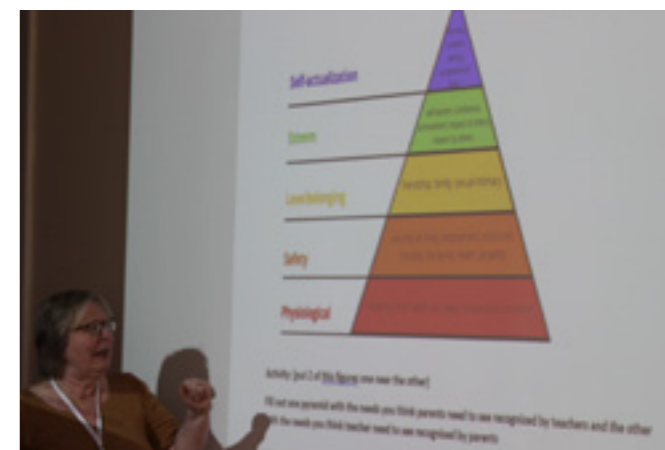
Also, she thought that regular gatherings with parents and teachers could be very helpful to improve communication. She thought that migrated parents that speak Turkish could be the gate keepers for non-Turkish speaking parents and encourage them to participate in the gatherings:

*[...] It would be very nice to gather these parents together and have a meeting together to get to know each other. This makes sense to me a lot. But I don't know how much I would be able to do this. But still maybe it would be good enough if we can do this with the parents that we are able to reach. Maybe they would tell this to the other parents as well. Because they communicate with each other since they speak the same language. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

In conclusion, school psychological counselors seem to be involved by the school when there was a problem. Language difficulties made it difficult for counselors to communicate with parents, they often had to ask students to translate their communication with parents. Counselors also mentioned financial difficulties as a disadvantage faced by newly migrated parents. Finally, although the relationship between migrated parents and the counselors was usually very positive, some local parents displayed discriminatory problems which could be tackled by bringing all parents (local and migrated) together which we tried in our workshop.

#### PARENTable-WORKSHOP IN MUĞLA, MAY 2022

Our workshop took place between 1113- May 2022 (Wednesday to Friday) at the Faculty of Education of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. Eight psychological counselors (5 females and 3 males) and five parents (2 females and 3 males) attended the workshop. We contacted the counselors and they were very interested. Three of them were currently working at primary schools, two of them were working at elementary schools, two of them were employed at high schools, and one of them was working at a Guidance Research Center. They were able to attend the workshop during schooldays with permission from the Provincial Directorate for National Education. We cooperated with the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) to reach the parent participants. Four of the parents came from Syria and one of them came from Iraq. Both psychological counselors and parents came from different districts of Muğla.



The workshop consisted of six sessions in the following order: identity, parent-school expectations, communication, multilingualism, stress & adaptation, and empathy. It was a very fruitful experience because it allowed school psychological counselors and parents to hear each other with curiosity. This was also important because, during the interviews, language difficulties had been endorsed by both counselors and parents as a major obstacle in the communication between schools and parents. Some of the school counselors had their own experiences of discrimination, which they shared with the other participants. Some of the participants seemed genuinely surprised to hear about the experiences and perspectives of other participants. One of the parents stated that although this experience was a great opportunity, it was at the same time an unfortunately late attempt at the solution of problems.

Note: We would like to thank the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), Muğla Provincial Directorate for National Education, migrated parents, and school psychological counselors for their contributions to our workshop and project.



# IMPORTANT TOPICS

## LANGUAGE LEARNING AND MULTILINGUALISM

Daniel Rellstab

Language opens up the possibility of connecting with others and becoming part of a community. Without understanding the language or languages of the country of residence, orientation is difficult: How to read the signs in public? How to understand the letter from your children's school? Communicating with people in the country of residence is vital for practically everything in the life of newly migrated parents and their children. Not knowing the language is one of the biggest challenges for recently arrived parents and their children. In our project, all parents talked about their initial experiences of not knowing and not understanding the new language and how difficult it was for them to learn it:

*Now I remember that the Swedish language was complicated at the beginning. (Parent, Sweden)*

All parents told us how their children are learning the languages of their new countries of residence and how the emergence of their new linguistic skills changes the family dynamics. And all parents told us how they had learned new languages, are still trying, or despair over the difficulties thrown at them in language classes or everyday conversations. Yet despite the commonalities we can perceive, the experiences vary according to the biographies, with the countries of residence, the rules in place in schools, and the resources provided by the government, schools, communities, and non-governmental organizations. And whether parents and children can overcome language barriers does not only depend on teachers, yet also on other parents, neighbors, or friends that parents and children can make.

### CHILDREN LEARNING TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE

It is common knowledge that young children learn new languages fast and seemingly effortlessly. Parents of toddlers or young children often relate how quickly their children have picked up the language of the new country of residence, especially when they have many possibilities to interact with other children, for example, in kindergarten.

*At first, we had a few problems because of communication with other children because of the language. She solved that quickly because you know children learn a language so quickly. (Parent, Turkey)*

*XY was two years old when he arrived here, his language is good, he is small, but he speaks Italian very well. (Parent, Italy)*

Yet parents realize that if their children speak the language fluently, this does not necessarily mean that their language proficiency is sufficient for success in school. They perceive gaps in the linguistic proficiency of their children:

*He has some problems with studying and the language: he could speak well, but he has issues with writing. He can talk well, but he can't write. (Parent, Italy)*

Writing is not the only challenge for children who are schooled in another language than they speak at home. Everyday language is different from academic language. Jim Cummins, who has done a lot of research on children, migration, and school success, differs between the so-called «basic interactional communication skills» (BICS) and the «cognitive academic language skills» (CALP). He introduced this distinction to draw educators' attention to the fact that even if children seem proficient in the language of schooling, they might need more support to catch up with their peers. BICS refers to the skills a child needs to be able to participate in everyday conversation. Conversely, CALP «refers to students'



ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school»<sup>28</sup>. A child needs different skills to understand the conversation in a TV series than the description of an exercise in a math textbook or to talk to friends and describe and explain guided movement possibilities in the air. Thus, parents and especially educators must closely monitor children's linguistic development at different stages of their skills in more conversational, informal, and formal academic contexts and provide them with the respective support.

In Sweden and Germany, schools organize specific preparatory classes for newly arrived school-aged children who do not speak the school language. In Sweden, children attend preparatory classes, yet they will most likely study at least one subject with their regular teaching group. Students can also receive study guidance in their mother tongue in specific subjects. In Germany, newly arrived children will also attend preparatory classes before entering a regular class; these are called welcome classes. Different models exist; schools are pretty flexible in organizing preparatory classes. Although such classes are important, they are not perfect. One parent from Sweden points out:

*Newly arrived children learn with other newly arrived children, which leads to them not learning the Swedish language for the better. (Parent, Sweden)*

A parent in Germany relates that the commute to the preparatory class was very long:

*My son [is] in kindergarten, and my daughter is in a so-called welcome class (preparatory class). Unfortunately, we could not find a school close to our place [...]. I had to take my daughter to XY every morning and pick her up in the afternoon. It took me between 3 ½ and four hours every day to get her there and pick her up. (Parent, Germany)*

It is also essential to explain to parents how preparatory classes function, to inform them about their aim, their didactic organization, and how long children will attend these classes before transiting to the regular classroom. Educators must understand that educational systems vary from country to country and that it is sometimes difficult for parents to understand the explicit and implicit rules and regulations of the school.

In Italy and Turkey, the possibilities for children to learn the school language before entering a regular class are limited. Sometimes, teachers work extra hours to provide at least some language education to newly arrived children:

*We rely on the good heart of the teachers who are part of the staff who may strengthen the Italian language in a few hours, but here too it must be something planned because otherwise, the children will never be able to catch up with the others. (Teacher, Italy)*

The same holds for Turkey, where newly arrived children can sometimes enjoy language classes, sometimes not. As one counselor describes it, it is common for newly arrived children to have to attend regular classes without any proficiency in Turkish.

*For example, when Syrian or Egyptian families come, they immediately send their children to school, and the child feels that it's so strange, you know, among all the children. I suggest that they have to be, all of them, I mean the migrants, in a classroom, to prepare them first; and then to put them in the regular classes. Because when they immediately go*

*to the classroom, they feel so low, according to the others. Their comprehension is not equal to that of other Turkish students. So, a preparation class for the immigrants would be an excellent idea for education. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

Preparatory classes presuppose financial resources provided by the government. However, assisting newly arrived children in their transition to become regular students in a new country also means providing good education offering one brick to construct a solid foundation for the future development of these children.

## CHILDREN GROWING UP MULTILINGUAL

Newly arrived children will become multilingual, and this is wonderful. Speaking different languages allows children to explore other linguistic structures, play with languages, have insights into different worldviews, and expand their communication radius. A language education theory has also claimed that speaking two languages at the same level of proficiency improves other cognitive skills. Thus, it is vital that newly arrived children not only learn and speak the languages of their new countries of residence but also retain, foster, and expand their proficiency in their family languages. The task of managing the use of two or three languages at the same time is, for most children, not a huge challenge. Having learned two or three languages as a child might be an advantage in learning new languages at school, as one parent from Sweden related:

*Both my children speak three languages fluently (Kurdish, Swedish, and English), and now they start with a new language, Spanish. And my son's latest language is German to know his cousins' language, although they have Kurdish in common. When they were younger, they spoke to us in Kurdish and to each other in Swedish / English, now I see that they talk to each other in Kurdish, but Swedish / English words appear sometimes. (Parent, Sweden)*

A child present during the interview with their parents also explained that it is a beautiful thing to be able to speak different languages.

Yet the family language often remains at a lower level than the language the children use in school. As the family language is only used in the confines of the family to talk about everyday affairs, children are often not capable of writing and reading in their family language. Thus, to improve their language skills, so-called family language classes should be offered; the best way to do this is at school, as in Sweden and sometimes in Germany. Family language classes could also be open to other children interested in learning the language of their peers. If there is a lack of courses and classes in family languages, parents should read books to their children in their family languages, sing songs, and teach their children to write and read in their family languages.

Moreover, all educators should appreciate the children's multilingual resources, making them an integral part of everyday learning and teaching in the classroom. Children should have the right to use their languages in class, for example, when working in groups. Teachers should abandon the somewhat outlandish idea that they can control everything in the classroom if all children only use the school language.

If children speak the languages of the new countries of residence better than their parents, family dynamics can change, and parents might become afraid to lose authority and control. One parent living in Sweden explains:

*Here, you don't own your children. My biggest stress is that if I leave my child alone, my child will talk in a different language. (Parent, Sweden)*

It can also be stressful because the children seem to gain the upper hand in communication:

<sup>28</sup> Jim Cummins 2008, *BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of distinction*, In: N.H. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*. Springer, Boston, MA. [https://doi.org/36\\_3-30424-387-0-978/10.1007, pp 499-487](https://doi.org/36_3-30424-387-0-978/10.1007, pp 499-487).

*She has started learning the language better than I have, so sometimes I cannot answer her questions. She knows about Swedish culture, and she starts questioning our culture. (Parent, Sweden)*

It is also typical that communicative dynamics in the family change, and children begin to use the new languages among themselves and use their family languages only when speaking with their parents. This situation can be stressful for parents too, as one parent from Germany explains, and parents might try to counter this:

*I noticed that my daughter started to speak German at home at the beginning of the third grade. I decided to counter this smoothly, so she kept speaking Arabic. (Parent, Germany)*

The success of such endeavors is, however, limited. Languages and the use of languages are connected to attitudes and emotions. If children feel forced to use a language, they might begin to rebel. Thus, it is better to develop a relaxed attitude towards the use of the different languages of the children, as one parent from Italy explains:

*They speak Arabic with us. But among them, even at home, they speak Italian. Then if they want to hide something, they start speaking Italian! (Parent, Italy)*

This parent is not worried about the linguistic practices of their children; they seem proud that their children manage the new language so well, and they acknowledge that the children gained an advantage over the parents by learning the new language quickly. Parents should, however, refrain from deploying the new language as a means of communication at home. If they do this, the children will inevitably lose the language their parents and grandparents speak.

## PARENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS

Learning a new language is challenging for children, yet it seems to be an even more significant challenge for parents. Parents who do not speak the language of their new environment feel isolated. Understanding what is going on in children's schools is almost impossible without having at least some proficiency in the new language. Moreover, it seems to be very difficult to make new friends, as a parent from Italy explains.

*No, I have communication problems [...] In meetings, we just say hello to each other and each other's children. (Parent, Italy)*

*I do not say relationships because, as I said, our language does not allow it. (Parent, Italy)*

Another parent perceives the lack of linguistic skills as the only caveat that separates them from the Italian parents; they also express their fear of speaking with neighbors because of their lack of language skills:

*I told you, currently, what separates us from the Italians is the language, nothing else. If, for example, I want to visit an Italian neighbor, I am afraid that he will ask me a question and I don't know how to answer it or that he will talk to me about something I don't understand. (Parent, Italy)*

All the parents we talked to acknowledge the need to learn the language of their new countries of residence. They know that talking to their children's teachers becomes possible as soon as they become proficient. They are elevated to a position to support their children, for example, in doing homework, and they can interact with other parents. Speaking the language is an often necessary, although not sufficient, condition for living a good life, and it can impact the self-

esteem of parents and their position in the new society:

*And now that I learned some German, I introduce myself. I say: I am a physics and chemistry teacher, and I can feel their astonishment and how this changes their view of me. (laughs). (Parent, Germany)*

Learning a new language as an adult is not a walk in the park, and different factors may impact the learning process positively or negatively. Gender is one such factor. Mothers, for example, who stay at home with their children are often deprived of learning. As one teacher explains:

*[...] men usually learn it first because they have contact with the outside world. Foreign women who stay at home - this is a big problem - have been in Italy for many years. But they do not speak Italian or speak very little Italian, not even at the A1 level, precisely because they have no contact with the outside world, if not with their community, and therefore, there is a big problem with this. (Teacher, Italy)*

Yet also the country of residence plays an important role. In some countries, newly arrived migrants can attend language courses, for example, in refugee accommodation, or they even have to attend language classes as part of an integration program, for example, in Germany. In other countries, such as Italy, language courses are mostly offered by non-governmental organizations. An Italian teacher told us about a brilliant project where schools and universities provided language classes for parents:

*Courses could be taken at schools and universities. [...] We had started it, it was for all parents, not only foreigners (Teacher, Italy)*

And a counselor from Turkey comes up with a similar idea:

*In addition, we did this language course for the children, but it can also be delivered to families. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

Such initiatives do not only provide linguistic support to parents. They can also help to create a space where parents can meet each other and teachers and form relationships outside the constraints of hectic everyday life.

However, even if courses are offered, it can still be difficult for parents to learn a new language. One parent from Germany explains.

My Problem is the language. Language is identity. And I didn't manage to master the language. That harms our life. I just don't make any progress - although I try hard. [...] I have a lot of excuses. Children and housekeeping etc etc. ...But I should have learned it up to now. (Parent, Germany)

However, there is no need to punish oneself if learning is not smooth and if progress seems slow. Not everyone is the same when learning a new language. The aptitude, the motivation, the strategies for learning, and the learner styles differ and make each learning process individual<sup>29</sup>. Some people seem to be able to pick up new words easily; others are excellent at understanding the grammar of a new language. Some people have a lot of motivation to learn a new language, and they can invest time. Others do not have the time to learn, and they might also not have the possibility to draw on previous experiences of learning a new language:

<sup>29</sup> Peter Skehan 1991, *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning*. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13, pp. 298-275. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100009979>

*I don't have time to learn the language... and then I didn't study much in school... (Parent, Italy)*

Motivation increases if learners perceive the courses as relevant, enjoyable, and rewarding. Language teachers could, for example, make learners aware of the strategies they already implicitly adopt when learning and help them improve if the techniques they already use have not been successful.

Everyone should remember that parents and children can probably speak not only their family language but also have learned other languages, for example, English, French, or Russian.

*I: regarding the language, you have three languages: Arabic, Armenian and Italian*

*P: Turkish too. And then English... And actually, I also do French and Spanish at school. (Parent, Turkey)*

*I didn't speak Turkish when I first came here. I learned it slowly as I heard it from people. I speak Russian and French, and I'm already an Arab but I didn't speak Turkish. (Parent, Turkey)*

Mainly educators should bear in mind that English can be an essential means of communication with parents, and they should relinquish their fears of not speaking English perfectly.

*In the first year, we mostly communicated with teachers or the authorities in English because that is the language we know, and it could be a common language between them and us. But there are a lot of people here who are not comfortable with English – even in school. (Parent, Germany)*

And if English is not an option, there are still other possibilities, as one parent in Germany explains:

*And of course, if I meet the teacher alone, I can understand more about his situation. She knows that my German is not so good, so she tries to speak slowly, and when there is an expression I do not understand, we look it up on the internet. (Parent, Germany)*

Individual meetings with parents are time-consuming, yet as this quotation demonstrates, they offer possibilities to seek and find understanding.

Yet in Sweden, Germany, and Italy, translators and interpreters are available – at least sometimes. Teachers should invite interpreters to parents' meetings, and they should have letters to the parents translated. It does not make sense to ask parents who do not understand the language to come to parents' meetings or give them letters they cannot understand. Moreover, translators and interpreters should not only translate and interpret yet also mediate between parents and educators and explain to each of them what the other says, understands, and needs.

## CHILDREN AS LANGUAGE BROKERS

If children speak the new language better than their parents, they often have to act as interpreters and translators, as so-called language brokers.

Tapping into the skills of children to secure communication is an understandable strategy, and children can be proud if they can demonstrate their skills. Yet it is problematic to have a child interpret the conversation between the teacher and the parent because parents and teachers cannot freely discuss the child's strengths and weaknesses if the child has to interpret. Employing another student who speaks the necessary languages is neither an optimal solution to the problem. An unofficial, inexperienced interpreter might not protect sensitive information. Furthermore, as a Turkish counselor explains, it is not clear if a student is capable of interpreting adequately:

Although I try to ask different students (not the child of the parent I'm talking to), I still cannot know how much that

student conveys between the parents and me. (School Counselor, Turkey)

Suppose no professional interpreters and translators are available. In that case, it might be better to ask parents to bring another adult person, an adult family member, or a friend to the conversation. In Germany and Italy, people from NGOs, certified or at least trained interpreters, can help and accompany the parents to teacher talks and parental meetings. There is no simple solution to overcome communication barriers. Yet if all parties involved are patient, use all the linguistic, digital, and analog resources available to them, and make a real effort to understand each other and be understood, communication can become possible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Newly arrived children should be able to meet children who speak the language of the new country of residence.
- Educators and parents should observe linguistic development closely and pay attention to the children's basic communication skills and academic language proficiency.
- Educators should inform parents about the structure and aims of preparatory or welcome classes if they are offered.
- If the country of residence does not offer preparatory classes, the burden of teaching the language to newly arrived children often lies on teachers' backs; this is not nice, but a big shoutout to teachers who do it anyway.
- All parents and educators should value and celebrate children's multilingual resources.
- Ideally, children also receive education in their family languages. These language classes should be an integral part of the school's curriculum. They should be open to all interested children.
- Suppose the school or another organization does not provide instruction in family languages. In that case, parents should read their children books in their language and teach them to write and read.
- Educators should appreciate the children's multilingual resources, making them an integral part of everyday learning and teaching in the classroom.
- Parents should be proud if their children speak the new language well, and they should not attempt to ban it from the confines of their homes.
- If parents have the opportunity to learn the new language, they should seize this opportunity.
- Parents should not blame themselves if they do not succeed at once. Learning a new language is difficult. It takes a child many years to learn the mother tongue. Why shouldn't it take parents years to learn a new language while raising kids, working, and finding themselves in a new environment?
- Educators should consider all of the parents' linguistic skills when they communicate with them. Maybe the communication can be conducted in English?
- Primary communication is also possible with online tools like google translator or deepl.com
- Educators should refrain from employing children and even older students as language brokers. Parents should instead bring an adult friend or family member to the conversation; schools should look for NGOs providing interpretation and translation services.
- All the parties involved should adhere to a «principle of charity:» Do not expect the interaction to be without bumps, be patient, and always try to understand what the other said and meant.

## FAMILY DYNAMICS AFTER MIGRATION

Miriam Stock

One important aspect often overlooked is the question of how families were impacted due to migration and re-settling. Families faced a lot of challenges, yet also developed new resources and resilience. Moreover, family roles and relations between parents and children, between older and younger siblings, changed after migration having impacts on school interaction and communication.

During our workshops and interviews in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Turkey, newly migrated parents were eager to share different issues that concerned their families. This helped teachers to better understand the situation families lived in, why children and parents would act in certain ways, and also helped to tackle misperceptions.

In the following, we aim to share some of the important issues newly migrated parents discussed with teachers and the project team. Thereby it is to mention, that many of these stories accounted for refugee migration which brought special challenges with them.

### STARTING FROM ZERO AFTER MIGRATION

First of all, many parents said that starting a new life was full of challenges, particularly since they came as refugees to new countries. One mother, who came from Syria to Italy shared the following story during our workshops:

*When we fled here, we didn't know where we would end up, we knew the country but not the region or city, we were afraid of what was waiting for us, when we came here it was like a challenge and we felt like, of course the children overcame it quickly, they learned Italian easily, people were afraid of us, they were closing the doors, others were looking at us with pity, which was also very hurtful, now we are five years here and we overcame this, now everyone says this Syrian family is really nice, you need patience. (Parent, Italy)*

Indeed, in all four workshops, parents said how much stress it was to start a new life from zero. This entailed bureaucracy, finding a house, settling, trying to get degrees recognized, learning the language, finding work, and starting a new social life. Some said that although they have been in the new country for years, they still couldn't receive the feeling of having settled.

*Something that it is stressful for us: Documents. If it is possible to receive support. Even now: You are stuck, no future ahead of you, a lot of stress. It is not up to me and the only one to decide, many factors play a role, the legal affairs, the state; you want to grow out of this challenge, but there are other factors. (Parent, Sweden)*

For others, life became much more stable after some years. Starting from zero not only counts for parents but also many children as one workshop participant described it:

*Children who came to Sweden have lost their homes. They experienced new life, new language. They are confronted with the collapse of their customs and traditions and those of the new society. And I think it is challenging. It is not easy to overcome this. (School tutor, Sweden)*

In any case, parents tried to support their children as much as possible during these unstable times. And in general, children adapted much faster to the new situation. However, as a mother from Syria also described children would be very individual and different in handling this situation:

*It depends on the character of a child. I have a son and a daughter, the daughter changed schools and still found coping mechanism. But my son is different, he is very attached to the home country.”(Parent, Berlin)*

In general workshop participants agreed that children needed a lot of love and respect.

Another difficulty was that parents lacked the social network they had from home, where grandparents and other kin were present. Also, it was hard to find a replacement. This was especially the case in Italy, where parents often lived in rural peripheral areas, as a mother described:

*I didn't have patience when I came here; still there is a big difference in social relationships here, we don't have grandparents or uncles here, sometimes children ask to visit somebody and I say we don't have anyone to visit, so we have to find other activities as a family, it's all on me to create new activities and relations to keep the children entertained and not in front of the iPad the whole day. (Parent, Italy)*

Again, it shows that parents became very inventive to give children a good environment. Here schools, as well as communities, could also have an effect by supporting a strong social community.

### **HAUNTING OF THE PAST AND OVERCOMING TRAUMA**

Most parents decided to become refugees and left their homes so their children could have a better future and they support them as much as they can. However, families also were haunted by the past and some had to overcome trauma. This was first due to war and hardship. Two parents shared their very touching and difficult stories of losing a child during the war in Syria. Another couple talked about their house being destroyed by a bomb. For others, the migration route itself invoked a lot of trauma. Here is a quote from a workshop participant in Italy:

*I had several difficult situations to overcome, I came with my children by boat and the boat sank, one of my children didn't breathe anymore, but she survived, then we came to a camp but the situation was difficult. Then we went to Germany and were in another camp, then they expelled us back to Italy, this was also very difficult. (Parent, Italy)*

All these incidents were very challenging. What nevertheless was striking for teachers and the project team alike was how open and reflective parents shared their stories and how they overcame many of these psychological difficulties and became more resilient. A mother in Berlin named it like this:

*I made the experience that you can live through dark times but you can break out of the circle and reach something good. (Parent, Germany)*

These hardships of course had an impact on the family's well-being. So sometimes it took parents longer to adapt to new environments and also to find their new position in society. What is important for them – everyone agreed – is a supportive social environment. In Germany for example, parents who have been previously teachers in Syria now took a one-year training with the NGO Back on Track to become teacher assistants in German schools. This helped them to receive recognition and a new structure and future vision.

### **STATUS LOSS AND ASPIRATION FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

While traumatic events were not the case for everyone, parents in all four countries suffered from losing their previous life and social status.

This suffering was even higher when they used to have a good social standing in their home country. One participant in the Swedish workshop who migrated herself to Europe and now worked as a teacher described it like this:

*The stress of the parents when emigrating to Europe, depends also on who they were in their country. The higher their social status was in their home country, the more it becomes difficult to start again from the beginning in another country results, due to all that they have loosed. The one who had a really low social status in their home country, can get involved more easily, because they hope to have a better life. (Teacher, Sweden)*

The status loss was particularly difficult for many educated people who had been lawyers, teachers, and doctors in their home country. However, due to often rigid regulations, they could not work in their professions in the host country. So it was very difficult to switch from having a favored social position to being at the margins of society and having to rely on the support of the state or find a low-profile job that wouldn't fit their previous education and professional experience. What also was difficult for parents was that they often felt devalued by others in the neighborhoods or schools precisely because they could not speak the language. They often faced the stereotype of being uneducated and could not fight back against these stereotypes.

One father in the workshop in Turkey described it as follows:

*It often happened to us that, if people know we don't speak Turkish, they think we don't know anything that we don't have a good education. But this is not true, we had good education and a place in society before. (Parent, Turkey)*

This status loss had an impact on the self-confidence of many parents, also when they talked with school officials and teachers. Some felt ashamed because they could not speak the language well enough, even if it took a lot of effort, and sometimes language classes were not available. In general, parents in all workshops agreed that it would help if in schools the rich family histories of migrants would also be integrated into the curriculum and social programs to tackle this misperception.

While parents had to deal with their status loss, they put in a lot of effort so their children would have a better future. Not seldom, parents had high expectations and put pressure on their children to perform well in school to be able to become a doctor or an engineer later.

A newly migrated teacher that took part in the workshop in Sweden described it as follows:

*Parents have really high expectations which makes the children stressed and that's why children hide things to their parents. I remember how parents become almost shocked in meetings when we talk about their children's behavior. (Teacher, Sweden)*

Here again, parents struggled with misperceptions because they felt that teachers wouldn't support their children adequately. In Berlin, parents told us, that teachers would suggest vocational practical training instead of an academic pathway for their children and this hurt them a lot. Children also found themselves in the middle of these two very opposite expectations. Here, many workshop participants agreed it would be better to support children more holistically with a partnership between families and schools.

### **CHILDREN ADAPTING FASTER AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIBLINGS**

A general issue debated in workshops was that children integrated much faster than their parents by learning the new language and being regularly in schools. While parents supported this very much and were happy about their children since they wanted their children to succeed and have a good life, this also entailed sometimes challenges.

This aspect was mainly discussed during our workshop in Sweden. A mother from Syria explained:

*She starts learning the language better than me, so sometimes I cannot really answer her questions. She learns about the Swedish culture and she starts questioning our culture. (Parent, Sweden)*

So they would come home with a lot of questions from school. Another father in the same workshop explained that he sometimes feared he would lose his children to the new society. Still another mother didn't see it as a problem:

*The children often ask why we have a different religion or we eat halal. When I explain them, they understand. They don't really have the difficulty in building an identity. They like both of the languages and like being here. (Parent, Sweden)*

In general, parents realized that they had to explain a lot to their children about their origins.

Parents also discussed that older and younger siblings would develop differently inside the family. While older siblings often were more socialized in e.g. Syria, younger siblings almost entirely grew up in the education system and society of the host country. A father in Sweden observed that because of this, he sometimes felt closer to his older sons and they would deal with him differently than the younger children. Another mother in the Swedish workshop realized that her older daughters needed more support:

*I have three daughters. Two of them are raised in Syria, one in Sweden, but we have to cope with the new society. The two younger one knows exactly what she wants. The older one asks a lot of questions. And they have to deal with it. Like us, we are new and we don't know a lot of things. (Parent, Sweden)*

This example from Sweden points to the fact that families should not be seen as a whole but that diverse processes are going on inside a family and there can be different identities and languages within one family. Moreover, it shows that particularly teenagers or older children may have more open questions and need support in their re-orientation.

## CHILDREN AS MEDIATORS

A final issue that was discussed in all locations was the aspect that children often had to serve as mediators or translators. This was mentioned in almost all contexts but even more in Germany, Italy, and Turkey where translators seemed to be missing.

Before the workshop, a teacher in Italy pointed it out like this:

*Let's say that in these cases children often become reference points for their parents, because children naturally acquire the language first and they go to school five or six days a week for many hours day, they learn the language easier... and so they become a mediator themselves. (Teacher, Italy)*

While children or older siblings were easily available this also changed the roles in families. Especially when it came to school issues, this aspect was seen as problematic. In the workshop taking place in Turkey, a school counselor mentioned that it would be needed to have professional translators:

*I think that you need to have professional translators because when we have to discuss something with the school, they just bring a child to translate, but maybe this child is not able to express what exactly I mean. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

Both parents and school educators agreed that it would need more professional translators and mediators in the school context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adaptation to a new country can be very stressful for families, particularly because of paper work, integration steps but also discrimination. Starting from zero takes a lot of energy. This should be recognized when communicating with newly migrated parents. Also, a vital social community can be an important support.
- Moreover, some refugee families might have lived through harsh events and might suffer from trauma. At the same time, by overcoming they might be particularly strong and very resilient.
- To lose their social status after the migration is not easy. Sometimes from the outside, you might not see the rich histories lying behind a family. These family histories could be also integrated more adequately into school curricula and beyond to change the picture.
- Parents are often very eager to communicate with schools but by not speaking the language, they often remain quiet. So try to communicate slowly and support their participation in school contexts.
- Newly migrated parents often have very high expectations of their children and they want them to perform successfully in school because they want them to have a better life. Try to support children adequately and build teams with parents. Yet, it might be good to lower the pressure.
- Children may adopt faster than their parents to the new society since they go to schools from the beginning. This also can change family dynamics. So have this in mind, when dealing with issues regarding family relations.
- There are many differences within one family regarding languages, identities, and cultures. This might be particularly the case between younger and older siblings having been socialized in different countries. See the culturally diverse settings and resources within a family rather than just perceiving the "migrant family" as a box.
- Even if an easy solution, children as translators can bear challenges for the family since it puts a lot of responsibility on children and changes family roles. It is better to have institutionalized translators and mediators.
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## STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION: EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY MIGRATED PARENTS, COPING STRATEGIES AND PREVENTION

Pauline Wetzel

*Honestly, even if for me there was no language problem, I felt like a prejudice towards the different. Although my son spoke Italian, he had an Italian name, I still felt that they connected him to his mother. There is this mistrust, perhaps a prejudice towards a person (the son) who was considered different. (Parent, Italy)*

This is what a mother of Moroccan origin who lives in Italy told us. She works as a cultural mediator, helping newly migrated families to arrive in the new country. Many other migrated parents told us stories of how they get treated unfairly or are confronted with stereotypes in their interactions with the school. This chapter is about these experiences, the ways the parents deal with them and the suggestions from parents and educators collected in the workshops we did, about how to deal with them. The discriminating acts can be directed towards the parents directly, or indirectly concerning their children. In both cases, they have strong emotional consequences and impact the relationship between the school and the parents.

To give an impression of the situations that newly migrated parents have experienced, we want to begin with a situation that a father and a mother told us about in our workshop in Turkey. The Syrian father, who has been a Forestier, told us about a group activity in his daughters' school. Every student should bring something to eat from home. The Arabic students were told to bring Coca-Cola because the other children said that Arab food was "dirty". The teacher agreed with this. The father was convinced that the behavior of the teacher influenced the children:

*I need to say what I feel that many problems in the school are happening because of the behavior of the teacher not the children, the way that they speak about Syrians so that children think this is true [...](Parent, Turkey)*

He also told us the story of a religion teacher who was talking inappropriately to the children in her class:

*[...] We had a problem with the religion teacher, she left all the things she was supposed to talk about and started talking about how Syrians are taking their homes, their jobs, destroying the country and how they should go back to their country. (Parent, Turkey)*

The mother of the child who was also present in the workshop told us in an interview that her daughter was devastated after this experience because her classmates began to turn against her:

*After the class, she came home crying. The next day her father went to school and complained about the teacher. In the meantime, her classmates also talked to her in a discriminatory way, which made it much more difficult for her. (Parent, Turkey)*

Other parents told us similar stories of their children getting mocked to be Syrian and asked why they would be in Turkey and not in Syria, saying that they shouldn't be there and questioning their reasons for having left the country. We want to continue this chapter with the experiences of stereotypes and prejudices the parents told us about in our workshops and the interviews.

### STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES TOWARDS MIGRATED PARENTS

Discriminatory acts derive from stereotypes and prejudices that we all have and sometimes unconsciously or without bad

intentions get directed toward another group. The binary forming of the In- and Outgroup by creating fixed categories, often giving positive attributes to the Own and negative to the Other is called Othering.

We observed the orientalist stereotypes, especially in the more distant countries, Germany, Sweden, and Italy. In Turkey, many stereotypes were more directed against the fact that Syrians should fight instead of fleeing from their country or classist stereotypes that they would take jobs or be the cause of the current economic crisis. A Syrian Armenian mother told us in our workshop in Italy that she was concerned about the sense of superiority that she felt from Italian people. In an interview she explained this further:

*When we say we come from Syria they think it's another world, they think we go on camels, we come on camels. They have the wrong idea about us, really. They think we come from a backward country... Thank God we have seen so many things but they think we have come on camels, that we don't know anything. I remain silent, I prefer to remain silent, I don't need to speak...but if I knew the language well I would answer in detail...And then they look at me, they look at how I am dressed, how my daughter is dressed, how I take care of her. These are all things I notice... sometimes I have to tell them: it's true that I'm Syrian but we're of Armenian origin, that we're Christians, so that they see that we're not strange compared to them. So then they calm down. (Parent, Italy)*

She told us also, that when people discovered that she was from Syria, they assumed she would be Muslim and asked about the Hijab and their eating habits, specifically pork-eating. We observed that these two tropes were also mentioned by the teachers we interviewed in Italy and so appeared as lines that were drawn between "Italian" and "foreign" people. Two teachers from Italy mentioned the veil and eating habits as important indicators. One said, referring to two children with migrated parents and difficulties in school:

*The difference between the two children [the boy and the girl] is this: the boy has a slightly more, let's say, intellectually elevated family than the girl's parents, and they are very careful. The mother doesn't wear a veil, she's not very rooted in their traditions, she goes to the beach, she wears bikini...while \*\*'s mother doesn't only wear a veil, she has those long, long dresses that take off part of her face and she rarely comes to school, because she has 4 children, including the very disabled one, so I interface with her father. Instead, with \*\*\*'s parents I interface with both of them. They are parents who care a lot, with sacrifices they sent \*\*\* to after-school, paying for it. On the other hand, \*\*, everything she learns, everything she does, she does at school because at home she is not followed, her parents are not able and they speak Arabic, so our work has been quite sustained and hard but she is not at the level of the others. (Teacher, Italy)*

The teacher emphasized the clothing habits of the mothers and connected this implicitly to more caring, engaged parents, although she said that in one family, the mother had a disabled child at home, which could be the reason for her absence from school. Another teacher mentioned that the only thing where she felt cultural closure of Moroccan sisters in her school was the menu:

*[...] the only thing you can perceive is a cultural closure by the families as far as food is concerned, because they have their own menu, they don't eat pork. (Teacher, Italy)*

What these stereotypes can erupt in people showed the case of a Turkish mother of two, that has been living in Sweden for four years. Her daughter suffered a lot under the feeling of being different in her kindergarten:

*She asks why we eat halal food. We explain her. She feels different at school because of this. She understands she has dark hair and dark skin. She cried once and she asked why she has dark skin. [...]*

*She doesn't feel like she belongs to the school. She feels alone and she doesn't want to go sometimes. She understands she is different and immigrant here. (Parent, Sweden)*

## LOWER ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS TOWARD PARENTS

A recurring theme in our observations of discrimination against migrated parents and their children was the lower academic expectation of the school towards them. Many parents in our workshops told us stories of their children getting worse grades or no promotion. Often the teachers mentioned lacking language skills as an explanation. One mother that participated in the Workshop in Germany said, that her son got a recommendation for a lower degree from his teacher even though his marks were very good, saying that he would have language problems. He still decided to go for a higher degree and had no difficulties following up. Other parents in the workshop agreed on the topic and told similar stories. They said, many Syrian students would choose an apprenticeship and didn't go for higher degrees and university studies because it got suggested to them by the teachers.

These lower academic expectations towards migrated students could be the ground for following discrimination. In the workshop, in Sweden, a participant told us that there was a school where there were two classes, one of them only with migrated children and the other one with none. Due to political decisions, they should have gotten mixed to increase communication and bonding between both groups. He said that the Swedish parents for the longest refused for the classes to get mixed because they feared that their children's education would suffer under this. Only with a lot of counseling they finally agreed.

In Germany, this separation is institutionalized to a certain level. There are so-called "Welcome classes" where newly arrived children get schooled separately, especially focusing on language-learning. This system was created to guarantee that the children get special attention and to ease their acclimatization in a new school system. Parents and counselors in our workshop in Turkey suggested such a system. But in our workshop in Germany, it became apparent that many parents of migrated children perceived it as segregation from the regular classes and didn't feel that their children got supported as much as students in the regular classes. A Syrian former English teacher who lives in Germany for almost two years told us that the 14-year-old daughter of her husband is not making a lot of progress in the Welcome class. She said that although the daughter has been going to this class for two years her reading skills in German would still be on an A2 level, that the daughter seldomly gets homework and that she only gets German lessons in this class and thus is not learning other languages or sciences. Asking the teachers about the progress, they seemed to be very content with the progress of the daughter. The two other mothers in the group interview suggested her to take her daughter out of the Welcoming class and were convinced that she would have learned more in a regular class. She then explained to them that she tried but the school did not accept:

*Right. I wanted that, but the school did not accept. After one year her level was still A not even A2. So they said we will not bear the responsibility to send her to a regular class. She has to improve her language first. (Parent, Germany)*

She also criticized that she and her husband have never been invited to a parents' assembly and have been excluded from cultural events in the school. Another mother from Berlin made also excluding experiences when attending her child's parents' assembly. When she went to the assembly of her son's class her German was not very good yet and she felt like the teacher didn't want to have her in the assembly:

*At the first time, I went there. And I did not understand everything. So I asked her to explain some words (...) She told me, I will send you the contents of our discussion later. And she did. But after that, she would only write: We had a meeting and these are the points discussed and the outcome. So she also excluded me, not only my son. (Parent, Germany)*



She was very happy that the new teacher of her son showed a lot of empathy for her situation:

*She knows that my German is not so good, so she tries to speak slowly and when there is an expression, I do not understand, we look it up in the internet. The second teacher has some empathy for me, but the first one did not at all. (Parent, Germany)*

The mother also made a lot of rejecting experiences with other parents from her children's classes. But now that her daughter has become one of the best students in the class, she felt proud to introduce herself:

*And now, when I attend a parents' meeting in her school, I feel proud to introduce myself as her mother. I feel respected because she is successful. And now that I learned some German I introduce myself I say: I am a teacher of physics and chemistry and I can feel their astonishment and how this changes their view towards me. (laughs). I would like to go back to my son's school and have an internship there, so they could see, I am not less than they are. Their view on us was wrong. I can be in the same place like you and your son could be in my sons place. And I would ask them, would you like your son being treated this way. But they did not accept me. (Parent, Germany)*

She found her way to deal with stereotypes against her by immediately refuting the stereotypes that she thought would be addressed to her. Other parents deal in different ways with the stereotypes or discriminations towards them or their children. We want to continue this chapter by shedding light on the different strategies parents developed to deal with discrimination.

### **PARENTS' STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION**

Some parents told us, they involved other people that weren't foreigners in the process to have more impact, as this Syrian mother in Sweden did. When her son was called racist words by another child with the teacher standing by and not intervening she informed herself well, booked an appointment, and went there with support:

*I called the school and booked an appointment with the teacher, I needed to read on the National Agency for Education's page his rights and school obligations, we went with a Swedish retired teacher to a meeting and when the teacher saw that we were loaded, then we solved the problem. (parent, Sweden)*

Other parents took mediation or talked to employees of the school, in most cases the principal, filing a complaint. In many cases, this solved the acute problem. One father reported that when in his child's school discriminations aroused against Syrian students, he and the other parents organized. They went together to the principal's office as he explained:

*Once, something happened at school about Syrians and we were sad. I went there with other Syrians. We said: "If we Syrians are the problem, we can leave the school". (Parent, Turkey)*

Other parents said they preferred not to avoid addressing the topic because they felt like it could worsen the situation for them or their children as this Syrian mother in Turkey did. The teacher of her daughter had made offensive comments about how the Turkish would stand together against the enemy, not like the Syrians who would run away. These comments disturbed her daughter, and to protect her, the mother preferred to stay silent:

*And I avoided talking to him in this issue because maybe things will take a different way and I didn't want to do this for my daughter, she is so sensitive and she gets offended easily as I told you. So I just ignored it. (Parent, Turkey)*

This is maybe the most important strategy used by parents: thinking first about the support of their children when discriminated against.

### **HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN THAT FACE DISCRIMINATION**

A Jordanian mother who lives in Germany and worked as a teacher reacted very supportively when her daughter was constantly discouraged by a teacher saying that her language was too bad to be in his class. She told us what she did to encourage her daughter:

*Me as a mother I am satisfied with my daughter and told her maybe you're not very good, maybe your language isn't perfect and he spoke in that way but maybe your language isn't very good. It doesn't matter don't be sad. After two days she should write a test, I taught her everything, but he doesn't let her write the test and said no you're not good enough and I have to bring you to second class, then I talked to him and then he was convinced and accepted my daughter in his class. (Parent, Germany)*

In our workshop, we emphasized the importance of supporting strategies such as this one. Discrimination isolates and children could project it on themselves and think there was something wrong with them when actually it is a societal imaginary.

A mother in our workshop in Italy told us the story about how she managed a situation in which her child was excluded by peers:

*Me and the children we were in a park and there were other children playing there and my children wanted to play with them but weren't allowed by them. So, my daughter came to me crying and I wanted to support them. So, she started to play another game with her children and then the other children wanted to participate because they were curious about the game. (Parent, Italy)*

A mother in our workshop in Berlin said, that her husband went even further to support their child that was having difficulties adapting to kindergarten. Their son suffered from exclusion and the feeling of being different. She said he came home saying: „My hair is black, but all of them their hair is yellow.“ Her husband applied for an internship and began working in the same kindergarten for six weeks to be able to support his child and be close to him.

### **PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

In our workshops, we asked the participating parents, teachers, and school counselors what should be done to prevent or deal with discrimination and stereotypes in school.

Many said, it was very important to be aware of their own stereotypes and question them as this school counselor in Turkey said:

*[...] we need to be aware of our stereotypes, because it is easy to think that we have none and are very humanistic, but we are inclined to make our group superior and the other inferior and we must think about how much our stereotypes influence our decisions, we can all change ourselves. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

It is important to involve first of all teachers and principals because they are the ones with power in the schools and should be role- models for the children. This would create a school culture that encourages good behavior as a counselor in Turkey said. But also the parents are an important factor because as this counselor, that works at a guidance research

center, in Turkey said:

*[...] what children experience at home a lot of times is what they bring to school. (Counselor, Turkey)*

A father who attended our workshop in Italy told us that he educated his daughter to have a respectful view of children with different features. He said:

*One time one of my daughters came home and said there is another child with black skin, it was the first time she saw a black person, at home I explained her that there was no difference between her and the child, it is important that also the majority gets taught this about us. (Parent, Italy)*

This education and sensibilization should also include the parents of the children in school as they have a huge impact on the views and behaviors of their children. The Father from our workshop in Italy mentioned the saying: “the knowledge is in school, but the education is at home” and suggested parents’ reunions to transmit the ideas to the parents.

A measure that many of the migrated parents suggested was to explain to the whole class the situation of the migrated children. Many were hoping that more knowledge about the reasons why people come to other countries would help against discriminating stereotypes. This Syrian father in the workshop in Turkey suggested:

*The teachers must get more information about what is happening in Syria so that they can explain why they came here, so when children ask about this, they can explain this. (Parent, Turkey)*

As a mother in our workshop in Italy said, activities in which the children can show aspects of their culture could arouse interest in the other children. Also, it would help the children feel appreciation for their diverse experiences.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have described some of the experiences with discrimination and stereotypes that newly migrated parents have made interacting with different schools in four different countries. While these stories are not easy and frustrating, it was very important for us to portray them to raise awareness. We have also spoken about how the interviewed parents and workshop participants have dealt with these situations and ways to prevent them.

This chapter shall be closed with the wishes of this Moroccan mother that works as a cultural mediator in Italy. She hopes for a general shift in the perception of children with a migration experience:

*I would like to avoid any prejudice, even that of thinking a priori that the child of foreign origin is lacking. The foreigner, the boy, is always a « lacking» person, who must adapt himself, he alone, he is the one who must achieve something. I wish it were not so. In schools the approach is yes of welcome, but often there are no tools available, there are no mediators. So for them, when a foreign child is about to arrive, it almost becomes a state of emergency, because they do not have the tools. The child is given the label of the one who has to adapt, of the one who is lacking and therefore at a disadvantage. The things he brings with him are not valued. His experience abroad is not valued. Instead, it is necessary to know it, give it the right value and integrate things together. Instead, the foreign child is always lacking, he must always recover. In a phase of identity formation, it is not a good thing! It is really distressing for a boy, especially when he comes with a school career behind him. (Parent, Italy)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For teachers

- Understand your privilege: Awareness of your own stereotypes and reflecting on the process of Othering are very important tools for teachers as they consciously or unconsciously influence our decisions and actions.
- Get and stay informed: specialized training would be great to reflect on your own biases and learn how to avoid reproducing them
- Understand your position of power: Teachers and principals are the ones with power in the schools and should be role- models for the children, involving them in specialized training would create a school culture that encourages good behavior
- Speak up and confront discrimination when you see or hear it (e.g. in school books, among pupils or colleagues, e.g: “Oh, Marie, I know you didn’t mean to be hurtful using that word, but we don’t say hurtful things in our classroom ” or «Why did you say that? Do you know where that comes from?»...).
- Involve different perspectives and cultural experiences in your lessons: in our workshops, many parents asked the teachers to explain to the whole class the situation of the migrated children. Many were hoping that more knowledge about the reasons why people come to other countries would help against discriminating stereotypes
- Try to implement topics in the school e.g. in history class about racism or colonialism or about normalizing migration; open-source material: <https://www.zwischentoene.info/themen.html>
- Respect and encourage the children’s expressions of their identity: Don’t devalue children’s expression of the cultures they live at home. This could be them talking in their first or second languages or sharing experiences or cultural aspects with you or peers. Try to create a climate in which all children feel like their experiences are valued.
- Keep an open mindset: Try to keep an open mindset and don’t jump to conclusions, instead try to ask questions to understand the other one
- Get help when communication problems arouse: If you have a problem and feel like you can’t communicate with the parents well enough, try to get translators or cultural mediators to support you in the communication. If this is not available try to ask the parents to bring an adult person that they trust and that speaks both the languages
- Don’t exclude parents from school events or information: We know it can be difficult with many languages and the needs of parents involved but it is crucial to involve all parents to work together on the education of their child.
- Give children the message: Here, you are right – as you are.

### For parents

- Start talking about incidents to your children; Don’t be afraid to have uncomfortable discussions. Discuss the feelings your children felt during the situation and reassure them that you will do whatever you can to ensure that they are safe in school.
- Prepare your child/teen: Support them in finding reactions and a «Stop” when they are harassed. Practice how to communicate when someone is harassing them, and when they are witnessing another student being harassed.
- Support your children in having a positive self- concept: Most important when your child is facing discrimination is support. Discrimination can isolate, so it is needed. This support can be by talking to them, giving empathy, or asking another person to talk to them if you don’t know how to deal with the topic or don’t feel at ease talking about it with your child, positive role models can help to break stereotype threats
- Report discrimination, get counseling: Talk to other teachers or employees of the school, to other parents, or external NGOs when your child or you are facing discrimination
- Organize together and get involved in schools: If cases occur more often, talk to other parents and try to organize and approach school together. It is easier to do something together
- Bring allies: Bring support to meetings in school when you feel discriminated against or not taken seriously, this could be someone close to you or someone that knows both your first language and the school language very well and can function as a testimony or support you in stressful situations

## EXPERIENCES IN DIFFERENT SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Sara Mazzei

When families move from one country to another, they have to adapt to a new social environment, and here, the school in which children are enrolled is often the main gateway. This adaptation and re-orientation require an understanding of the differences between the educational system from which the pupils come and that of the host country. Parents' unfamiliarity with the functioning of the host country's education system could lead to misunderstandings with teachers, as both teachers and parents recognize in many interviews and in the workshops we conducted in the four countries involved in the projects. At the same time, there can be misunderstandings and preconceptions from the teachers' sides regarding the educative systems in countries of origin.

In this section, we are going to highlight the differences between educative systems that have been discussed in the interviews and workshops and that have an impact on the schools-families relationship and misunderstandings between them starting from the discussion on the topic that happened in our four workshops.

### INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FAMILY-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

The first and central point parents mentioned was the difference they experienced regarding the institutionalization, frequency, and forms of family-school communication. In the Swedish workshop, one parent from Syria described the different experience:

*When I was a child, my parents did not know how the teachers look like. Also, when my children go to school in Syria we never go to school. Parents go to school only if there is one problem. Instead, in Sweden schools ask us to go to school often, to speak about what is better for our children. (Parent, Sweden)*

In Syria, as in many other countries from which refugees and migrants we worked with came, normally parents have less frequent communication with the school and teachers. When a teacher or the headmaster asks parents to come to school to talk about their children, it probably means that there is a concrete and serious incident. Therefore, it is comprehensible that when parents were addressed to come for a speaking hour to school in Sweden, Germany, or Italy, some of them are worried.

For some parents, it took time to get used to a constant relationship, and they may remain with a basic anxiety every time they go to school. Others however have different experiences, as another mother who was working as a teacher told us:

*In cities, the parents are not involved in schools in Syria, as a teacher you don't meet the student's parents at all. In Kurdistan, when I was a teacher, I was more involved, so the parents asked me all the time, how it is going with the son because it was relatives. In Sweden, I had also different experiences. In the beginning, I was asking a lot, because I wanted everything to be fine. Yet the first teacher was not so open. But the second teacher helped us a lot. And I think now, it needs to be a minimum of once a month. (Parent, Sweden)*

Therefore, knowing the educative system of a country is a good base to have a good relationship with parents coming from there; but should not lead to generalization. Instead, it is necessary to know the individual parent in his or her specific experiences.

As we have seen, newly migrated parents often are used to teachers that communicate with them only when pupils do something wrong:

*In the country I grew up, they often focus on the negative sides of children. I know an example, when parents then felt shame for their son. In Sweden, it is the opposite, the teachers focus on the positive sides, so parents get involved. (Parent and Educator, Sweden)*

In Sweden, as in other European countries, the communication between teachers and parents regards instead the general attitude and behaviors of pupils, underlining also their positive features. Therefore, parents face a particular teachers' communication method that focuses on the positive sides, to which more weight is given than to the negative aspects, in order not to demotivate parents but instead to support them. This does not always result in effective communication:

*The difference is in the method of communication between Sweden and Syria. The teacher said only at the end of the year that my son is not good at school. I ask why she said only at the end of the year. There is a lack of communication because it is ok to focus on the positive things but parents get used to a more direct and explicit communication would think that really all go well. (Parent, Sweden)*

As it is possible to read in this quote, newly migrated parents would wish for more direct and honest feedback, because they are not used to this very indirect communicative style. In their past experiences, teachers talk about problems directly and explicitly as the first and only thing to talk about, so what is considered polite communication could turn out to be seen as a lack of clarity. The same experience happened to a mother in Italy, as she narrated to us in one interview:

*They never called me, they told me he was good. Maybe they did it on purpose to flunk him because it was the first time he had arrived and therefore he shouldn't go on immediately but do another year, to learn Italian better. (Parent, Italy)*

In this case, the teachers did not explain to the mother the problem of her son, because he behaved well and did not create problems in the classroom. In this case, this school in south Italy seems more like the school in the home country of these newly migrated families, as teachers think they have a duty to warn families only in cases of particularly bad behavior. A mother reports the same situation in Germany:

*I know that our girl does not do well at school. And whenever we ask them to motivate her, they tell us it's all fine. But it clearly is not. There must be honesty in their feedback. Why don't they suggest extra lessons or tell us, how we could probably support her so she improves, how we can find a way to motivate her and not just leave her alone. (Parent, Germany)*

Even in this case, teachers do not communicate with the parents even if their children have learning problems and need help, so parents find themselves left alone. This might be also due to biases and wrong predictions on the side of parents. In this case, the teacher might have a bias that the pupil will fail because he or she does not know the language enough, so he/she considers it useless to engage with the parents in trying to make him improve, as they have already decreed his failure. This of course is a wrong attitude.

Some parents might also experience fear and anxiety towards a school system that they do not know and in which they might feel lost in the beginning. In Germany, one parent told us that she felt stressed by the complexity of the system itself:

*It wasn't easy to understand the system. You know, the schools here are very big. Then there is this issue with appointments. And in general, when they see that you are a foreigner, they do not give you the opportunity to explain yourself. So more or less it was a negative feeling. (Parent, Germany)*

This parent might have felt lost in the beginning in a big institution in which no one seems to be available to listen and explain, in which marks are assigned differently, and in which it is a challenge to receive information. However, our interviews and workshops also highlighted that parents were eager to inform themselves and learn about how to navigate new structures to support their children adequately.

## TEACHING METHODS AND ATTITUDE

Parents in our interviews and workshops also talked about different teaching methods that they could observe regarding their country of origin and the new society they would live in now.

Here again, we aim to give an example of the comparison between Syria and Sweden.

In Sweden, education is based on performance standards instead of content standards as in Syria and the feedback regards children's progress and not only children's grade. Therefore, a parent could not understand the reason for a negative result of a child who knows the contents of the lessons but cannot perform the requested task, such as doing a presentation in front of the classroom through technological tools.

*Here you have to be creative, you have to write an essay, you have to research and.. and even when you got the exam you have like three questions which are all longer answers and not... just like one, yes, these ones for me is the biggest differences... They are positive in my opinion but it needed time to adapt to them. (Parent, Sweden)*

In many cases, newly migrated pupils are not used to creating content and even less to show them, so tasks like this could be more difficult for them than learning the lesson. Also, language skills play an important role in this regard, as pupils may feel embarrassed by their non-perfect command of the language in performing tasks such as this, despite knowing the topic very well. Shyness, embarrassment about the language, and not being used to an interactive teaching method can therefore contribute to poor results even in a pupil who studies and knows the topics, as parents can verify at home in an environment where, however, he or she does not experience embarrassment

In Germany, a mother complained about the lack of competition. In the educational systems from which the newly migrated parents we interviewed came, pupils, are often pushed to compete through, for example, competitions on memorization, such as of a poem or chemical elements:

*There are no competitions. No reading competition, no writing competition or anything cultural. It's non-existent. I wonder, how children discover their abilities. Yes, of course, they do, but they could discover more this way, when they are obliged to compete with others they will find new competencies. (Parent, Germany)*

This mother believed that children should be more motivated through competition to discover their strengths, while in cooperative and discussion-based learning, common in European schools, the same goal is pursued in theory precisely through cooperation and discussion. It may be the case that such collaboration and discussion in the classroom fails to involve her daughter, who is somehow left out. Other parents instead prefer the teaching method in Germany and its lack of competition, because everyone can work by themselves without the pressure they have experienced in the school system of the home country.

Beyond every one's personal opinions, it is important that the teacher explains to the parents the pedagogical reason for their choice not to overwhelmingly reward the most talented in something, so that they will not be disappointed without understanding, thinking that their children are not being recognized for their merits.

In Germany, anyway, newly migrated pupils and parents complained about the stress of exams, group pressure, and adherence to schedules (Workshop, Berlin), differently in Italy and Sweden, whose educational system is seen as very relaxed compared to what they are used to (Workshop Sweden and Workshop Italy). In Italy, newly migrated parents in

Italy see the study as more simple compared to their home country, as expressed by this mother in one interview:

*I see the Italian school as a game! It is a game compared to studying as it is done in Syria. But here there is freedom, it is a free country [...] Here of course it is good, but in Syria, the teaching is more in-depth. If you have to study, you have to study. You can't get your diploma like that! Here, honestly, it is easier. The only obstacle is language. If you speak the language, you get the diploma. Not at our place in Syria, studying is difficult" (Parent, Italy)*

Her opinion represents a common judgment on the Italian school system in general, in which it is easy to enter and succeed, a free system in which teachers do not ask too much of pupils. There are of course pupils that cannot succeed in Italian schools, but it is mostly for language problems.

The fundamental difference between Italy and Germany is that, in Italy, there is no level of language proficiency required to enter and the first separation of careers happens in Italy at the end of middle school, in the 8th grade, and most German landers at the 4th grade. Therefore, newly migrated pupils in Italy can enter common schools until they are 13-14 years old without any selection for admission.

In Germany, instead, selectivity and channeling begin very early. It means that newly migrated pupils who enter German schools at primary levels have much less time than those who enter Italian primary schools to learn the language and adapt to the system, before choosing, or being chosen, to attend a lyceum or vocational school:

*Also the topic of Gymnasium and Realschule, that's very stressful for parents, from third grade start the parents think what if my child doesn't go to Gymnasium. I hope that this system didn't exist. (Parent, Germany)*

How this Jordan's mother stated, newly arrived parents and pupils perceive this selection as very stressful at an early age, when pupils should think only to socialize with peers and integrate into society, instead of having to think about go or not to university already before adolescence.

The experience of newly migrated pupils in Italy is the opposite, as in most cases, they can simply enter all schools they want to attend. The idea is that they could learn better the language while socializing with Italian peers and learning the subjects at the same time. This system of course sometimes causes some problems, with pupils that never reach a sufficient level in the Italian language and therefore fail at some point or leave school because they do not understand the lessons.

What we are most interested in here is the teacher's attitude related to the difference in the admission system. Many newly migrated parents in Italy talk about teachers who put a special emphasis on newly migrated pupils to teach them the language at every level of education. On the contrary, many parents in Germany complain about teachers who mostly judge whether the pupil's language level is sufficient to attend that class since teaching language to newly migrated pupils is not their job but that of teachers in welcoming classes. A parent in Germany said in an interview:

Her teacher was not good with her, even that I remember that first time she was in class he asked her "Who brought you here?". She answered "we have moved here and I am registered here", he said to her "you don't speak German either, I will bring you to the second grade, come and sit here in front of me because you're not good and I'll take you to second class". (Parent, Germany)

## PARENTS' & TEACHERS' RIGHTS AND DUTIES

A final aspect mentioned by our interview partners and workshop participants is the relationships between parents and teachers and their rights and duties. A teacher who migrated herself to Sweden from Syria said about the difference between her youth and now.

*Big differences. When I was in school my parents trust teachers so much, now parents protect pupils so much and do not trust teachers so much. When you as a teacher do something here, you have to expect a reaction "what do you do with my children". I think this has to be a balance between trust and protection. (Teacher, Sweden)*

This might not only be a difference between two places but also between generations which is important to note and affect all parents and teachers, if migrated to another country or not. For this teacher, today, there is a lack of respect towards teachers from the side of parents since they want to protect their children as much as possible. But it also has a dimension of different educative systems. It could be that newly migrated parents fear that teachers have the right to decide what to do in the classroom without continuous parental interference, as was the case in their experience in their home country, where it was rare to question the teachers' actions.

Another aspect that was discussed particularly in our workshop in Sweden was the question of children's rights. One school tutor said that in Sweden there would be a lot of protection for the children, but this made an acquaintance very insecure.

*Parents' rights are important: What can I do with my kids, or not. One father told me his daughter is addicted to the phone. He was scared to take it away because he feels that this is against the law. (School Tutor, Sweden)*

In this quote, we hear about a Syrian father scared of the Swedish law concerning the rights of children, which seems to take away his parental rights and limit him in his educational action. Here it shows that it would be very important to inform parents about what they can or cannot do with their children.

This problem emerges also from the interviews, with parents who feel continuously controlled by school institutions that ask their children if something bothered them at home, and this insistent request results in their eyes as a humiliating prejudice, or, in less severe cases, in stress on the children. A mother in Italy explained to us:

*It always happened to me at school that they would ask me: "Do you wear the hijab at home? Do you wear it in front of your husband and your children?!" That was the question they asked me the most. Then the teachers ask a lot of information to the children about us, about how we live at home. And we wanted to make them understand how we are and that, at home, we are the same as them! Are you free at home? So are we! Then, little by little, they began to get to know us. Also because here they know nothing about Arabic and Islamic culture. They watch something on TV or meet a person and think that they are all the same. They don't think that we have a great culture, important families. My children at school were exposed to so many questions. (Parent, Italy)*

In this case, this investigation is closely linked to prejudice against religious belonging. It impacts the relationship with teachers and pupils, who continuously ask her and her children about their religion and customs. Her way to respond is to be recognized with her Muslim identity and therefore she is willing to answer the school's questions also to contrast the prejudices toward Muslims spread by television in a society, such as the small Calabrian town where she is located, where people are not used to dealing with Muslims.

This said, in most cases, the right of parents regarding religious belonging is respected, as stated by this other mother in another interview:

*You know that we are Muslims... I don't have any problem, I want to know the culture here and the others are curious about our culture too. Many times the teachers call me and ask my permission for something. (Parent, Italy)*

## CONCLUSION

Despite the differences between the educational system of home and host countries, and the consequent difficulties and misunderstandings, many parents, however, experience the change positively:

*The school in Sweden is different compared with the Syrian, but this has not meant any problems, Rather, it has given us as parents and our children a broader view on education – and to us education is central! (Parent, Sweden)*

In this quote, the differences are seen as a challenge to reflect on education in general and open the mind by understanding how it is influenced by local context and culture. Maybe this positive attitude depends on the cultural background of the family, maybe on the teachers they have met, and this allows us to remember how sometimes even the willingness of an individual teacher to have conversations with parents can contribute to a positive adjustment to the new system:

Here, I always ask the teachers how my daughters are doing, but even without asking, it is the teachers who inform me, they follow the children also at home, they talk to the mother on the phone. This is what I liked the most. And if, for example, the children have problems with understanding, the mother and the teachers cooperate, they know what the problem is and try to find a solution. (Parent, Italy)

As this mother states, the cooperative relationship that her daughters' teacher has established with her is helping her and the pupils to cope with all the problems relating to adaptation to a new system.

### SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

- Newly migrated parents may be used to a different educative system, in which they are required to perform different roles compared to those they are required to do in the host countries. It is important to remember this for teachers dealing with them for the first time.
- Dealing with a new educative system can cause anxiety and confusion, so teachers and school staff should take into consideration their condition and try to offer help
- Schools should organize projects of welcoming in which the school system is explained to newly-arrived parents, to help them to feel more secure. When schools have to deal with one or a few parents, the help of a mediator seems to be the best option.
- Knowing the educative system from which newly migrated pupils came could help school employees and teachers to avoid misunderstandings, prejudice, and expectation towards their families.
- An important aspect to know is the differences regarding school-family communication itself. In some Arab countries e.g., parent-school-relations might be different. Parents only are addressed by teachers when there are serious disciplinary problems.
- Another aspect is one of the teaching methods. It shows that often classrooms seemed much more competitive and demanding in certain countries of origin in Syria, where grades were very important, as would be the case e.g. in Germany, where reflections, discussions, and performances are more important.
- Finally, it is important to be more transparent about parents' duties and children's rights.

## DIVERSITY BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

*Petra Becker, Miriam Stock*

Societies in Europe are increasingly shaped by diversity and this is also reflected in school contexts. Therefore, diversity was also a matter of discussion in our workshops and interviews. Parents and teachers in our different workshops described to us that classrooms were diverse regarding many aspects, such as countries of origin, present languages, (non-)religious beliefs and traditions, different cultural references, values, social backgrounds, and so on. This generates a lot of opportunities but also challenges and demands for new ways to address diversity adequately both inside schools and at home.

In the following, we attempt to portray how parents and teachers/counselors who participated in our workshops perceived diversity in schools and beyond, which structures work well for them and which do not, how issues of diversities are discussed at schools and home, and how newly migrated teachers and other mediators are or could be an important asset in regards to these issues.

First, it has to be mentioned that diversity issues have been addressed quite differently in our four regional contexts. While in big cities in central Europe such as Berlin, classrooms were much more diverse, it seemed that for example in schools in Muğla in Turkey or South Italy, schools could be more homogeneous. However, our discussions with parents and teachers alike also highlighted that often it differentiated from school to school, so there is no generalization. In Berlin in some areas, schools were quite homogeneous, whereas other schools in South Italy were described as having students with family histories from many different countries.

### PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY

In general, newly migrated parents perceived diverse classrooms as very positive. They felt that their children could benefit from the notion, that differences were appreciated. A mother in Sweden talked about her experience with her children:

*There are students from different parts of the world in their present school. This makes them not feel different. They have friends from different backgrounds, and they are lucky to have that chance. What makes it easy is that they know the language, my children have no language difficulties, and this helps them. They have a habit of reading, and this makes it easier to acquire new knowledge. (Parent, Sweden)*

This could also be seen in the opposite case, i.e., in the case of classrooms were not diverse. This doesn't have to be the case in general but in some schools, this could make children feel different and excluded, particularly if diversity issues are not addressed by teachers and other staff. One particularly bad example was described by a mother in Berlin. She said about her daughter and son:

*She feels different at school (...). She understands she has dark hair and dark skin. She cried once and she asked why she has dark skin. For my son, it was even worse. My son did not want to stay in the kindergarten. My husband did not see any solution but to do an internship in the same kindergarten so my son would be ready to attend. He was suffering from exclusion. My son's hair is black like mine. He would come back from kindergarten and say: „My hair is black, but all of them their hair is yellow.“ He was only three and a half or four years then. (Parent, Germany)*

So diverse classrooms could lead to more inclusive feelings among pupils and prevent discrimination.

## FEARS REGARDING DIVERSITY

However, there might also be fears that arise with diversity and perceived differences. For many parents and teachers alike, this was not the case, however, others shared some concerns. This had to do with the fear that others would change their own culture or identity, as becomes evident in a quote from an Italian teacher who said:

*As far as expectations are concerned, I would like a total integration of these people, of these families, diversity is an enrichment, it should not be seen as an exclusion. Their culture, way of doing things, food, should also enrich our Italian culture in some way and it would be beautiful. My fear is at the same time precisely culture because I fear that they have a closed mentality, a way of thinking that even where it is wrong for me it is right for them. (Teacher, Italy)*

Here, it becomes obvious that the fear had to do with the perception that parents who migrated e.g. from Arab regions would have a closed mentality – a common stereotype that we heard often during our interviews. However, the discussions between parents and teachers in our workshops showed that this might be a large misunderstanding and that what was perceived as a “closed mentality” could have other reasons, such as shame of not mastering the language and many other things. It thus would be important to offer teachers more knowledge on newly migrated people and their backgrounds and about their own perceptions. This was also mentioned by a mother in Sweden during an interview. She said that she wished teachers would know more about her culture and norms.

The same fear of being “changed” by the other was also mentioned by some parents. One mother in Sweden said the same about the fear of transformation

*Integration plays a big role. I do not know if I can adjust myself to Swedish culture. If I adapt, I might forget my earlier culture. I think we have to support each other. (Parent, Sweden)*

Other parents told us that they sometimes feared they would lose their children to the “new culture”. Also here, it shows that some parents might have quite a closed concept of culture, assuming that one culture can only be replaced entirely by another. However other parents again didn’t see any problems for their children as another mother in Sweden told us:

*They don't really have any difficulty in building an identity. They like both of the languages and they like being here. (Parent, Sweden)*

## DISCUSSIONS AT SCHOOL

Diversity also may cause conflicts in schools. A mother in Berlin told us, that she was very upset her 17-year-old daughter had sex education at school. The girl herself refused to take part and her father went to complain to the school, as he did not find that appropriate. We know that this is also a topic of discussion between more progressive and more conservative families of German origin.

A big topic being discussed in schools is multilingualism. Although it is well confirmed that children who achieve a good command of their family language learn other languages more easily, we found that a lot of teachers were not comfortable with children using their family language in school not even with schoolmates during the break. Even many teachers and preschool educators advised parents not to use the family language at home. Both behaviors damage the self-esteem of migrated children and their families and make them feel excluded.

## DISCUSSIONS AT HOME

Parents also told us, that children would come home with many questions since they experienced different norms, traditions, and lifestyles at school. This also led them to reflect on family cultures and practices. These issues had often to do with different religious practices and were mainly perceived in Italy, Germany, and Sweden. In Turkey, these discussions were less the case because the majority of both Turkish families and migrated families from Syria were Muslims.

One mother in Sweden told us during an interview:

*The children often ask why we have a different religion and why we eat halal meat. When I explain them, they understand. (Parent, Sweden)*

Another mother in Germany mentioned that due to her experiences with diverse religious affiliations children would come home with questions.

*The children began to talk about religion between themselves. Even if God exists at all. They discuss. They say ,God does not exist. We cannot see him. Children tell her we were apes or chicken or or ... Anyhow they discuss these things. Is there a devil? In their school there are people from all backgrounds. There are Muslims, there are atheists and so on. They want answers to their questions. And here, we get into some trouble sometimes. But you cannot avoid that. These questions will be asked. And you will have to answer them. And I try to answer them without driving them into a direction which pleases me. I need to answer my daughter's questions but without having her believe what I believe in. I want her to think freely. (Parent, Germany)*

So, for parents, it was often a challenge to answer many questions that they did not have to answer in their home countries. But as the example shows, it was very important for parents to answer those questions. This mother in Berlin was a good example in talking adequately to her daughter, explaining questions of religion without pushing her too much into one direction. Here again, it also shows that diversity can be an asset because it can help children to become very reflective about many important societal topics.

Another story, parents often wondered about, is that children came home with new ideas about children's rights and would challenge their parents. This was told to us in Sweden when a mother said she was scared when her children said things like: “You are not allowed to check on my smartphone because that affects my privacy rights”. Most parents were very concerned about what children are being taught at school. From our observations, we understood that there is a lot of misunderstanding about the implementation of children's rights and a feeling of insecurity about what rights parents and the authorities have in case of a conflict. So here, it would be important to be more transparent so parents can feel more secure.

## SUGGESTIONS: PREVENT SEGREGATION IN SCHOOLS

After highlighting general perceptions and discussions on diversity, in the second part of this chapter, we attempt to look more closely into structures and methods that can support a good interaction with diversity and other structures which might prevent this.

One important aspect that was mentioned both in Germany and Italy and that was perceived as negative was the segregation in schools. In Germany, this is an official policy at the beginning of school integration. Children were placed in separate classes to learn the language faster. However, a mother in Berlin was concerned about the outcome of these classes. She said:

*Our daughter has been there for more than one year. She does not have any German friends and clings to the Arabic speaking girls in her class. They only speak Arabic. So how could she possibly practice her language and improve? (Parent, Berlin)*

Also in Sweden, a mother raised concerns about her children not learning the language right when she is only segregated:

*I talk about integration. My opinion is that there is segregation at school. Newly arrived learn with other newly arrived which leads to that they do not learn the Swedish language to the better. (Parent, Sweden)*

So in general, particularly from the parents' side, this segregation was not appreciated. This said, also in regular classes, sometimes segregation took place, as a mother in Italy told us about her experience with school:

*For example, if there are 4 foreign children, they decide to put them together, let them sit together. They say that it is to put them at ease. But there were teachers who said no, they have to be moved, to have an approach with everyone. Then the cultural side takes over: Can girls sit next to a boy? They think they might have problems and so they tend to put them together (foreign children). Once we dealt with this issue during a class council. I was class representative. Most of them said «Let's leave them where they are». And so even during the interval foreign children do not mix up. But I said: Let's move them but not only them, all of them so that there can be a constant interaction between the children, even boys and girls. In this way fixed couples are not created and the relationship can be facilitated. I remember well, even my son used to tell me this, that children of foreign origin were always in a group (or in pairs) among themselves. We faced this problem. But most of the parents, and also the teachers, preferred it this way, so as not to create problems. (Parent, Italy)*

Here it shows, that sometimes there might be approaches to prevent conflicts by putting similar children together in one group and that this would be also preferred by some parents and teachers alike. But as the mother pointed out rightly, this can be very counterproductive, because it is important for children to mix up.

However, what was not perceived so well by parents was if there were big age gaps between children in one class. One woman in Italy explained that this created problems for her son:

*When we enrolled him in school, they put him in a class with children three years younger than him, and this created problems. He was too big, he didn't fit in with them, he was very agitated ... for a whole year there were problems. He didn't tell me, he just said: Mum, I don't like school. And he did a lot of absences. The teacher always said there were problems, but she didn't understand that was the problem, that he was big and he was sitting next to children three years younger than him. I went to the reception, the teachers thought that he had some learning problem but on the contrary! He is the most intelligent of all my children. (Parent, Italy).*

This is a tricky subject because one might argue children should be put into classes according to their level of knowledge. However, this example shows that it is important to have age-sensitive approaches rather than culture-sensitive approaches with often may enforce segregation.

Sweden might have a good solution to this question. We learned, that in Sweden children are placed in school classes according to their age but that at the beginning of the procedure there was a placement test in basic subjects. This placement test is carried out by a teacher who speaks the child's language. Through this, the school knows about the level of the child in reading and writing their own language and about what kind of support it needs to catch up with their classmates in the main subjects.

## **SUGGESTION: APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY IN CURRICULA**

Parents and teachers also reflected in the workshops on how there could be more diversity-sensitive approaches in teaching and classroom. In Italy, we heard a heartwarming story of a teacher who asked all of the children in her class to bring a lullaby from their home country. They could write it down or sing it or have somebody from their family sing and bring the recording with them. So every child could feel, that they have something beautiful at home which is appreciated. On the other hand, the other children could experience that cultures are not so different and that there are many shared habits and values.

A teacher in Berlin told us that she asked a new pupil from Syria to teach her classmates some basic ideas about Arabic in the afternoons, so the girl knew her previous knowledge was valued, and her classmates knew that Arabic was a language worth learning, just like Spanish or French.

Besides, the inclusion of diverse languages into school curricula could also help to have a more positive approach to diversity. A teacher of a welcoming class in Germany told us that she had a class with many Syrian children so besides German they also partly translated aspects into Arabic. While this is certainly difficult to maintain with many languages and more mixed languages, the presence of Arabic in school contexts had a very positive effect on the children as she discussed:

*I think this acceptance, we had at the school very much, like we had a family feeling at the school, you are welcome here, it's nice that you are here, I think that has made a lot of difference and that one has also accepted the culture of the other, not like: you are now in Germany you have to speak German here now and you know what, your culture your mother tongue you may forget now, but that was already such a nice togetherness and I think that has also made it easier and yes also the entry easier. (Teacher, Germany)*

## **SUGGESTION: TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

What we heard from both teachers and parents in all countries was, that there is a need for teacher training on diversity, multilingualism, and knowledge about the countries, the children come from and the reasons, why people flee or migrate from these countries. One teacher from Sweden who herself had a migration history said about her colleagues:

*They need to be empathetic to understand the special situation. They need more knowledge understanding about migrant histories, background, cultures. (Teacher, Sweden)*

And a father in our workshop in Turkey suggested:

*I think that the teachers must get more information about what is happening in Syria so that they can explain (to the Turkish children in their class) why they came here, so when children ask about this, they can explain this. (Parent, Turkey)*

In general, all agreed that more long-term training is needed, yet for teachers, this was also a matter of resources and time since they were often overloaded with many tasks.

## **SUGGESTIONS: PARENTAL MEETINGS**

Another suggestion both parents and teachers made was, to have more exchanges between families. Schools or preschools could organize events, where parents meet and take care that everybody feels invited and included.



A psychological school counselor from Turkey suggested during the workshop doing this also in class:

*(We could) ... organize events where families come together, activities that they used at pre-school: children paint posters showing some photos of their family members and write their professions and present the poster in school. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

However, this must be carried out in a very careful way so that children, who lost their family or have a difficult family situation do not feel ashamed.

### **SUGGESTION: MORE DIVERSE TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS**

What also everybody – both parents and teachers in all countries – agreed about was the need for more diversity among the school staff. There were different suggestions on how to achieve this goal.

During the workshop in Berlin, parents and teachers said it would be helpful to have a multicultural team at the school including teachers who come from the same countries the children come from, so they can explain to their colleagues about the school system, the children come from.

A teacher from Sweden who has herself a migration history talked about her experience at school in an interview:

*Me as both a parent and a teacher, I wish they hire more teachers/mentors who have different backgrounds. I have noticed this in my children and in my school. (The) Mentor group at my school consists of 6 people, three of whom have a different background than Swedish. They say that this helps them to develop and how they handle different situations. (Teacher, Sweden)*

Another teacher with a similar background said, that diversity is not only needed within the teaching staff but also between social workers, counselors, and beyond, etc.:

*I came to Sweden in 2015 (...) I have been an English teacher for four years in Syria and in 2017 I started to work as a teacher again. The first two years, I worked just with refugee children. The children (teenagers) who came alone to Sweden, they needed psychological counseling. I couldn't provide it because I met them two hours every week. During these hours, I was trying to be near them, talk to them because they needed it more than teaching. They needed someone who can listen to them and understand their situation (coming from war zone, trying to fit in the new country, etc.) (Teacher, Sweden)*

However, it is important to make sure, that colleagues who take over certain tasks are also trained for this. Knowing the cultural background and the language does not make a good interpreter, mediator, or social worker. (Needless to say, this goes for all staff) As one teacher from Italy pointed out:

*First of all, it is not only a matter of language but of mediation, it is a different thing, that is why it is fundamental ... Sometimes you think that translating and mediating is the same thing, but it is not. I can translate because I speak languages, but I am not a mediator. It is a different thing, the mediator is fundamental because it helps, it is a bridge between the two cultures, it helps the teachers to understand the point of view of the parents and helps the parents to understand the point of view of the teachers and how education works in Italy, what are the perspectives, because it is important that the son or daughter attends school and finish the education cycle. (Teacher, Italy)*

### **BARRIERS TO THE INCLUSION OF FOREIGN TEACHERS/ EDUCATORS**

Finally, we want to hint at a point, that was often discussed in our workshop, namely the challenge of newly migrated teachers and educators to have their former qualifications recognized. For most of them, it seems an almost unreachable dream to work in the field of education again.

There are single programs in both Sweden and Germany for newly migrated teachers, but they only qualify for finding a job as an assistant teacher or likewise. In Turkey a program for Syrian teachers who were employed as assistants in Turkish schools was stopped for a lack of funding and all of them lost their jobs again.

A school counselor from Turkey said:

*We have hired a teacher who also came from Syria and who used to be a teacher in Syria. They are also a citizen of Turkey. It's financially difficult to hire a teacher but we cut down on other things about home to be able to pay the teacher. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

So, some schools see the need of including newly migrated teachers, but they need the legal framework and funding for doing so.

Other schools are reluctant to employ newly migrated teachers as they do not trust in their capabilities or, as one school headmaster in Berlin pointed out, feared the complaints of racist parents.

A Syrian parent from Berlin who is also an English teacher was ignored although there was an obvious need for teachers in her daughter's class:

*When (we) went to school first, there were English lessons as well. Then they stopped. When we asked them why, they said: There is no English teacher. And I said I am an English teacher and I can teach even as a volunteer. But they did not respond. They did not have English lessons all year long. That made me upset. (Parent, Germany)*

But there are also other obstacles: In the case of Berlin, a quarrel about head scarfs at school has been going on for years. Up to now, teachers in Berlin are not allowed to wear a head scarf at school. That keeps many very qualified teachers, the school system is in dire need of, out of the system.

But at least for Germany, we can say that inclusion of newly migrated teachers has reached the political agenda. The lack of teachers is so huge, that the system is opening up step by step – although this will take time because bureaucratic obstacles need to be addressed one by one.

One step in between is the employment of tutors or mentors. In Italy, "cultural mediators" were a great asset for schools. In Sweden, our partner at the University of Gävle ran a program for newly migrated teachers to become "Studiehandledare" in schools, and thus mentors and tutors. Some of them later got employed as formal teachers in Swedish schools. In Germany, some universities and civil organizations have been implementing training for migrant teachers for years, e.g., the "Refugee Teachers Program" in Potsdam or the "LehrkräftePLUS" Program implemented by universities of Bielefeld, Bochum, Duisburg-Essen, Cologne, and Siegen, the "BAB project" implemented by Back on Track e.V. in Berlin, the "IGEL" Program in Weingarten and the "InterTeach" Program in Flensburg and Kiel. But these programs need to take the next step in combination with formal teachers' education so migrant teachers can take the next step from assistant teachers to fully trained and recognized teachers<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.uni-siegen.de/start/news/oeffentlichkeit/980746.html>

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### **Governments:**

- Open the school systems for newly migrated teachers and educators (offer low threshold qualification programs)
- Make multilingualism and diversity competencies obligatory in curricula for teachers and educators
- Organize a pool of interpreters and mediators who can be booked by schools

### **Teachers/schools:**

- Offer more diversity training for teachers
- Implement more formats where parents from diverse backgrounds can meet and are listened to
- Include newly migrated parents actively in school activities
- Learn about the background of the children and their families

### **Parents:**

- Attend school meetings and ask for assistance, translation, or mediation in case you have open questions
- Be open and supportive when children come home with new questions and discussions
- Cherish an open approach to diversity at home

## CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIES TO GET A BETTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Gernot Aich

A very important part of our workshop were communication, challenges in communication, and conflict solutions. The general aim was to improve the communication between parents and teachers to foster a positive environment for the child's development.

Several studies point out that positive, open, mutual communication is the centerpiece of well-functioning cooperation between parents and teachers. Very often both sides – teachers and parents – want to help the child, but a lack of communication, misunderstandings or other types of dysfunctional interactions avoid good support for the child. Factors for difficulties in parent-teacher dialogues according to different studies are:

- The limited time for parent-teacher-talks
- The not well-trained communications skills of the teachers
- The unclear structures
- The indistinct responsibility for the child
- The high injury potential of parents and teachers and fears on both sides.

In the context of the PARENTable project, these factors have to be taken into account, and in addition, the cross-cultural backgrounds of parents and teachers lead to some challenges which also have to be considered. In the interviews and during workshop discussions, we found several results which help to better understand communication difficulties and to improve communication between parents and teachers. In the following, we attempt to portray what has been discovered both in interviews before as well as during workshop discussions between educators and parents.

### LANGUAGE ASPECTS

One of the main challenges in all four workshops was the missing possibility of understanding each other because of language issues. One parent in Sweden said during an interview:

*I always communicate with them, but the only problem is the language. Sometimes I don't understand them because of the language. (Parent, Sweden)*

This was also mentioned in Turkey during our workshop where a parent explained to us:

*Children have to translate, because we don't speak Turkish, sometimes we ask the school to have language courses. The problem is that our own children have to translate when there are problems in school. (Parent, Turkey)*

Also, a school counselor in the same workshop confirmed:

*that for them (the teachers) it is also a huge problem, because sometimes the children do not translate in the right way, e.g. if it is something which has to do with their own discipline problems. (School Counselor, Turkey)*

and therefore school counselors also asked for language.

Logically, it can be ascertained that without a common language it is difficult to deal with each other and the best solution would be language courses to support newly migrated parents in language learning. That is what also helps

parents in other circumstances. A translator is the second-best solution and as a requirement, it can be said that the more serious the subject is the more official and professional the translator has to be. Another possibility that helps is translator apps. In the meantime, they are functioning very well, but one has to be careful because of privacy reasons. Another difficulty in this context was, that schools very often communicate with parents via letters just in the language of the host country. One parent living in Germany mentioned the following:

*It's a bit difficult because we are in Germany and for example when they send us letters that we, they can insist it to be in German but maybe give us a chance to translate it a little bit on the bottom or give us the possibility not to make mistakes because at the beginning I received letters and the letters were not followed up because I didn't understand what to do. (Parent, Germany)*

A possible solution could be a summary of the content of the letter in the language of the parents or a letter sent digitally so that the parents can copy it and translate it using a language translator app. Sometimes in very important cases, it is necessary to go into personal contact with the parents and explain to them the content to help the child. The same parent said:

*... if there is a letter that is too important for the children and for the children's future... You don't have to translate all the letters, but there are situations where you can or maybe even have to. (Parent, Germany)*

## FEARS IN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

In all workshops, teachers said that they want to understand the situations of the parents or the family but on the other hand they had the fear of being too intrusive. A teacher in the workshop in Berlin raised the following question:

*How can you get to know the other one without being too intruding? (Teacher, Germany).*

Here it shows that teachers want to respect the privacy of families and or/they did not want to trigger something which they are not able to cope with, e.g. a traumatic situation during the war or the flight. This is very understandable, but on the other hand, it blocks open communication. Parents in the workshops very often said, that from their perspective it is a very good idea to ask because they want to talk about their situation and explain what they need from the school or the teacher to support their children. Many parents said that it is important to ask in a respectful form, but not from a too compassionate attitude. A good way to get in such an attitude would be to perceive them as experts in their situation and of their child which they really are.

Another fear which was mentioned particularly by the parents was the fear that they say something or get information that gets or has to get to the officials. Here teachers answered that they just have to report issues that are against the law and all other issues are kept secret in the school. Parents said that it would be good to get this information at the beginning of a parent-teacher talk to gain trust in the teacher.

Other parents mentioned that they have fears to say something wrong or too much. A parent in Berlin said during the workshop:

*I am afraid that the teacher gets angry and therefore I don't tell him too much (Parent, Germany)*

Many teachers found that interesting and said, that they now better understand, that it is really hard to talk to a teacher in a new surrounding with many unknown circumstances. Parents and teachers agreed that it would be good to mention this also at the beginning of the communication.

## DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION STYLES

Another challenge that was often mentioned was different communication styles and different expectations towards teachers or parents in the country of origin and the new country. For example, in Italy one mother mentioned during an interview:

*In Syria there is shame, a parent is a bit ashamed to talk to the teacher, there is a strong respect... here parents are free to talk whenever they want with the teacher, they change school as they want... It's not like that in our country. Here in Italy, if there's a problem, parents change school immediately! Even when they talk to teachers, it's as if they were friends, it's not like that in our country. (Parent, Italy).*

Here it shows, that parents may have been confronted with a new and different communication style and new attitude related to school. One can easily see that for someone in a new country this might be a challenge to adapt to new communication forms to solve problems with schools and teachers. And it is even harder in insecure circumstances as many newly migrated parents with refugee backgrounds live. For this reason, teachers need to know the differences so that they can invite parents to have mutual and respectful communication.

Another example shows the misunderstandings which can arise from different cultural backgrounds. This is what a parent said during the workshop in Sweden.

*The difference in the method of communication between Sweden and Syria. The teacher said only at the end of the year that my son is not good at school. I ask why she said only at the end of the year. There is a lack of communication because it is ok to focus on the positive things but parents get used to a more direct and explicit communication, would think that really all go well." (Parent, Sweden)*

Here the parent thinks that everything is okay and only at the end of the school year she finds out, that there is a problem with her child. Another participant confirms that and says from the perspective of a parent and a teacher:

*In Sweden teachers talk a lot about the positive things, and then there is a but, because they don't talk directly. So migrant parents don't understand". (Tutor, Sweden)*

In this case, it is very important for both teachers and parents that they are aware of existing differences. So for the teacher, it is important to inform the parents and for parents, it is important to ask, if they are not sure about something concerning their child, the school, or the school system. One parent explained her successful behavior as follows in Sweden:

*I think I am more engaged because I ask very detailed questions about my children. If I don't ask, they don't tell me about their day." (Parent, Sweden).*

Sometimes different communication styles may even lead to conflicts. One teacher in Sweden that herself newly migrated to the surrounding of Gävle reported an example:

*Sometimes parents get the wrong message, because they don't understand, what it means. So it is a negative message with the positive message. And then there are angry, because there is a wrong grade." (Teacher, Sweden)*

Here the different communication styles led to a conflict, because parents heard the positive message and did not

understand, that there was also a message, which meant that pupils were not good at school. Parents in the workshops insisted that they would like to get the difficult information about their children as well and early because only then they can sensibly support their children and help them to improve at school. And the teacher from the quote who herself has a migration history discusses these issues with other teachers in her school to sensitize them to be more open. Teachers and parents believed that if there is a good relationship between teacher and parent and good cooperation even such difficult situations or conflicts can be solved. One parent in Berlin said:

*I wish to have a good cooperation even in conflict situations in order to solve the conflicts together, also to protect the child.”(Parent, Berlin)*

This quote from a parent underlines what research proves, and how important it is to enable parents to bring their perspective and their knowledge into schools.

### STRATEGIES TO GET A BETTER OPEN AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

As already described in the introduction, parent-teacher discussions are often difficult and full of conflict. As the examples illustrate, there are still a few extra challenges in the cross-cultural area. From the examples named it can be deduced that the lack of knowledge about the school system and the lack of a common language are two crucial points for difficulties in communication between refugee parents and teachers. At this point, it becomes obvious again how important language courses are. At the same time, it would be very important that information material about the school system is provided in the language of the parents to enable the parents to get involved in the school on an equal footing. Another point that would be important is a joint evening in which the respective school, the teachers, and the parents introduce themselves and get to know each other. This could be done in an informal setting, but in which also information is exchanged, e.g. how do I proceed as a teacher or how do I imagine the school for my child, or what are my ideas about education. This measure would very likely have an opening effect, which could then also help in difficult conversational situations.

In addition to this institutional level, individual approaches are of course important to improve the culture of discussion. A conscious and sensitive approach to the above challenges is important for both parents and teachers. On the part of the teachers, high awareness of the language challenges that parents face and the effects that can arise from them (see above). On the part of the parents, a conscious questioning and gathering of information regarding the school system, the special school, and their child. To support this, the teacher must be open and supportive in the sense mentioned above.

In specific cases, it helps to make mutual agreements about the procedure. This sounds complicated at first, but later it is a very good way to promote communication or cooperation to success for the child. This «contract» discusses:

- What are the parents' and teachers' goals/concerns regarding the child?
- How can you see whether you are successful, i.e. whether you have clarified the issue and/or have reached your goal
- Who assumes which responsibility, e.g. when solving the problem.
- Are the parents' or the teachers' expectations realistic?
- Do both parties have enough resources?
- Does the procedure make sense from the point of view of both parties? What other strategies might be helpful?

Both sides must agree with the procedure and find it sensible. It is important in contract work that both parties are in an appreciative attitude that allows communication at eye level. Differences in perspectives are accepted, and compromises are made to support the child/adolescent. For this, it is important that both sides treat each other

empathetically and appreciatively and that the people are authentic. A counselor from Turkey said during the workshop:

*They need to be empathetic to understand the special situation. (School counselor, Turkey)*

If this attitude could be achieved in talks between newly migrated parents and teachers it would be a great help for the teachers, the parents, and especially for the children.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### **Schools:**

- Low-threshold events to get to know each other. For example, a common time to drink some coffee or tea. Here, parents and teachers get to know each other informally. Here a relationship can be established and information can be exchanged.
- A meeting between teachers and newly arrived parents at the beginning of the school year to exchange their perspectives on school, the education of children, and the needs of both sides.
- Setting up a system of good interpreters for teachers and parents.
- Information in letters should be also made available at least as a summary in other families or at least it should be ensured that important information is transmitted and can be understood
- Establish a step-by-step-plan of how to solve conflicts or difficult situations. Such a plan gives parents and teachers a structure, because they know where they are going to and what each next step is. Thus, it help to clear responsibilities, and offers a feeling of secureness.
- Give information about privacy reasons for parent-teacher talks. Who gets the information? Can I communicate openly? should be part of it.

#### **During the parent-teacher-talks:**

- Try to make your conversational partner feel comfortable and safe, tell something about the content, your aims for the conversation, and privacy, and ask if he or she needs more information to feel safe and ready to talk. Ask if you are uncertain about anything, ask till you have the information you need.
- Empathize with the situation of the other, and try to think of different needs and expectations your communication partner might have from you regarding the talk.

## MY EXPERIENCE WITH PARENTABLE AS A TEACHER

*Emelie Aune*

In the 15 years that I have worked in elementary schools, I have attended many different continuing education courses, but I have never attended one that has worked in this way. Workshops with various practical exercises over three days in four different countries have been a unique way of working and gathering information for me. Many times when we within the teaching staff are to further our education, we read scientific articles, attend lectures and write various reports. But here we instead had to work with ourselves and through the workshop reflecting the values and the opinions we had.

One thing that struck me during this work was the importance of being a good listener. Many of the guardians had the experience that they were never listened to. There are so many prejudices and preconceived notions of how we categorize people based on their origin and not on their individuality which makes it easy for misunderstandings to occur. Here, within the school, we need to meet each student and take part in that particular student's history to be able to provide the best conditions for success.

It became clear that we as teachers have different conditions to succeed in our mission depending on the country we work in. Many teachers testify to shortcomings in terms of access to technical aids that could help in learning the new language and translations, the lack of teachers who speak the student's mother tongue, and shortages in too large groups with different mother tongues. Here it became very clear that teachers struggle to be able to carry out their mission, but that more financial means and support are needed for it to function more satisfactorily. Despite the different conditions, a Turkish consultant said at the last event that «we have to change the way we look at each other», which strengthens my thoughts regarding this project. We cannot change each other, but we have to start processing ourselves and our way of acting. By being a good listener, being able to communicate, and stop categorizing our fellow human beings, we will go a long way.

During the project, I have had the opportunity to participate in all the workshops again and again. This has strengthened my view as a teacher of what might be relevant to work on. In my own work team, I have lifted content from the project during the project period, which created a curiosity in what I have learned. Through proven experience, I can now reshape the content and adapt it to my work team and I now regularly work with parts of the project's workshop to strengthen them in how we meet our students and parents. The exercise with lemons, for example (<https://www.parent-able.com/anti-bias-1>) proved during the workshops to be an eye-opener for both teachers and parents in how we view others. I chose to try it with my work team and used apples which worked just as well. Many of the modules' content can be adapted to suit the school's activities, such as the importance of good communication can be linked to the development talks where home and school meet.

Many strong stories have come to affect me such as the woman whose child was shot on the way to school, misunderstandings that lead to a report to social services, and all the stories about how hard it is to come to a new country and not be able to relax without constantly thinking that you soon need to escape again. «Before I was somebody, now I'm nobody,» said a woman from Turkey, and her words have stuck with me.

I have received an incredible amount of inspiration for how I want to work in the school in the future to make more students succeed, collaborate with the guardians and develop together with my colleagues. Thank you PARENTable for letting me be a part of this journey!

Emelie Aune, teacher in Sweden, 2022



[www.parent-able.com](http://www.parent-able.com)

