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## METHODOLOGY

### 1. RATIONALE

Migrant children are especially vulnerable persons: uprooted from their home countries and familiar social and educational systems, they experience psychosocial stress due to the clash of different cultural norms and values, lack of social networks in a new living and educational environment, and communicational challenges caused by insufficient knowledge of the dominant foreign languages (e.g. English, German, French or Russian) and the language of their host country. While transitioning into a new country, they also carry trauma and challenges caused by war, violence, and separation.

The psychological sense of being accepted by a group or environment is a fundamental need for immigrant children, and is associated with potential success in their long-term inclusion (Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan, 2019). Inadequate (or a lack of) access to integration measures and culturally responsive education can lead to various forms of rights violation, social inequality, exclusion, and segregation (Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan 2019; Parkhouse et al. 2019; Sedmak et al. 2021; Rivera-Vargas et al. 2021; Popyk 2023).

The European Commission aims to support the EU Member States in the integration of migrant children and young people into host countries' educational systems. The Resolution on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and education in promoting EU fundamental values, adopted in 2016, particularly emphasizes the role of intercultural education in the integration process (European Commission 2019). In 2020, the Commission confirmed the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027. The implication behind this document is that students who are academically and socially well-integrated into the education systems of host countries have more chance of fulfilling their potential. Educational practices are considered to be one of the cultural adaptations that most significantly contribute to an individual's feeling of well-being and sense of belonging (Curdt-Christiansen 2020).

Teachers and educators are among the most significant individuals for a migrant child's entrance into a new community (Sedmak et al. 2021). Under the guidelines of multicultural education,

teachers are expected to value diversity, respect social and cultural differences, and provide instructive opportunities for all students to help them increase their academic and social success. However, national education systems are encountering major difficulties in hosting ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse migrant children, and migrant children are often torn between assimilation and marginalization processes (Arun et al. 2021; Medarić et al. 2021; Rivera-Vargas et al. 2021). Teachers resist infusing culture into the curriculum, and (or) lack materials to connect students' cultures to study programs (Parkhouse et al. 2019). Children are required to move into instruction in the language of the host country as quickly as possible, and speaking a language different to that of the host country is often perceived as a problem, leading to segregation in language classes.

The resistance of national education systems to change that is marked as one of the most fundamental challenges of integration. As Medarić et al. (2021) noted that the principle of interculturality requires both systemic changes and a change in staff pedagogical approaches. Without adequate intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and intercultural communication competencies, teachers often merely reproduce discrimination and the othering of migrant children.

An international classroom, featuring students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who bring varying degrees of openness and experience, provides an ideal setting for all involved to learn from each other and experience intercultural communication. Multicultural education lowers levels of prejudice, opens children to critical thinking, and sensitizes them with higher levels of empathy (Arun et al., 2021). Therefore, training for educators is an important means aiming to increase teachers' knowledge and competencies in terms of culturally responsive education. Teachers need continuous training in the field of intercultural education in order to promote the inclusion of migrant children (e.g., Portera, 2014; Mellizo, 2017; Eko and Putranto, 2019).

The MentUwell team conducted qualitative research with teachers, educators and other staff from schools and educational institutions in three countries: Poland, Romania and Lithuania. A total of 30 people were interviewed to share their reflections from their own educational practice with Ukrainian children and young people arriving as migrants in these countries.

The results of the study revealed a lack of preparation for a multicultural teaching environment in all school systems in the countries surveyed. The notion that teachers need to be aware of how

to teach in a culturally sensitive way for multiculturalism to be successfully implemented in educational environments should not be neglected. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as making use of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Wang et al. 2022). Teachers mostly study other cultures and cultural self-awareness of their own volition. It is notable that training teachers to teach in culturally diverse learning groups is not an integral part of teacher education in all three countries. Teachers are in a continuous process of developing their intercultural competencies. These efforts are dualistic: both schools and teachers strive to strengthen their capacity to work in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms.

The study results show that teachers' expectations toward developing multicultural education in their institution mainly reflect the development of intercultural competencies ("It is very important that the teacher welcoming the migrant into their classroom receives appropriate training"). However, training expectations emerge not only for teachers—according to the respondents, they encompass four subgroups depending on the recipient, all of whom require training: (1) teachers; (2) immigrant children; (3) immigrant children's parents; and (4) classmates. Teachers believe that intercultural training is essential in order to improve multicultural education. All participating parties should be united/included in promoting a multicultural environment.

Being underprepared to work in culturally diverse classrooms, teachers are willing to develop their intercultural competences. Interculturally competent educators guide students using respectful, inclusive, and culturally relevant teaching strategies. In this vein, Dimitrov and Haque (2016) proposed an Intercultural Teaching Competence (ITC) model consisting of 20 key competencies and teaching strategies, grouped into three interrelated categories: foundational competencies, facilitation skills, and curriculum design competencies. Teacher's foundational competencies focus on self-awareness and the ability to model intercultural competence for students. Facilitation skills build on foundational competencies, allowing educators to interact with and encourage interaction among students in ways that are respectful of diversity. Finally, curriculum design competencies reflect the skills of educators who intentionally engage students in global and intercultural learning activities or discussions of social justice issues to promote global learning outcomes (Dimitrov and Haque 2016). Moreover, teaching materials should be provided to teachers. Professional development can also include workshops, teacher

inquiry/action research, coaching/mentoring, co-teaching, lesson study, virtual modules, simulations, conferences, summer institutes, or various combinations of these items (Parkhouse et al 2019).

Similar to other research, language fluency was revealed as a critical matter in this study. Issues of inclusion in school deal mainly with struggles around language because of migrant children's inability to communicate, express themselves, and make new friends. In line with Medarić et al. (2021), it can be concluded that language proficiency is perceived as evidence of successful integration as one of the aspects of integration.

In the study, teachers shared their perspectives on how to improve their school's inclusiveness. The key factor is the development of the intercultural competencies of all involved (including migrants and their parents, and Lithuanian children and their parents). The difficulty here is that the involvement of all community members can be complicated by many factors, such as timelines, language barriers, maturity level, and the backgrounds of students. However, teachers themselves can create more opportunities for contact between migrant families and local families in order to foster cross-cultural friendships (Nameni 2020). Collaborative activities may vary in terms of purpose, duration, group size, etc., but the primary idea is that individuals with different cultural backgrounds are paired or organized into groups to promote cooperative intercultural learning. To address the issue of avoiding interactions, Campbell (2016) recommended achieving "buy-in" from local people by explicitly and emphatically reiterating the importance and benefits of contact with international people. This might help locals to recognize the "flow-on" effect that their efforts might have on their employment, or on their becoming global citizens in general. An international classroom, featuring students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who bring varying degrees of openness and experience, provides an ideal setting for all involved to learn from each other and to experience intercultural communication.

## 2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this guide and the accompanying tools is to help those involved in working with young refugees.

The focus is therefore on three areas:

- 1) to develop educators' intercultural communication competence

At the heart of multicultural education is the notion of taking individual differences into account in organizing the educational environment, and aiming to ensure that all students enjoy equal education (Karacabey et al. 2019). With the principle of equality in education, multicultural education allows students to understand the culture of their community, remove cultural boundaries that can serve as barriers towards other cultures, and build a society that is common to all (Karacabey et al. 2019). This type of school has a key role in fostering positive attitudes and feelings amongst migrant pupils, thus influencing their long-term psychological well-being and inclusion within society (Ritchie and Gaulter, 2020).

- 2) to enrich educators' inventory of teaching / learning methods

To efficiently teach teenagers in multicultural educational environment teachers need to help them overcome unique challenges migrant teenagers face like language barriers, varied educational backgrounds and experiences, social integration, specific emotional and psychological needs, adaptation to new educational system and classroom, encouraging participation. Teachers and educators need to have quick and visual access to the pool of teaching / learning methods that help pupils to get acquainted, concentrate and prepare for learning, be able to learn individually and as a group, comprehend the subject taught and reflect on the learning experience. Although a great variety of teaching-learning methods are available and known to teachers, there is a need to constantly empower teachers to learn and apply new ones and adapt them to the needs of migrant children and teenagers most of which have traumatic experience. In addition, working in a multicultural educational environment and teaching teenagers requires flexibility and

adaptability. Gamification based teaching / learning methods can serve as means of concentrating on the problem at hand, building relations and integrating into the local educational environment. By employing a variety of teaching / learning methods educators can create a positive and inclusive learning environment, that addresses diverse needs of migrant teenagers, and supports their academic and social development.

- 3) providing teaching/learning resources for both the host country's language and the migrants' language

Language is considered as the most important factor excluding migrant children and teenagers and their families from equal participation in schools and communities (Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan 2019). The multilingualism perspective highlights the need to maintain and develop migrant children's linguistic and cultural experiences. Multilingual education refers to the conducting of teaching and learning in more than one language, as the classroom is multicultural when the communicative production of a variety of small cultures is produced. Classroom communication is intercultural when narratives of small cultures are constructed (Baraldi et al. 2023). Introducing the languages of migrant children and their families into their daily practices is beneficial for improving students' performance, well-being, and sense of belonging, and also for building relationships between educators and parents (Onsès-Gegarra and Domingo-Coscollola 2024).

### 3. CONTENT

#### 3.1. Developing educators' intercultural communication competence

Intercultural communication competence education typically includes two broad sets of activities (Reichard et al. 2014). The first fulfils the purpose of giving information, and is more cognitive and intellectual in nature; it is a knowledge set that relies on acquiring knowledge about different cultures. The second set of activities includes a broad set of intercultural skills such as adaptation, cross-cultural communication, and partnership skills (Ciuladiene 2023). Acquiring knowledge regarding global cultural differences (values, norms, practices, and beliefs) contributes to understanding the differences between cultures, adopting an informed perspective, and learning how to accept diversity and thinking outside of one's own culture (Deveci et al. 2022). The skillset element consists of the ability to integrate the cognitive and affective dimensions into intercultural interactions (Vaccarino and Li 2018), including the ability to build relationships, resolve problems and cultural conflicts, manage social interactions and anxiety, identify cultural biases and prejudices, accurately interpret other people's behaviour, and learn new behaviours appropriate to cultural expectations. Developing intercultural competence helps recognizing the diversity of people's values, perceptions, and attitudes, and then actively harnessing this diversity to find creative solutions in cross-cultural encounters as well as within own cultural environment.

#### 3.2. Variety of teaching / learning methods to support migrants' inclusion

Teachers working with migrant teenagers need to know and apply different teaching / learning methods to support migrant teenagers' well-being and inclusion. Migrant teenagers often face unique challenges that require flexible and adverse approaches to address effectively. Migrant teenagers often have inconsistent or interrupted school attendance which leads to diverse levels of knowledge and skills. Teachers and educators need to apply different means of communication, gamification, different and individualized instruction methods to satisfy migrant pupils academic and psycho-social needs. Furthermore, migrant pupils often feel isolated, traumatized or discriminated which affect their self-confidence and participation. Teachers need support in learning and applying different cooperative learning and group projects to foster collaboration and help build peer relations. In addition, as migrant teenagers have specific emotional and psychological needs, face trauma, stress or anxiety caused by migration experience or adjustment

to new environment, teachers need to apply trauma-informed teaching / learning methods, maintain a positive classroom climate to help create a sense of safety and belonging. As migrant teenagers may not be familiar with the teaching style, classroom norms, expectations and performance evaluation, hand-on learning experience may ease the transition and integration. Interactive methods like role playing or gamification encourage active involvement and participation.

### **3.3 Variety of language apps to use in creating multilingual setting**

Migrant teenagers often arrive with limited proficiency in the language of instruction, making it difficult to understand a lesson and express themselves. Using methods like language apps, open access internet bilingual resources and peer-assisted learning help to bridge the language gaps. In addition, as language is related to cultural awareness and thinking, teachers and educators need to be aware that migrant pupils come from different cultural backgrounds that influence their learning styles, expectations and social interactions. Incorporating different linguistic approaches and methods, such as, for instance, storytelling and culturally responsive teaching into educational environment, helps to validate migrant teenagers' identity and promote inclusivity and integration.



#### 4. DESCRIPTIONS OF THE TOOLS PROVIDED

##### **4.1. "The Mental Well-Being of Youth during the War-Related Migration Crisis"**

(MentUwell) script is a methodological tool designed for psychoeducational and preventative work with youth aged 13-18, with particular emphasis on young people experiencing migration, refugeeism, long-term uncertainty, and crisis-related stress. Its goal is to strengthen the mental well-being, resilience, and personal and social resources of youth.

The script is modular and flexible, allowing it to be used in both group settings (e.g., schools, after-school centers, support centers, NGOs) and individually. It can be used by educators, teachers, counselors, psychologists, tutors, mentors, and other youth workers, including those without clinical training – provided that the principles of psychological safety are maintained.

The methodological foundation of the script is a developmental and holistic approach to mental well-being, considering the interdependence of the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral spheres. The psychoeducational content within it allows for a better understanding of the specifics of adolescence, the mechanisms of stress, mental crisis, and factors protecting youth's mental health. At the same time, the script emphasizes the practical application of knowledge through everyday habits, attitudes, and relationships that can truly improve young people's functioning.

In practice, the script can be used at various stages of working with a group or individual: as a starting point for conversation, a resource for planning activities, a source of psychoeducational content, and as a basis for creating workshops, exercises, and team-building activities. It is particularly useful in situations of increased stress, emotional disorganization, and a reduced sense of security and belonging, but also proactively to strengthen resources before crisis symptoms appear.

Using the script achieves several key outcomes: increasing the youth's self-awareness of emotions and psychological needs, normalizing responses to stress and crisis, developing self-regulation skills, strengthening their sense of agency, and building more supportive social relationships. For youth with migration experience, a significant outcome can also be a reduction in feelings of isolation and a better understanding of their own reactions in a new cultural context.

When using the script, it is important to pay particular attention to the voluntary nature of contact, adapting the content to the age, developmental level, and experiences of the young people, and

creating a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere. The script should be treated as a resource from which appropriate content can be selected. Attention to signs of emotional overload is crucial – if symptoms of a serious mental crisis or trauma emerge, referral to specialist help is necessary.

It is also important to be careful not to cross the line between psychoeducation and therapeutic intervention. The script does not replace psychotherapy or clinical diagnosis; its strength lies in prevention, strengthening resources, and supporting young people in the process of self-understanding. Responsible use of the material involves combining the knowledge contained in the script with an empathetic adult attitude and a willingness to collaborate with other forms of support.

In a project-based approach, MentUwell can serve as a coherent methodological framework, organizing educational activities and supporting the mental well-being of young people in times of crisis and uncertainty. Its use helps build an environment that not only responds to difficulties but actively supports healthy development, mental resilience, and a sense of purpose in young people.

**4.2. “A Practical Guide to Supporting Teenagers in Crisis Situations - Recommendations for Teachers and Parents”** is a tool with a distinctly practical and educational focus, designed for adults who daily accompany young people in situations of stress, crisis, and long-term uncertainty. Unlike a theoretical and developmental guide, this guide focuses on specific reactions, messages, and actions that teachers, educators, and parents can take in response to the difficulties they observe in young people.

From a methodological perspective, the guide serves as a translational tool - translating psychological knowledge into the language of everyday educational and parenting practice. It teaches adults how to react, what to say, what to avoid, and how to recognize warning signs, without assuming the role of a therapist. It is primarily intended to teach a sensitive, regulating, and empowering way of being with young people, especially in conditions of stress overload, migration experiences, indirect trauma, and long-term adaptation.

The guide can be used by educators on several levels. First, it serves as a training resource, developing competencies in recognizing anxiety, stress, and disorganization in children and adolescents. The situations described (e.g., excessive anxiety, insomnia, withdrawal, risky

behavior, apparent emotional indifference) help educators better interpret young people's behavior as a signal of a need for support, rather than "bad behavior."

Second, the guide serves as a practical resource for ongoing work – it can be used as inspiration for individual conversations, group work, meetings with parents, and as a reference point in difficult situations requiring a quick but thoughtful response. The proposed messages, rituals, regulating exercises, and simple expressive techniques teach educators how to support young people in regaining a sense of security, control, and agency.

A crucial element of the guide is teaching adults to normalize their reactions to stress and crisis. The material demonstrates that anxiety, regression, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and impulsive behavior are often natural bodily responses to stress, not signs of "weakness" or a "disorder." This allows educators to support young people in ways that reduce shame, guilt, and isolation while simultaneously strengthening their mental resilience.

From a methodological perspective, it is particularly important that the guide teaches adults to be mindful of their own boundaries and those of young people. It clearly separates supportive activities from therapeutic interventions, indicating when it is necessary to refer a young person to specialist psychological help. Educators using the tool learn to recognize warning signs (e.g., prolonged isolation, self-destructive thoughts, loss of interest), but do not assume responsibility for treatment or diagnosis.

The MentUWell guide is dedicated to working with young people who are reluctant to verbalize their emotions. The proposed expressive techniques, rituals, body- and sensory-based activities, and exercises that restore a sense of control allow educators to reach young people in an indirect, unobtrusive, and safe way.

In the context of the project, the guide serves as a practical methodological resource, supporting the daily work of educators and parents. It teaches not only how to help young people but also how adults can regulate their own reactions, understand the importance of modeling behavior, and take care of themselves as a key source of safety for young people.

Combined with the MentUWell script, the guide creates a coherent support system: from a deeper understanding of developmental processes and mental well-being to specific, everyday actions that can be undertaken in school, family, and caregiving environments. This provides educators not only with knowledge but also with real tools for working responsibly, empathetically, and effectively with young people in crisis.

**4.3. The "MentUWell for Teenagers Practical Guide"** is a psychoeducational tool specifically designed for young people, providing a simple, understandable, and supportive guide to coping with stress, emotional tension, and feelings of helplessness. Its language, structure, and suggested strategies are tailored to the cognitive and emotional capabilities of teenagers, allowing them to use it independently or with minimal adult support.

From a project methodology perspective, it is crucial that the guide is not a training resource for educators, but a tool for young people, requiring an appropriate introduction and integration into the educational relationship. The role of the educator is not to implement the guide's content "for young people," but to create conditions in which young people can use it safely, reflectively, and in a way that is tailored to their own needs.

The guide is based on the premise that in situations of crisis, war, migration, or prolonged uncertainty, teenagers need specific, simple, and accessible strategies that restore a sense of influence and control over their daily lives. The tips it contains focus on possible actions "here and now": regulating tension through the body and senses, contact with nature, movement, imagination, creativity, relationships, and small daily rituals.

Methodologically, the guide can be used by educators primarily as a tool to support youth self-help. It can be provided to teenagers for independent reading, discussed in fragments during classes, or used as a starting point for conversations and reflection. Educators should not impose specific strategies or expect that all suggestions will be effective for everyone – the key is to strengthen young people's autonomy in choosing what truly helps them.

A crucial element of the guide is the normalization of stress responses. The material directly communicates to young people that anxiety, anger, sadness, fatigue, and mood swings are a natural stress response, not a sign of weakness or "insufficient resilience." From a methodological perspective, this allows educators to work with young people in a way that destigmatizes and reduces tension and guilt.

The guide is particularly useful for working with adolescents who are reluctant to talk about their emotions or who are not yet able to name them. The strategies proposed within it are often indirect – based on action, imagery, movement, symbolism, or brief self-reflection. This allows educators to support young people without overly "triggering" difficult emotional content and without crossing the line between psychoeducation and therapeutic intervention.

From a methodological perspective, it is also important that the guide does not promise quick solutions to problems, but encourages patience, gentleness, and treating stress management as a process. This message helps educators develop realistic expectations for young people and counteract the pressure for "quick fixes," which is unrealistic and burdensome in conditions of prolonged crisis.

At the same time, the guide contains clear messages that not every difficulty can be resolved independently. From a methodological perspective, this allows educators to use it as a tool for discussing the limits of self-help and the importance of seeking support from adults or professionals in situations of severe mental distress.

Within the MentUWell project, the guide for teenagers serves as a tool that empowers young people and complements the work of educators and parents. Combined with the theoretical script and the guide for adults, it creates a coherent, multi-level support model in which young people actively participate in the process of caring for their own mental well-being.

#### **4.4. Lesson plans**

The scenarios are the work of teachers from Polish schools. They were created by people involved in the process of admitting foreign students to Polish schools and with extensive experience in teaching. The scenarios are proposals that use active teaching and educational methods with children and young people in school.

The scenarios are intended for children and young people aged 13–16. They can be used in many curricular and extracurricular activities. Some of the proposed scenarios are dedicated to specific school subjects, while others are universal and can be used not only in lessons but also during extracurricular activities, e.g. in the common room or during form tutor lessons. The scenarios can also be used in other institutions, e.g. in boarding schools, community centres or libraries. The overall objective of using the scenarios is to ensure the well-being and mental health of children and young people in the migration crisis. It is also important to ensure the well-being of the host community, children and young people, as well as teachers, educators and tutors who act as hosts. The implementation of selected scenarios will allow entities to more easily integrate young people in the migration crisis into peer groups and will allow young migrants to adapt more freely to the situation in which they find themselves.

The scenarios are only suggestions for working with children and young people. They can be implemented exactly as their authors intended, but they can also serve as a basis for modification or simply as inspiration for creating original solutions and ideas for lessons or workshops.

#### Example - Scenario 2.2

The scenario is designed to work with children and young people aged 13-16 years. The implementation of this scenario aims to increase the awareness of pupils in the class about the mental well-being of international pupils joining the class. It can be expected that pupils will, through the scenario, be more open to new pupils and support them in difficult situations. They will be sensitive to situations that may be aggravating for international students.

The scenario uses active methods and lasts 45 minutes. The scenario is accompanied by relevant materials and links to resources that the teacher can use. The implementation of the scenario does not require special teaching resources. The scenario can be implemented at school, in the common room during each class.

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