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## REACHMIND

**Refugee, Education, And Children Mental health IN Development:  
Empowering children, parents and teachers in promoting and protecting  
refugee, migrant and minority children's mental health and well-being in  
education**

### Needs Assessment (Parents)

Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia



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Publisher: International Organization for Migration  
17 route des Morillons  
P.O. Box 17  
1211 Geneva 19  
Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 22 717 9111  
Fax: +41 22 798 6150  
Email: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int)  
Website: [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

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## Contents

1. Executive Summary .....	3
2. Region overview .....	5
1. National policies and ecosystem for inclusion .....	6
2. Access to mental health services in schools.....	8
3. Research context and methodology .....	9
3. The impact of migrant parents' cultural context on inclusion.....	13
4. Research findings.....	13
4. Cross-cutting research themes .....	13
5. Main Research Questions in FGDs with Parents:.....	21
5. Conclusion and recommendations .....	28
6. Key takeaways from FGDs with parents .....	28
7. Recommendations for the development of a MHPPS Toolkit .....	32

## 1. Executive Summary

This needs assessment, conducted as a part of the CERV-2024 REACHMIND project, identifies key challenges and priorities of migrant parents in supporting their children's inclusion and mental health in schools across Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Based on qualitative research through focus groups with migrant parents in each country, the analysis provides specific, data-backed insights that will guide the development of the project's core output: the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Toolkit for Parents. Disaggregated data by sex, age, and disability are used wherever possible, ensuring that non-discrimination and intersectionality are at the heart of this assessment.

This research focuses on three key population groups: migrants, refugees from Ukraine, and displaced Roma communities from Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> In line with IOM's inclusive approach, the term migrant is used as an umbrella concept encompassing all individuals who have moved away from their place of habitual residence, regardless of legal status, reason for movement, or duration of stay. This includes people who have been forcibly displaced due to conflict, as well as displaced individuals from minority backgrounds who experience compounded vulnerabilities linked to both their displacement and identity. Refugees from Ukraine are persons who have fled Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and who are Temporary Protection (TP) holders in host countries. Displaced Roma from Ukraine represent a minority population disproportionately affected by both displacement and systemic exclusion due to their identity and historical marginalization. By analyzing focus group discussions with parents and exploring their perceptions and experiences, the research aims to inform the development of a toolkit to empower migrant, refugee, and displaced minority parents with practical, culturally sensitive, and psychosocially informed resources to support their children's mental health and well-being. The toolkit will be grounded in the lived experiences of migrant families and directly respond to the challenges and priorities identified.

The findings reveal that migrant parents across all four countries face a combination of cultural, linguistic, and institutional barriers that hinder their children's full inclusion in schools and access to adequate mental health and psychosocial support. Parents report a general lack of structured communication with schools, limited culturally sensitive resources, and unfamiliarity with local systems of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Classroom environments often lack diversity-sensitive practices, which affects children's sense of belonging. Parents express a strong need for accessible information, training, and support in navigating these systems and in helping their children manage stress, social exclusion, and discrimination. Gendered differences were noted, for example in the emotional expression and help-seeking behaviours of boys and girls, while children with disabilities often faced multiple layers of exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella-term 'Roma' encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.). EU policy documents and discussions commonly employ this terminology. Source: [Roma equality, inclusion and participation in the EU - European Commission](#)

Despite these challenges, parents also described coping strategies and informal support systems they rely on, including peer support within migrant communities and reliance on extended family networks. However, these approaches are often fragmented or insufficient. Across the board, parents articulated a clear need for tools that help them better understand MHPSS, communicate effectively with their children and schools, and advocate for inclusive practices. These insights will directly inform the design and structure of the MHPSS Toolkit for Parents, ensuring it is rooted in the lived experience of migrant families and tailored to their specific priorities and challenges.

## 2. Region overview

The mental health and psychosocial well-being of children is closely linked to their right to inclusive, quality education and a supportive school environment. For minority, migrant, and refugee children, schools play a vital role not only in academic development but also in fostering emotional resilience, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging. In the context of the Visegrad Four (V4) region – Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms has brought both opportunities and challenges for education systems. Ensuring that migrant and refugee children feel safe, supported, and included in schools is essential to safeguarding their mental health. Migrant parents play a key role in this process, yet they often lack access to clear information, culturally sensitive guidance, and channels of communication with schools. Strengthening systemic support for parents is critical to empowering them to better understand, advocate for, and care for their children's emotional well-being. To better contextualize these needs, the following section outlines recent migration trends in the V4 countries and the evolving demographic composition of school populations.

According to the Eurostat data, as of January 1, 2024, the number of third country nationals in Czechia was 756,065 (6.9 per cent of the total population). Further, at the end of March 2025, Czechia hosted 365,055 individuals who held active temporary protection status (33.5 per 1000 people; 24.2 per cent of which were children),<sup>2</sup> which is the highest number of refugees from Ukraine per capita in the EU since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In the 2023/24 school year 19,409 foreign children attended nursery schools (5.4% of all 360,420 migrant pupils), 70,662 were in basic (primary) schools (7.1% of all 1,002,460 migrant pupils) and 17,184 in secondary schools (3.4% of all 503,189 foreign migrant students). Besides Ukrainians the top third-country nationalities in Czech schools include Vietnamese.<sup>3</sup> As of January 1, 2024, based on Eurostat data, Hungary hosted 166,271 third-country nationals which is 1.7 per cent of the total population. The largest groups among them included nationals from China, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Serbia, and India.<sup>4</sup> As of the end of March 2025, Hungary recorded 39,895 temporary protection holders - refugees from Ukraine (4.2 per 1000 people), of which 34 per cent are children (0–17 years). In the 2024/2025 school year, approximately 2,310 foreign students were enrolled in Hungarian elementary and secondary schools, including children with refugee or subsidiary protection status.<sup>5</sup> Overall, 79 per cent of refugee children aged 3–16 is enrolled in Hungarian schools or kindergartens. Pre-primary enrolment for refugee children aged 3 to 5 remains relatively low at 64 per cent, despite it being mandatory, with the highest enrolment in primary school (83%), lower in secondary (78%) and kindergarten (64%). Simultaneously, many children attend Ukrainian online education (37% in parallel, 16% exclusively).

Eurostat statistics say that as of January 1, 2024, there were 397,823 third country nationals (1.1 per cent of the total population) in Poland. Further, at the end of March 2025, the country hosted 997,120

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/21850209/KS-01-25-008-EN-N.pdf/945ba93a-6689-101a-8cea-df2b320c6bf3?version=2.0&t=1752050518841>

<sup>3</sup> [https://csu.gov.cz/education-of-foreigners?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com&pocet=10&start=0&podskupiny=294&razeni=-datumVydani](https://csu.gov.cz/education-of-foreigners?utm_source=chatgpt.com&pocet=10&start=0&podskupiny=294&razeni=-datumVydani)

<sup>4</sup> [22.1.1.23. Foreign citizens residing in Hungary by country of citizenship and sex, 1 January](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/21850209/KS-01-25-008-EN-N.pdf/945ba93a-6689-101a-8cea-df2b320c6bf3?version=2.0&t=1752050518841)

<sup>5</sup> [Education GPS - Hungary - Overview of the education system \(EAG 2024\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/21850209/KS-01-25-008-EN-N.pdf/945ba93a-6689-101a-8cea-df2b320c6bf3?version=2.0&t=1752050518841)

beneficiaries of temporary protection which makes 27.2 per 1000 people. In the 2023/24 school year, Poland's public and private education system recorded approximately 5.2 million students including nearly 7 per cent foreign nationals. In 2022/2023, 90 per cent of foreign students were Ukrainian<sup>6</sup> followed by students from Belarus, the Russian Federation, Vietnam, and Bulgaria.<sup>7</sup> Approximately 203,000 Ukrainian students are currently enrolled in Polish schools. From February 2020 to September 2024 over 150,000 students arrived in Poland from Ukraine, an increase of over 20,000 compared to the previous year.<sup>8</sup> This growth is linked to the introduction of compulsory schooling for children under temporary protection and the requirement to enroll in school to access social services.

Based on Eurostat data, at the end of March 2025 Slovakia hosted 132,615 temporary protection beneficiaries (24.5 per 1000 people) while as of January 1, 2024, there were 23,585 third country nationals with permanent residence which makes 0.4 per of the total population. (But in total there are 281,648 third country nationals granted permanent, temporary, or tolerated residence.) The overall number of migrants is comprised of 70 per cent Ukrainian, 6 per cent Serbian, 3.6 per cent Vietnamese, 3.1 per cent Russian, 1.9 per cent Georgian, and 1.6 per cent Indian nationals. An additional 55,492 EU nationals received similar type of residence. By June 2025, 133,290 Ukrainian refugees were granted temporary protection status, including 40,812 children. In the 2024/2025 school year, 19,038 foreign students were enrolled in elementary and high schools.<sup>9</sup>

## 1. National policies and ecosystem for inclusion

In the V4 countries, migrant children have the same educational rights and obligations as citizens. The implementation of compulsory education for migrant children has varied and evolved in recent years in the region.

### *Compulsory Education Policies*

- Czechia: Under Section 20 of Act 561/2004 Sb<sup>10</sup> and in line with international obligations, migrant and minority children have the right to equal access to education, regardless of legal status.
- Hungary: Under the Hungarian Public Education Act CXC of 2011, children in Hungary for more than 3 months are subject to compulsory education. This includes kindergarten from age 3 and school from age 6, with access to all levels of education and facilities for children with special needs.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [Raport\\_z\\_badania\\_KBnM\\_PAN\\_dla\\_MSWiA.pdf](https://www.nik.gov.pl/najnowsze-informacje-o-wynikach-kontroli/ksztalcenie-dzieci-cudzoziemcow.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nik.gov.pl/najnowsze-informacje-o-wynikach-kontroli/ksztalcenie-dzieci-cudzoziemcow.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://sio.gov.pl/>

<sup>9</sup> Annual Statistics, Temporary protection. Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic. Retrieved from:

<https://www.minv.sk/?docasne-utocisko>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/translation/cs/2004-561?langid=1033&utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/translation/cs/2004-561?langid=1033&utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>11</sup> [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AIDA-HU\\_Temporary-Protection\\_2022.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AIDA-HU_Temporary-Protection_2022.pdf)

- Poland: The Act of June 13, 2003, on granting protection to foreigners includes provisions for compulsory education. As of September 2024, Ukrainian children under temporary protection are subject to compulsory local schooling.
- Slovakia: The Education Act mandates ten years of compulsory schooling for Slovak children and children and foreign children with permanent or temporary residence, or those seeking asylum. Starting September 2025, this will also apply to children from Ukraine (aged 6-16) under temporary protection as well, as part of the new State Educational Program.

Following the onset of the Ukraine crisis in 2022, Czechia expanded its support for foreign students. The Ministry of Education (MŠMT) introduced special grants for schools to employ psychologists and inclusion assistants, offer adaptation groups, and provide trauma-informed care, alongside staff training in cultural sensitivity and stress management. Non-governmental organizations such as META, People in Need, OPU, Almathea, and Slovo 21 as well as UNICEF Czechia played a pivotal role. They provided teacher training in mental health and psychosocial support, funded crisis intervention teams, and language courses, supported legal and cultural mediation, anti-discrimination initiatives, social work, and inclusion assistance. This multi-actor ecosystem aims to ensure comprehensive academic and psychosocial support for migrant families.

Hungary's support system is decentralized, with schools and NGOs largely responsible for inclusion efforts. While national law mandates education, there is no overarching national inclusion strategy. As a result, schools often develop internal practices to facilitate the inclusion of non-Hungarian speaking students, particularly in urban centers such as Budapest. Support includes civil society-led Hungarian language classes and tailored assistance within schools. Government funding provides five hours per week of language classes for Ukrainian children under temporary protection; however, a shortage of qualified teachers limits implementation and impact. NGOs and volunteers often supplement or fully provide essential services to bridge gaps in support, with a particular focus on language development and inclusion for foreign students.

Preparatory classes are a key support for foreign students in Polish schools. Students are entitled to additional Polish language lessons, and up to five supplementary lessons per week. Depending on available resources, schools strive to employ intercultural assistants. However, most schools lack the funding to fully implement these measures. Since 2022, international and non-governmental organizations (such as UNHCR, UNICEF, IRC, Save the children, Polish Migration Forum, Polish Center for International Aid, Nomada Foundation, and Roma organizations – Towards Dialogue and Central Roma Council, etc.) have helped fill these gaps through external support and European Union (EU) funds. To systematize support, the “Friendly School” program (2025-2027) was launched to promote educational equity, particularly for Ukrainian students. Funds can be used for intercultural assistance and psychosocial and pedagogical support for students and parents. Additional components include staff skills training and individual support for students.<sup>12</sup>

Slovakia's “Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education until 2030” and its Second Action Plan (2025–2027) emphasize inclusive education, desegregation, teacher training, and targeted support

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<sup>12</sup> [Rusza rządowy program wyrównywania szans edukacyjnych „Przyjazna szkoła” na lata 2025-2027 finansowany ze środków UE - Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej - Portal Gov.pl](https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/rusza-rz%C3%A1dowy-program-wyr%C3%B3wnywania-szans-edukacyjnych-Przyjazna-szko%C3%B3a-na-lata-2025-2027-finansowany-ze-s%C3%B3rodk%C3%B3w-ue)

for migrant and refugee students.<sup>13</sup> The Strategy's six key priority areas include: tailored learning support, strengthened school counselling systems to improve guidance, prevention, and intervention services for students, anti-segregation measures, removal of physical, social, and organizational barriers to equitable education, training of educators and specialists, and destigmatization of special needs, minority status, and diversity to foster a more accepting and supportive school culture.<sup>14</sup> A 2024 amendment to the Slovak School Act introduced "adaptation classes" to support students needing Slovak language improvement or individualised teaching methods based on expert recommendations.

## 2. Access to mental health services in schools

Access to mental health and psychosocial support in V4 is uneven and largely dependent on NGOs and external funding, particularly for services in languages understood by foreign students. For example, in Slovakia over 77.5 per cent of primary schools (1,596) lack a school psychologist. In 2023, one psychologist was responsible for an average of 935.3 children.<sup>15</sup> In Poland, the shortage of school psychologists is less severe but still significant - 23.9 per cent of psychologist positions remain unfilled, and 12.5 per cent of municipalities do not have a single school psychologist.<sup>16</sup> Language-accessible support is rare; only 1 per cent of schools in Poland reported employing a Ukrainian psychologist before the start of the 2024/2025 school year.<sup>17</sup> In Czechia, a 2025 amendment to the School Act, will mandate either a psychologist or a special educator on staff funded by the national government starting in 2026. However, as of 2024, only 20 per cent of schools in the country offered psychological support services<sup>18</sup>. In Hungary, national-level data is scarce, but anecdotal evidence and reports from service providers indicate that school-based MHPSS services are largely absent, and where they do exist, they are often delivered via NGO programmes and community initiatives. These efforts remain patchy and localized, leaving many migrant children without regular access to mental health support in their native language.<sup>19</sup>

In the face of systemic shortages, schools are striving to implement alternative support measures and pilot programs aimed at providing MHPSS, and nation led efforts are emerging for best practices. For example, from the school year 2024/2025, elementary schools in Slovakia can use the

<sup>13</sup> European Commission. 2025. "Slovakia: New Action Plan Advances Inclusivity in Education." January 29, 2025. Accessed June 5, 2025. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/slovakia-new-action-plan-advances-inclusivity-education-2025-01-29\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/slovakia-new-action-plan-advances-inclusivity-education-2025-01-29_en).

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (MINEDU). 2021. Stratégia inkluzívneho prístupu vo vzdelávaní [The Strategy of an Inclusive Approach in Education]. Accessed June 14, 2025. <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/928/23120.ae7062.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.vzdelavacieanalyzy.sk/kolko-mame-v-skolach-psychologickej-specialnych-pedagogov-ci-pedagojickyh-asistentiek/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.termedia.pl/mz/Wakaty-psychologow-szkolnych-najnowsze-dane--57645.html>

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<sup>18</sup> Dva tisíce psychologů do škol. Za tři roky je začne platit stát, chybět ale mohou dál - Aktuálně.cz

<sup>19</sup> [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/migrant-integration-hub/eu-countries-updates-and-facts/migrant-integration-hungary\\_en?pref\\_lang=pl](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/migrant-integration-hub/eu-countries-updates-and-facts/migrant-integration-hungary_en?pref_lang=pl)

methodological guide for “morning circles” prepared by the Ministry of Education.<sup>20</sup> However, the availability of such support is often dependent on short-term or inconsistent and unsustainable funding.

### 3. Research context and methodology

The aim of this needs assessment is to explore and evaluate the current state of inclusion and MHPSS in multicultural school settings across Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents from diverse migrant and minority backgrounds, we seek to identify existing resources, barriers, and coping strategies related to emotional wellbeing and inclusion in schools. The assessment further aims to uncover parents’ perspectives on their children’s experiences, their own support needs, and to gather actionable insights and recommendations to inform inclusive educational practices and support systems.

This research focuses on three key population groups: migrants, refugees from Ukraine, and displaced Roma communities from Ukraine, residing in one of the project’s countries in 2025. In line with IOM’s inclusive approach, the term migrant is used as an umbrella concept encompassing all individuals who have moved away from their place of habitual residence, regardless of legal status, reason for movement, or duration of stay. This includes people who have been forcibly displaced due to conflict, as well as displaced individuals from minority backgrounds who experience compounded vulnerabilities linked to both their displacement and identity. Refugees from Ukraine are persons who have fled Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and who are Temporary Protection (TP) holders in host countries. Displaced Roma from Ukraine represent a minority population disproportionately affected by both displacement and systemic exclusion due to their identity and historical marginalization. By analyzing focus group discussions with parents and exploring their perceptions and experiences, the research aims to inform the development of a toolkit to empower migrant, refugee, and displaced minority parents with practical, culturally sensitive, and psychosocially informed resources to support their children’s mental health and well-being.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the FGDs with migrant parents, given the sensitive nature of topics such as mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, discrimination, and social exclusion. Participation was fully voluntary, and informed consent was obtained in advance, with clear explanations provided in participants’ native or preferred languages. To manage potential distress, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences, and referrals to appropriate support services were made available when needed.

Before the study began, the consortium established five key research questions, shared throughout the study and across all groups:

- What is the state of MHPSS and inclusion in the context of diversifying classrooms?

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<sup>20</sup> Nová praktická príručka na ranné kruhy podporuje duševnú pohodu detí v škole. Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth. Retrieved from: <https://www.minedu.sk/nova-prakticka-prirucka-na-ranne-kruhy-podporuje-dusevnu-pohodu-detи-v-skole/>

- What are the cultural and structural barriers and facilitators of inclusion and MHPSS in school settings?
- What existing supports and resources aid the inclusion and MHPSS in schools?
- What coping strategies do migrant, local, and minority children use, and what is missing to help them manage stress and mental health challenges?
- What are the priorities surrounding inclusion and MHPSS according to parents, students, and teachers?

Overarching research questions were transformed into sub-questions within a semi-structured interview guide. The guide focused on assessing similarities and differences in V4 countries regarding the current refugee situation, mapping resources, drivers and barriers, tools, and needs within these thematic areas. The questionnaire was translated from English into the national languages, and the FGDs were conducted in local languages. All members of the project consortium from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia were involved in preparing the research questions and the questionnaire.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview guide for FGDs

Research Area	Research Questions
<b>State of MHPSS and inclusion in the context of diversifying classrooms</b>	<p><b>How does your child feel at school?</b> Are they generally excited, resistant, or does it vary?</p> <p>What do you consider to be the key factors? What could support their better integration?</p>
<b>Cultural and structural barriers and facilitators of inclusion and MHPSS in school settings</b>	<p><b>How do you interact/communicate with the school?</b></p> <p>What, if anything, would they like to see done differently / what is missing? What kinds of conflicts, if any, arise?</p>
<b>Existing support and resources aid the inclusion and MHPSS in schools</b>	<p><b>Has your child received any emotional or mental health and psychosocial support from their school?</b></p> <p>Do you know/understand where your child can seek support?</p>
<b>Coping strategies which migrant, local, and minority children use and what is missing to manage stress and mental health challenges</b>	<p>What strategies do the participants' children use to cope with stress (etc.)? What are their (the children's) needs?</p>
<b>Priorities surrounding inclusion and MHPSS according to parents</b>	<p><b>What are your potential needs in this context?</b></p>

<b>Main challenges migrant and minority group children face in schools</b>	<b>How do the children respond to these challenges?</b>  <b>What would help the children cope with these challenges?</b>
<b>Main challenges for parents/care givers to provide their children with adequate support in their emotional wellbeing and resilience</b>	What makes it difficult for you to provide your child with psychological support?  What would make it easier for you to support your child with stress and social difficulties (knowledge, sources, techniques)?
<b>Tools, strategies, or support systems which parents currently use to help their children cope with stress, discrimination, and social challenges as well as additional resources or information which parents need to better understand and support their children's mental health and psychosocial well-being</b>	<b>What barriers do the participants perceive in providing such support?</b>  <b>What works well for them? What do they build on?</b>
<b>Priorities and recommendations</b>	<b>What is missing?</b>

Source: REACHMIND project

FGDs were conducted by the consortium members in May and June 2025 and lasted 1.5 to 2 hours with 3-11 participants. In total, 66 women and 15 men participated, all providing informed consent. Their children's experience in schools varied, for example in Czechia some were the only non-native speaker in their class while others were among several. In the case of parents from Ukraine, some reported that their children attended classes composed entirely of Ukrainian students. Some participants had transferred their children between schools to find better fits and support..

Recruitment methods were adapted to national and local contexts and included outreach via schools, open calls, and direct invitations shared via employers or partner NGOs. FGDs were held in schools, integration centres, or at IOM and partner offices. In Czechia all participants were mainly Ukrainian parents, Hungary included Ukrainian, Transcarpathian Roma, and other migrant parents, Poland held one Ukrainian and one Ukrainian Roma FGD, and Slovakia hosted two groups with mainly Ukrainian parents and two groups with participants as representatives of migrant parents coming mainly from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Mongolia, Angola and Egypt. Discussions were facilitated in local languages, Ukrainian or English depending on the best fit for the group.

The recruitment process for migrant parents took longer than anticipated, leading to delays in conducting the focus groups across all project countries. Building trust within communities required time and in some cases, outreach had to be repeated through multiple channels, including schools, NGOs, and community mediators to ensure adequate participation. These delays highlighted the importance of sustained, trust-based engagement strategies and the need for flexible timelines when working with vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups.

Table 2: FGDs participation by country and parent group type

Country	Localization	Number of women	Number of men	Subtotal	Total per country
Czechia	Praha (3 groups Ukrainian parents)	23	1	24	24
Hungary	Budapest (2 groups Ukrainian parents, 1 group migrant parents, 1 group Transcarpathian Roma parents)	16	3	19	19
Poland	Warsaw (1 group Ukrainian parents)	8	2	10	21
	Southern Poland (1 group Ukrainian Roma parents)	8	3	11	
Slovakia	Bratislava (2 groups Ukrainian parents, 2 groups migrant parents)	11	6	17	17
<b>Total:</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>81</b>	

Source: REACHMIND project

Some groups were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed; others were documented through detailed field notes. Data processing was overseen by national consortium partners: in Czechia – IOM Czechia, in Hungary – Menedek, in Poland – IOM Poland, and in Slovakia – IOM Slovakia.

The following chapter presents findings from the FGDs with parents, beginning with responses to questions posed to all participants – reflecting cross-cutting research themes – and followed by insights from questions directed exclusively to parents.

### 3. The impact of migrant parents' cultural context on inclusion

The cultural context of migrant parents in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia often differs from that of the host societies. For example, Ukrainian families typically place high value on academic achievement, discipline, and teacher authority, expecting more structured homework, stricter grading, and formal school-parent relations. In contrast, local schools emphasize informality, student autonomy, and less rigorous academic pressure, which can feel disorienting or insufficient to migrant families. Open expression of emotions and feelings and mental health discussions are less common in Ukrainian and other migrant cultures, which may clash with local expectations for open communication and child-centered approaches. Attitudes toward mental health and psychosocial support can vary greatly among migrant families and play a significant role in how children's psychosocial emotional needs are addressed. In many cultures, seeking psychological help is still stigmatized or misunderstood. Parents may view using these mental health services as a sign of personal failure, weakness, or something to be ashamed of. This stigma can lead to reluctance or avoidance of professional support, even when children show signs of stress. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with the educational system, and differing norms around parental involvement can also hinder effective engagement. Moreover, differences in gender roles, trust in institutions as well as socio-economic limitations might become hurdles for migrant parents to integrate. These mismatches often require support and orientation to bridge expectations and foster trust between families and schools.

## 4. Research findings

### 4. Cross-cutting research themes

#### *State of MHPSS and inclusion in the context of diversifying classrooms*

##### **How do migrant children feel at school as perceived by their parents**

Across all four countries, parents reported that migrant children initially felt isolated, homesick, excluded, anxious, or sad, especially due to language barriers, lack of friends, or cultural differences. Some experienced depression or stress, particularly after moving or changing schools. However, parents noticed an improvement over time: parents noted that their children "became alive" or felt better after transferring to a more inclusive or supportive school. Positive feelings were related to the situation when children had supportive teachers, managed to make friends, or were in participatory classes – then they often felt happy, included, and motivated. Still, mental health and psychosocial well-being remains fragile for some, especially those affected by bullying, frequent moves, or instability. Parents agreed that older children (13+) often struggle more with integration, motivation, and emotional regulation, especially when lacking peer support or facing academic pressure.

Key factors affecting children's well-being and inclusion according to parents include:

- Teacher attitudes and support: Empathetic, fair, and communicative teachers had a strong positive impact; discriminatory or indifferent ones cause distress.

- Language barriers: A major obstacle to both academic success and social inclusion.
- Peer relationships: Friendships, especially with children of similar backgrounds supported emotional safety; bullying and exclusion were significant concerns when present.
- School environment: Schools with inclusive classes, multicultural assistants, and inclusive policies were seen as more supportive.
- Parental involvement and communication: regular updates via school and open communication with teachers, were valued.
- Psychological support: access to Ukrainian-speaking psychologists or psychosocial support was seen as crucial, though often lacking or underutilized.
- Family well-being: Children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing closely ties to the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of parents and family.
- Roma families at risk: Older Roma children often face difficulties due to unfamiliarity with school environment, feelings of inferiority, and in some cases exposure to verbal abuse by teachers.

Parent-led suggestions for improving inclusion at school include:

- Expand integration and language classes and increase their availability.
- Employ multicultural assistants to provide multilayered academic support to children. Provide teachers' training on cultural sensitivity, psychosocially-informed practices, and language-inclusive teaching.
- Adapt grading practices for children still learning the local language.
- Ensure confidential, accessible psychological services, including in native languages
- Establish parental support groups for sharing experiences and strategies.
- Offer clear communication about available resources, extra classes, and school expectations.
- Encouraging social activities through school trips, clubs, and group projects to foster friendships.
- Ensure interpreters' availability at school for both children and parents to avoid exclusion.

#### *Cultural and structural barriers and facilitators of inclusion and MHPSS in school settings*

How is the communication between participants and the school carried out?

Migrant parents' cultural backgrounds significantly shape how they perceive and engage with school systems in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Many families, particularly those from Ukraine, value academic achievement, discipline, and teacher authority, often expecting structured homework, formal grading, and clear boundaries in school-parent relations. These expectations can clash with host country norms that tend to emphasize informality, student autonomy, and open emotional expression. Such mismatches may lead to confusion, frustration, or disengagement unless schools provide orientation and culturally sensitive support.

Language emerged as the most significant factor shaping inclusion across all countries. Parents consistently identified proficiency in the host country's language as a key factor because it deeply shapes how children and parents experience belonging, confidence, and recognition in a new environment. Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a carrier of identity, culture, and emotional expression. When children are unable to fully understand or express themselves in the host country's language, they may feel excluded, misunderstood, or inferior, which can impact both academic performance and self-esteem.

For migrant parents, limited language skills often create barriers to communicating with teachers, understanding school expectations, or advocating for their child's needs. This can lead to isolation and disempowerment. Moreover, when schools discourage the use of a child's native language, either explicitly or implicitly, it can undermine their sense of identity and cultural belonging, leading to internal conflict or shame.

Supporting multilingualism and affirming children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds are therefore essential to building inclusive schools. Valuing both the host language and the child's mother tongue helps maintain identity, strengthens family bonds, and supports better emotional and academic development. In Czechia, Slovakia and Poland, children from Slavic-speaking backgrounds, particularly Ukrainian students, were seen as having an easier time adapting due to linguistic and cultural similarities. English, when used, was also viewed favourably and more approachable by local students in Czech schools. In Hungary, gaps in early education and unfamiliarity with school norms compounded these linguistic challenges, putting students at an early disadvantage.

Additionally, trust in institutions can be a major barrier. Because of these past experiences, some migrant families may feel hesitant about engaging with school staff, counsellors, or social workers in the host country. This lack of trust can prevent families from accessing valuable support and makes it harder for schools to connect with them in a meaningful way. Understanding these attitudes and building trust through respectful communication is essential for improving mental health and psychosocial support and inclusion.

Gender and family roles significantly influence how migrant parents engage with their children's education and psychological wellbeing. In many migrant communities, mothers are typically the primary caregivers and take on most of the responsibilities related to school communication, helping with homework, and supporting children's psychological needs. Fathers, on the other hand, are often less involved due to cultural expectations, work commitments, or traditional views about parenting roles. This can make it challenging for schools to engage fathers or involve them in their children's school life, which may limit the family's overall support network.

Additionally, single-parent families - especially those led by women - may face stigma both within their own communities and from the wider society. This judgment can affect a parent's confidence and willingness to participate actively in school activities or seek support. Single parents often carry a heavy load, balancing childcare, work, and household duties, which can increase stress and reduce their capacity to engage with schools. Understanding these gender and family dynamics is

important for schools and support services to provide tailored outreach that respects cultural roles while encouraging inclusive participation from all caregivers.

Socioeconomic position plays a crucial role in shaping migrant families' ability to support their children's education and wellbeing. Many migrant families experience financial difficulties due to limited job opportunities, low wages, or unstable employment. This lack of resources can make it challenging to afford school-related expenses such as textbooks, uniforms, or supplies, as well as extracurricular activities like sports clubs or after-school programs that are important for social inclusion and personal development. Transportation costs and time constraints may also prevent parents from attending school meetings or participating in parent-teacher associations, reducing their involvement in their children's education.

In addition, digital access is another significant barrier. Some migrant families may not have reliable internet connections or the necessary devices, such as computers or smartphones, at home. Even when technology is available, a lack of digital skills can hinder parents' ability to navigate online school platforms, communicate effectively with teachers, or access important information about their child's progress and school events. This digital divide limits timely and consistent communication between families and schools, potentially leaving parents feeling disconnected or less empowered to advocate for their children's needs. Addressing these socioeconomic and digital challenges is essential to creating inclusive and supportive educational environments for migrant families.

Communication between schools and migrant parents varied widely ranging from positive engagement to minimal or ineffective contact. Differences were less country specific and more about individual schools, often influenced by the attitudes of educators and their willingness to adapt communication methods for non-native parents.

Especially in Poland and Hungary, Roma parents reported mixed experiences, often linked to specific teachers. Communication was generally better in lower grades classes but declined as academic pressure increased where the teachers tended to be less patient. Among the most important barriers, Roma parents name:

- Lack of local language skills, limiting verbal communication with school staff.
- Written information in Ukrainian or Russian was ineffective due to illiteracy or limited literacy among some parents.
- Many parents avoid meetings and school events.
- Deep-rooted distrust of public institutions, including schools.
- Limited understanding and awareness of school requirements, reducing motivation to engage.

While some schools/teachers relied on traditional ways of communication through group meetings often without interpretation, some use more accessible platforms like Edupage (Slovakia), Librus (Poland), Kreta (Hungary), Bakalari (Czechia) or messaging apps like Viber and Telegram. Still, language barriers persist, with many parents relying on Google Translate, their children, or informal

interpreters to understand messages. Teachers' inconsistent use of English or translated content adds to the difficulty.

Communication was often gendered, with mothers as primary contact, and fathers rarely involved. When communication was strong, this included proactive regular updates, dialogue and feedback on both positive behaviours and concerns, and the involvement of social workers for families facing hardship.

Parents expressed a clear desire for:

- Professional interpreters at meetings.
- Multilingual guides to navigate school platforms and expectations.
- Empathetic, two-way communication where their voices are heard.
- Clearer, more consistent messages and stronger engagement from school leadership.
- When parents felt ignored or dismissed, their involvement declined, weakening cooperation between home and school.

**What kind of conflicts, if any, do parents perceive to arise?**

Parents reported a range of school-based conflicts, from minor peer arguments to more serious cases of bullying, exclusion, and discrimination. Minor incidents were typically resolved by teachers without parent involvement. However, in schools with little experience in working with migrant or minority students, bullying and social exclusion were more frequent. These incidents may involve emotional abuse, social isolation, or even damage to personal property, and often occur without adequate intervention from school staff. Instances of discrimination and racism have also been reported, with school responses varying significantly, while some principals respond effectively, others fail to address complaints. Conflicts also arise between parents and teachers, especially when teachers dismiss parental concerns or neglect to consider pedagogical assessments for children with special needs. In such cases, parents often feel ignored or patronized in their efforts to advocate for their children.

*Existing support and resources aid the inclusion and MHPSS in schools*

**What support have the participants' children received at school around MHPSS ? How do the participants evaluate this support, if at all?**

Parents described uneven access to support provided in schools. Some schools helped through school psychologists and counsellors, language support assistants, or those specifically supporting Ukrainian students. While many found this support essential, it was not universally available. When such support was in place, it was seen as crucial in helping children build trusting relationships at school - ideally someone who speaks their native language. Peer relationships also provide important support, particularly for children who form friendships with others from similar backgrounds. Positive experiences were also reported with adaptation groups for both children and

parents, and in-person tripartite meetings that fostered better communication between families and schools. When in-school support was insufficient, some parents turned to external psychologists, often through NGOs or foundations, to ensure their children received the help they needed.

Awareness among parents regarding where to seek MHPSS, both within and outside schools, is generally low. In Czechia, some parents observed that Ukrainian families in general are more hesitant and may face greater barriers in seeking MHPSS compared to Czech families, a perception echoed also in other FGDs (e.g. with teachers). Migrant parents in Hungary reported lack of communication from schools on existing support leaving parents to rely on personal networks or internet searches. In Poland, especially in the case of the studied Roma community, parents were not fully aware of the support available through the Polish system. In the preparatory classes attended by their children, a Ukrainian-speaking multicultural assistant (not of Roma origin) was present, which in some situations made communication easier. Within the mixed migrant groups of parents in Slovakia, the level of awareness about the accessible MHPSS was very low. This is connected to social norms in their country of origin (and probably also to social status), where talking about MHPSS was not common.

Barriers identified by parents across all countries:

- Language: difficulty accessing or understanding available services.
- Stigma and myths: some children and their parents were reluctant to see psychologists due to fear of being judged or misunderstood
- Lack of information: parents expressed a need for clearer, more visible communication about available services.
- A lack of cultural sensitivity of teachers and insufficient preparation to work especially with children with no prior schooling before migration.

Parents consistently called for improved information-sharing, multilingual guidance, and greater visibility of available psychological and social work services within and beyond the school.

*Coping strategies which migrant, local, and minority children use and what is missing to manage stress and mental health challenges*

*What strategies do the participants' children use to cope with stress (etc.)? What are the main children's needs?*

Children's coping strategies varied by age, personality, and support systems. Key strategies named by parents included (the following list includes summary of findings from all FGDs conducted with migrant parents):

- Seeking parental support: many children turn to their parents for comfort, especially younger ones. Parents described: talking through problems; offering physical comfort (e.g. hugs); creating a calm environment for open conversation (e.g. bedtime talks).
- Avoidance or withdrawal and passivity or disengagement: some children withdrew socially, avoided school, or even skipped classes (e.g. one child went to a supermarket instead of

school). Others isolated themselves emotionally, saying “everything is fine” while clearly struggling. This was named as a common practice among Roma children.

- Peer support: children often relied on friends from similar backgrounds (e.g. other Ukrainian or Moldovan students). However, this support could sometimes be toxic or reinforce negative behaviours especially when led online.
- Academic engagement: a few children coped by focusing on schoolwork and excelling academically, which gave them a sense of control and achievement.
- Use of gadgets: some children turn to phones or digital devices as a distraction or an escape from stress.
- One parent noted that their child expressed distress and attempted to gain a sense of control by threatening to return to Ukraine.

Unmet needs identified across focus groups in the region:

- Understanding and empathy: children needed adults who would listen without judgment and validate their emotions, feelings, thoughts and behaviours – from both family and school.
- Belonging and inclusion: many children felt like outsiders and needed to feel accepted by peers and teachers.
- Stable friendships: a lack of close friends was a major source of sadness and stress.
- Safe communication: confidentiality was important, children feared being mocked for seeing a psychologist.
- Access to mental health professionals, preferably Ukrainian-speaking or culturally sensitive.
- MHPSS are available early in the adaptation process, not after children have already struggled.
- Psychoeducation: to reduce stigma around MHPSS, to help children understand and express their emotions better.
- Support for parents: parents often felt psychologically exhausted and under-equipped to support their children. They expressed a need for training, techniques, and support groups to better handle their children’s stress.
- Consistency and clarity: children needed clear rules, expectations, and routines to feel secure. Inconsistent grading or unclear school policies added to their stress.
- Age and capacity appropriate communication should be tailored to both children and parents’ understanding.

#### *Priorities surrounding inclusion and MHPSS*

Parents report good mental health and psychosocial well-being and social inclusion as fundamental to their children’s academic success and adjustment. They emphasized the need for schools to support language acquisition, ensure fair treatment of all children regardless of background, and communicate openly with families. Migrant parents often struggle with navigating the school system and want more guidance, cultural sensitivity, and availability of translated materials or interpreters. Across the board, parents prioritize teachers who are approachable, respectful, and attentive to their children’s individual emotional and social needs. They also welcome practical support in

addressing material barriers in provision of low cost extracurricular and recreational activities which foster social inclusion of their children.

### What are potential needs of migrant parents in this context?

Table 3: Country-specific needs identified by parents

Country	Needs
Czechia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive information tool on CZ school system for newly arriving parents and especially on all support which is accessible within the system (although most of the info is available on Ministry of Education website as well as on other websites of NGOs and schools, the information is rather scattered and too complicated)</li> <li>- More Ukrainian speaking psychologists in schools</li> <li>- Parental education on supporting their children in coping with various forms of stress , exclusion, bullying etc.</li> <li>- Training for teachers/principals in psychoeducation</li> <li>- Teachers could benefit from stronger multicultural competence and training in empathy</li> <li>- Well established, systemic buddy / peer system and support in all schools for both students as well as parents</li> <li>- Support of after-school activities (free of charge for socially weaker students)</li> <li>- Safe spaces for parental groups and their better inclusion into schools</li> </ul>
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information and communication tools: multilingual guides/manuals on how to navigate the Hungarian school system, use of e-platforms, understanding school expectations, rights, and procedures</li> <li>- Professional interpreter support at parent-teacher meetings, especially for parents with limited Hungarian or English</li> <li>- More responsive and empathetic communication from schools, including two-way channels that allow a dialogue</li> <li>- Access to psychological or parenting support to help parents manage their own stress and frustration, which affects their capacity to support their children</li> <li>- Parental guidance on how to talk with children and manage psychological challenges</li> <li>- Peer support spaces</li> <li>- Inclusion of parents into school life - contribute to school decisions or activities, beyond being passive recipients of updates</li> <li>- Addressing material barriers to participation, engagement and access to support</li> </ul>
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More Ukrainian-speaking psychologists in schools</li> <li>- Early intervention: support should be available immediately upon arrival, not after the children have already adapted</li> <li>- Psychoeducation: to normalize mental health support and reduce stigma among children and parents</li> <li>- Confidentiality: ensuring privacy so children aren't embarrassed or bullied for seeking help</li> <li>- Parental support: many parents expressed psychological exhaustion and a desire for support groups, training, or resources to help them support their children</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear communication: schools should provide accessible, multilingual information about mental health services and how to access them</li> </ul>
<b>Slovakia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Psychological support available at all schools and preferably also in Ukrainian language</li> <li>- Tools for clear navigation through available mental health services</li> <li>- Programs and tools for parents on how to talk to their children in difficult situations, about cultural identity, bullying, anxiety, how to cope with stress and manage emotional challenges</li> <li>- More inclusion of migrant parents into school decision making processes</li> <li>- Information on low cost or free extracurricular programs for children which can build children's confidence and social inclusion</li> </ul>

Source: REACHMIND project

## 5. Main Research Questions in FGDs with Parents:

*Main challenges faced by migrant and minority group children in school*

Czechia:

Language barriers emerged as a key challenge affecting both the social inclusion and academic success of Ukrainian and other migrant children in Czech schools. When children are unable to communicate effectively, it not only hinders their ability to make friends but also limits their understanding of classroom content. Participants emphasized that successful socialization depends on more than language proficiency. A child's personality, particularly how outgoing they are, and their mental health and psychosocial well-being are important factors. Many children carry the psychological burden of war and displacement, though parents noted that symptoms such as fatigue are not always solely linked to migration. Additional difficulties include tensions based on regional origins, fear of rejection by peers or society and a broader negative attitude toward refugees, sometimes fuelled by extremist rhetoric or misinformation online. Some children also struggle with joining pre-established groups or understanding the social norms of Czech classmates, which further complicates their adjustment.

Hungary:

Refugee and migrant children in Hungary face a complex set of challenges that hinder their successful inclusion into the school system. Language barriers are significant, as children are often expected to learn both Hungarian and English simultaneously without sufficient support for Hungarian as a second language, making academic participation especially difficult. Many also experience bullying, racism, or social exclusion, particularly in schools with little exposure to diversity, and some teachers fail to intervene appropriately, or even place blame on the victims. Being the only foreign or visibly different child can lead to deep social isolation, compounded by confusion over cultural norms and behaviour. These struggles are further intensified by traumatic and other forms of stress, frequent relocations, or unstable housing, all occurring in environments where mental health and psychosocial support is largely invisible. Additionally, structural barriers such as rigid academic expectations, unaffordable school supplies, inconsistent schedules, and

unfamiliar school meals contribute to children's daily stress and reinforce feelings of inadequacy and exclusion.

#### **Poland:**

Migrant children in Polish schools face multiple barriers that impact their ability to integrate and thrive. Language difficulties are a major challenge, especially in the early stages, as students often struggle to understand Polish and lack access to adapted learning materials or consistent bilingual support. These barriers contribute to social isolation, with many children finding it hard to make friends, particularly with Polish peers, and experiencing exclusion or bullying, sometimes worsened by school policies that disperse migrant students across different classes. Instances of discrimination and unequal treatment were also reported, including biased grading, discouragement from speaking their native language, and discriminatory behaviour from both peers and school staff. Finally, children face academic pressures and confusion due to structural differences between e.g. the Ukrainian and Polish education systems, with some schools lacking structure or clear grading standards, further complicating their educational adjustment.

#### **Slovakia:**

Children with foreign backgrounds in Slovak schools often face social exclusion, primarily due to language barriers and cultural differences that make it difficult to form friendships and fully participate in class life. Many experience bullying, both in person and online, based on their limited Slovak language skills, different behavior, appearance, or cultural expressions, such as being physically affectionate or more active during breaks. In some cases, teachers unfairly compare non-Slavic children to Ukrainian peers, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and discrimination. However, as children gradually learn Slovak, their ability to socialize improves significantly, which marks a turning point in their school experience. The lack of formal academic evaluation during their first year in Slovakia helps reduce pressure and allows children more time to adjust. The attitude and personal engagement of individual teachers also plays a crucial role in helping children feel supported and included. Despite these individual efforts, participants noted that Slovak schools are not yet fully equipped, in terms of experience, staff training, and capacity, to effectively include foreign children or accommodate those with special educational needs, highlighting broader cultural and systemic barriers to inclusion.

#### *How do the children respond to these challenges?*

Children's responses varied widely (also see hereabove "the coping mechanisms"):

- Withdrawal and disengagement: some children became quiet, isolated, or stopped attending school.
- Resistance: refusal to go to school or participate in certain classes.
- Adaptation: some children adapted well, especially when supported by empathetic teachers or peers.
- Seeking Comfort: turning to parents or peers for emotional support.

- Avoidance: using gadgets or distractions.
- In some cases, children expressed their distress by saying they wanted to return to Ukraine.

#### **What would help the children cope with these challenges?**

Participants emphasized the importance of supporting parents and caregivers so they can, in turn, effectively support their children. Suggestions to better aid children's inclusion included improving language proficiency, encouraging realistic expectations around friendships - helping children understand that it's okay not to connect with everyone - and fostering greater inclusion efforts from local peers, both in schools and informal settings like summer camps, which can ease future social transitions. Participants also highlighted the urgent need for more accessible mental health support especially in schools, noting that current waiting times for psychologists and psychiatrists can exceed a few months and that emergency psychological services are sometimes lacking.

Additionally, the attitude of parents toward long-term settlement plays a key role: when parents are uncertain or focused on returning to Ukraine, their children often lack motivation to fully engage or integrate. Above all, participants stressed the value of empathy and understanding, both from peers and adults, as essential for creating an environment where refugee children can feel safe and supported. Stability is key: minimizing housing and school transitions, maintaining predictable routines, and ensuring consistent peer groups all support emotional well-being.

Finally, stronger school-family partnerships are needed. Parents want to be engaged as equal partners, not just informed. Clear communication, interpreter access, and a more compassionate, collaborative approach from schools are crucial to building trust and supporting children's resilience.

#### ***Main challenges for parents to provide their children with adequate support in their emotional well-being and resilience***

Migrant parents and caregivers in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia face a range of challenges when trying to support their children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing and resilience. One of the most significant barriers is the language gap. Many parents struggle with the local language, which makes it hard to communicate with teachers, understand school systems, or access available services. Without clear information in a language they understand, parents often feel excluded from their child's education and unable to intervene when psychological issues arise.

Another major issue is limited access to mental health and psychosocial support services. In all four countries, psychological support in schools is often overstretched, and waiting times to see child psychiatrists or psychologists can stretch for months - sometimes over a year. Many schools lack staff trained in psychosocially-informed care or in working with children from diverse backgrounds. In addition, there is often a lack of trust or awareness among migrant parents about how to seek such services, especially if they fear stigma or judgment within their own community or from host institutions.

Social isolation also affects both children and their caregivers. Parents often report feeling alone in their struggles, especially when they lack family or community networks in the host country. This isolation can limit their ability to support their children emotionally. It also makes it harder for them to understand how their children are adapting socially - particularly when their children face bullying, exclusion, or discrimination at school. Without a support system, it is difficult for caregivers to manage their own stress and model emotional stability for their children.

The uncertainty of the migration experience adds to the emotional strain. Many parents live in temporary or insecure housing, face unstable employment, or remain unsure whether they will stay in the host country long-term. This uncertainty affects their ability to plan for the future, provide stability for their children, or invest in integration. Children sense this instability, which can affect their emotional security and willingness to adapt to a new environment.

Further, cultural differences and gaps in the education systems make it harder for parents to engage effectively. Migrant parents may not understand the expectations of schools in the host country or may find that teaching methods, discipline, and values differ significantly from what they are used to. This mismatch can lead to confusion or conflict between the home and school environment, making it harder for parents to support their children's psychological and educational needs in a consistent and effective way.

On top, parents and caregivers displaced by the war face several specific challenges due to the war itself and the displacement caused by it. This means that parents are often dealing with distress, both their own and their children's, linked to displacement, separation from family members (often fathers or grandparents), and the ongoing war. This emotional burden can make it harder for them to support their children effectively, as they are often still in survival mode themselves. The war is ongoing back home, and families may be dealing with fear, grief, and guilt, all of which affect their ability to provide emotional security to their children.

This state even more requires adequate addressing and targeted guidance for parents on how to support their children's mental health and psychosocial well-being. Without targeted support and guidance, parents may lack knowledge, confidence, or tools to recognize and respond to their children's emotional needs. Education in MHPSS empowers parents to provide stable, nurturing environments, recognize early signs of distress, and access available resources. It also strengthens their role as protective figures during a time of instability, helping children build resilience, emotional security, and a sense of belonging in their host country. Supporting parents in this way is a critical investment in both the wellbeing of refugee families and the long-term success of integration efforts.

*Tools, strategies, or support systems which parents currently use to help their children cope with stress, discrimination, and social challenges*

Czechia:

FGDs participants identified a range of strategies parents use to support their children's emotional wellbeing, particularly outside of school. Many rely on external support systems, such as NGOs and community centres, which offer psychosocial support, or turn to extracurricular activities like clubs and camps that help children integrate and build friendships. However, the cost of such activities can be a barrier for some families. Parents also shared personal strategies, such as openly talking with their children about what troubles them, standing by them unconditionally, and helping them process negative experiences without taking them personally. They teach their children that people vary in their attitudes, and while some may be kind and accepting, others may not, especially due to differences in background. Parents also emphasize the importance of adapting to local norms and following rules in the host country. In school-related matters, some parents have taken proactive steps, such as contacting teachers or school leadership to resolve issues, or even changing schools when necessary to ensure a more supportive environment.

#### *Barriers*

The most significant barrier parents faced in supporting their children was the lack of time and personal capacity. Many caregivers expressed frustration at not being able to spend enough quality time with their children, help them solve problems, or accompany them to extracurricular activities. This strain is often caused by heavy workloads, as well as incomplete family structures and the absence of extended family support, such as help from grandparents. Parents also emphasized that the lack of time affects their ability to rest and care for their own mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. In addition to time constraints, financial difficulties were frequently mentioned, further limiting access to supportive resources and activities that could benefit their children's wellbeing.

#### [\*\*Hungary:\*\*](#)

Participants support their children through daily conversations about school and emotions to detect stress early and provide reassurance. They encourage extracurricular activities like sports and music to build confidence and social ties. Parent networks on WhatsApp and Telegram offer important information and emotional support. Some seek professional help through psychologists or developmental assessments. In shelters, parents create stable routines and peer groups, while actively advocating for their children in cases like bullying. They also promote positive coping through hobbies and open discussions about challenges.

#### *Barriers*

Barriers include language difficulties navigating school systems like Kréta, emotional exhaustion especially among mothers and cultural differences between home and school. Mental health and psychosocial support services are often unavailable or inaccessible, and financial constraints limit access to supplies and tutoring. Parents want more accessible, culturally sensitive mental health and psychosocial support, professional interpreters in school meetings and online counselling options. They also seek clear orientation materials and stronger, consistent school responses to bullying without overburdening families. What works well includes community and peer support

networks, empathetic teachers, and extracurricular programs from NGOs like Menedék that foster belonging. Public parks and sports facilities provide affordable outlets for children, and pedagogical assessments help tailor academic support.

#### **Poland:**

Parents support their children's wellbeing through a combination of emotional, practical, and communicative strategies. Emotionally, they offer active listening, physical affection like hugs, and create calm, safe spaces for conversation, especially during times of distress. They help children reflect on and normalize their emotions, reinforcing that difficult feelings are a natural response to challenging experiences. On a practical level, parents assist with homework, maintain communication with teachers and school staff, and in some cases, even change schools or classes to better support their child's needs. Building trust and open communication is also a key focus - they encourage children to share school experiences, rehearse social or academic situations to boost confidence, and stay engaged in school life through tools like Librus. These efforts form a holistic approach to strengthening children's resilience and promoting their psychological and academic development.

#### **Barriers**

Parents face multiple, overlapping challenges that limit their ability to fully support their children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Many are overwhelmed by demanding work schedules, household responsibilities, and fatigue, often feeling they are simply "out of resources." This lack of time and energy makes it difficult to respond consistently to their children's needs, especially during adolescence, when distress and withdrawal can be particularly hard to navigate. Parents also struggle with feelings of helplessness, especially when communication with their children breaks down. Additionally, significant knowledge gaps - such as unfamiliarity with school policies, MHPSS options, and strategies for helping teenagers - further hinder their efforts. These gaps are even more pronounced in marginalized communities, such as among Roma families, who often face challenges understanding the school system and its expectations. Language and cultural barriers compound these difficulties; limited proficiency in Polish and differing parenting norms frequently lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding between families and schools.

#### **Slovakia:**

In the initial months of school, parents often encouraged their children to persevere despite the many challenges they faced. One Ukrainian mother emphasized the importance of empathetic, non-judgmental listening - avoiding lectures and instead focusing on hearing the child's perspective - to build lasting trust and ensure that children continue sharing their thoughts and feelings into adolescence.

#### **Barriers**

Parents who did not speak Slovak experienced particular difficulties, as they could not fully support their children with learning; some coped by learning to read together, while many expressed a strong need for accessible Slovak language courses for adults, which remain insufficient in Slovakia. Issues like cyberbullying were also a concern, as illustrated by a Mongolian student who was harassed on WhatsApp - her mother found the messages, alerted the teacher, and the situation was addressed through mediation. Parents expressed a wish for more education in schools about digital safety, the responsible use of social media and gaming, and how to identify and report harmful behaviour. They also shared simple but meaningful strategies like remembering the names and stories of their children's classmates and following up on them, showing children that their daily lives matter and are remembered.

#### *Best practices and positive examples as seen by migrant parents*

Migrant parents across FGDs shared a range of effective strategies, supportive practices, and positive experiences that contributed to their children's inclusion and emotional wellbeing in school settings. These included:

##### Parental Engagement and Attitudes

- Seeking help rather than trying to manage challenges alone.
- Modelling adaptive behaviour: children often mirror their parents' attitudes and actions.
- Emphasizing the importance of learning the local language to support inclusion.
- Demonstrating openness to adaptation and integration to set a positive example for children.
- Expressing appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences and receive wellbeing toolkits during FGDs – more discussion groups are welcome.

##### Supportive School Practices

- Teachers who are patient, inclusive, and proactive in supporting migrant children.
- The presence of assistants who provide translation, orientation, and basic psychosocial support.
- Strong communication between schools and parents, including regular updates via platforms, phone calls, and meetings.
- Teachers involving parents in problem-solving and decision-making processes.
- Inclusive school environments that foster a sense of belonging.
- Integration classes where children feel accepted and supported.
- Schools that allow children to maintain their native language and peer connections.

##### Social and Community Support

- Peer support from local families, often leading to lasting friendships.
- Parents encouraging and facilitating social interactions among children.
- Participation in school trips and extracurricular activities.
- Accessing additional support through NGOs, city councils, and municipalities.

- Opportunities for parents to connect with others facing similar challenges.

#### Family and Child Resilience

- Strong parent-child relationships characterized by open communication, emotional closeness, and trust.
- Children showing resilience and adaptability, especially when supported by understanding adults.
- In Roma communities, cultural and extended family support played a key role in protecting and promoting the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

### 6. Key takeaways from FGDs with parents

Table 5: Country-specific priorities and recommendations

Priority	Recommendations	Intersectional considerations
<b>Czechia</b>		
Personnel capacities to support inclusion and parents' mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stable support from the system (state) to provide psychologists, psychiatrists, interpreters, etc.</li> <li>- Czech language courses (especially free ones)</li> <li>- Maintaining the existing support</li> </ul>	To effectively support inclusion and the mental health of parents from migrant and minority backgrounds; it is essential to adopt an approach that acknowledges how overlapping identities - such as ethnicity, migration status, language ability, socioeconomic position, and gender - shape individual experiences and access to services.
Emotional and mental wellbeing of both parents and children	Tools/material/trainings to guide parents in their attitude towards supporting their children	Consider gender roles, migration trauma, socioeconomic hardship, and language barriers. Single parents, especially mothers, often bear disproportionate psychological strain. Children's wellbeing is closely tied to their parents' one and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate support.
Provision of a safe space where parents can meet/share/ talk together about mutual topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for sharing, mutual support, and exchange of information among parents both in-person and online</li> <li>- Providing a space as well as facilitation</li> </ul>	Creating spaces where parents can come together to talk, share experiences, and support one another, whether in person or online, offers significant potential for enhancing well-being and social inclusion. However, these spaces must be designed with awareness, recognizing how different factors such as language, culture, migration history, socioeconomic status, gender roles, and digital access shape parents' ability to participate and benefit.

Support of creation of parents' peer communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connecting Ukrainian parents with the locals</li> </ul>	Support for parent peer communities must ensure inclusivity across differences in migration status, ethnicity, language, gender roles, and resources. This includes addressing barriers like language, digital access, and stigma (especially for marginalized groups). Diverse leadership and culturally safe environments are key to making these spaces empowering rather than exclusionary.
Support for educating school staff in multicultural issues as well as practical matters related to the arrival of migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better understanding of topics such as differences in communication customs, geographical and historical backgrounds, issues of trauma and other psychological burdens of newcomers, as well as their current lived reality in the Czech Republic (family and financial situation, capacities, etc.)</li> <li>- Support for empathy</li> </ul>	Support for educating school staff in multicultural issues and practical matters related to the arrival of migrants must consider the realities of both students and their families. Migrant children may face layered challenges stemming from their ethnicity, language barriers, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, or traumatic experiences - factors that influence how they experience school and interact with peers and teachers. School staff should be equipped not only with cultural competence but also with sensitivity to the complex ways in which these identities intersect.
Raising awareness and motivation of Ukrainian parents ("PR campaign")	<p>Form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) on the schools' own websites (at least at the level of a gateway/link),</li> <li>b) in leaflets or on the web (especially on social networks – preferably Facebook and Telegram... the most popular ones)</li> </ul> <p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practical information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. functioning of the Czech education system</li> <li>b. support options</li> <li>c. rights and obligations</li> </ul> </li> <li>Soft information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. destigmatization of help especially around mental health</li> <li>b. how to support your children</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Awareness efforts must consider intersecting factors such as gender (mothers often carry the emotional burden), socioeconomic status (single-income or low-income households face more barriers), language proficiency, and regional differences within Ukraine. Parents with limited education or digital access may require tailored outreach. Mental health stigma and distress also influence motivation and ability to engage.
Systemic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free extracurricular activities</li> <li>- free Czech language courses</li> <li>- visa (residence) policy</li> </ul>	
<b>Hungary</b>		
Emotional and mental well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop training materials and tools for schools on how to create linguistically inclusive, supportive</li> </ul>	Address language barriers, stigma around mental health, and gendered differences in emotional

	environments and respond to children's emotional needs.	expression. Ensure both girls and boys feel safe to seek support.
Inclusive school environment	- Provide training sessions and practical resources for teachers on psychosocially-informed, intercultural, and anti-bullying practices.	Ensure materials reflect diverse student backgrounds, including Roma, Muslim, and visibly minority children. Acknowledge intersecting identities and experiences of exclusion.
Parent-school communication	- Produce multilingual guides and communication templates; organize workshops to support more inclusive, two-way communication between schools and families.	Address digital literacy, education level, and access challenges in single-parent or migrant households.
Parental empowerment	- Create culturally adapted resources (print, video, online) to help parents support children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, identity formation, and in conflict resolution.	Raising awareness on traditional gender roles and encouragement of changing the mindset. Offer flexible formats for diverse parenting situations.
Conflict resolution & accountability	- Offer schools tools and session formats to promote peer mediation, inclusive classroom discussions, and prevention of bullying and discrimination.	Equip educators to recognize and respond to racial, ethnic, and language-based bullying. Emphasize equal protection and dignity for Roma and visibly different children.
<b>Poland</b>		
Equip parents with age-appropriate tools for supporting their child's emotional wellbeing in "normal" situations*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Including knowledge on emotional development during adolescence, considering gender differences</li> <li>- Teaching communication skills, including non-violent communication</li> <li>- Positive strategies for coping with everyday stress</li> </ul>	Awareness of the authors' own positionality when creating the toolkit
Equip parents with age-appropriate tools to support their child's emotional wellbeing in difficult and crisis situations*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporate elements of psychological first aid</li> <li>- Emotional regulation</li> <li>- Conflict resolution strategies</li> </ul>	Involving individuals with diverse backgrounds in the development of the tool
Increase awareness of available tools and rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Country-specific information on where to find up-to-date legal regulations regarding the education of foreign children</li> <li>- Mapping of key actors in the field of education</li> </ul>	Engaging the community in testing the toolkit
		Considering gendered forms of exclusion and violence faced by children in schools
		Considering cultural differences in the understanding of mental health and psychosocial support needs and response .

Ensure linguistic and cultural accessibility of tools	- Appropriate language of the tools	
Balance tools promoting individual support as well as psychosocial support based on relationships and community	- Support parent associations and self-help groups  - Emphasize the role of sociorelational support	
Ensure complementarity with the toolkit for teachers and the toolkit for students	- Collaboration among those working on the toolkits	
<b>Slovakia</b>		
Accessibility through navigating systems of education and support	- Support in learning Slovak language  - Free accessible courses for both children and parents	Culturally sensitive guidance and translated, simplified information is essential for equitable access.
Educating school staff in multicultural issues, inclusion and empathy	- Workshops on cultural awareness  - Trainings on inclusive communication and classroom practice	Educating school staff must address biases linked to ethnicity, language, religion, and socioeconomic background to foster inclusive practices. Training should include intersectional awareness of how multiple identities affect students' experiences. Representation, lived experience sharing, and practical tools for empathy and inclusion are key.
Raising parental awareness in supporting their child's emotional wellbeing	- Information on available mental health and psychosocial support  - Tool on self-help and adequate support for children  - Basic orientation around MHPSS	Parental awareness efforts must consider differences in migration status, trauma exposure, language skills, and cultural norms around parenting and mental health. Single parents, those with limited education, or from marginalized communities may need tailored, accessible support. Inclusive approaches should respect diverse experiences while building trust and confidence.
Improve school – parent communication and parental involvement	- Available interpreters for parent-teacher meetings  - Communication apps	Effective school–parent communication must address language barriers, digital exclusion, and differing cultural expectations about parental roles. Inclusive strategies should also consider parents' work schedules, migration status, and trust in institutions.
Inclusion education of parents on expectations, social norms	- Cultural orientation provided by schools to migrant parents	Inclusion education for parents must consider diverse cultural backgrounds, literacy levels, and prior experiences with education systems. Tailored approaches are needed for marginalized groups

		who may face mistrust, stigma, or limited access to reliable information.
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Source: REACHMIND project

## 7. Recommendations for the development of a MHPPS Toolkit

### 1. Develop Culturally and Linguistically Accessible Resources for Parents

The toolkit should include practical, multilingual tools (print, digital, and audio-visual) tailored to various literacy levels, providing guidance on MHPSS and on navigating the school system. Resources should reflect culturally diverse understandings of mental health and psychosocial needs and resources and help normalize help-seeking behaviour.

### 2. Support Parent-School Communication and Relationships

Include templates and guidance to strengthen two-way communication between schools and parents, with emphasis on interpreters, inclusive digital tools, and communication norms. Recommendations should encourage schools to create regular, accessible spaces for parents to engage with staff and one another.

### 3. Equip Parents to Support Their Children's Emotional Well-being

Provide age-appropriate, psychosocially -informed guidance for parents on how to support their children in both everyday and crisis situations. This includes tools for emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and psychological first aid adapted for different age groups and parenting situations.

### 4. Foster Peer Support and Community-Based Coping Mechanisms

The toolkit should encourage the creation and maintenance of parent peer-support groups (online and offline) to share experiences, reduce isolation, and build trust. It should provide facilitation tools to empower diverse parent leaders and ensure inclusivity.

### 5. Strengthen School Staff Competence and Collaboration with Parents

Encourage alignment between the parent toolkit and teacher/student toolkits by including guidance for parents on how to advocate for inclusive practices and collaborate with educators. Support for psychosocially -informed, culturally aware schools is essential to building trust and effective partnerships.

### Intersectional Considerations

- **Gender Dynamics:** Mothers often bear the emotional and practical burden of caregiving, particularly in single-parent households or when fathers remain abroad. The toolkit should offer flexible formats, address changing traditional gender roles, and acknowledge gendered experiences of stress, exclusion, and resilience.
- **Migration Status, Language, and Socioeconomic Position:** Undocumented or newly arrived families, parents with low language proficiency or digital access, and those facing

economic hardship may struggle to access support. Materials must be easy to navigate, free of jargon, and available in multiple formats to reduce access barriers.

- **Ethnicity, Religion, and Cultural Background:** The toolkit should recognize and respect diverse cultural attitudes toward parenting, education, and mental health (e.g. among Roma, Muslim, or Ukrainian communities). Content must be adaptable and co-created or tested with families from different backgrounds to ensure relevance and safety.
- **Disability and Trauma Exposure:** Where possible, tools should accommodate parents of children with disabilities or those who have experienced trauma. Clear signposting to specialized resources, visual alternatives, and trauma-sensitive content are key for inclusive design.
- **Trust in Institutions and Previous Experience with Support Systems:** Many migrant parents carry mistrust of state institutions or previous negative experiences with education systems. The toolkit should take a supportive, non-judgmental tone and prioritize empowerment, rights awareness, and practical steps for engagement.