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 (Teachers) Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia

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This publication was issued without formal editing by IOM.
This publication was issued without IOM Publications Unit (PUB) approval for adherence to IOM's brand and style standards.
This publication was issued without IOM Research Unit (RES) endorsement.

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1. Executive summary

The needs assessment, conducted as a part of the CERV-2024 REACHMIND project, examined the experiences of teachers working in increasingly diverse classrooms across the Visegrad region, with a particular focus on inclusion and mental health and psychosocial support for migrant, refugee, and displaced minority children.

This research focuses on three key population groups: migrants, refugees from Ukraine, and displaced Roma communities from Ukraine.[1] 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 teachers and exploring their perceptions of students' emotional wellbeing, inclusion challenges, and cultural dynamics in the classroom, the research aims to inform the development of a practical, culturally sensitive, and psychosocially informed toolkit for educators, equipping them with strategies and resources to better support the mental health and inclusion of migrant, refugee, and displaced minority students.

Drawing on focus group discussions with 84 educators, the study highlights both the dedication of teaching staff and the systemic challenges they face in supporting student wellbeing and inclusion.

Teachers reported that multicultural classrooms have become a new norm, with students representing a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. While diversity itself is not viewed as a barrier, it brings with it a need for tailored teaching strategies and MHPSS systems that many schools are not fully equipped to provide. Language barriers were the most frequently mentioned challenge, affecting students' ability to follow lessons, form social connections, and access MHPSS. Although children demonstrate resourcefulness - using digital tools, peer support, and bilingual communication - the lack of structured language support limits their academic and psychological development.

Mental health and psychosocial support services within schools are unevenly available and often inaccessible in languages spoken by migrant students. The shortage of trained mental health and

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[1] 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

psychosocial support professionals, particularly those familiar with intercultural approaches and psychosocially-informed care, leaves teachers as the primary responders to student distress. Many educators expressed a lack of confidence in addressing complex psychological needs, particularly in cases involving traumatic experiences, including forced migration, or family separation.

Parental engagement emerged as both a critical factor and a persistent challenge. Teachers observed that migrant parents often have limited time, linguistic capacity, or familiarity with the education system, which hinders collaboration between home and school. Cultural expectations around education and gender roles further influence student experiences and opportunities for participation. In some cases, children take on adult responsibilities, such as caring for siblings or managing school-related communication, which adds stress and limits their academic performance.

The needs assessment revealed several gender-related dynamics shaping students' school experiences. Teachers observed that girls, particularly those from refugee or migrant backgrounds, often face restrictions on their mobility and participation in extracurricular activities due to cultural norms or family expectations. Some girls take on caregiving responsibilities for siblings, limiting their time and engagement in school, particularly in regard to extracurricular activities. Boys, on the other hand, were noted to express distress more often through behaviour or social withdrawal. These patterns reflect broader gendered expectations and highlight the need for school responses that are sensitive to how gender and cultural backgrounds intersect in shaping students' opportunities, well-being, and access to support.

In locations where the issues of including children from the displaced Roma community (displaced minority) were raised, teachers generally observed common adaptation problems typical for children from different language backgrounds and with migration experience. In addition to general challenges, teachers mentioned more frequent school absences and dropouts, low engagement in school activities by displaced Roma children, their own difficulties in motivating them to participate in education, and their own shortcomings in understanding the cultural factors that affect these children's participation in school activities, including intercultural difficulties in reading and understanding children's emotions. The teachers often noted their lack of preparation for working with displaced Roma children, especially those without prior school experience, which could also influence their assessment of the specific challenges faced by this group.

Teachers expressed a strong interest in practical tools and training to support their work. While many currently rely on self-developed materials and informal peer networks, they called for resources that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and directly applicable to classroom situations. Training should include strategies for working in multilingual settings, recognizing signs of distress, engaging with families, and responding to crisis situations. Educators also emphasized the importance of peer mentoring, extracurricular activities, and flexible teaching methods that support both inclusion and wellbeing.

To meet these needs, several priorities should be addressed. These include strengthening language and MHPSS support within schools, improving access to high-quality, practice-oriented training, and supporting teachers with adaptable curricula and classroom tools. Engaging parents in culturally responsive ways and developing standard procedures for integrating new students were also seen as essential. Ultimately, supporting teachers in this work requires both classroom-level resources and broader systemic change, including policies that recognize the psychological and practical demands of teaching in increasingly diverse educational settings.

2. Region overview

The mental health and psychosocial well-being of children is deeply intertwined with their right to inclusive, quality education and a supportive school environment. For migrant, refugee, and minority children, schools are not only spaces for academic development but also critical environments for fostering emotional resilience, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging. In the Visegrad Four (V4) region—Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia—classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, presenting both opportunities and challenges for educators and education systems. Teachers are at the forefront of this transformation. As cultural and linguistic diversity grows, they are tasked with supporting students' emotional and academic needs in settings that often lack adequate resources. While migrant and minority children face specific vulnerabilities, the findings of this assessment reveal that many of the challenges teachers encounter—particularly around parental involvement, emotional support, and inclusion—reflect broader systemic patterns that affect all students, regardless of background. Strengthening support for teachers and parents alike is essential to ensuring that every child feels safe, understood, and included. To contextualize these needs, the following section outlines recent migration trends and demographic shifts in the V4 countries, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of teachers' experiences and the systemic conditions shaping inclusive education.

Due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the introduction of border movement restrictions for men, there has been a significant influx of women and children with refugee experience in recent years. This influx has notably altered migration patterns in the countries included in the following studies, with Ukrainians becoming the largest national group among recent arrivals. The shift has had a substantial impact on the educational system in the region, changing the ethnic and national composition of classrooms. In turn, this transformation has brought both new opportunities and challenges to the Visegrad countries.

According to the Eurostat data, as of January 1, 2024, the number of third country nationals in Czechia was 756,065 which translates into 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% of which were children),[2] 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.[3]

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

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[2] [Asylum and Migration Overview 2024 - Statistical Annex](#)

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

China, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Serbia, and India.[4] 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.[5] 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 which constitutes 1.1 per cent of the total population) in Poland. Further, at the end of March 2025, the country hosted 997,120 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[6] followed by students from Belarus, the Russian Federation, Vietnam, and Bulgaria.[7] 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.[8] 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.[9]

National policies and ecosystem for inclusion of migrant children

In the countries of the region, the legislative framework guarantees equal access to education for all foreign children residing in the country, ensuring they are entitled to the same educational rights as

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[4] 22.1.1.23. Foreign citizens residing in Hungary by country of citizenship and sex, 1 January

[5] Education GPS - Hungary - Overview of the education system (EAG 2024)

[6] Raport_z_badania_KBnM_PAN_dla_MSWiA.pdf

[7] https://www.nik.gov.pl/najnowsze-informacje-o-wynikach-kontroli/ksztalcenie-dzieci-cudzoziemcow.html

[8] https://sio.gov.pl/

[9] Annual Statistics, Temporary protection. Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic. Retrieved from: https://www.minv.sk/?docasne-utocisko

citizens. However, the application of compulsory education for Ukrainian children who arrived due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and are under temporary protection has varied between countries and has changed over the past three years. Schools adopt different approaches for supporting and integrating foreign children in the classrooms. The availability and quality of these support measures depend on national policies, the school's location, and the broader institutional landscape, including the role of non-governmental organizations.

Under Czech law (Section 20 *Vzdělávání cizinců* which is located in Part I – General Provisions of Act 561/2004 Sb[10]) and in line with international obligations, migrant children are entitled to right to equal access to education, regardless of their legal status. Following the onset of the Ukraine crisis in 2022, Czechia significantly expanded its support ecosystem for foreign students, particularly those with refugee backgrounds. The Ministry of Education (MŠMT) introduced special grants enabling schools to employ psychologists and inclusion assistants, offer adaptation groups, and provide trauma-informed care, alongside staff training in cultural sensitivity and stress management. Complementing these government initiatives, international and non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF Czechia, META, People in Need, OPU, Almathea, and Slovo 21 played a pivotal role. They provided teacher training in psychosocial support, funded crisis intervention teams, and facilitated both adaptation sessions and language courses. These organizations also contributed to legal and cultural mediation, anti-discrimination initiatives, social work, and integration assistance. Educational materials, enrolment assistance, and intercultural competences training for schools further enhanced the multifaceted approach, ensuring that foreign students and their families received comprehensive academic and social-emotional support within the Czech educational landscape.

Under Hungary's Public Education Act CXC of 2011, children residing in the country for more than three months are subject to mandatory education. This includes kindergarten from age of three and school education from age of six, ensuring access to all levels of education, including facilities for children with special needs.[11] The support system for foreign students operates through a decentralized model, with individual educational institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) playing a significant role. While Hungarian law mandates compulsory education, there is no overarching national integration strategy. As a result, schools —particularly in urban areas like Budapest— often develop their own internal practices to facilitate the inclusion of non-Hungarian speaking students. Support measures include civil society-led Hungarian language classes and tailored assistance within schools. Government funding is available for Ukrainian children under temporary protection, providing five hours per week of individual language instruction. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is often constrained by shortages of qualified teachers specializing in Hungarian as a second language. Consequently, NGOs and volunteer groups often step in to

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[10] Act No. 561/2004 Coll.Act on Pre-School, Primary, Secondary, Higher Vocational and Other Education (Education Act). Source: https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/translation/cs/2004-561?langid=1033&utm_
[11] Aida Asylum Protection Database. Temporary Protection in Hungary. Hugarian Helsinki Committee.
Source: https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AIDA-HU_Temporary-Protection_2022.pdf

supplement or fully provide essential services, with a particular focus on language development and inclusion for foreign students.

In Poland, compulsory education is governed by the Act of June 13, 2003 on granting protection to foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Poland. As of September 2024, Ukrainian children under temporary protection—including Ukrainian-Roma children—have also become subject to compulsory schooling. Preparatory classes are one of key support mechanisms recommended for Polish schools accommodating foreign students. These students are also entitled to additional Polish language instruction as well as compensatory classes—up to five supplementary lessons per week. Where resources permit, schools make an effort to employ intercultural assistants. In practice, however, due to a lack of systematic resources, most schools either do not implement these support measures or do so only partially. Following the rise of foreign students after 2022, some of these responsibilities and additional support services were provided by 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, among others) or funded from the foreign or EU funds. To systematize support, Polish schools will be able to benefit from the government's "Friendly School" program for the 2025-27, aimed at promoting educational equity, in response to growing enrolment of Ukrainian students. Funds allocated to participating institutions may be used to hire supervising intercultural assistant and to provide various forms of psychological and pedagogical support for students and parents. Another module considered in the government program focuses on staff development, competency enhancement and individual student support.[12]

In Slovakia the School Act stipulates that ten years of compulsory school attendance applies to both Slovak children and children of foreigners who have permanent or temporary residence or are in the process of acquiring asylum status. In 2024, an important amendment to the Slovak School Act introduced the concept of "adaptation classes". These classes are intended to support students who need to improve their Slovak language proficiency or require tailored educational methods and approaches, based on expert recommendations. From September 2025, compulsory school attendance will apply to children from Ukraine (aged 6-16) residing in Slovakia under temporary protection, as part of the new State Educational Program. Slovakia's "Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education until 2030" and its Second Action Plan (2025–2027) places strong emphasis on inclusive education, desegregation, teacher training, and targeted support for migrant and refugee students.[13] The Strategy identifies six key priority areas to support inclusive education. The

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[12] Rusza rządowy program wyrównywania szans edukacyjnych „Przyjazna szkoła" na lata 2025-2027 finansowany ze środków UE. Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej. Source: Rusza rządowy program wyrównywania szans edukacyjnych „Przyjazna szkoła" na lata 2025-2027 finansowany ze środków UE - Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej - Portal Gov.pl

[13] Slovakia: New Action Plan Advances Inclusivity in Education. European Commission. Source: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/slovakia-new-action-plan-advances-inclusivity-education-2025-01-29_en

first priority focuses on developing inclusive education and tailored support measures to address the diverse learning needs of all students. The second area emphasizes strengthening the school counselling system to improve guidance, prevention, and intervention services for students. The third priority aims to actively combat segregation in education and promote diversity within classrooms. Another crucial focus is on removing physical, social, and organizational barriers in school environments to ensure equal access for every student. Additionally, the Strategy underlines the importance of training educators and specialists to enhance their capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively. Finally, a significant priority is the destigmatization of special needs, minority status, and diversity, to foster a more accepting and supportive school culture.[14]

Access to mental health services in schools

Similarly, the availability of psychological support in schools across the Visegrad region— particularly support accessible in the languages of foreign students—varies by country and is largely characterized by a heavy reliance on non-governmental organizations, external funding sources and dynamically changing policies. An amendment to the School Act, passed in May 2025, will require most public elementary schools in the Czech Republic to employ either a psychologist or a special educator, with funding provided by the national government starting in January 2026. Nonetheless, as of 2024, it was estimated that only around one in five schools in the country offered psychological support services.[15] A systemic shortage of personnel is also evident in Hungary. According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), there were 983 practicing school psychologists nationwide during the 2022/2023 school year. However, this number does not equate to 983 schools with dedicated psychologists, as many professionals serve multiple institutions. In fact, 51.5% of school psychologists work at more than one location, significantly limiting their availability and impact in any single school[16]. Similarly, in Slovakia more than three-quarters of primary schools (77.5%, i.e., 1,596 schools) lacked a school psychologist. In 2023, one psychologist was responsible for an average of 935.3 children (CVA, 2024).[17] In Poland, while the issue is less severe, a shortage of school psychologists still exists: 23.9% of psychologists positions remains unfilled, and 308 municipalities (12,5%) reported having no school psychologist at all.[18] Furthermore, on-site support is rarely available in the appropriate language— prior to the 2024/2025 school year only 1% of

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[14] Stratégia inkluzívneho prístupu vo vzdelávaní. Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (MINEDU). Source: https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/928/23120.ae7062.pdf.

[15] Dva tisíce psychologů do škol. Za tři roky je začne platit stát, chybět ale mohou dál. Aktualne.cz. Source: Dva tisíce psychologů do škol. Za tři roky je začne platit stát, chybět ale mohou dál - Aktuálně.cz

[16] UNICEF Magyarország Országos Óvoda- és Iskolapszichológiai (ÓIP) Módszertani Bázis: Gyakorló óvoda- és iskolapszichológusok komplex felméréséről szóló kutatás összefoglalója. UNICEF Hungary. Source: oip-kutatas.pdf

[17] Koľko máme v školách psychologičiek, špeciálnych pedagógov či pedagogických asistentiek. Centrum vzdelávacích analýz. Source: HYPERLINK "https://www.vzdelavacieanalyzy.sk/kolko-mame-v-skolach-psychologiciek-specialnych-pedagogov-ci-pedagogickych-asistentiek/"https://www.vzdelavacieanalyzy.sk/kolko-mame-v-skolach-psychologiciek-specialnych-pedagogov-ci-pedagogickych-asistentiek/

[18] Wakaty psychologów szkolnych - najnowsze dane. Termedia. Source: https://www.termedia.pl/mz/Wakaty-psychologow-szkolnych-najnowsze-dane-,57645.html

schools in Poland reported employing a Ukrainian psychologist.[19] In the face of these shortages, schools across the region are striving to implement alternative support measures and pilot programs aimed at providing psychosocial assistance. For example, beginning in the 2024/2025 school year, elementary schools in Slovakia can use a methodological guide developed by the Ministry of Education to facilitate "morning circles" as part of broader well-being initiatives[20] Across the region, this gap is partially filled by non-governmental organizations that provide psychosocial activities for foreign children and their parents. However, the availability of such services is highly dependent on location and is often subject to irregular funding.

3. Research context and methodology

This assessment aims to explore and evaluate the current state of inclusion and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in multicultural school environments across Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, with a specific focus on teachers' perspectives and experiences. Through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with educators working with children from diverse migrant and minority backgrounds, the assessment seeks to identify existing resources, challenges, and strategies related to promoting emotional wellbeing and inclusive practices in schools. It further aims to capture teachers' views on their students' needs, their own support requirements, and to gather actionable insights and recommendations to strengthen inclusive education and support systems.

This research focuses on the experiences and needs of teachers working with three key student populations in 2025: migrants, refugees from Ukraine, and displaced Roma communities from Ukraine. 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 teachers and exploring their perceptions of students' emotional wellbeing, inclusion challenges, and cultural dynamics in the classroom, the research aims to inform the development of a practical, culturally sensitive, and psychosocially informed toolkit for educators, equipping them with strategies and resources to better support the mental health and inclusion of migrant, refugee, and displaced minority students.

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[19] Co dalej z asystentami międzykulturowymi? Tylko 71 samorządów zadeklarowało zatrudnienie takich pracowników. Strefa Edukacji. Source: Nie będzie asystentów międzykulturowych? Zatrudnienie zadeklarowało 71 samorządów | Strefa Edukacji

[20] Nová praktická príručka na ranné kruhy podporuje duševnú pohodu detí v škole. Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth. Source: https://www.minedu.sk/nova-prakticka-prirucka-na-ranne-kruhy-podporuje-dusevnu-pohodu-deti-v-skole/

The study began with the establishment of overarching research questions and specific (questionnaire) items for the FGDs, divided into two interconnected parts focusing on the level of inclusion in multicultural classrooms, as well as issues of emotional wellbeing in such settings. 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?
- 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?

The questions were particularly aimed at evaluating the current situation, mapping resources, barriers, tools, and needs within these thematic areas. The questionnaire was translated from English into the national languages, and the focus groups were conducted in those 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
What is the state of MHPSS and Inclusion in Diversifying Classrooms? **What are the priorities surrounding inclusion and MHPSS according to parents, students, and teachers?** **What are cultural and structural barriers and facilitators of inclusion and MHPSS in school settings?**	**How diversified is your class (e.g. gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc.) Is it *inclusive* in your opinion?** **Are there any specific challenges faced by migrant or migrant minority students that differ from local students?** Are there any cultural factors (e.g., language, traditions, beliefs) that support or hinder inclusion of children from migrant minority groups or with a migrant background? How do you find it to work with these factors? If not – why? If yes – do you have any examples of activity that helped? Do boys and girls face different challenges / opportunities? **How would you define the state of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in your**

	class? Which would be your main concern (boys and girls)?
	Have you noticed changes in student well-being (positive or negative) due to increasing classroom diversity?
What coping strategies do local, migrant (including minority) children use and what is missing to manage stress and other MHPSS needs?	**Do you notice any coping strategies that students use to manage stress and mental health challenges?** Do some of them include reaching out to school personnel? Do you notice differences in how local and migrant (including displaced Roma) students cope with these issues (do boys and girls react similarly)?
How do teachers view their role in promoting inclusion, tolerance, multiculturalism, and well-being in the classroom and what challenges do they encounter in this process?	**Is there anything teachers can do to foster inclusion (if not, why and what would help you?)** How do you try to facilitate integration when a new student joins the classroom? What can teachers do to foster mental health and psychosocial support? How would you respond if you noticed concerning signs related to a student's mental health?
What existing supports and resources aid the inclusion and MHPSS in schools? **What existing supports and resources aid the inclusion and MHPSS in schools?** **What tools and strategies do teachers use to foster inclusion and well-being in the classroom, and how do they acquire these resources?** **Which tools and strategies do teachers find most effective in promoting inclusion and well-being, and what gaps or unmet needs do they identify in their current experience?**	Have you received any training or resources on multicultural education or inclusion? If yes, how useful were they? If not, what would be useful for you? What was missing? **Where do you look for additional materials for inclusion and which tools you can recommend as helpful?** **What kind of skills and tools would help you address the challenges of teaching in a multicultural classroom?** Is there anything you find useful – is there anything you would be interested in but couldn't find? **What would help you feel more comfortable while providing support to children from migrant groups** [generally and in particularly difficult situations]? Where do you look for additional materials on mental health?

	Is there anything you find useful – is there anything you would be interested in but couldn't find? What kind of training or support would help you address the challenges of teaching in a multicultural classroom, specifically focusing on mental health? What is missing?
Engaging with parents	What is your experience of engaging with (migrant) parents? **What additional support do parents, specifically with migrant/minority backgrounds, need to better manage mental health support? What additional support would teachers need to engage with parents in that regard?**

Source: REACHMIND project

The qualitative questionnaire was prepared in a semi-structured form, with identified priority and additional questions, for FGDs designed to last 1.5 to 2 hours. In total, 74 women and 10 men participated in the study. The educators participating in the study were particularly chosen based on their experience in working with classes for children age 12-16. The research was conducted in May and June 2025. Due to the timing, just before the end of the school year, and the busy schedules of teaching staff, more groups were organized than initially planned, some of them with a smaller number of participants.

Recruitment for the study depended on the national context. Some of the groups took place in schools, while others were held in integration centers. Educators were recruited based on previous cooperation between schools and organizations, through a snowball method, or by contacting a school in a specific location selected for the study. School staff involved in the study included professionals with practical educational or psychological backgrounds (subject teachers, support teachers, school psychologists, pedagogues, and tutors), all of whom had experience working with multicultural classrooms.

The study focused on schools attended by children with migration backgrounds. In line with the project's aim to include a section in the Toolkit for teachers dedicated to supporting the integration of Roma children, dedicated interviews were conducted in Poland (rural areas) to explore the specific needs of Roma children displaced from Ukraine as they enter the education system. Similarly, teachers in Hungary shared experience working with Roma students, including those from the Transcarpathian Roma community. These insights underscore the importance of addressing not only migrant-specific challenges but also the intersectional needs of displaced minority groups— such as Roma children from Transcarpathia—who face unique challenges in joining education systems abroad.

The data was collected and processed in accordance with the IOM Data Protection Principles, and participants were informed about the methods of data processing, their rights in this regard, and provided their written consent to take part in the study. This regional report was prepared using anonymized national reports. The names of locations that could allow identifying study participants were also anonymized during the preparation of the report.

Some groups were recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed. Others were based on notes taken during the sessions. The processing of national data was overseen by consortium partners: in Czechia – IOM Czechia, in Hungary – Menedék, in Poland – IOM Poland, and in Slovakia – IOM Slovakia.

Table 2: FGDs participation by country and location

Country	Localization	Number of women	Number of men	Subtotal	Total per country
Czechia	Praha (2 groups)	12	5	17	26
	Česká Lípa (1 group)	9	0	9	
Hungary	Budapest (3 groups)	19	1	20	20
Poland	Warsaw (2 groups)	10	0	10	18
	Southern Poland (3 groups)	6	2	8	
Slovakia	Bratislava (3 groups)	10	1	11	20
	Kosice (1 group)	4	0	4	
	Skalica (1 group)	4	1	5	
Total:		74	10	84	

Source: REACHMIND project

4. Research findings

Overview and teachers' perceptions on inclusion and mental health

Across all countries, FGDs' participants reported extensive experience working with highly diverse student groups. Here, "diversity" extended beyond nationality and ethnicity to include factors such as gender, socio-economic status, previous schooling (or lack thereof), disabilities, neurodivergence, and a range of individual needs, including specific educational needs.

Classrooms demonstrate significant multicultural diversity, with students representing a broad spectrum of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism is increasingly perceived by teachers as a new, normal feature of schools in the four countries; at the same time, schools grapple with structural problems that affect the available forms of support and the possibility of individualized approaches to teaching.

Teachers in all countries reported that Ukrainian students constitute the largest migrant students' group, appearing in nearly every classroom. In selected rural areas in Southern Poland, Ukrainian students of Roma descent are also present. Similarly, participants in Hungary reported teaching experience with Transcarpathian Roma children. Additionally, schools in larger cities tend to have an even more varied composition, including students from Vietnam, Russian Federation, Central Asia's countries, and Belarus. In Poland, several teachers reported experience working in preparatory classes designed specifically for foreign students. These classes aim to equip students with the necessary skills to eventually join their age-appropriate mainstream cohorts after a year of preparatory education. Most schools represented by the interviewed teachers in Poland implemented this organizational approach. However, it was also noted that other classrooms, outside the preparatory framework, were also characterized by significant national diversity among students.

Wellbeing and inclusion in the context of diversifying classrooms

Most teachers in all countries described their classrooms as inclusive, while noting that children's wellbeing should be assessed individually. At the same time, depending on the country and group, teachers were more or less able to specify what obstacles or dividing lines appeared in multicultural classrooms. The language barrier emerged as a major theme in all groups—affecting virtually every aspect of school life for children with a migration background: from education (understanding lessons, participation, academic performance), to social interactions, and access to MHPSS services at school that are not always available in a native tongue. Teachers also noted that children demonstrate creativity in communication by utilising digital tools, English language skills, support from peers and siblings, as well as engaging in mutual learning of vocabulary from different languages.

In Czechia, most teachers observed that student groups are divided into subgroups, but these divisions are not mainly based on migrant or minority status. Instead, factors like gender and age tend to shape class segmentation. In Poland and Slovakia, alongside gender-based divisions teachers noted a tendency for children to self-segregate during breaks and/or after-school, often socializing primarily with peers from their own country or other foreign students. According to some teachers in Slovakia, increasing classroom diversity can make inclusion more challenging. Conversely, a group of Polish teachers observed that classrooms with greater diversity might be, in fact, easier to integrate than those consisting of only two nationalities. Similarly, teachers in the Czech Republic observed that relationships in homogeneous classrooms can be more challenging to navigate than those in diverse ones. In Hungary, teachers did not observe the formation of distinct groups within classes that were highly ethnically and nationally diverse. However, participants noted that in classes with a larger number of Roma children, this group is often isolated from others.

Similarly, Polish teachers also observed that preparatory classes—numerically dominated by children from Ukraine—can limit students' readiness to integrate with the broader school community, as they tend to keep children within a linguistic and cultural "bubble."

The issue of mental health and psychosocial well-being is seen by teachers as something difficult to generalize. At the same time, when it comes to children from Ukraine, teachers often pointed out the need for skills to work with children who have unique needs related to family separation, forced migration and potential war-related trauma. In groups in Hungary and Slovakia, some teachers pointed out the difficulties they face when working with children who have experienced traumatic experiences, identifying a lack of adequate preparation and adequate resources within school. Across all countries, the role of mental health professionals was emphasized as crucial experts who support or lead the emotional work with students. Czech teachers also noted the importance of understanding when to reach out for help from a mental health specialist.

In Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, the topic of diagnosing mental health conditions that bring to educational challenges—such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, autism, and ADHD—was strongly emphasized. Slovak teachers pointed out the lack of sufficient systemic support for diagnosing and assisting such students, while Polish teachers noted reluctance among foreign parents to have their children assessed. Hungarian teachers pointed out the general difficulty in diagnosing these conditions among foreign children who are just beginning to learn the language and who already face the typical challenges of the learning process.

At the same time, teachers generally agreed that multiculturalism itself is not a factor influencing mental health and psychological well-being in the classroom, although the arrival of children from a war-affected country has introduced new issues (such as working with children suffering from post-traumatic stress) or the need to work with parents from different cultural backgrounds and with different expectations towards school and teachers' role. Teachers emphasize the necessity of an individualized approach and the importance of increasing competence in identifying emotional needs and referring students to specialists.

The functioning of the family was consistently identified by teachers as a key determinant of a child's inclusion and wellbeing – often more so than the child's migrant or minority background. In Hungary and Poland particularly, the issue of involving parents or guardians in work with the child was particularly prominent (including information exchange between school and parents or involving other service providers if needed). In Poland, teachers across all groups indicated that in general children from families facing challenges (such as addiction, parental absence, or lack of communication with the school) were at higher risk of school absenteeism, poorer academic performance, discrimination and isolation. While these issues are not exclusive to any one group, teachers observed that families with recent migration experience may face additional pressures – not due to dysfunction per se, but as a result of economic hardship (such as long working hours or being the sole breadwinner), family separation caused by war, or uncertainty about their place of residence and future. These factors can influence a child's ability to form attachments to their class and fully engage in school life. In Hungary, the theme of parental involvement also emerged strongly,

with some teachers noting that parents with a migration background were often more hesitant to engage with schools, potentially due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with the education system. In all the countries studied, communication with parents and the language barrier were raised as significant issues.

Similarly, the broader informational and social context in which children operate influences the narratives that emerge in the classroom. Both local and migrant children are affected by public rhetoric and attitudes in the host society, and discriminatory themes present in political and public discourse tend to re-emerge in school settings. Slovak teachers also noted that administrative barriers, such as residency processing, and prejudices, significantly affect students' sense of security and well-being in the host country.

Impact of cultural factors on inclusion

Language

Language emerged as the most significant factor shaping inclusion across all countries. Teachers consistently identified language proficiency as both an obstacle and a potential enabler of inclusion. In all countries the lack of local language skills—especially among newcomers—remained a major barrier not only for students but also for their parents. In Czechia 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 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.

Cultural proximity

Czech and Polish educators reported that cultural closeness between Ukraine and their own countries helped facilitate smoother social and academic inclusion. In contrast, students from backgrounds perceived to be more culturally distant faced more substantial hurdles. This was particularly evident in Hungary and in Polish schools working with Roma communities, where divergent norms around learning, communication, and family roles complicated students' engagement with the school system. Polish teachers working with the Roma community from Ukraine admitted that they knew little about the culture, while the students and their parents remained very closed off. Teachers noted internal divisions within the community itself, which the school was unable to understand (for example, the presence of a family that considered itself elite and discriminated against other Roma children in Poland).

Parental expectations

A shared concern among teachers was that some migrant parents often prioritized academic achievement over social inclusion and psychosocial wellbeing. Particularly, in Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland, parents' expectations regarding their children's academic performance often proved problematic when combined with the need to learn a new language, adapt to a new educational system, and cope with the general context of forced migration. Parents expect their children to

maintain good grades, which can add extra stress to the students and may also lead to misunderstandings at school. In Slovakia, parental concerns—especially around academic performance and financial costs—often led to children skipping extracurricular activities. Many students continued to attend online Ukrainian schools alongside their Slovak classes, leaving little time for social engagement. This dual-schooling arrangement limited opportunities for inclusion and added to the emotional and cognitive burden on students. In Hungary, cultural norms can limit parental involvement or children's mobility, reducing their access to wider social experiences and full participation in school life.

Parental engagement

Teachers generally assessed the involvement of migrant children's parents with the school as lower compared to local parents. This engagement was often limited by lack of time (especially for those raising a child alone in a new country and being the sole provider), poor knowledge of the local language, limited understanding of the educational system and its components, as well as cultural factors. In Poland, some teachers observed that teenagers sometimes take control of their own participation in school life—accessing their parent's school account, writing their own absence notes, and deciding whether to take part in integration activities. Due to language barriers and limited knowledge of the family context, teachers are not always able to verify information with the parents. Teachers working with Roma children in Poland observed that parents can sometimes be challenging to engage—often due to the community's insularity and closed nature, a lack of involvement in their child's education, or, in cases of misunderstandings, a tendency toward either confrontational or withdrawn behaviour. On the other hand, as Czech teachers noted, Ukrainian parents may seek out alternative sources of information about their child's school—especially those accessible in their own language—such as contacting other parents or Ukrainian-speaking assistants. Slovak and Hungarian teachers reported trying different communication methods to connect with parents, such as using Telegram or WhatsApp to share information.

Attitudes towards mental health and psychosocial support

Polish teachers noted a more frequent reluctance among Ukrainian parents to use psychological support or available diagnostics—even when these services are accessible in Ukrainian or Russian languages. A particular case involved a deaf child whose parents concealed the disability from the school out of fear of complications or the child being transferred to a special education school. Similarly, in a group discussion conducted in Czechia it was noted that in many Eastern cultures seeking psychological assistance remains a taboo and a lingering stigma around discussing mental health and psychosocial support needs, especially among some migrant families can discourage children from seeking help.

Teachers' intercultural competences

Some teachers felt unprepared to understand or respond to the cultural or psychological needs of migrant children, particularly from more distant cultures. In Poland, educators working with Roma students reported that they were unable to identify students' thoughts or feelings or build trust over the school year. Cultural distance, frequent school absences, and non-participation in school activities created significant barriers to relationship building. Similarly, Hungarian teachers also

spoke of cultural misunderstandings that affected children's educational experiences. Norms around child-rearing, learning styles, and communication differed significantly from local expectations, which often led to misinterpretation of students' needs or behaviour. These gaps occasionally led to stereotyping or assumptions about children's abilities, resulting in inadequate academic support.

Table 3: Challenges faced by migrant children per country

Main challenges	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Lower language proficiency lead to an the overall understanding of school instructions and teaching materials, which hinders inclusion.	Simplification of teaching materials impacts ability to understand more complex instructions and texts Teenage boys tend to have more difficulties on average in learning the learn local language.	Newcomers tend to acquire "observer status" during class activities to catch up with language which may distance them from learning and class life.	Lower language proficiency makes children feel less intelligent than their peers, which can have a negative impact, especially on those who were top students in their country of origin. The lack of previous school experience among some of the Roma children and the lack of available teaching materials and curricula tailored to the specific needs of children without prior school experience pose serious methodological problems for teachers of older children.	Many Slovak educators are not fully aware of how difficult it can be for a child to acquire an entirely new language. There is an insufficient availability of tailored materials and resources for teaching Slovak as a second language.
Particularly challenging family situations (including family separation)	The issue of how children spend their free time when their parents are working and do have limited time to spend with them.	Some pupils juggle school responsibilities with family duties, such as caring for younger siblings, leading to fatigue and diminished academic engagement.	Children become intermediaries between parents and the school or other institutions	Children are often required to demonstrate greater independence and responsibility

affect educational outcomes and well-being.			(including taking control of the school electronic system for parents.	compared to their local peers.
Strain related to (forced) migration, in some cases war-related distress and inclusion.	Children with a migrant background are often overloaded — expected to adapt quickly, learn the language, and sometimes simultaneously follow online schooling.	Parental expectations regarding children's academic performance can lead to conflicts at home and contribute to increased stress.	Some children withdraw from school life and resist inclusion due to an identity crisis and a longing to return home. Overstimulation – excessive information, functioning in multiple language systems, lack of digital hygiene. Teachers did not consistently acknowledge the psychological and identity-related challenges faced by displaced Roma children. Some teachers did not perceive the Roma community as war refugees, but as people taking advantage of the situation to move to an EU country.	These concerns predominantly affect students from Ukraine, who are particularly vulnerable due to the ongoing conflict in their home country and the resulting separation from family members. Children may struggle to feel like they belong in their new surroundings and can become confused about who they are, since their national, cultural, and religious identity was much clearer to them before.
Challenges in adapting to a new education, assessment and grading system	Some children may experience educational shock subjects are often taught differently here than in the children's country of origin. Migrant children in particular face added	Parents often have high expectations without fully understanding the time required for language acquisition, which can place undue pressure on children. Some children experience physical or psychological	Local students and their parents oppose different grading systems that appear to favor new arrivals. Teachers are unsure how to	The way students are graded is not suited to the needs of migrant children. Teachers feel it is unfair to judge them by

	burdens, such as adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, and sometimes continuing online learning in their home country.	punishment at home related to academic performance. Teachers often face pressures balancing high parental expectations with students' actual capacities and needs. Teachers noted that Roma children are often convinced that they cannot succeed in education.	best assess these students. The need to assess each child's progress means that children with migration experience often receive lower grades and become demotivated. Lack of previous school experience among some teenagers from the Roma community, and the need to function in a school environment not adapted to their needs; In some cases, teachers expressed low expectations, with one stating hope that these students would leave or relocate before transitioning to regular classes.	the same standards as local students because of language and cultural differences. They suggest that grading should take these challenges into account.
Different forms of discrimination and bullying.	Teachers concerned with hidden bullying and discrimination. In some cases, there are tensions or judgments from the majority population, and sometimes even within minority communities themselves.	Specific intersectional discrimination against Roma and visibly minority children – some teachers do not know how to respond to it.	Multifaceted discrimination—between local students, and among students of different backgrounds. Teachers may also, knowingly or unknowingly, engage in discriminatory behaviour. There is specific, systemic discrimination against children of Roma origin.	Discrimination linked to the political climate that children and teachers. bring into the school, as well as administrative barriers related to legalizing status. Teachers may also make discriminatory remarks.

Some children do not participate in extracurricular activities and school life.	Children who do not participate end up unsupervised and unable to engage in the activities they were used to.	Limited parental involvement can influence a child's participation in such activities. Extracurricular activities foster social interaction, though cultural differences may create additional challenges.	Some children independently decide, and even influence their parents, not to participate in additional integration activities.	Many Ukrainian children do not participate in extracurricular or after-school programs due to parental concerns that such activities may cause worse academic results and/or financial barriers, as many activities come with additional costs.
Socioeconomic challenges.	Financial issues affect the amount of time parents can dedicate to their children and the possibility of participating in extracurricular activities.	Financial constraints add to exclusion, as families may struggle to provide necessary school supplies or finance participation in school activities.	Children from lower-income families, including migrants, are often unable to participate in all extracurricular and integration activities. Families dealing with additional challenges—such as lack of cooperation, addiction issues, or parental absence—further hinder a child's ability to integrate and receive support.	Impact participation in extracurricular activities and direct children to low-quality stimulating entertainments (phone games, scrolling).

Source: REACHMIND project

Copying strategies used by migrant children to manage mental health and psychosocial challenges, including stress

Peer and social support networks

Across all four countries, peer relationships emerged as a critical coping mechanism for migrant and minority children. Children often rely on friends—especially those from similar backgrounds—for

validation , practical help, and a sense of belonging. In Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary, children were reported to seek out trusted peers or older siblings to navigate school life and manage stress. In Slovakia and Poland peer-to-peer learning appeared as important tools for social and educational inclusion. In both countries, forming nationality-based peer groups was common, creating safe spaces where children could speak their mother tongue and find mutual support. Similarly, Polish educators noticed that teenage Roma children have tendency to keep together and remain distrustful towards teachers and school. While these groups help children feel less alone, teachers also noted that they can impede inclusion and delay language acquisition. On the other hand, among the group of teachers from Hungary, there was an opinion that Roma children have greater freedom in interacting with other culturally different children and often serve as the "first point of contact" for a new student in the class.

Engagement in activities

Children across all four countries use structured and unstructured activities to divert attention from stressors. This includes sports, theatre, creative arts, and plays. In Slovakia, teachers explicitly described these as successful strategies for calming down and refocusing. Czech teachers noted that group projects and games helped children connect beyond language, while Hungarian children benefited from extracurricular activities and community involvement. These activities serve psychosocial support functions, helping children develop new relationships and feel a part of the school environment.

Technology as a coping tool

Technology plays a dual role in children's coping mechanisms. In all countries, digital tools like mobile translation apps, games, and social media platforms help children overcome language barriers and maintain connections. In Czechia, online gaming communities were described as easier spaces for inclusion than traditional physical play. Similarly, in Hungary, mobile translation tools enable children to access learning and communicate more effectively in class. However, Slovak teachers expressed concern that excessive screen time—6 to 8 hours daily in some cases—can isolate children and reduce physical and social engagement.

Seeking trusted adults

While not consistent across all settings, teachers report that some children do turn to adults—especially intercultural assistants, teachers, or school psychologists—for support. In Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, children were observed confiding in assistants with whom they shared a language, particularly when they felt safe and understood. Educators across all countries noted that children may seek comfort from empathetic teachers.

Making use of school resources and infrastructure

Some students make use of school resources such as intercultural assistant support (if available), psychological support, or quiet places to calm. However, the insufficient number of such resources—both staff and safe spaces—significantly limits the possibility of utilizing them and is considered a structural barrier.

Withdrawal and isolation

Withdrawing from educational activities or self-isolation is another strategy identified by teachers, particularly in Czechia and Poland. In Poland, this withdrawal can take the form of isolation in class and during breaks, but also school absences, often excused by parents. In Czechia, teachers noted that problematic behaviour and aggression can also stem from difficulties adapting to a new environment. This was also mentioned in the case of Roma children in Poland where – combined with school absenteeism and frequent dropouts – it hindered teachers' ability to build connection with children.

Addiction

Teachers in all countries reflected on how addictions—particularly to online games, mobile phones, computers, but also to alcohol, nicotine, or drugs—can emerge as negative examples of attempts to cope with school-related stress in a new environment.

Gender analysis

Gender dynamics in peer relationships and inclusion

Teachers shared varied perceptions regarding the gendered nature of peer group formation and social inclusion, with some observing a clear division in how girls and boys interact within school settings. Girls were frequently described as forming smaller, more intimate groups characterized by closer emotional bonds, whereas boys were seen as forming larger, more unified peer circles, especially when engaging in physical activities such as sports, where language barriers were less significant. These gendered social formations appear to influence inclusion trajectories, particularly for children from migrant backgrounds, such as Ukrainians and Vietnamese, whose behaviours and levels of participation were noted to differ based on both age and gender. For example, Ukrainian boys—especially those in adolescence—were frequently described as resistant to integration, often withdrawn or defiant, and more likely to engage in risky peer dynamics or display aggression or emotional detachment. In contrast, Ukrainian girls were generally seen as more open and willing to engage but were also reported to experience psychological strain, which in some cases led to school absenteeism, withdrawal, or susceptibility to isolation. These patterns were not consistent across all regions; some teachers emphasized individual differences over gender generalizations, but there was nonetheless a recurring theme that boys and girls experience and express integration challenges in distinct ways, often shaped by cultural expectations and familial norms.

Gender and MHPSS needs in schools, the discussions across all four countries underscored the importance of recognizing gender differences in how students engage with MHPSS and express distress. Teachers in Czechia noted that girls were more likely to seek support for psychosocial needs , such as those related to peer dynamics, self-esteem, or body image, and were more frequent users of school-based services like nutrition counselling. Conversely, boys were often described as reserved, less willing to confide in adults, and more likely to externalize distress through aggression, risk-taking, or social withdrawal. In Slovakia, boys were seen using digital spaces, such as gaming, as a form of relaxation , while girls were perceived as better able to articulate their needs within safe school environments, particularly if such safety might not always be guaranteed beyond school walls (teachers reported that girls and non-heteronormative children may find it difficult to find safe

spaces if they are not provided by schools). . In Hungary and Poland, teachers emphasized that while both boys and girls experience emotional difficulties, girls are often burdened with additional caregiving roles at home, particularly in migrant families, which compounds their stress and leads to exhaustion, absenteeism, or decreased academic performance. Teachers acknowledged that male students, particularly from culturally more conservative backgrounds, may be reluctant to express vulnerability, which exacerbates their isolation. Teachers also reflected on their own gendered limitations in addressing student MHPSS needs, with some female staff feeling more comfortable engaging with relational issues and some male teachers expressing discomfort in dealing with complex psychological problems faced by girls. The gender imbalance in the teaching workforce—often female-dominated—was also discussed as a factor potentially limiting boys' access to relatable role models or trusted adult figures.

Gender roles, cultural expectations, and responsibilities

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles emerged as strong influencing factors in shaping the behaviours, responsibilities, and perceived roles of boys and girls in educational settings. In both Hungary and Poland, teachers noted that migrant girls, particularly those from more patriarchal households, often bore a disproportionate burden of caregiving duties, such as looking after younger siblings or managing household responsibilities when parents were working (this was particularly important in case of Roma children in Poland). This gendered division of labour not only reduced their capacity to fully engage in school but also led to emotional fatigue, lowered academic performance, and a lack of participation in extracurricular activities or leadership opportunities. In Vietnamese and Ukrainian households discussed in Czechia and Slovakia, teachers noticed that boys and girls are sometimes constrained by parental expectations and gender roles. While boys were often prioritized for educational investment, girls are more often expected to stay closer to a household and remain obedient. Meanwhile, Ukrainian boys in Slovakia reportedly experienced frustration or internal conflict over their inability to remain in Ukraine due to age or gender restrictions, leading to feelings of guilt, injustice, or perceived weakness. Teachers noted that these gender norms—whether reflected through favouritism, restriction, or emotional expectations— could hinder both boys and girls in different ways and contributed to unequal psychosocial burdens and divergent behavioural responses to stress and transition.

Gender and participation in decision-making and school life

Student participation in school life and decision-making processes also reflected underlying gender disparities that were shaped by cultural norms, emotional confidence, and social expectations. Across focus groups in Hungary and Slovakia, it was observed that girls were often more open to participating in school discussions or engaging in relational dynamics, yet their ability to make meaningful decisions—particularly regarding their migration, educational pathways, or public engagement—was frequently limited within their families. For example, in Hungary, girls were rarely consulted on family migration decisions or language preferences, and their participation in mixed-gender settings was sometimes discouraged due to cultural norms. Boys, although more visibly active in certain domains such as sports or group behaviour, often refrained from emotional expression or leadership in contexts that required vulnerability or introspection. In Czechia, teachers commented that girls tended to confide more readily in adults, while boys were perceived as closed-

off and less engaged in participatory processes unless they involved physical or performative activities. Notably, some teachers also reported that student councils and peer representation mechanisms were underutilized tools that could support more balanced participation but required structural support and cultural sensitivity to be effective. Although teachers in Poland stated that boys and girls had equal opportunities to participate in school life, other feedback from the region suggested that deep-seated norms around gender expression and relational behaviour often shaped who spoke up, who engaged with peers, and who accessed influence within the classroom and beyond. A teacher working with a Roma group in Poland also pointed out a dynamic within the Roma children's group that she found both incomprehensible and unacceptable. One of the girls considered herself part of the community elite and refused to play or participate in activities with other Roma children whom she perceived as inferior. The teacher admitted that such comments and self-distancing made her feel angry, as they affected the atmosphere in the entire group, and that she found it difficult to react properly. Teachers in Hungary noted that cultural factors limit the participation of girls from the Roma community in coeducational classes or sports activities led by male teachers. In both countries, teachers observed that these girls do not change clothes for physical education, which makes them stand out in the group both visually and in terms of the activities they are able to participate in.

Gendered access to services, resources, and information

Access to school-based resources and services was shaped not only by availability but also by gender barriers related to cultural expectations, parental control, and emotional autonomy. Girls, particularly from migrant families, often faced restrictions on their physical mobility, participation in extracurricular activities, and access to services that required independence or interaction in mixed-gender settings. In Hungary and Slovakia, it was reported that family-imposed limitations or traditional beliefs about girls' roles led to decreased access to opportunities that were otherwise available, while boys—although more mobile—often failed to utilize services due to stigma, emotional reservation, or lack of supportive peer dynamics. Language barriers and the absence of culturally and linguistically appropriate services further limited access for both genders, although girls were often more proactive in using translation tools or seeking adult assistance. Teachers in Czechia noted that while girls were more frequent users of health and counselling services, this did not necessarily equate to improved well-being, as absenteeism and unresolved psychological stress were still prevalent. Boys, on the other hand, were less likely to seek help but were also less likely to be targeted by services that addressed emotional needs, often being assumed to be more self-sufficient or resilient. Inequalities in parental monitoring and of digital access to information also shaped how and what children could access in terms of academic or emotional support, often to the detriment of girls, who were expected to conform to more passive and compliant roles.

Existing resources favouring inclusion and MHPSS

In all the countries analysed, teachers reported varying access to MHPSS in languages available to children, depending on geographic and structural factors. As key inclusion enabler mentioned was the presence of school psychologists, special educators, and teaching assistants—particularly those who speak the language of migrant students or have experience working in intercultural

contexts. These professionals can help children navigate the psychological and academic challenges of adapting to a new school environment, support teachers in adjusting their approach, and serve as a bridge between the school, families, and external services. However, the availability of such staff is uneven across regions and schools. Across all countries there are several existing supports and resources that contribute to the inclusion of diverse pupils and to addressing their mental health and psychosocial support needs, but their availability, quality and effectiveness vary. The development of psychosocial support capacity—particularly support that can assist teachers in recognizing and addressing students' needs—has emerged as especially important in both Czechia and Slovakia. In these countries, teachers have highlighted an urgent need for culturally aware, multilingual professionals, since many children struggle without sufficient support and teachers may not always be able to identify concerning signs.

Teachers in Poland and Slovakia pointed to the need for cooperation between schools, professionals, and parents in diagnosing neurodiverse children and supporting foreign students with dyslexia and dysgraphia. In Slovakia, teachers cited the lack or inadequacy of services as the main barrier—while in Poland, reluctance among parents to seek a diagnosis stemmed from fears of stigmatization. According to teachers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in supporting schools in both Czechia and Hungary. These organizations provide mental health and psychosocial, integration, and language support for migrant children, often filling gaps where school resources are lacking. Typically, NGOs offer free supplementary activities and work in partnership with schools to address diverse needs. In Poland and Czechia, intercultural assistants are highlighted as a key school resource. These assistants are either employed directly by schools or provided through NGOs. However, teachers have expressed concern over the sustainability of such solutions, as these positions are often project-based and dependent on available funding. In rural schools in Poland attended by Roma children, Ukrainian intercultural assistants were available. However, as they themselves admitted, they did not have specialized training to work with children from this ethnic minority, which limited their ability to engage in intercultural activities.

Hungarian and Czech teachers also highlighted the importance of peer support and the unique integrative opportunities provided by the school, such as field trips, group work, and group discussions, which in themselves serve as ideal occasions for inclusion. Similarly, school-related topics can serve as a foundation for building parent community engagement, including through informal initiatives.

Teachers' role in fostering inclusion and wellbeing

In all countries, teachers saw their role in promoting inclusion and wellbeing among students, including newcomers. Teachers pointed out some ability to adapt teaching techniques and the format of lessons to the needs of new students. At the same time, this flexibility is limited by the need to follow specific curricula for each subject and to assess academic progress. Polish teachers, recognizing their important role, expressed concerns about rigid curricula that they are held accountable to, as well as the lack of compensation for additional extracurricular initiatives. Striking a balance between imparting knowledge and engaging in "soft" activities that support inclusion was highlighted as an important element (with examples) by Czech and Slovak teachers. In practice,

teachers' work can also involve removing the stigma around seeking psychological support—this includes collaborating with specialists, addressing topics related to mental health and psychosocial support , and engaging in conversations with parents.

In addition to their own role, teachers emphasized the importance of the entire school support ecosystem for foreign students: the contribution of culturally competent and linguistically accessible assistants, social workers, and psychologists. They are often the "first point of contact" for students and parents. Expert support is crucial not only for student inclusion and well-being but can also take the form of peer supervision and support for the teachers themselves. Hungarian and Polish teachers also emphasized that cooperation between teachers and parents is a key factor in achieving success.

Tools and strategies used by teachers

Teachers from Poland and Czechia stressed that they most often prepare for work independently, including creating their own materials. Polish teachers most frequently used the internet (general search engines) for resources, and less often mentioned using educational platforms (such as the *Zintegrowana Platforma Edukacyjna* or platforms provided by non-governmental organizations). Some, especially in Warsaw, could name specific guides published by NGOs. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, teachers highlighted the importance of their own experience and experimentation, as much of what they do is developed informally—through practice, peer discussion, and trial and error—rather than through formal training. Czech teachers were able to name and positively assess the usefulness of materials prepared by Czech non-governmental organizations—particularly user-friendly infographics on inclusion and mental health. At the same time, in both countries there were instances where teachers reported feeling fatigued by the repetitive nature of the subject matter, the overload of information, and poorly timed trainings, all of which reduced their willingness to participate, understand, and later implement new tools. On the contrary, Hungarian and Slovak groups more often indicated a desire to participate in formal training or receiving new material to improve their qualifications. Hungarian teachers reported that, while they are interested in formal training (typically offered by educational authorities or NGOs), such opportunities are inconsistent and there remains an ongoing need for more accessible, high-quality training focused on inclusion and mental health and psychosocial support, as the systematic sharing of these resources is still lacking. Similarly, most Slovak participants expressed a need for practical and actionable materials and trainings that would be helpful when dealing with concrete challenges. However, Slovak teachers had limited awareness of where to find quality training, despite existing institutions like NIVAM, UNICEF, or *Inklucentrum*.

In all four countries, teachers emphasized the importance of the teaching community itself in sharing knowledge and information. In Slovakia, although proactive independent searching for materials is less common, teachers learn about new resources through social media groups, forwarded emails, or from school staff. Similarly, Czech teachers pointed out the formative impact of real-life case discussions within professional learning communities, both within and outside their schools. In Hungary, this method of acquiring new information and broadening knowledge was

described as primary, with teachers highlighting informal discussions, staff meetings, and workshops led by colleagues as practical ways to share knowledge in daily practice.

Across all four countries, teachers play a central role in fostering inclusive and safe school environments. Examples of specific techniques depend not so much on the country as on the individual teacher and the resources available near the school. Teachers who had more flexibility to adapt the curriculum (such as in Hungary) cited this technique as being used more often—in contrast to, for example, Polish teachers, who emphasized the necessity of adhering to the curriculum. Similarly, teachers who had better systemic opportunities to refer a child to an intercultural assistant, psychologist, or further diagnostics more frequently indicated taking advantage of such support. At the same time, teachers from all countries pointed to the possibility of adapting teaching techniques to inclusion tasks, the impact of extracurricular activities and engagement in school life, the planning of additional activities for inclusion and relaxation, language support, building relationships with other students, emotional support, and integrating parents as key tools for inclusion.

Table 4: Main examples of tools and techniques adopted by teachers, by country

Technique	Examples	Country X – mentioned often + – mentioned less often			
		Cze chia	**Hun gary**	**Pola nd**	**Slov akia**
Inclusion-oriented techniques integrated in teaching	Gamification, group work, proposing joint projects, discussions, workshop elements, icebreakers.	X	X	X	X
Additional integration activities – encouraging foreign children to participate in	Additional integration/wellbeing practices during classes Sports clubs, interest groups, additional projects, school events, and library meetings.	X	X	X	X
Language support	Speaking slowly, allowing the use of translation apps, support from a translator or intercultural assistant, simplification of instructions	X	+	+	X

Integration activities outside school	Trips, school sleepovers, picnics	X	+	X	X
Emotional support from the teacher	Individual support, conversations, mediation during conflicts Maintaining contact outside of school.	+	X	+	+
Involving students in helping	Assigning a peer to guide newcomers around the school and explain key information, seating together in class Assigning a peer tutor / mentor for a longer period of time	X	+	X	+
Engaging with parents	Inviting parents to picnic and school activities, including culture picnics	X	+	+	+
Working with the curriculum	Attempts to adapt the teaching program to students' needs	+	X	+	+
Individualized work with the student	Preparation of individualized learning paths Additional remedial classes Opening up students (emotionally)	+	+	+	+
Support from the school psychologist	Organizing additional group sessions with the psychologist Individual consultations	X	X	X	X
Support from an intercultural assistant	Language support Assistance with homework Communication with parents Contact outside of school	X	X	X	X

Cultural mediation by the school or teacher	Providing parents with information on non-educational topics	+	+	+	+
	Offering practical guidance to the child				
	Explaining cultural differences				
Adaptation of school and educational materials	Translating into the child's language	+	+	+	+
	Simplifying materials				
	Using visual forms				
Adaptation of school infrastructure	Wellbeing rooms (Slovakia)	X	n/a	n/a	+
Referrals	Seeking support in NGOs (extracurricular activities)	+	X	X	+
	Referring children for assessment and diagnosis				

Source: REACHMIND project

Needs and gaps in trainings and resources

Depending on the country, region, and teacher group, teachers reported varying levels of competence in the subject, and thus different needs for new materials and training. Teachers more often reported participating in trainings or familiarity with materials focused on inclusion rather than on mental health and psychosocial support (this was stated by Polish and Slovak teachers; Czech teachers had difficulty distinguishing between these two areas; while Hungarian teachers reported irregular access to trainings in general, without making such distinctions). As a result, beyond general skills development, teachers were primarily interested in practical assistance addressing difficult situations that arise in multicultural classrooms and upskilling in MHPSS. Polish (Warsaw) and Czech teachers tended to indicate a lower need for training and additional materials than their Slovak and Hungarian colleagues. Additionally, some reported market saturation with similar trainings, especially after 2022, and the necessity to focus on several—in their opinion— unaddressed issues. Hungarian teachers across different regions highlighted several unmet needs in supporting migrant and minority students. They lack structured guidance and practical resources for adapting teaching methods to diverse classrooms, including flexible, culturally relevant materials and clear protocols for integrating new arrivals. Assessing school readiness is challenging,

especially when language barriers may mask broader learning needs. Some Slovak and Hungarian teachers reported also a notable gap in training for managing intercultural dynamics, addressing stress of various causes, and responding to crises—such as handling students' reactions to events that may trigger past experiences.

Teachers from all countries pointed out systemic limitations that affect the quality of their work, for example, unequal access to psychological support and diagnostics; lack of actionable training or its uneven distribution in Hungary and Slovakia; in Poland, the necessity to implement a rigid curriculum and engage in extracurricular activities free of charge; in the Czech Republic, need for a holistic approach to working with the child, including experts organizing home visits and work with the family.

5. Recommendations for Teachers' Toolkit

Table 5: Recommendations for Teachers' Toolkit

Area	Content recommendation
Methodological support	• Guidance on how to simplify educational materials and improve educational opportunities for children with migration backgrounds. • Guidance on how to prepare educational materials and progress assessment tools for teenage children without prior school experience (specifically mentioned in the context of Roma children). • Tips on organizing work in a multilingual classroom with children of similar ages but varying abilities to understand educational content. • Practical tools to assess school readiness in migrant children, recognizing when challenges stem from language barriers versus broader learning needs. • Motivating students facing integration challenges (language, emotional, or adaptation difficulties), including those with specific needs, such as limited prior schooling (Roma children), no knowledge of the language or those who feel discouraged from education.
Tools to address practical challenges in multicultural classrooms:	• Short activities to start the class and help students get to know each other better—supporting inclusion from "day one." • Constructive strategies for resolving conflicts among students of different nationalities.

	• Practical advice for intergroup and gender-inclusive integration activities and developing social skills. • Tips for fostering peer inclusion, such as reducing bullying or stereotyping based on ethnicity, language, or religion, including how to respond immediately to discrimination. • Guidance on supporting peer mentoring, including practical tips for assisting a child or group that has taken on the role of peer tutor.
Intercultural competence	• Hands-on support for working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Roma children), including cultural knowledge and understanding gender and family dynamics. •
Increasing knowledge about providing emotional support to children with migration experience	• Systematizing knowledge and awareness about the specific challenges these children face – including the often-invisible emotional and identity-related challenges faced by displaced Roma children. • Understanding typical stress reactions related to migration, as well as recognizing warning signs that require special attention. • Understanding the cultural dimension of MHPSS and culturally sensitive ways of providing basic MHPSS to children from the Roma community. • Active listening, basic helping skills. Psychological first aid • Preventing self-harm and negative coping mechanisms.
Engaging and building trust with parents	• Practical guide for involving the parents of children with migration experience, including those from different cultural backgrounds. • Including how to foster culturally informed communication with parents (general). • How to collaborate with parents in exceptional situations (child's difficulties, parental expectations) in a multicultural environment . • Supporting parents in navigating the education system.
Self-care and peer support	• Fostering peer support and teacher networking. • Taking care of one's own psychosocial well-being.
Structural needs	• Flexible curricula.

	• A holistic approach to working with the child (teacher-parent-child-assistant-psychologist). • Access to psychologists and intercultural assistants. • Access to psychological support for teachers.
Other	• School standard operating procedures (SOPs) for integrating new foreign students and assessing their educational abilities

- Prefer practice-oriented short, timely, and visually accessible materials (e.g., brochures, infographics, videos, leaflets) that can be used both during classes and distributed to parents or students,
- Include sample lesson plans, adaptable materials, real classroom scenarios, conversation starter
- Templates for flexible curriculum adaptation, allowing differentiation by language, content familiarity, or learning pace.
- Provide language support materials, especially for first-year inclusion (e.g., bilingual word lists, visual aids).
- Guidelines for effective communication with students and parents from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- On-demand and asynchronous training options to fit busy schedules.

Source: REACHMIND project