INTEGRATING THE PERSPECTIVE OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN WELFARE AND POLICY ON TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

KEY INSIGHTS WG 2

Background:

- Children and young people growing up in transnational families (TNFs) often face complex challenges that can affect their well-being, development, and access to support. Yet, their own experiences and perspectives are not always sufficiently reflected in welfare systems, policies, and research.
- Understanding how children and young people experience migration, care, vulnerability, and support, as well as how they exercise agency in navigating these experiences and shaping their own lives, is therefore essential to developing policies and services that respond to their actual needs.
- Research that places their voices at the centre can help identify gaps in existing systems and contribute to more inclusive, effective, and child-centred welfare policies and practices.

What are the Important Gaps to Explore?

- Children's and young people's perspectives, well-being, and agency
- Healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and early intervention
- Vulnerability, prevention, resilience, and protective practices
- Professional and service responses to children's needs
- Policies and practices affecting children and young people in TNFs

Seeing children and young people in TNFs means recognising both their vulnerabilities and their strengths - so they are not only heard, but truly **SEEN, SAFE and SUPPORTED.**

Mapping Psychosocial Care and Services for Children in TNFs

Psychosocial services for children in TNFs can be understood as a multidimensional range of formal and informal supports that strengthen children's emotional and relational well-being, development, participation and ability to cope with challenges associated with transnational family life. These services include emotional and relational support; educational and developmental support; psychological and mental health interventions; and legal, welfare and protective services. They may be provided by family members and extended kin, peers and community networks, as well as by schools, health and social services, NGOs and other public or third-sector organisations, through face-to-face, digital or hybrid forms of delivery. In TNF contexts, psychosocial care and services need to recognise children's relationships and care arrangements across borders and respond to their diverse social, cultural, developmental and structural circumstances.

How are psychosocial care and services for children in TNFs characterized and delivered?

- **Informal support matters most:** Family, peers, communities, and digital connections are key sources of care and emotional support.
- **Formal support remains limited:** Mental health, education, legal, and welfare services are often fragmented or difficult to access.
- **Important gaps remain:** Research and services pay less attention to fathers, grandparents, and wider kin networks.
- **Resilience exists but children in TNFs need support:** Strong family and community networks can protect children, but systemic gaps leave many psychosocial needs unmet.

Best Practice Recommendations

- Develop integrated, culturally responsive, and accessible support systems that connect formal services with family and community networks.
- Strengthen cross-border and digital access to psychosocial care and services.
- Ensure that children's voices, their needs, and their strengths are at the centre of research, policy, and practice.

Access the entire article here:

Caring children across borders: Rethinking family support in transnational migrations

How does transnational migration influence children's caregiving arrangements, emotional and educational outcomes, and gender roles within families?

Transnational migration reshapes caregiving by redistributing responsibilities among extended family and using digital technology to maintain bonds. Children's educational and emotional well-being can benefit from remittances and support from relatives, but separation also creates emotional challenges, such as feelings of abandonment and identity struggles. Gender roles are often renegotiated, with women taking on both economic and emotional caregiving roles across distances.

How are these processes mediated by digital technologies, institutional frameworks, and policy responses across origin and destination countries?

Digital technologies facilitate continuity of care and emotional connection through virtual presence, helping families coordinate and share everyday moments despite physical separation. Institutional and policy frameworks influence these processes by regulating family reunification, access to welfare, and legal rights, often enabling or constraining care practices. Cross-border policies and institutional coordination are crucial; gaps can lead to fragmented care and unmet psychosocial needs for TNFs.

Best Practice Recommendations

- Integrated, family-centered policies that facilitate legal and social support across borders, promote digital inclusion for sustained communication, and recognize the gendered and cultural dimensions of caregiving.

Mota, C. P., Bozic, A., Aksoy, B., Dervishi, E., Gripshi, Z., Ilgaz, A., Sulaj, A., Bolacoli, E. T., & Ramos, A. C. (in press). Caring children across borders: Rethinking family support in transnational migrations. In M. Schrooten, A. Zabrodskaja, B. Bäckström, E. Dervishi, & K. Haagsman (Eds.), Navigating borders: Transnational family dynamics in and beyond contemporary Europe. Palgrave Macmillan.

Further questions to consider:

- How can children's voices shape psychosocial support?
- How can formal services better recognise and strengthen the informal care and support provided by parents, extended family, peers and transnational communities?
- How can support reach children across borders?
- How can services become more accessible and culturally responsive?
- How can schools, health and mental health services, social welfare, child protection and community organisations work together to provide more integrated and continuous support?

Education: supporting inclusion and belonging in schools

Education is much more than access to schooling. For children in transnational and migrant families, schools often become the first place where they experience belonging, stability, and social participation after migration or prolonged family separation. At the same time, schools are also the places where inequalities become visible through language barriers, interrupted educational trajectories, discrimination, social isolation, and limited institutional support.
Successful educational inclusion depends not only on children's resilience, but also on schools' capacity to recognise diversity, respond to individual needs, and work collaboratively with families and communities. Educational inclusion is therefore both a pedagogical and a social responsibility.

How can education systems create learning environments that better support children in TNFs?

- **Language is the gateway to inclusion:** Language learning enables children to participate in classroom activities, build friendships, access the curriculum, and develop a sense of belonging.
- **Well-being comes before learning:** Emotional security, trusting relationships with teachers, peer acceptance, and protection from bullying are essential prerequisites for educational success.
- **Teachers are key agents of inclusion:** Teachers frequently compensate for gaps in policy by developing flexible and creative practices that support newly arrived students.
- **Inclusion requires collaboration:** Successful inclusion depends on strong partnerships between teachers, families, psychologists, social workers, health professionals, community organisations, and policy makers.

Best Practice Recommendations:

- Promote inclusive school environments where every child feels welcome, respected, and able to participate.
- Recognise multilingualism as a resource by implementing translanguaging and other language-supportive approaches.
- Strengthen teachers' competences through continuous professional development.
- Foster meaningful partnerships between schools, families, and community organisations.
- Develop coordinated educational, psychosocial, and health support for children experiencing migration and transnational family life.
- Ensure that children's voices, experiences, and strengths are actively considered in educational decision-making, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Schooling children across borders: Rethinking educational support in transnational migrations

How can schools and educational systems promote successful inclusion of migrant children across different European contexts?

Schools are much more than places where children acquire knowledge; they are environments where children develop relationships, construct identities, and experience belonging. Evidence from the Education subgroup demonstrates that educational inclusion depends on creating learning environments where children feel seen, safe, and supported. This requires recognising multilingualism and cultural diversity as strengths, providing appropriate language support, fostering emotional wellbeing, preventing discrimination and bullying, and ensuring meaningful participation for every learner. Educational success is therefore closely connected to children's sense of belonging and to schools' capacity to respond to their diverse educational, linguistic, and psychosocial needs.

How can educational systems translate these principles into everyday practice?

Across participating countries, successful inclusion was consistently associated with collaborative and flexible educational practices. Schools that adopted multilingual approaches, culturally responsive pedagogy, peer support, multimodal teaching strategies, and strong partnerships with families were better equipped to support migrant children's learning and wellbeing. Equally important was the collaboration between education, psychosocial, and health professionals, demonstrating that educational inclusion is a shared responsibility extending beyond the classroom. Sustainable inclusion therefore requires coordinated action at individual, school, community, and policy levels.

Best Practice Recommendations

- Schools should function as inclusive communities where diversity, multilingualism, and collaboration are embedded in everyday practice.
- Foster meaningful partnerships between schools, families, and community organisations.

Udrea, G., Ringblom, N., Bäckström, B., & Goginava, L. (in press). Filling the gaps of incomplete policies: Teachers' practices for educating students with a migrant background: Insights from Georgia, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden. In L. Wei (Ed.), Multilingualism, mobility, and learning. IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture, and Society.

Across Europe – different practices, common principles

Although participating countries differ considerably in terms of educational policies and migration histories, remarkably similar principles emerged from the examples collected.

Country	Illustrative practice
Albania	Peer mentoring and cultural recognition
Cyprus	Scaffolding participation before language mastery
Georgia	Belonging before learning
Italy	Strengths-based inclusion
Portugal	Multilingualism as a classroom resource
Romania	Participation through everyday classroom adaptations
Sweden	Coordinated support among teachers and study supervisors

Together, these examples demonstrate that although educational systems vary considerably, successful inclusion consistently relies on recognising children's strengths, supporting multilingualism, fostering belonging, and promoting collaboration across educational communities.

Further questions to consider:

- How can schools move beyond ensuring access to education towards fostering genuine belonging?
- How can multilingualism become an educational resource rather than a perceived obstacle?
- What structures best support collaboration among education, psychosocial, and health professionals?
- How can schools ensure that migrant children and their families actively participate in decisions affecting their educational experiences?
- How can educational systems better recognise and build upon children's existing strengths, identities, and cultural resources?

Addressing the Practice: 3S Framework for Professionals

Based on evidence from WG2 publications, we developed the 3S Framework – Seen, Safe, Supported – for professionals working with migrant children. The framework translates this evidence into practical guidance for psychosocial, educational, and healthcare and services.

Bozic, A., Ramos, A. C., Udrea, G., Goginava, L., Bäckström, B., Ilgaz, A., Bellani, H., Koushiou, M., Spiteri, J., Dervishi, E., Ringblom, N., & Mota, C. P. (2026). 3S: Seen, Safe, Supported — A Cross-Sectoral Framework for Professionals Working with Migrant Children across Psychosocial, Education, and Health Services.

How can professionals support the psychosocial well-being of migrant children while recognising both their vulnerabilities and their strengths?

Professionals should start from the child's own experiences, perspectives and strengths. Psychosocial support should identify emotional and relational needs while also recognising children's agency, coping strategies, family and peer relationships, and sources of belonging. Support should be child- and family-centred, culturally responsive and trauma-informed, with particular attention to trusted relationships, participation, TNF connections and continuity of support.

How can education professionals support migrant children's participation, belonging and learning on an equal basis?

Schools should create emotionally safe and inclusive learning environments in which children's languages, cultures, previous educational experiences and strengths are recognised as resources. This requires sustained language support integrated across the curriculum, flexible and multimodal teaching, meaningful participation, supportive peer relationships and collaboration with families. Educational inclusion should go beyond enrolment: children need to feel recognised, safe and able to participate in school life.

How can healthcare professionals support migrant children's participation, belonging and learning on an equal basis?

Health professionals should identify physical, developmental and mental health needs early while recognising that health is shaped by social, economic, legal, linguistic and environmental conditions. Care should therefore be accessible, preventive, culturally responsive and trauma-informed, with professional interpretation, clear information and active participation of children and families. Particular attention is needed to continuity of care when children move between services, regions or countries, and to effective referral and follow-up.

Best Practice Recommendations:

- **Listen to children and build on their strengths** - See the child before the case. Ask children how they understand their situation, what they need, what matters to them and what helps them feel safe and supported.
- **Make services accessible and culturally responsive** - Ensure that children and families can understand, access and use services regardless of language, migration status or unfamiliarity with institutions.
- **Create safe, inclusive everyday environments** - Schools, primary healthcare, community organisations and other everyday settings should create environments where migrant children experience trust, belonging, recognition and protection from discrimination.
- **Ensure continuity of support** - Avoid fragmented interventions. Establish clear referral pathways, shared support plans where appropriate, responsible contact persons and follow-up mechanisms so that children do not have to repeatedly explain their situation or navigate complex systems alone. Continuity is particularly important when children change schools, healthcare providers, accommodation or countries.
- **Work across sectors and professions** - No single sector can address the complexity of children's lives alone.

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