



Republic of Serbia  
Ministry of Education  
Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs

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EU Support to Migration Management in Serbia – Improving reception capacity, protection services and access to education III (2023-25)

## Report on the supervision of support for schools working with migrant pupils



Belgrade, December 2025





## Contents

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT.....	5
1. INTRODUCTION .....	6
2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES.....	8
2.1. Research Design.....	8
2.2. Instruments.....	9
2.3. Research Participants .....	10
2.4. Research Process and Data Analysis .....	11
2.5. Structure of the report .....	12
3. SUBJECT AND RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH.....	12
3.1. TRAINING ON THE PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING.....	12
3.1.1. Context.....	12
3.1.2. Implementation of activities after the training and challenges .....	14
3.1.3. Effects and user perception.....	16
3.1.4. Summary of findings and lessons learned .....	21
3.2. SCHOOL GRANT.....	24
3.2.1. Context.....	24
3.2.2. Implementation of grant-funded activities.....	25
3.2.3. Challenges in implementing the grant activities.....	31
3.2.4. Effects and user perception.....	33
3.2.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned .....	40
3.3. MENTOR EXPERT SUPPORT .....	44
3.3.1. Context.....	44
3.3.2. Implementation of mentor support.....	45





3.3.3. Challenges in implementing mentor support .....	48
3.3.4. Effects of the support and user perceptions .....	50
3.3.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned .....	55
3.4. TRANSLATION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL .....	58
3.4.1. Context.....	58
3.4.2. The implementation of support for the translation of teaching materials.....	59
3.4.3. Challenges in implementing the translation of teaching materials .....	61
3.4.4. User effects and perception.....	62
3.4.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned .....	66
4. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	68
4.1. Concluding Remarks.....	68
4.2. Recommendations for improving the support system .....	71
4.3. Conclusion .....	73
APPENDICES .....	76
APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire – Online training on prevention of human trafficking..	76
APPENDIX 2. Questionnaire – Mentors and Translation of Teaching Materials.....	76
APPENDIX 3. Focus Group Guide – Schools (Grant).....	76
APPENDIX 4. Focus Group Guide – Mentors.....	76
APPENDIX 5. Focus Group Guide – Key Informants .....	76
APPENDIX 7. List of school grant reports .....	76





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## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This report presents the results of the supervision of educational activities implemented within the framework of the project ‘EU Support to Migration Management in Serbia – Improving Reception Capacity, Protection Services and Access to Education III’ (2023-2025). The research covered four key components of support for schools: training on the prevention of child trafficking, school grants, mentoring support, and the translation of teaching materials. A mixed-methodology was used with 307 questionnaire respondents and 6 focus groups; the target group was school staff from five school administration offices with the highest number of migrant pupils.

The results confirm significant effects at all levels. The training on child trafficking prevention built the competencies of over 95% of participants, with three-quarters of schools organising preventive activities after the training. However, a gap was identified between the acquired competencies and their practical application – around two-thirds of teachers use the knowledge in their daily work, which indicates a need to strengthen support for the transfer of knowledge into practice.

School grants (14 schools, maximum of €4,000) enabled Serbian as a foreign language classes, material support for pupils, psychosocial workshops, teacher training and intercultural events. Cases of successful integration of migrant pupils into society, successful completion of primary education and transition to secondary education, the development of teachers' competencies and an improved intercultural climate in the school and local community have been documented. The main challenges were administrative complexity and the fluctuation of the migrant population.

Mentoring support (9 mentors) proved to be key – 81% of schools confirm its contribution to the faster integration of migrant pupils, and 72% recognise an enhanced school capacity. Schools most valued remote consultations, assistance with administrative tasks, and networking with other schools. The lack of psychosocial support for pupils from war-torn areas was identified as a significant challenge.

Half of the schools used the translation of teaching materials, with 70% confirming that the materials helped pupils to master the curriculum. The materials are available on the REMIS website as a resource centre. The main challenge was the time lag between the request and delivery, which motivated schools to develop alternative solutions.





The competencies developed through the project (risk recognition, communication skills, differentiated teaching, intercultural pedagogy) are applicable to working with all pupils from vulnerable groups, which represents the project's wider significance.

Priority recommendations include the institutionalisation of mentoring support through the expansion of the mandate of external counsellors by securing national-level funding, and the development of a psychosocial support system through a network of specialised counsellors at the regional level, strengthening the teaching of Serbian as a foreign language, simplifying administrative procedures for grants, and strengthening coordination between relevant institutions.

Teachers' competencies, transformed attitudes, established networks of cooperation and material resources constitute the project's lasting legacy. The sustainability of the achieved results will depend on the system's ability to integrate successful practices into its regular activities and to provide continuous support to schools, independently of project cycles.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, the Republic of Serbia has been facing significant migratory movements resulting from political developments in the Middle East and the Maghreb countries. A large number of asylum seekers transit the so-called Balkan Route on their way to Europe, including Serbia. This wave of migration has necessitated the development of a coordinated system for the support and protection of migrants, particularly in the area of children's education.

The migrant population profile has changed over the past decade. At the start of the crisis, the migrant population consisted nearly entirely of children from war-torn areas – Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. Today, the situation is significantly different – around 70% of the migrant population consists of Ukrainian children, while the remaining 30% come from other countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. This change has required significant flexibility from the education system, as there are not only linguistic but also cultural differences between these groups.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter the Ministry) has been actively involved in addressing the educational needs of the migrant population since the beginning of the migrant crisis. From the very beginning, an inclusive approach was chosen, without segregating migrants into special schools, which has proven to be an extremely successful model.





According to officials at the Ministry, the enrolment of migrant pupils in<sup>1</sup> the education system has never gone below 85% and has at times reached as high as 95% of the population represented in asylum centres, reception centres or private accommodation. This impressive result was achieved thanks to a holistic approach that involves the relevant ministries, institutions, the non-governmental sector and international partners in the drafting and implementation of public policy documents and regulations dealing with this area.

The legal and institutional framework for migration management was established as early as 2012 with the adoption of *the Law on Migration Management*<sup>2</sup>, which defined a coordinated system and established the responsibilities of the Commissioner for Refugees and Migration. Then, in 2017, the Ministry, based on international and domestic legal documents and the intention to provide every child with educational and psychosocial support, issued *the Expert Instruction for the Inclusion of Refugee/Asylum-Seeking Pupils in the Education System*. The Instruction specified the obligations of schools to develop a *School-Level Support Plan* and to create a *Pupil Support Plan*<sup>3</sup>. In 2024, the Ministry adopted amendments to *the Rulebook on the Protocol for Institutional Procedures in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect*<sup>4</sup>, which explicitly lists human trafficking as a form of violence and abuse. This is of particular importance, given that children arriving from war-torn areas are particularly vulnerable in this regard.

In the period from 2023 to 2025, a series of activities was implemented within the framework of the project named *EU Support to Migration Management in Serbia – Improving Reception Capacity, Protection Services and Access to Education III* (hereinafter the Project), funded by the European Union. The educational support component of the Project was implemented by the Ministry in cooperation with its implementing partner, the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Experience from a similar previous project<sup>5</sup> has shown that the education system must provide additional support and empower migrant pupils, and that further investment is necessary to improve their quality of life and prevent the abuse of this socially vulnerable group.

The following report aims to present the results of the research relating to the implementation and effects of certain project activities carried out in education over the past two

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'migrant pupil' in this document refers to pupils who have arrived in Serbia from war-torn countries, with or without parental accompaniment.

<sup>2</sup> Law on Migration Management, "Službeni glasnik RS", no. 107/12

<sup>3</sup> <https://prosveta.gov.rs/vesti/strucno-uputstvo-za-ukljucivanje-ucenika-izbeglicatrizilaca-azila-u-sistem-obrazovanja-i-vaspitanja/>

<sup>4</sup> Regulation on the Protocol of Procedures in an Institution for Responding to Violence, Abuse and Neglect, 'Official Gazette of the RS', 11/24

<sup>5</sup> MADAD 2 - European Union support to Serbia in migration management – Grant agreement TF-MADAD/2017/T04.86





years within the aforementioned Project, and to present the key lessons learned. The document provides guidance for improving the process of aligning the needs of migrant pupils, schools, and the education system as a whole. The report is designed to contribute to the sustainability of the results achieved in the education sector by setting out clear priorities and key lessons learned identified within the aforementioned project activities, as well as to support the preparation of an evaluation report that will address the overall results achieved in the Project.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The focus of this research were four key school support project activities: (a) online training for the prevention of child and youth trafficking, (b) allocation of grants to schools, (c) expert mentoring support for local schools with migrant pupils, and (d) Translation of educational material into the native languages of migrant pupils. Special attention was paid to the effects at the school level and on national education policies.

### 2.1. Research Design

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis. This design allowed for the triangulation of data and the obtaining of a complete picture of the effects of the project's activities from the perspectives of different users and stakeholders.

The quantitative portion of the research was carried out using the survey technique, with two specialised questionnaires used. One questionnaire was intended for participants in the training on the prevention of child trafficking, while the second was for representatives of schools that used mentoring support and/or translated teaching materials. On the other hand, the qualitative portion of the research included an analysis of reporting documentation, specifically the schools' final project reports following the implementation of grant-funded activities, as well as reports from mentors on the support provided to the schools. Additionally, focus groups were conducted with the relevant stakeholders. These were organised according to the stakeholders' roles, which enabled each participant to share their thoughts on the given topic and to personally contribute to the discussion.





## 2.2. Instruments

For the purposes of the research, specialised instruments were developed which enabled a comprehensive assessment of the effects of the project's activities. These comprised questionnaires and focus group guides, which are briefly described below.

### Training Participants' Questionnaire

The first questionnaire was a comprehensive instrument for assessing the effects of the training for teachers in the field of trafficking prevention, which was taken by education professionals who had completed the training. The questionnaire covered several key areas: basic demographic and work-related information about the respondents (gender, length of service, type of institution, job title, geographical location of the school), the competencies acquired and their practical application, measured on a Likert scale, the organisation of preventive activities in schools and the age groups of pupils involved, the assessment of indirect effects on pupils after participating in the preventive activities, as well as challenges, limiting factors, plans for continuation, and suggestions for improving future training. The questionnaire content is presented in *Appendix 1*.

### School Questionnaire

The second questionnaire served for assessing the effectiveness of mentoring support and the translation of teaching materials in working with migrant and refugee pupils. It was completed by representatives of the schools where one or both forms of support were used. The questionnaire included general questions about the countries of origin of the migrant pupils, the greatest challenges in working with this population, problems in communication with parents, and teacher motivation. The section on mentoring support examined in detail how the schools had learned about the support option, what types of support they had received, and how effective that support had been. Using a Likert scale, teachers assessed the contribution of mentoring support to strengthening school capacity, teacher competencies, horizontal collaboration, and the integration of migrant pupils. The section on translated teaching materials examined the challenges related to language support, the use of translation services, the assessment of the materials' quality and usability, as well as the functionality of the process for this form of support. The questionnaire in the final section had open-ended questions about which type of support had had the most positive impact, as well as recommendations for decision-makers. The questionnaire content is presented in *Appendix 2*.





## Focus Group Guides

For the purposes of the qualitative research, three guides for conducting focus groups were developed: a guide for a focus group with staff in schools that had received a grant, a guide for a focus group with experienced educators (mentors) who had been engaged to support the schools, and a guide for a focus group with staff in the public and state sector (key informants) who had participated in the design and monitoring of the implementation of the project activities. Each of the guides, in addition to an introductory and concluding section, contains four central thematic areas: technical aspects of the work, implementation of activities and participant satisfaction, effects on pupils, the school and the local community, as well as challenges, sustainability and lessons learned. Within each thematic area, a list of questions was developed to help the interviewer explore and better understand the subject of the research. The guides are available in appendices 3, 4 and 5.

### 2.3. Research Participants

The target population for the research comprised schools in the five school districts with the highest number of migrant pupils in the previous period, which therefore received various forms of support under the Project. These were the school districts of Belgrade, Valjevo, Leskovac, Novi Sad and Sombor.

#### Participants in the survey on the effects of the training

The questionnaire on the effects of the training was sent electronically to 596 school staff members from the five school districts that had successfully completed the training on the prevention of child trafficking. Almost half of the participants, 237 in total, completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 47%. The School Administration Office of Belgrade was the most represented with 102 participants (43.0%), followed by the School Administration Office of Sombor with 59 participants (24.9%), the School Administration Office of Novi Sad with 34 participants (14.3%), the School Administration Office of Valjevo with 26 participants (11.0%) and the School Administration Office of Leskovac with 16 participants (6.8%).

The majority of participants come from primary schools – 155 (65.4%), followed by vocational secondary schools with a total of 56 respondents (23.6%), while gymnasiums and special schools are represented by 13 respondents each (5.5%). The gender breakdown shows a high proportion of women, 204 (86.1%), which is approximately in line with the average gender structure of employees in schools. According to their job role, the largest group are subject teachers with 136 respondents (57.4%), followed by classroom teachers with 55 respondents (23.2%), and





school expert associates with 31 respondents (13.1%), while the least represented were school directors and assistant directors with 12 respondents (5.1%) and special educational needs experts with 3 respondents (1.3%).

### **Participants in the survey on mentoring support and the translation of materials**

Seventy representatives from 97 schools, the average number appearing in mentors' reports, participated in the survey on support related to mentors and the translation of teaching materials. This represents 72% of the total population of schools with pupils from migrant backgrounds. Regarding the gender of the sample, the majority were female, with 60 respondents (85.7%), while 10 (14.3%) were male.

Regarding the type of institution in which the respondents work, the largest number of them are employed in a primary school – 43 (61.4%), followed by secondary school teachers, from which 17 participants (24.3%) come, then 8 (11.4%) representatives of secondary schools, while the smallest number of respondents stated they were employed in other institutions (ballet and music school), with two (2.9%) of them. This distribution is expected, given that migrant pupils are most often integrated into primary schools, where the majority of support for their education and adaptation is provided.

### **Focus group participants**

A total of 6 focus groups were conducted, 5 of which were online and one 'in-person', with a total of 24 participants. Regarding the evaluation of the grant's effects, reports from all 14 schools that received the grant were reviewed. However, 11 schools (79% of the total number of schools that received the grant) responded to the interview, with a total of 13 representatives. A total of 8 mentors participated in dedicated discussions, while one mentor contributed via correspondence, representing a total of 9 participants, or 100% of the mentors engaged in the project. Finally, a discussion was also organised with key informants from the Ministry of Education, the Institute for the Improvement of Education (IIE), and the authors of the training programme of which 4 participants contributed in person or in writing. The focus group list of participants is presented in *Appendix 6*.

## **2.4. Research Process and Data Analysis**

The research instruments presented were applied within the relevant target groups, which enabled the comprehensive collection of information from different perspectives. Data collection





and analysis were carried out on a representative sample at both local and national levels, thereby documenting the effects of the implemented project activities.

Considering that participation was voluntary and that the research was conducted during a very dynamic period for the schools (the end of the calendar year), the number of respondents, i.e., the schools that responded, was quite satisfactory for the purposes of supervision and drawing general conclusions.

## 2.5. Structure of the report

The supervisory report consists of five chapters. Following the first, introductory, and the second, methodological, chapters, which have just been presented, the third, central chapter consists of four sub-chapters presenting the research findings relating to the four educational activities that are the subject of the study. The fourth chapter contains concluding reflections and specific recommendations for further action in developing systemic activities related to supporting migrant schools and pupils. The appendices provide the instruments used in the research, as well as the lists of participants in the qualitative study.

## 3. SUBJECT AND RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

In accordance with the contractual assignment<sup>6</sup>, the research underlying the supervision aims to examine certain types of support and determine the effect of the following educational activities carried out in the period 2024–2025: (1) Online training on the prevention of child and youth trafficking, (2) a school grant, (3) mentoring support and (4) the translation of educational materials.

The results and a detailed analysis follow below.

### 3.1. TRAINING ON THE PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

#### 3.1.1. Context

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with partners, delivered several training courses at the end of 2024. Two of the courses were delivered in person. These were: “Serbian as a Foreign Language in Teaching” and “Applying Professional Guidelines through the Creation of a Support

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<sup>6</sup> Contract 10/IPA3/NOV25-DEC25





Plan and Didactic Materials for Migrants in Schools”. Nineteen seminars were held for 508 participants. According to the results, the training was very successful. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the content, organisation, and the competent trainers who ensured an effective transfer of knowledge. The facilitators confirmed the participants' strong engagement and progress, while the participants demonstrated their acquired knowledge and skills through examples of good practice, which are now available at <https://remis.rs/>.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, during the same period, an online training course entitled 'Application of the Expert Guidance for the Inclusion of Migrant Pupils in the Education System – Prevention of Child Trafficking'. The aim of the training was to enhance the competencies of staff in pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools for a more effective response to the challenges of migration and the protection of human rights. The training was structured into three modules. The first module addressed the role of the education and upbringing system in the fight against human trafficking, covering ways to protect pupils from violence, abuse and neglect, the implementation of preventative activities with parental involvement, as well as the recognition and assessment of the risk of a child becoming a potential victim of human trafficking. The second module focused on the basic concepts of the phenomenon of human trafficking, including the different forms of trafficking, potential victims, vulnerability factors, methods of recruitment and control of victims, as well as the legal framework for protection in the Republic of Serbia. The third module covered prevention, intervention, and support through three lessons which examined planning preventative activities in schools, factors of vulnerability, interventions in cases of suspected human trafficking, as well as the application of an indicator list for identifying potential victims, inter-sectoral cooperation and the principles of safeguarding child victims of trafficking.

The effectiveness of the training was assessed by checking whether the planned outcomes had been achieved and whether there had been a change in participants' behaviour and the development of positive attitudes. An evaluation study conducted immediately after the training<sup>8</sup>, showed that participants had a statistically significant increase in their competencies in this area,

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<sup>7</sup> Project documentation The Report on the Evaluation of the Training Programmes: Serbian as a Foreign Language in Teaching Practice & Application of the Professional Instruction through the development of a support plan and didactic material for migrants in schools, January 2025

<sup>8</sup> Project documentation: Report on the development, implementation and effect assessment of the training programme: "Applying expert guidance for the inclusion of migrant pupils in the education system – preventing child trafficking", January 2025





as well as on the test material and the self-assessment scale. These data indicated that the training had a positive effect and that genuine learning had occurred among the participants.

New research within the supervision was intended to show the long-term nature of the training's initial effects and answer the question of whether teachers still feel competent to work in the field of prevention, and whether they have applied any of the activities in a teaching or extracurricular context at school, as well as how this was reflected in the pupils' behaviour.

### 3.1.2. Implementation of activities after the training and challenges

As mentioned, in line with the training objectives, the application of the acquired knowledge was planned through teaching and extracurricular activities in schools. The research examined whether preventive activities on the prevention of the trafficking of children and young people were organised in schools after the training. Of the total of 237 participants, 173 (73.0%) confirm that preventive activities were organised in their schools, while 64 (27.0%) state that this was not done.

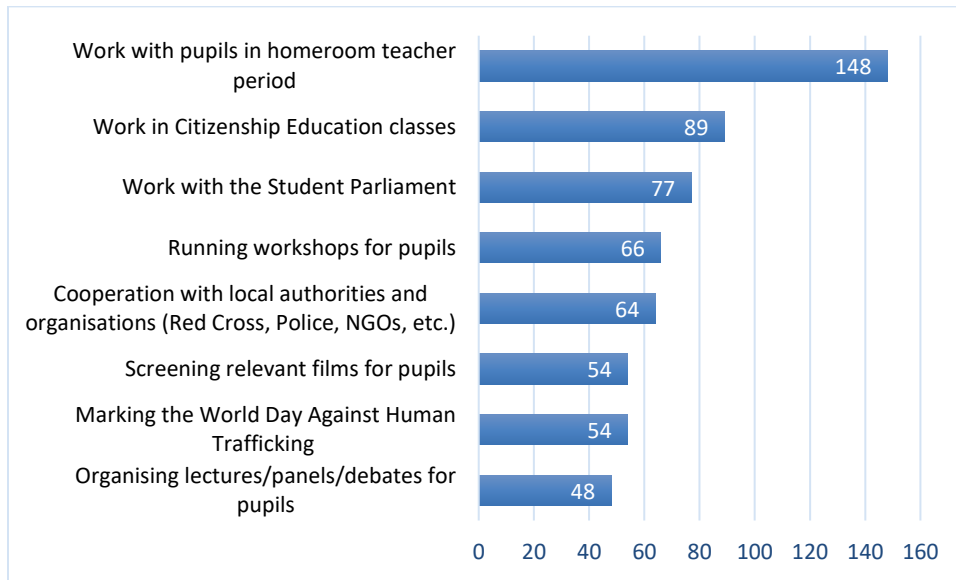
A further analysis of the 173 affirmative responses provides insight into the diverse approaches schools are using for prevention, with a focus on working with pupils, teachers, parents and external partners. Working with pupils in homeroom teacher period stands out as the most common activity, cited by 148 respondents (85.5%). This frequency seems expected, as form classroom meetings are the right place for preventative work, being primarily focused on upbringing content and the development of pupils' social and emotional skills. This is followed by work in citizenship education lessons, which was organised in 89 schools (51.4%), indicating that the topic of child trafficking is most systematically addressed within the subject specifically focused on the development of pupils' values and civic competencies. Work with the pupil council is reported in 77 cases (44.5%), and the implementation of workshops for pupils in 66 cases (38.2%). A similar frequency is observed regarding cooperation with local authorities and organisations such as the Red Cross, the Ministry of the Interior, and non-governmental organisations, which is evident in 64 responses (37.0%), which shows that schools recognise the importance of interactive methods and cross-sectoral cooperation. Showing relevant films for pupils and marking the World Day against Human Trafficking are equally represented and were mentioned in 54 school responses (31.2%). The least frequently mentioned activity was the organisation of lectures, forums or debates for pupils, which was mentioned in 48 responses (27.7%), meaning that only one in four schools that carried out preventative activities did so.

The data are presented in Figure 1.





**Figure 1. Types of curricular and extracurricular activities on the prevention and protection of children and young people**



In addition to the most common activities shown in Figure 1, schools also organised work with the Parents' Council (28 participants, 16.2%), parent-teacher meetings on the topic of child trafficking (23 cases, 13.3%), and lectures and workshops for teachers and school expert associates (18 schools, 10.4%), the production of informational materials (16 schools, 9.2%), as well as lectures or forums for parents (11 respondents, 6.4%). Some participants also mentioned work in subject teaching such as Serbian language, history, sociology and informatics.

In the schools where preventive activities were organised, they were mainly aimed at pupils of all ages. Thus, a third of the respondents, or 56 respondents (32.4%), state that pupils from all years of secondary school participated in the activities at school, and around a third, 52 (30.0%), state that the activities were aimed at pupils from all years of primary school. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents, 49 (28.3%), indicated that the activities were exclusively aimed at the upper primary school years (Years 5 to 8). The least common were cases where the activities were aimed at a smaller group of pupils, specifically those in the upper years. Thus, only 11 responses (6.4%) identified the upper years of primary school (Year 7 and Year 8) as the target group, while in 5 cases (2.9%), it was confirmed that the activities were carried out exclusively with pupils in the upper years of secondary school (Year 11 and Year 12).

Participants provided concrete examples of good practice that illustrate a diverse and creative approach to preventative work. Collaboration with the state and civil sectors stands out as





a significant model. Several participants cite successful partnerships with the Ministry of the Interior, the Red Cross, and the ASTRA organisation, which have delivered workshops and lectures for various age groups of pupils. Furthermore, interactive and creative methods are recognised as an effective way to engage pupils. Examples include activities where pupils draw slips of paper with real-life situations on them and comment on how they would react, working with a Debating Club, as well as creating short preventative video material. A common feature of these approaches is the active participation of pupils in the learning process, where they are not passive recipients of information but participants who critically assess situations, argue viewpoints, and create content. Such methods have the potential to have a deeper effect on the development of self-protection competencies than traditional lecture-based methods. Additionally, the documentation of activities, teamwork, and continuity are emphasised as key aspects of good practice. Participants in the study highlight the importance of a systemic approach that ensures transparency, evaluation, and long-term planning of preventative activities, with the support of professional staff and colleagues within the school community.

In addition to a number of positive examples, interviewees also cited the challenges they faced. For instance, several of them highlight adapting the content to the children's age and sensibilities as a challenge. Some point out that potential victims are often unaware of the situation they are in. Training participants note that the abundance of instructions on how to proceed can make practical application difficult, noting that every child is a 'unique case'. Several of them pointed to institutional barriers that hinder preventative work, from a lack of awareness about the prevalence of the problem, through a desire to protect the institution's reputation, to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the numerous demands placed on teachers and schools. Furthermore, some schools faced challenges regarding collaboration with the social welfare centre, as well as difficulties in establishing cooperation with parents, particularly when they are not prepared to discuss the topic.

### 3.1.3. Effects and user perception

An overview of the types and scope of the activities carried out is only one aspect of supervision. It is equally important to examine how teachers, pupils, and schools as institutions experienced the effects of the training and to what extent there were actual changes in their competencies and practice.

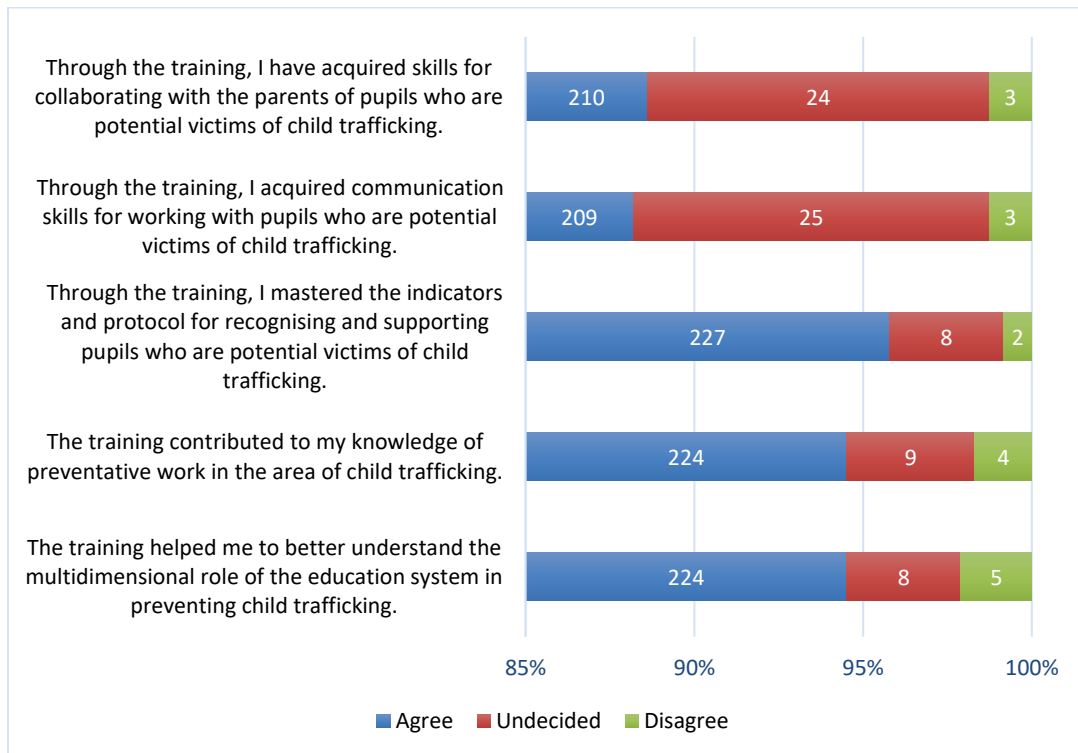




## The effect of the training on participants employed at the school

The results of the research shown in Chart 2 indicate that the training on the prevention of child and youth trafficking had a significant effect on the development of teachers' competencies. A total of 227 participants (95.8%) confirm that the training improved their knowledge of recognising and supporting pupils who are potential victims of child trafficking, while 224 participants (94.5%) recognise that the training contributed to a better understanding of preventative work. Communication skills were also improved for a large number of participants – 210 (88.6%) confirm they acquired skills to communicate more effectively with pupils' parents and 209 (88.2%) with pupils on this sensitive topic. Understanding of preventative work was recognised by 224 participants (94.5%) as a significant outcome of the training, which indicates that school staff are better acquainted with institutional safeguarding mechanisms and procedures. Only a minority, one in ten participants, were undecided as to whether the training had improved their competencies, while a negligible number, between 2 and 5, expressed some disagreement.

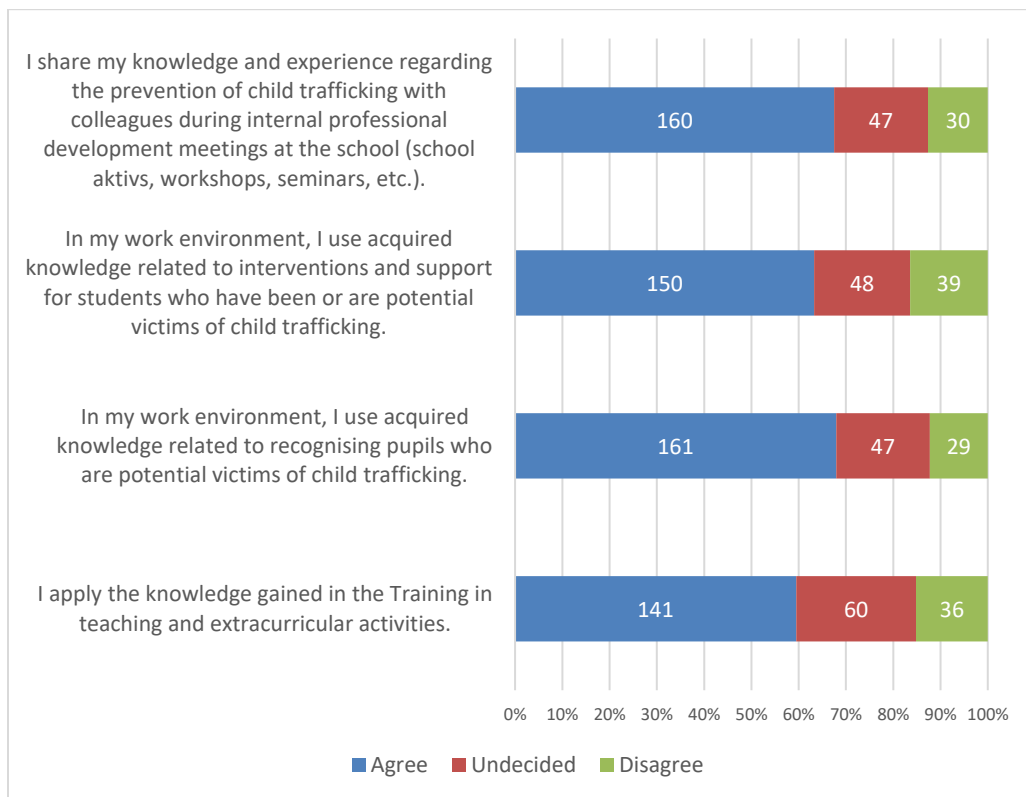
Figure 2. Knowledge acquired through training





However, a gap is evident between the acquired competencies and their practical application in daily work. While almost all participants confirm that they have improved their knowledge through the training, a slightly smaller number confirm that they consistently apply this knowledge in practice. As can be seen in Chart 3, a total of 161 participants (67.9%) state that they use, in their work environment, the knowledge gained regarding the identification of pupils who are potential victims of child trafficking. Interventions and support for pupils are also present in the participants' work. Thus, 150 participants (63.3%) state that they use the knowledge gained in the workplace, relating to interventions and support for pupils who are potential victims of child trafficking, while 141 participants (59.5%) apply the knowledge gained in both teaching and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the exchange of knowledge with colleagues is also very common. Thus, 160 participants (67.5%) confirm that they share their knowledge and experience regarding the prevention of child trafficking with colleagues at subject-department meetings, staff meetings, workshops or seminars.

Figure 3. Application of acquired knowledge





A certain degree of indecision and disagreement is also noticeable. This indecisiveness varies, being greatest for applying knowledge in teaching and extracurricular activities, cited by one in four participants (60 participants, or 25.3%), and least for identifying pupils at risk and exchanging knowledge with colleagues, cited by 47 teachers (19.8%). This indecisiveness may indicate various factors—from a lack of concrete opportunities to apply the acquired knowledge, through the need for additional support in transferring knowledge into practice, to the specific context of individual schools. Between 29 and 39 participants expressed disagreement, with the highest percentage (16.5%) regarding the use of knowledge for intervention and support, and slightly less so in relation to recognising potential victims (12.2%).

### **Effect of the training on pupils**

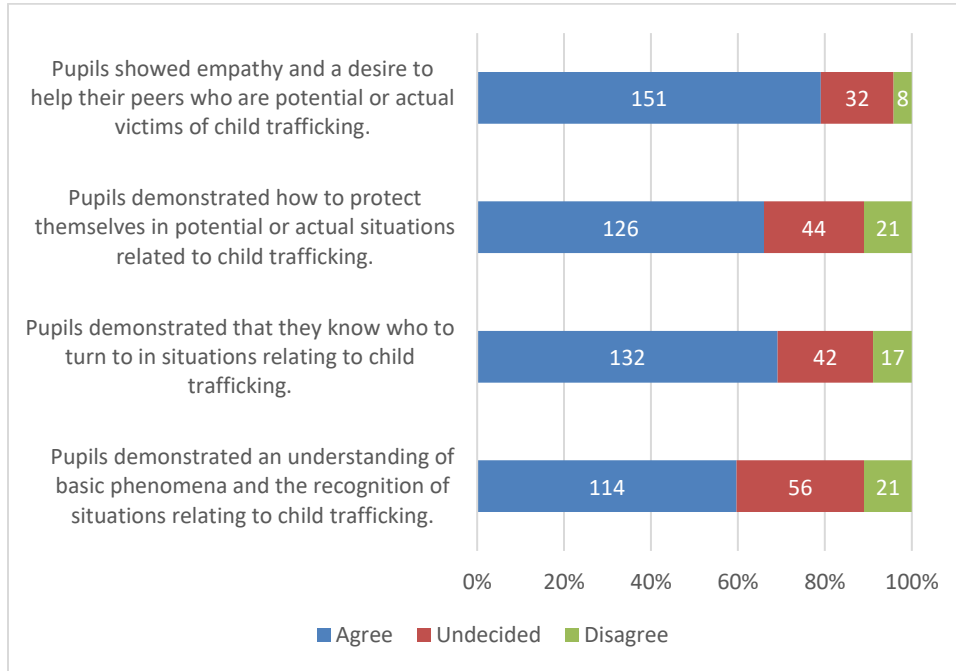
The implementation of teaching and non-teaching activities related to the prevention of child and youth trafficking aimed to inform pupils, help them recognise and know how to protect themselves in situations that could be threatening. Teachers recognise positive changes in pupil behaviour following the implementation of the aforementioned activities aimed at preventing the trafficking of children and young people. 191 participants in the survey commented on this.

A total of 114 participants (59.7%) confirm that the pupils demonstrated recognition of basic phenomena and situations related to child trafficking, while 126 (66.0%) agree that the pupils learned how to protect themselves in potentially risky situations related to child trafficking. Also, pupils know who to turn to in situations related to child trafficking, as stated by 132 (69.1%) participants. However, empathy and understanding stand out as the most pronounced change in pupil behaviour. A full 151 participants (79.1%) confirm that pupils have shown empathy and understanding towards their peers who are potential victims of child trafficking. However, a certain indecisiveness is also noticeable among 32–56 teachers (17.0% to 29.3%), while 8–21 teachers (4.2% to 11.0%) disagree with the statements. The breakdown is shown in Figure 4.





Figure 4. Change in pupil behaviour



In addition to the previously identified changes in pupil behaviour, participants also wrote comments that provide further insight into some of the effects of the preventative activities. Thus, in addition to achieving a higher level of empathy and understanding of the issue, other emotional reactions from pupils were also observed, including concern, fear, and curiosity. Furthermore, according to some teachers, awareness of digital risks remains a challenge, as they notice that pupils are often unaware of the dangers lurking online.

### Effect of the training on the school

At the level of school establishments, the training has initiated significant preventative activity. A large number of participants state that, following the training, various forms of preventative work have been organised in their schools, which testifies to the fact that the training had a catalysing effect at an institutional level. Schools have developed a diverse approach to prevention, integrating this theme into various segments of school life and work.

The schools also recognised the importance of interactive methods and cross-sectoral cooperation. The implementation of workshops, the screening of relevant films, the commemoration of the World Day against Human Trafficking, as well as cooperation with local





authorities and relevant organisations, show that the schools do not work in isolation but actively seek support and partnership with external actors.

### 3.1.4. Summary of findings and lessons learned

In 2024, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with partners, implemented a training course entitled 'Application of the Expert Guidance for the Inclusion of Migrant Pupils in the Education System – Prevention of Child Trafficking'. The aim of the training was to enhance the competencies of staff in pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools to have a more effective response to migration challenges and protect human rights. The training was structured into three modules covering the role of the education system in combating human trafficking, the basic concepts of the phenomenon (forms of trafficking, potential victims, factors of vulnerability, methods of victim recruitment and control, as well as the legal framework for protection), and prevention, intervention and support.

A previous evaluation study conducted immediately after the training showed a statistically significant increase in participants' knowledge and competencies. This research aimed to determine the long-term effects of the training: whether teachers still feel competent to work in the field of prevention, whether they have applied the knowledge gained in a teaching or extra-curricular context, and how this has been reflected in pupil behaviour.

The research findings confirm that the training had significant and multi-layered effects at the level of teachers, pupils, and educational institutions. At the level of specific competencies, the training showed exceptionally positive results. As many as 95,8% of participants confirm that the training improved their knowledge of recognising and supporting pupils who are potential victims of child trafficking, while 94.5% recognise that the training contributed to a better understanding of the multi-dimensional role of the education system in the prevention of child trafficking. Communication skills for working with pupils and parents were also improved for a large number of participants, as around 88% confirm they acquired skills for more effective communication.

However, a certain gap is identified between the acquired competencies and their practical application in daily work. Around two-thirds of participants (67.9%) state that they use the knowledge gained in their work environment regarding the identification of pupils who are potential victims of child trafficking, while 63.3% state that they use knowledge relating to interventions and support. The application of knowledge in teaching and extracurricular activities is slightly less common (59.5%), which may indicate various factors – from a lack of specific opportunities to apply the acquired knowledge, through the need for additional support in





transferring knowledge into practice, to institutional barriers and personal insecurity in dealing with such a complex issue. A positive finding is the fact that 67.5% of participants actively share their knowledge and experience with colleagues, which indicates the existence of a culture of exchange and mutual support within school teams.

Of the total of 237 respondents, 173 (73.0%) confirm that preventive activities were organised in their schools following the training. Schools have developed a diverse approach to prevention, with work with pupils in homeroom teacher period standing out as the most common activity, cited by 85.5% of participants. This is followed by work in citizenship education lessons, reported by around half of the participants (51.4%), work with the pupil council (44.5%), and the delivery of workshops for pupils in 38.2% of cases. Cooperation with local authorities and organisations such as the Red Cross, the Ministry of the Interior and non-governmental organisations is present in 37.0% of the responses.

Activities aimed at parents are less common – parent-teacher meetings on the topic of child trafficking are mentioned in 13.3% of responses, while the organisation of lectures or seminars for parents is mentioned in only 6.4% of cases. This low prevalence indicates a need to strengthen this segment of preventative work, as parental involvement is key to effective prevention.

At the level of the pupils, teachers recognise positive changes in behaviour following the implementation of preventative activities. Empathy and understanding stand out as the most pronounced change, with 79.1% of participants confirming that pupils showed empathy and understanding towards their peers who are potential victims of child trafficking. Additionally, 69.1% of participants state that the pupils know who to turn to in situations related to child trafficking, while 66.0% agree that the pupils have learnt how to protect themselves in potentially risky situations. These findings suggest that the preventative activities had a real effect on the pupils and contributed to their awareness, the development of protective factors, and prosocial values.

Respondents provided specific examples of good practice that illustrate creativity in preventative work. Interactive and creative teaching methods, the work of a debating club, and the production of short preventative video materials were recognised as an effective way of engaging pupils. A common characteristic of these approaches is the active participation of pupils in the learning process, where they critically evaluate situations, argue viewpoints and create content. The documentation of activities, teamwork and continuity were highlighted as key aspects of good practice, as was cooperation with the state and civil sectors.





In addition to the positive effects, participants identified several challenges that limit the effectiveness of preventative work. Adapting content to the age of the children and their sensibilities requires additional competencies. Some teachers point out that an abundance of instructions on how to proceed can make practical application difficult, and that every situation is unique and requires an individual approach. A lack of interest from some schools and colleagues in this topic has also been noted ('it doesn't happen here, we shouldn't worry people'), which may be a reflection of insufficient awareness of the problem's prevalence, a desire to protect the institution's reputation, or a feeling of being overwhelmed. A lack of organisation and internal communication, as well as difficulties in collaboration with social welfare centre and parents, further complicate preventative work. Teachers note that pupils are often unaware of the dangers lurking online, which indicates that awareness of digital risks remains a challenge.

The research findings confirm that the training was a valuable investment in developing the preventative capacity of the education system. The training succeeded in building a solid knowledge base among staff in educational institutions, initiating preventative activities in schools, and contributing to the development of protective factors among pupils. The vast majority of schools organised various forms of preventative work after the training, which testifies to the fact that the training had a catalysing effect at the institutional level.

Key lessons learned highlight several important aspects. Firstly, the training successfully built teachers' competencies, but strengthening the transfer of knowledge into practice is necessary. The gap between the acquired competencies and their practical application suggests a need for continuous support, mentoring, and the exchange of experiences. Second, schools have demonstrated the capacity to integrate preventive activities into various segments of school life, but the systemic involvement of parents is necessary, as parental involvement is key to effective prevention. Thirdly, collaboration with external stakeholders – government institutions and civil society organisations – has proven to be an important resource that schools should continue to develop. Fourth, institutional barriers such as the disinterest of some schools and difficulties in cross-sectoral collaboration require systemic solutions that go beyond the individual efforts of teachers.

The long-term sustainability of the training's effects will depend on continuous support, the exchange of experiences, and strengthening the network of cooperation between schools, local communities, and relevant institutions. It is necessary to include this topic in schools' annual work plans and to regularly report on the activities carried out, as well as to develop mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating preventive activities. The training has laid the foundations for a long-





term and systemic response to the challenge of child and youth trafficking, but its full value will only be realised if these foundations are further developed and institutionalised.

## 3.2. SCHOOL GRANT

### 3.2.1. Context

Recognising the need for systemic support for schools working with migrant pupils, the project included a financial assistance component through a mechanism of small-scale grants awarded to schools (the so-called 'school grant'). The aim of this activity was threefold: to improve the capacities of institutions and professionals in the education system for providing adequate support for migrant pupils, to create a stimulating and tolerant educational environment, and to improve the quality of education for migrants at all levels. To this end, a public call was issued, giving schools the opportunity to apply for funding for specific activities in inclusive education.

The application criteria were clearly defined. Educational institutions registered in the Republic of Serbia as legal entities, which educated migrant pupils (asylum seekers and applicants for asylum), were eligible to participate. During the selection process, priority was given to educational institutions that had already gained experience by participating in capacity-building training in the field of migration management, as well as those that had implemented programmes for the education of refugee and asylum-seeker pupils. This approach ensured that grants were awarded to schools that had already demonstrated a commitment to, and an understanding of, the specific needs of this pupil population.

The project framework defined clear expected results which included several key dimensions:

- (a) the inclusion of migrant pupils in primary education, accompanied by the enhancement of teaching quality and the development of teachers' competencies for inclusive practice;
- (b) supporting the continuation of migrants' education by their inclusion in secondary schools;
- (c) improving the intercultural climate in schools and strengthening the sensitivity of all school stakeholders to the specific support needs of pupils from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The timeframe for the implementation of the school projects covered the period from March 2024 to May 2025. The maximum amount per individual grant was 4,000 euros in the dinar equivalent, which enabled schools to devise comprehensive interventions tailored to local needs.





The budget framework was structured to ensure a balance between different types of support: funds could be used for human resources costs (maximum 30% of the budget), the procurement of equipment to improve teaching quality (maximum 25% of the budget), and direct support for pupils through the provision of textbooks and school supplies, lunches, clothing, and extracurricular activities. Special attention is paid to the social dimension of integration – activities for the promotion of inclusion and social cohesion must constitute at least 15% of the budget, thereby emphasising the importance of creating a stimulating environment for all pupils.

Based on the submitted school project proposals, a total of 14 grants were awarded to educational institutions across Serbia, thereby creating a network of schools dedicated to improving inclusive education for migrant pupils. The list of schools that received a grant is available in Appendix 7.

### 3.2.2. Implementation of grant-funded activities

The grant-awarding process was organised through public calls, with the criteria clearly defined. The Ministry, in cooperation with school administrations and mentors, informed schools about the opportunities. The process was transparent: "We issue a public call and, in that public call, the criteria for who can apply for the small grant, and what is required, are specified" (Ministry). In this process, mentors played a key role, acting as a link between the different levels of the system: "We were that link between the Ministry of Education and the international organisations that provide the opportunity to apply for projects" (Mentor). The mentors provided direct support to schools throughout the entire process – from the initial idea, through to writing the application, to its implementation and reporting.

Regarding the expected results of the grant's implementation, the supervision revealed the following:

#### **(a) Activities for the inclusion of migrant pupils in primary education and the development of teachers' competencies**

This set of activities was aimed at ensuring quality primary education for migrant pupils by strengthening the capacity of schools and teachers for inclusive practice.

*Teaching Serbian as a foreign language* took centre stage, recognised as crucial for the successful integration of migrant pupils. Without an adequate command of the language, pupils cannot fully participate in the teaching process or integrate into their peer community. Schools have developed various teaching models – from regular Serbian as a foreign language classes,





through supplementary classes and study clubs, to individual lessons tailored to the specific needs of pupils. Thus, at the 'Kraljica Marija' Primary School, in the study club a teacher "delivered 37 lessons during the school year. The pupils used modern teaching aids, magnetic boards with didactic materials and computers" (Report 7). At the primary school 'Svetozar Marković' in Vranje, they used 'the curriculum for the elective programme *Serbian as a foreign language* from the portal of the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Care, as well as specialised manuals for teachers. Ten supplementary lessons of Serbian as a foreign language were held weekly, with the long-term goal of the functional use of the Serbian language in everyday life" (Report 12). For schools working with minors in transit centres, language teaching took place through workshops in the centres, which required a different approach from regular school teaching. As part of the 'Learning from Each Other' project, devised by the staff of Branko Radičević Primary School, 'four workshops for learning Serbian as a foreign language were held at the *Principovac* reception centre, where teachers and pupils from the school worked together with 8-10 migrants. Through games such as *Uno*, the children learned colours and numbers in several languages, while workshops on the human body and hygiene combined visual games and practical tasks" (Report 2). The Sava Šumanović Grammar School ran "four workshops of Serbian as a foreign language, where 25 migrant pupils, with the support of 12 peers, learned the language through biology, board games and interactive activities" (Report 11).

*The creation of individual support plans and adapting teaching to the specific needs of each pupil were key to achieving academic success.* The 'Branko Pešić' Primary School has developed an individual career guidance plan for each pupil. Serbian language teaching was adapted through the creation of new materials, and technical support was also provided, including a mobile phone for observing lessons" (Report 1). Primary School "Lazar Savatić" documents: "Teachers applied differentiation and an individualised approach, with a special focus on developing communication competence in the Serbian language. Particularly illustrative is the example of an eighth-grade pupil who was provided with comprehensive support in preparing for their final exams in the Serbian language, mathematics and geography, with the creation of an individual plan that would serve as a model for future work" (Report 8).

*Providing material support was crucial for enabling equal learning conditions.* The 'Jozef Marčok Dragutin' Primary School provided textbooks, school supplies, teaching materials, dictionaries, and technical equipment (a laptop and a printer) for preparing materials... Two pupils from the lower years were included in an extended day programme, and three from the upper years in an enriched single-shift programme, which allowed them to stay at school longer and have more intensive communication with their peers. The school also 'organised meals throughout the school





year' for refugee pupils (Report 6). The 'Mile Dubljević' Primary School equipped the schools 'with modern teaching aids – a CD player, an interactive whiteboard, geographical maps, sports equipment and didactic materials' (Report 9).

*Providing psychosocial support* was particularly important for pupils who came from war-torn areas or were travelling without parental accompaniment. The Lazar Savatić Primary School organised 'two workshops on cultural and linguistic similarities (December 2024 and February 2025) with 58 participants, including two migrant pupils. The pupils explored traditional dance, food, music, and customs, sharing their cultural identities. The emotions workshop, where migrant pupils, local pupils and teachers discussed how to recognise and name emotions in real-life situations together, was particularly striking' (Report 8). The Sava Šumanović Grammar School held "three psychosocial workshops as part of careers guidance - *Understanding Emotions, Body and Emotions*, and the workshop *When I Grow Up I Will Be...*". These workshops aimed to promote physical and mental health, and to develop empathy, self-awareness and positive communication" (Report 11).

*Strengthening teachers' competencies* involved a series of educational activities, based on the understanding that the quality of support for pupils directly depends on the competence of the teaching staff. The training covered various topics – from teaching Serbian as a foreign language and creating adapted didactic materials, to differentiated teaching and intercultural pedagogy. Primary School "Branko Pešić" implemented a training for "ten teachers on the application of differentiated teaching methods" (Report 1). At the 'Branko Radičević' Primary School, the project 'Learning from Each Other' included 'training for 30 teachers on the development of cross-curricular competencies, and the continuous exchange of experiences between the three schools significantly empowered the teachers to work with migrant children' (Report 2). The "Kraljica Marija" Primary School organised a seminar for "28 staff members on the influence of the teacher's personality on creating a tolerant environment, where mediation and conflict management skills were strengthened" (Report 7). The Sava Šumanović Grammar School organised a "study visit to the Branko Pešić Primary School, where 10 teachers exchanged experiences on working with pupils who do not speak Serbian as their mother tongue. Two exemplary lessons were delivered, one of which, '*Emotions Behind a Mask in the Tragedy of Hamlet*', was awarded first prize in the IIE competition' (Report 11).





## **(b) Activities for continuing education in secondary schools**

Although secondary education is not compulsory in the Republic of Serbia, the projects paid special attention to preparing migrant pupils for continuing their education and transitioning to secondary schools. This decision stemmed from the understanding that educational continuity is crucial for the long-term integration and life prospects of young migrants. In this regard, *systematic career guidance* is crucial for a successful continuation of education. The Lazar Savatić Primary School provides details: "For the migrant pupil finishing the eighth grade, a detailed career guidance plan was implemented. A joint strategy was developed with the family, particularly with the father, who is dedicated to his children's education. The pupil completed questionnaires, familiarised themselves with prospectuses and the selection of secondary schools, receiving direct support in the process of deciding which secondary school to choose. This process was carried out during April and May 2025, with the aim of the pupil successfully completing their primary education, passing the final examination, and making an appropriate decision about continuing their schooling" (Report 8).

*Providing support in preparation for the final examination* was crucial for the successful completion of primary education. The "Branko Pešić" Primary School documents that "three migrant pupils – from Cameroon, Congo and Afghanistan – successfully completed their primary education and passed the final exam thanks to systematic support" (Report 1).

*Establishing cooperation between primary and secondary schools* was crucial for the continuity of support. The "Branko Pešić" Primary School organised cooperation with the "Bora Stanković" Secondary School and, on that occasion, "staff trained to create individual support plans and adapt didactic materials. The school included pupils from Ukraine for the first time, and counselling enabled a systematic approach to their integration with a special focus on language transition and documentation support" (Report 1).

*Organising visits to secondary schools and providing information on further education opportunities* helped pupils make informed decisions. The 'Jozef Marčok Dragutin' Primary School organised 'a school trip to Futog, Novi Sad, and Sremski Karlovci for upper-year pupils, which included a visit to the Agricultural School and pupil dorm, providing the pupils from Ukraine with insight into opportunities for continuing their education. This was the first school trip Ukraine pupils during their schooling, carried out in a relaxed atmosphere of socialising" (Report 6). The 'Vasa Pelagić' Primary School organised "three meetings to exchange experiences with migrant pupils, where secondary school pupils – volunteers who had completed the eighth grade and started secondary school in the previous school year – met with pupils in the eighth grade. The topic of





conversation was the experience gained during the preparation for and sitting of the final examination, choosing a profession and secondary school in line with their potential and interests, as well as affirmative action measures for the enrolment of migrant pupils" (Report 13).

The projects did not only involve preparation for enrolment in secondary schools, but also *direct support for pupils who were already enrolled in secondary education*. The 'Mile Dubljević' Primary School implemented a project in cooperation with the Loznica Technical School: a pupil from Ukraine attends the 'Wall Surface Decorator' programme, while a pupil from Israel studies for an 'Electrical Energy Technician' qualification at the Loznica Technical School. At the beginning of July, these pupils, together with their classes, actively participated in painting and decorating a room intended for parents, demonstrating the practical application of the skills they had acquired. For successfully completing the school year, they received symbolic gifts – a school rucksack and stationery for a new start" (Report 9). The Sava Šumanović Secondary School worked directly with the secondary school pupils: "The project directly involved secondary school pupils aged 14 to 17 accommodated in the Reception Centre. A total of 66 migrant pupils, mostly male, participated in educational activities focused on learning the Serbian language and social and emotional support" (Report 11).

### **(c) Activities aimed at improving the intercultural climate**

This group of activities was aimed at creating a conducive environment for the integration of migrant pupils by strengthening the intercultural climate in schools and local communities. Recognising that successful integration requires not only educational support but also a change in attitude and the creation of an atmosphere of acceptance, a large number of schools organised intercultural workshops and events that brought together pupils, teachers, parents, and the local community.

The 'Đura Jaksić' Primary School organised the '*Get to Know the Tradition and Culture of Other Peoples*' event, which brought together 476 pupils, 25 teachers and 40 parents. Through three art workshops, pupils created works inspired by Ukrainian Petrykivka painting, Rushnyky and folk costumes. Particularly moving was the *Tolerance* poster, featuring a globe surrounded by children's hands as a symbol of unity" (Report 3). The 'Jovan Popović' Primary School in Novi Sad held a '*Fair of Culture and Tradition*' to mark the International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2024, attended by over 2,000 people via the media (RTV Novi Sad, NS reporter). The event featured a performance by the school choir, a play, and folklore from the *Kobzar* Ukrainian Cultural Centre, the sounds of traditional gusle, and a tasting of national dishes from China, Russia, Italy, Ukraine, and Serbia" (Report 5). The Vasa Pelagić Primary School organised the *Vasi Ethno*





*Festival* in the school's assembly hall, which attracted around 150 visitors. The participants prepared stands, decorations and a rich programme, food and materials for all visitors, in order to portray the richness of the cultures, customs and languages of the countries from which the migrant pupils come and of the countries on migration routes" (Report 13).

Some schools have used theatre and art as powerful tools to promote interculturality and inclusion. The "Radoje Domanović" Primary School implemented the "*Inclusive Stage*" project, which involved "eight migrant pupils aged 7–14, of whom five were girls and three were boys, who actively participated in creating two theatre plays: *Rad(e) and Mir(a) - This is the Country for Us* and *All the Colours of My School*, which attracted over 1,450 live audience members, while online, over 5,000 people watched the performances on social media. 110 local pupils, 22 teachers, 18 parents of local pupils and 9 parents of migrant pupils participated in the preparation and performances. The performances were staged on the *Bora Stanković Theatre* stage using special effects – dry ice, bubbles, and lighting and sound effects" (Report 10).

Sport proved to be an extremely effective means of overcoming social distance and building friendships. The *Let's Learn from Each Other* project organised a 'World Play Day' celebration which brought together over 500 local pupils and six migrants through Zumba, folk dancing, and ballet. The sports activities – football, volleyball, and billiards – proved to be extremely successful in overcoming the social distance" (Report 2). The "Jozef Marčok Dragutin" Primary School organised "A sports day entitled '*Everyone should know what society means*' marked the *Pink Shirt Day* dedicated to fighting against bullying. Mixed teams of different year groups were formed for relay games, football, and volleyball, promoting friendship, tolerance and inclusion. 108 pupils and 14 teachers participated" (Report 6).

Schools used the marking of significant dates as an opportunity to promote interculturality and human rights. The Sava Šumanović Secondary School and schools from Šid organised a public event under the slogan '*Together in Tolerance – a Step Closer to Each Other*', where pupils from the camp and three schools jointly produced informational leaflets with messages of peace and distributed them to 100 citizens in Šid town centre. *The International Mother Language Day* was also marked with a public event, '*The Power of the Mother Tongue*', where 46 pupils participated in the programme and 72 were in the audience, along with a symbolic release of balloons as a message that words can reach every corner of the world" (Reports 11, 14).

School trips and visits to cultural institutions provided an opportunity for informal socialising and familiarising with local culture and traditions. The Kraljica Marija' Primary School organised visits for migrant pupils: Migrant pupils visited Kalemegdan, the Museum of Science





and Technology, the Palace of Science, and Tašmajdan together with their peers.' Particularly illustrative is the case of a female migrant pupil who, upon her return from a visit to the Kalemegdan Fortress, "was very pleased and happy, which shows her growing confidence and sense of belonging to the school community" (Report 7). The *Learning from Each Other* project organised "a school trip to the *Zasavica* nature park under the slogan *There is Hope Away from Home*, which brought together 14 local pupils and six migrants in a relaxed atmosphere" (Report 2).

Active parental involvement was crucial for creating wider support for the integration of migrant pupils. The 'Đura Jaksić' Primary School states: 'The event "*Let's Get to Know the Traditions and Culture of Other Peoples*", in addition to pupils and teachers, also brought together 40 parents...' Active participation in all the events enabled them to present their culture, feel a sense of belonging, and be accepted in the school environment and the local community" (Report 3). The 'Radoje Domanović' Primary School notes that '110 local pupils, 22 teachers, 18 parents of local pupils and 9 parents of migrants participated in the preparation and performance' (Report 10). Also, the same school reports that "online, over 5,000 citizens watched the performances on social media. A media campaign with 11 features contributed to spreading the message of tolerance" (Report 10), meaning that the media coverage of the activities contributed to spreading messages of interculturality and inclusion to the wider public.

Some schools organised professional gatherings which enabled the exchange of experiences and good practices between schools. The Economic and Commercial School in Vranje organised a professional conference at the theatre, where representatives from the Ministry of Education and schools with migrants were invited to present the activities they had undertaken during the implementation of this grant, what their challenges were, where they encountered problems and some advice 'because we invited schools that are new, that have only just started having migrants, which have not undergone any training and have no experience in working with migrants, to that professional gathering' (Focus group 2).

### 3.2.3. Challenges in implementing the grant activities

The implementation of inclusive education projects for migrant pupils faced several challenges, which varied depending on the specific context of each school.

Administrative and financial challenges represented a significant burden. Schools were facing the requirements of European documentation standards for the first time, which was particularly difficult for staff with no prior experience. Financial planning was demanding: "All





those items had to be somehow squeezed to stay within that amount... it was all very rigorous" (Focus Group 2). A particular challenge was obtaining VAT relief and finding suppliers willing to participate in such a system. A coordinator from another school describes: "If there was something we wanted to buy, we were constantly looking, finding a company, and they'd say they didn't want to take part... So we were pleading everywhere" (Focus group 2). Schools without economists on their team could not manage the financial aspects of the project on their own.

Fluctuation in the target population was one of the most significant challenges. For schools working with unaccompanied minors in transit centres, high pupil turnover required a complete reorganisation of activities. The changes required a rapid response: "The camp stopped operating and became a transit camp, so the children stayed for a short time, and we redirected the activities" (Focus group 3). A report from the 'Creating Opportunities for Learning and Friendship Together' project illustrates: 'Although the children's turnover is high and occurs on a daily basis, each activity was aimed at specific short-term goals of understanding and communication' (Report 11). Many schools highlighted that the timeframe for preparing and implementing the project was too short, and that strikes in the education system during 2024 affected the articulation of the activities.

The language barrier was a constant challenge. The problem was not just the lack of a common language, but also the fact that many migrant pupils were not literate in their mother tongue. A participant from one school reports: "It was very common for us to find that children could speak their language, but they couldn't read. They couldn't read their own script" (Focus group 3). Schools had developed creative solutions – using video material, Google Translate, and planning activities for the days when an interpreter is available.

Schools working with pupils from Ukraine faced different challenges to those from the Middle East. Pupils from Ukraine arrived with their families and picked up Serbian more quickly, but they carried the trauma of war. Unaccompanied minors from Middle Eastern countries faced deeper emotional problems and the uncertainty of their immigration status.

Many schools faced initial teacher resistance to working with migrant pupils, stemming from insecurity and a lack of experience. A focus group participant describes: "The teachers didn't take to it readily... well, how are we supposed to do it, we weren't trained for it, well, we can't do it..." "There were real difficulties there" (Focus Group 2). The resistance came not only from teachers but sometimes also from the parents of local pupils, but the situation was successfully resolved through training and practical experience.





The implementation of the projects took place in a complex socio-political context. Strikes and work stoppages affected the timing of the activities. Tragic events in the local communities required the adaptation of the planned activities. Schools highlighted the problem of a lack of continuous support between project cycles – when the project ended, the schools were left without resources. A participant from one school says: "We don't have them in the area anymore, they've gone to another municipality, we're not currently working with migrants" (Focus group 2). The lack of clear protocols for emergencies required improvisation when unexpected pupil needs arose.

Despite these challenges, schools developed strategies to adapt and managed to implement the planned activities. The flexibility, creativity, and dedication of teachers and school expert associates were key factors in overcoming the obstacles.

### 3.2.4. Effects and user perception

Analysis of the effects of inclusive education projects for migrant pupils shows multi-layered positive outcomes that have encompassed not only the immediate beneficiaries – the migrant pupils – but also schools as institutions, teachers, local pupils, and the wider local communities. These effects can be viewed through three key perspectives: the perception of schools, the effect on migrant pupils, and the effect on teachers and their professional development.

#### School Perception

Schools perceived the grants as significant support that enabled the implementation of activities that would otherwise not have been possible. As was highlighted, 'no matter how small they are, they always create something dynamic in the school, because they have to commit to implementing the activities, and then various promotions take place, and the effects of those promotions are always very positive' (Mentor).

The grants gave schools the freedom to use the funds according to the specific needs of their pupils. The Ministry gave "the school a certain kind of freedom to meet the specific needs of each pupil" (Ministry), which was crucial, and they say, "we didn't go for segregation... we went for a completely inclusive approach" (Ministry). This approach has enabled 'every school to have one or two migrant children... the school can then very easily determine the pupil's need, whether it's sneakers or a tracksuit... so that the child doesn't feel isolated' (Ministry).

Schools have recognised the projects as a significant opportunity to strengthen their own capacity in working with diverse pupil populations. The school director of one school highlights: "In our school, since 2017, a large number of migrants have attended lessons. There was even a





period when there were over 20 migrants. Yes, we have faced various challenges, including resistance from the local community and other accompanying problems. However, we have had very positive experiences" (Focus group 1). A report from another primary school documents a systemic approach: "The school has significantly strengthened its capacity to work with children from the migrant population through the organisation of fifteen educational workshops in which 55 pupils participated. Teachers developed additional skills in inclusive education and working with pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds" (Report 10).

One of the most significant effects of the projects was a visible shift in the intercultural climate of the schools. From initial resistance and prejudice, the schools evolved towards an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for the diversity among the children. The school director of one school testified to the change in attitudes: "There's a difference between the workshop we held in November and the one we held in April, in the approach, the response and the participation... Children, as a rule, are quick to accept any pupil who is different in some way." However, it is not always that simple. 'They are much easier to deal with than the parents. Even the resistance that exists among the children actually comes from the parents. And from what they hear at home' (Focus group 1).

Schools highly valued the material support they received through the projects, as it enabled them to enhance the teaching process in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. One participant emphasises: "With the grant, we managed to buy speakers for for the ceremonial hall and the cultural-art society...a smart board and things like that, which is a bit of a bigger item that can last" (Focus group 2). Another participant states: "That material effect is also very important. We designed the workshops in such a way that we actually used the money we received from the project to buy things we couldn't otherwise get through our material expenses... we also had a free school trip" (Focus Group 3).

The networking had multiple effects. It was said: 'schools connected with each other... Besides resolving those dynamics at the school level, I think all these programmes and projects have brought about an improvement within schools in terms of collaboration and teamwork' (Mentor). The coordinator from the Economic and Commercial School in Vranje highlights: "What I would emphasise is the professional conference that we organised here in our theatre, where we invited the representatives of the Ministry ... And examples of good practice... where we invited other schools with migrants to present the activities they had during the implementation of this grant, what their challenges were, where they encountered problems and offer some advice,





because we invited schools that are new to this, that have only just started having migrants, to this professional gathering" (Focus group 2).

Schools recognised the projects as an opportunity to enhance their visibility and positive reputation within the local community. A report from the 'Radoje Domanović' Primary School documents exceptional reach: 'Two theatre performances - *Rad(e) and Mir(a) - This is a Country for Us* and *All the Colours of My School* - attracted over 1,450 live audience members, while online, over 5,000 citizens watched the performances on social media... The event was attended by the IOM leadership and representatives from the Ministry of Education, which confirmed the value of the project" (Report 10).

Schools noted that project work brings a special energy and motivation to the team, which is different from routine work. A coordinator from one school explains: 'Generally speaking, I'd say that when it comes to a project, motivation is better. We have specific deadlines, the energy simply goes up, something is happening in the school, we create something...' Simply, when a project is on, there's a different approach, a much more serious approach. There are evaluations, there are reports, and I think that then it's a bit better performance in any case, from all of us" (Focus group 3).

### **Effect on pupils**

The grants had a direct positive effect on the integration and well-being of migrant pupils. Providing for basic material needs was of great importance: "the children come barefoot and naked because they are refugees and have nothing, and secondly, in their countries there is no winter... they have no sneakers, they have no thick coats. Schools were able to provide 'school materials, school supplies, notebooks, pens, sneakers... so that the child would not feel isolated and could have everything to attend lessons' (Ministry).

Activities of social cohesion and interculturality were of particular importance. One mentor described how 'art workshops that were linked to emotions... pupils drew four ways of showing an emotion... That socialising, that togetherness, that teamwork, I think that left a big mark' (Mentor).

One of the most significant and measurable effects of the projects was the progress of migrant pupils in mastering the Serbian language. Schools are reporting outstanding results, particularly among pupils who received continuous support. A report from one school documents that three migrant pupils successfully completed their primary education and passed their final exams thanks to systematic support (Report 1). One focus group participant shares a concrete example: "A pupil very quickly mastered the Serbian language, because she had also completed





the eighth grade in Serbia. And with her came a pupil who, from the very start, both she and her mother had a negative attitude when she came for the interview before enrolment... had an aversion to Serbia, she doesn't like Russia, she doesn't like Serbia, she doesn't like the Serbian language... However... slowly, slowly, as her peers won her over, she fitted in with the class... By the end of the second year in the first semester of the second year already, she came here, she was always here with me, and she had already started speaking Serbian... So by the end of Year 2, she had completely mastered the Serbian language and had even picked up the grammar" (Focus group 2).

A report from the 'Jozef Marčok Dragutin' Primary School states: "Five refugee pupils from Ukraine have successfully integrated into the peer group and made personal friends. They have learned the Slovak language, which they use to communicate with their peers, very well, as well as Serbian, and are absorbing the curriculum in both languages without any problems" (Report 6). A coordinator from a primary school describes the challenges and successes: "We had an example of a difficult adjustment. The pupil was in Year 3 at the time, and we were faced with the child coming to school in tears almost every day for nearly two months. And we, of course, as the support staff, and with the teacher who was very dedicated, simply approached the child every day and had conversations with him. And I must say, we managed to overcome that challenge. He is now in Year 6 and has really grown into a confident child" (Focus group 1).

The projects have significantly contributed to the social integration of migrant pupils. Through joint activities with their peers, migrant pupils have developed friendships, a sense of belonging and self-confidence. A report from the 'Branko Pešić' Primary School states: 'The *'Craft that Connects'* workshop at a local print shop, where a migrant pupil shared his experiences of the same kind of work in Afghanistan and Turkey, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging, was particularly significant. Nineteen pupils took part in *the Social Cohesion Day*, including six from the migrant population, along with 15 representatives of the local community" (Report 1).

The project brought unexpected changes: "... Our boy, a Ukrainian, was just a really timid boy...however, when the project started, he was given an important role and he stood out through some positive role models, which greatly contributed to him maturing so much in this and it also somewhat influenced his behaviour in class. Here's an example of an educational way of working where he was the centre of attention, which resulted in positive effects" (Focus Group 3).

For pupils who had come from war-torn areas or were travelling without parental accompaniment, emotional support was crucial. One participant shares a deeply emotional testimony: "They stayed at our school for a short time, a couple of months; they were in transition. The girl was saying goodbye with a speech; she called it a farewell letter from the friends she had





made in our school in those two months. And her tears...I can never forget those words of hers when, again, it was her peers who had spent time with them outside of school, and she said that she had eaten popcorn with our children in front of the post office in our town. I mean, it's not a particularly significant event for us, but it made such an impression on her, she says, just by her walking over and sitting down in front of the post office to eat popcorn with her friends, she thanked them for reminding her that she's just a teenager, only 16 years old, and for bringing her back to a time she should actually be living, rather than the time she's living in now. We were all crying, I mean, the amphitheatre was full and we really were all crying because she says, 'I will never forget this popcorn because you reminded me that I am really just a teenager' (Focus group 2).

In addition to language competencies, migrant pupils developed a range of other skills through participation in various activities. A report from the 'Svetozar Marković' Primary School documents: Migrant pupils actively participated in *the school's Promotion Day*, in the work of the clubs, the pupils' cooperative, and in all cultural activities, thereby achieving social integration. They became familiar with the tradition and culture of the city of Vranje, noticed similarities and differences in culture between Serbia and their country of origin, and gained knowledge about the characteristics of the region and its customs. They developed digital competencies, learned internet etiquette, and gained knowledge about gender equality" (Report 12). The projects paid special attention to preparing migrant pupils for their further education, particularly the transition to secondary schools.

The projects also had a significant positive effect on local pupils, who, through interaction with migrant peers, developed empathy, intercultural competence, and a broader understanding of the world. A report from the 'Radoje Domanović' Primary School documents measurable changes: 'Questionnaires show a significant increase in the level of tolerance among pupils – from an initial value of 4 on a scale of 1 to 10, a value of 6 was reached after the project... 650 pupils from the school and 1,400 pupils from other schools have strengthened democratic capacities and reduced prejudice towards the migrant population" (Report 10).

A coordinator from a primary school gives an example of a change in perspective: "A boy who is now in Year 8 drew a picture of a boy dreaming of being a footballer, playing for a big club and scoring a goal. And in the end, his mum woke him up..." And when I asked him why he had drawn that, he said, 'Well, we were in a workshop with children from the camp and one boy from Syria went to Italy to become a footballer.' So he was thinking of him while he was drawing that





comic and says – 'I'd want the same thing, but I think he's a bigger fighter than me, since he's already started such a long journey to become a footballer' (Focus group 3).

Through the projects, local pupils have gained knowledge of different cultures, traditions and ways of life. A coordinator from one school highlights: "What was interesting through the project was that they got to know Ukrainian culture and customs, to really understand the way they lived there, how they live, and what the similarities and differences are." I think everyone gained a lot; we didn't know some of the details, and we actually learned about the culture and customs in different countries through this project. So, I think it was a real enrichment for everyone." (Focus group 3). In the end, many of the resident pupils became active peer supporters, which contributed to their personal development and strengthened their sense of social responsibility. A coordinator from one school highlights the sustainability of this model: "It's a story that has really taken off and we have some very good results. And what I can add is that the other day I was surprised when our former pupils came in; they're now in their second year of secondary school and you know what they asked me: *'Excuse me, are there any winter schools?'*" I said, *'Where on earth did that come from?'* And they said, *'If there are, you can count on us.'*" (Focus group 2).

### **Effect on teachers**

The grants had a significant effect on teachers' professional development and the strengthening of their competencies. Working on projects supported by the grants encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice. "Teachers now see more in certain situations; they know exactly, 'I really need support and to progress in this or that.' So, I'm not going to focus on some seminars or training that are just about ticking a box, but on having something concrete that gives me what I need." (Mentor).

Horizontal collaboration between teachers within the school has been significantly strengthened. Teamwork regarding migrant pupils has "strengthened collegial collaboration" (Mentor). The grants gave teachers the space for innovation and creativity, 'an opportunity to do something a little different... Those who were sensitised, who knew and wanted to do more of what they love, could do that' (Mentor).

Through training and practical experience, teachers have developed new competencies which are applicable not only in working with migrant pupils, but also with all pupils who have diverse educational needs. A report from the 'Branko Pešić' Primary School states: '10 teachers completed training in the application of differentiated teaching methods... The training was a very significant moment, as the teachers acquired very important competencies for working with this





population, concerning the adaptation and creation of materials, precisely by using the examples provided (Report 1).

One of the most significant effects of the projects was the change of teachers' attitudes towards working with migrant pupils – from initial resistance and insecurity to acceptance and active engagement. An educator from one school describes this transformation: "We had to be very careful right at the start in 2017. when the first migrant pupils were due to arrive, and of course the teachers didn't readily accept it: 'How are we going to manage? We haven't been trained for this, we can't do it, we have pupils on individualised education plans, and now we have immigrants as well, we just can't do it.' I mean, it was really difficult there. And first of all, we had to overcome that barrier, to convince the teachers and to explain to them how we were going to work...We really don't have any problems now; we've seen that we can, so they've introduced innovations into the lessons themselves, using Google Translate. They gave it a go and found they could do it. They didn't even know they could, and many teachers speak English. At the time, my English was the only thing that helped with communication, then the collaboration of multiple teachers, teachers who knew English, and those who didn't, then the issue of translation, and even just that connection between teachers, they really saw many more advantages than disadvantages in working with such pupils" (Focus group 2).

The projects have encouraged more intensive collaboration between teachers within schools, but also between schools, which has contributed to professional development and the exchange of good practice. A participant in the focus group emphasises: "The greatest benefit for me is the collaboration with colleagues from other schools, that we have finally realised how we work together, that it will be both better and easier for us" (Focus group 3). Teachers developed specialised skills in teaching Serbian as a foreign language, in creating adapted didactic materials, and in applying a multicultural approach to teaching. A coordinator from a primary school explains: "Five or six of us went through the training for Serbian as a foreign language and then we brought those materials back from the training. After that, we created didactic materials specifically for working with foreign pupils. That is a different kind of training...So we collected and shared all those materials and I think they will even be available on some platform" (Focus group 3).

### **Effect on the local community**

The projects had a significant effect on the wider local communities, contributing to a change in perception of migrants, strengthening the intercultural climate, and developing a sense





of shared responsibility. Public events and activities organised as part of the projects contributed to changing the attitudes of the local population towards migrants.

Parents of both local pupils and migrant pupils were actively involved in project activities, which contributed to mutual acquaintance and understanding. A coordinator from a primary school describes: "There was an activity before Orthodox and Catholic Easter. And then the Ukrainians brought in their food with their parents, the dishes and so on; they read and explained how Easter is celebrated. It was very interesting. Parents were preparing various cakes and everyone gathered somewhere, and it was really lovely to see that exchange and that spirit of tolerance in one place" (Focus group 3). Media coverage of the project's activities contributed to the spread of positive messages about inclusion and interculturalism, while partnerships with local organisations ensured the sustainability of the support model.

### 3.2.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned

The grant allocation system for schools working with migrant pupils was established as part of the wider support provided by the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the European Union and the International Organisation for Migration. School projects funded by the grant were implemented in the period of March 2024. – May 2025, with a maximum individual grant amount of 4,000 euros in the dinar equivalent. The funds could be used for human resources costs (maximum 30% of the budget), the procurement of equipment for the development of teaching quality (maximum 25% of the budget), direct support for pupils and activities to promote inclusion and social cohesion (at least 15% of the budget). Based on the proposals submitted, a total of 14 grants were awarded to educational institutions across Serbia.

The activities carried out included three key sets of interventions. The first set was aimed at providing quality primary education for migrant pupils, with teaching Serbian as a foreign language taking centre stage. Schools developed various models – from regular lessons and study clubs to individual classes tailored to specific needs, while schools working with minors in transit centres ran workshops with the support of local pupils. Strengthening teachers' competencies included training in differentiated teaching, intercultural pedagogy, and the creation of customised didactic materials, along with study visits and the exchange of experiences between schools. Material support was provided through textbooks, school supplies, and technical equipment, as well as access to extended care and organised meals, along with psychosocial support for pupils who had come from war-torn areas or were travelling without parental accompaniment.





The second set of activities paid special attention to preparing migrant pupils for continuing their education in secondary schools through systematic career guidance, support for final exam preparation, establishing cooperation between primary and secondary schools, and an exchange of experiences with pupils already enrolled in secondary schools. The third set of activities was aimed at creating a supportive environment for integration through intercultural workshops and events, theatre performances, sports activities, school trips and visits to cultural institutions, with the active involvement of parents and media coverage which contributed to spreading messages about interculturality to the wider public.

Analysis of the effects of inclusive education projects for migrant pupils shows multiple positive outcomes at all levels. At the school level, the projects have contributed to strengthening institutional capacities, improving the intercultural climate, and developing partnership networks. At the level of migrant pupils, significant progress was noted in language competence, socialisation, emotional well-being, and academic achievement. Local pupils developed empathy, intercultural competence, and peer support skills. Teachers strengthened their professional competencies, developed new pedagogical approaches, and transformed their attitudes towards diversity. Local communities became more open and inclusive, with a stronger sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of all children. These effects confirm the value of investing in inclusive education and indicate the potential of such projects to contribute not only to educational outcomes but also to the broader societal goals of social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

An analysis of the successful elements of the projects reveals several key factors that contributed to the positive outcomes. Mentoring support proved to be invaluable – mentors provided not only technical assistance with preparing documentation and reporting, but also expert support in designing and implementing activities, acting as a link between different levels of the system. The use of grants enabled schools to respond to the specific needs of their pupils. The ability of schools to adapt to unforeseen circumstances – such as the relocation of transit centres or changes in the status of camps – proved to be crucial for the success of the projects. Horizontal cooperation between schools created lasting links and an exchange of good practice, enabling the joint planning of activities and more efficient use of resources. Schools that combined different types of activities – educational, cultural, sporting, and creative – achieved the best results in integrating migrant pupils. Peer support proved to be an extremely effective mechanism for integration, which simultaneously contributed to the development of both local and migrant pupils. Crucially, this model continues to function even after the projects have ended. Public events and local-level social cohesion activities, which brought together multiple schools, local authorities,





citizens and parents, proved particularly effective in changing attitudes and creating support for integration.

The implementation of the projects faced a series of challenges that varied depending on the specific context of each school. Administrative and financial challenges related to the complexity of procedures and financial reporting according to European standards, with schools facing such requirements for the first time experiencing a significant burden. A particular challenge was obtaining VAT exemption and finding suppliers willing to participate in such a system, as well as translating documentation into English. Strict restrictions on the percentage allocation of the budget by category prevented schools from optimally utilising the funds according to actual needs. The extremely high pupil turnover, particularly among unaccompanied minors in transit centres, required a complete reorganisation of planned activities and the development of flexible working methods that could be quickly adapted to a new group of pupils. The timeframe for preparing and implementing the project was too short, while strikes and work stoppages in the education system during 2024, as well as tragic events in local communities, affected the timing of the activities. The language barrier was a constant challenge, particularly as many migrant pupils were not literate in their mother tongue, which required creative solutions such as using video materials and Google Translate, and strategic planning of activities for days when an interpreter is available at the centre.

Schools that worked with pupils from Ukraine faced different challenges to those that worked with pupils from the Middle East – pupils from Ukraine often arrived with their families and mastered the Serbian language more quickly due to linguistic similarities, but they carried the trauma of war and uncertainty about the future, while unaccompanied minors from Middle Eastern countries faced deeper emotional problems and uncertainty over their migration status. Many schools faced an initial resistance from teachers to working with migrant pupils, which stemmed from insecurity and a lack of experience, but this resistance was gradually overcome through training, mentoring and practical experience.

The experiences of the participating schools provide a rich insight into what worked well and what requires improvement in future interventions. Mentor support and the availability of mentors at all times proved to be crucial for success, particularly for schools with no prior experience in project work, indicating the need for this model to be systemically provided in the future. Flexibility in the use of the grants enabled schools to respond to the specific needs of their pupils, but at the same time, greater flexibility in the percentage allocation of the budget needs to be considered so that schools can use the funds more optimally in line with their actual priorities.





Horizontal cooperation and networking between schools have created lasting connections that continue to function after the projects have ended, representing a model that should be systemically supported and expanded. A holistic approach combining educational, cultural, sporting and creative activities has proven to be the most effective for the integration of migrant pupils, with peer support being a particularly valuable mechanism that contributes to the development of all pupils. Public events and social cohesion activities at the local level have a strong effect on changing attitudes in the wider community and should be systematically included in project activities.

The administrative procedure should be simplified, particularly for schools with no prior experience in project work, where initial training at the start of the project could significantly facilitate its implementation. Consideration should be given to adequate recognition and remuneration for staff who undertake significant additional work in implementing the projects, including accounting personnel who could not be counted in out-of-teaching activities. A lack of support for the psychosocial needs of pupils and teachers was identified as a gap to be addressed in future interventions through the engagement of psychologists with the support of translators. The high pupil turnover in transit centres requires the development of specific approaches focused on short-term goals of understanding and communication, but which can also provide a positive learning experience. Different profiles of migrant pupils – pupils from Ukraine with their families and unaccompanied minors from the Middle East – require differentiated approaches that take into account their specific needs, traumas, and migration statuses.

The sustainability of the achieved results is a key issue for the long-term effect of the projects. The analysis shows that different components have varying potential for sustainability. Teachers' competencies, developed through training and practical experience, remain as a permanent resource for the school and can be applied in working with all pupils who have diverse educational needs. Teachers have developed specialised skills in teaching Serbian as a foreign language, creating adapted didactic materials, and applying a multicultural approach to teaching, with these materials having been collected and made available on the platform for wider use. The change of attitudes towards diversity among teachers, pupils, and the local community is perhaps the most significant sustainable effect of the projects. From initial resistance and prejudice, schools have evolved towards an atmosphere of accepting and respecting diversity, with a visible difference in the approach and response of the local community between the start and end of the projects. Study clubs and peer support models have proven to be sustainable, as they continue to function after the projects have ended, with pupils themselves initiating meetings and proposing





activities and plans. The material equipment procured through the projects remains as a permanent resource for the school, which can be used in various activities.

However, dependence on project funding represents the greatest challenge to the continuity of support. When the project ends, schools are left without the resources to continue the activities at the same intensity, leading to concerns that many of them will cease. Without additional resources and compensation, it is difficult to expect teachers to maintain the same level of engagement after the project's conclusion. The sustainability of the results achieved depends on the system's ability to integrate successful practices into regular school activities, provide continuous support to teachers, and develop funding mechanisms that are not exclusively dependent on project cycles. Positive examples show that local authorities can provide support through funding for meals and textbooks for migrant pupils, which represents a model for sustainability at the local level. Developed teacher competencies, changed attitudes, established partnership networks between schools, and material resources provide a solid foundation for sustainability, but they require systemic support to fully realise their potential and for schools to be able to continue providing quality support to migrant pupils independently of project cycles.

### 3.3. MENTOR EXPERT SUPPORT

#### 3.3.1. Context

Since 2015, when the massive migrant crisis began, the Serbian education system has faced the great challenge of adapting its capacities and resources to the needs of children coming from different countries, with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, often with traumas and adverse experiences. This challenge required not only a rapid response, but also the development of long-term support mechanisms that would be sustainable and adaptable to changing circumstances.

Mentor support, as a form of continuous and personalised assistance to schools, was developed precisely in response to these identified needs. Through long-standing collaboration with school administrations, the Ministry recognised that schools could not tackle the complex challenges of including migrant pupils on their own. These challenges were not only linguistic but also administrative, social, emotional, and organisational. Mentor support was therefore conceived as a bridge between central policy and local implementation, as a form of support that is flexible, responsive to needs, and continuous. This approach enabled the support to be tailored to the specific needs of each school, while maintaining a consistent standard and national objectives.





Between October 2023 and the end of 2025, mentor support was delivered through a network of mentors. Their primary task was to support schools in their work with migrant pupils, and their role was multi-dimensional: from administrative support in writing projects and reports, through consultative assistance in developing support plans for pupils, to direct involvement in activities in schools and networking between schools. This diversity of roles reflected the complexity of the challenges faced by schools, as well as the need for a holistic approach that would encompass all aspects of working with migrant pupils.

### 3.3.2. Implementation of mentor support

The organisational structure was hierarchical and network-based. At the national level, the Ministry was responsible for coordination and funding. At the level of school administrations, educational advisers coordinated activities and the selection of mentors. The selection process was participatory: "We asked school administrations to propose candidates; we wrote a public call for applications... and we selected these people who would be mentors together" (Ministry). This approach ensured that mentors were individuals who knew the local context and had the trust of school administrations, which was crucial for establishing quality collaboration with schools.

The mentors were mainly educational advisers or external advisers with many years of experience, and their number varied, according to a ministry representative: "We once had 12 mentors, and the schools were attached to asylum centres and reception centres." Later, this number was reduced, reflecting the changes in the migrant population: "We now have 5 school administrations and in fact, 70% of pupils are not in asylum centres and reception centres, but are in private accommodation" (Ministry). This change in pupil accommodation also required a different approach to mentor support, as schools receiving pupils from private accommodation had different needs from those working with reception centres.

The ways in which schools found mentors varied. According to the questionnaire results, the most common way of being informed was through the Ministry and the school administration, as stated by 28 schools (45.2%). The mentor contacted the school in 22 cases (35.5%). Seven schools (11.3%) received the information through another school or a colleague, while five schools (8.1%) learned about this support through international and domestic organisations (UNHCR, IOM, NGOs, institutes, etc.). These data show that information was disseminated through multiple channels, which increased the likelihood that all relevant schools would receive support.

The proactivity of the mentors was key to the success of the support system. One mentor states: "I went out to the schools in my role as an educational adviser, and in terms of data





collection, we literally visited every single institution then." In some school administrations, the process was more systematic: "We arranged two online meetings with the schools to familiarise them with what it was all about... I think each meeting lasted about two hours, where we went through all of that with them" (Mentor). These organised meetings enabled schools to receive detailed information about the available support and to ask questions.

Mentor support for schools was diverse and tailored to the specific needs of each school. According to the questionnaire results, schools received various types of support, with the diversity of approaches enabling a wide range of needs to be addressed.

The most common form of support was connecting with other schools and sharing experiences, cited by 26 schools (44.8%). This high prevalence shows that networking was recognised as a priority. The exchange of experiences enabled schools to learn from one another, to see different approaches and solutions, and to feel less isolated in their work.

Participation in school activities and events and consultations regarding pupil assessment and progress monitoring were equally represented in 24 schools (41.4%). This even distribution shows that mentors balanced between direct participation in the life of the school and providing expert support in specific areas. Consultations regarding assessment were particularly important because teachers were often unsure how to assess pupils who did not speak Serbian or who had significant gaps in their knowledge. This uncertainty was not a result of a lack of teacher competence, but a natural reaction to a new and complex situation for which they had no prior experience.

Assistance with translating teaching materials was provided in 23 schools (39.7%). This type of support was used less in the latest period due to a change in the composition of the migrant population—pupils from Ukraine were acquiring Serbian more quickly because of the linguistic similarity, which reduced the need for translation. However, for schools working with pupils from other linguistic backgrounds, this support remained crucial.

Support with project writing and grant applications was provided in 22 schools (37.9%). This type of support was particularly intensive during periods when calls for small grants were open. One mentor described: "We literally sat together, both in person and online, for the whole weekend until it all came together." According to the questionnaire results, help with administrative tasks (projects, reports, plans) was most often cited as the most useful support by 25 schools (43.1%). This indicates that schools valued practical help that eased their administrative burden and allowed them to focus more on direct work with pupils.





Assistance with creating support plans for migrant and refugee pupils was received by 17 schools (29.3%). For schools that received this support, it was very useful, as developing support plans is an important step towards institutionalising work with migrant pupils, which allows support to be systematic and documented.

Assistance with communication with camps and asylum centres was provided to 12 schools (20.7%). This type of support was only relevant to schools that were receiving pupils from reception centres. Mentors acted as intermediaries between schools and reception centres, assisting with the coordination of pupil enrolment, the exchange of information about the children, and the organisation of activities. The reduction in the number of schools using this support reflected a change in the accommodation of the migrant population, with a greater number of families in private accommodation.

Lesson observations and observations of work with migrant pupils were carried out in 11 schools (19.0%). This relatively low prevalence may have been a consequence of legal restrictions, as lesson observations could only be conducted by mentors who were qualified as educational advisers.

The organisation of thematic meetings with the teaching staff or team was carried out in 8 schools (13.8%). This lowest prevalence indicates that this type of support was reserved for situations where a specific problem existed or for schools that were receiving migrant pupils for the first time. Thematic meetings were an opportunity for the entire teaching staff to familiarise themselves with the specifics of working with migrant pupils and to develop a shared understanding of the approach.

The most useful forms of support, according to schools, were: help with administrative tasks (43.1%), and connecting with resources—other mentors, schools, and organisations (34.5%), direct in-school support—visits, meetings, lesson observations (27.6%), professional support for teachers and motivation (27.6%), and remote consultations (8.6%). These data show that schools valued practical, concrete support that eased their day-to-day work the most, as well as support that contributed to their professional development and sense of competence.

This diversity of support types shows that the mentoring was flexible and adaptable. Mentors did not offer a one-size-fits-all support to all schools, but rather tailored their activities to the specific needs, capacities, and context of each school. One mentor explained her approach: "My approach was to build on the strengths in each school, which meant that in one school I worked best with the school director, in another with the school expert associates, and in a third





with subject teachers." This individualised approach required mentors to be able to assess the situation quickly and be flexible in adapting their support strategies.

The intensity and frequency of the support varied according to the needs of the schools. According to the questionnaire results, 'once a month' was the most frequently stated preference, chosen by 25 schools (43.1%), while 'only when needed', i.e. when a problem arises, was chosen by 21 schools (36.2%). Once a term was the preference for 7 schools (12.1%), while once a week was chosen by 5 schools (8.6%). These data show that the majority of schools preferred a moderate frequency of contact—monthly or as needed. This suggests that schools valued regular support but did not want to be overwhelmed by frequent contacts that would take time away from other commitments.

One mentor noted a change in intensity: "Previously, that support was much more intensive, and now most of the children have been in the system for longer. And there are few new children, so that support then takes on a completely different form from what it was at the beginning." This change reflects changes in the migrant population and in the schools' capacities—in the initial period, support was more intensive, and as the schools gained experience, the need for intensive support decreased. This is a natural development which shows that the mentor support achieved one of its key objectives—strengthening the capacity of schools to work independently with migrant pupils.

### 3.3.3. Challenges in implementing mentor support

One of the biggest challenges mentor support faced was "the fluctuation of the migrant population." (Ministry). This unpredictability required constant adaptation of the planned activities and support strategies within the Project. A specific example was the municipality of Šid where closed reception centres were located: "Three huge asylum centres... the Šid schools, were overcrowded with migrant children. It was there at one moment, and the next... you have nothing" (Mentor). This fluctuation made planning difficult, was emotionally challenging for teachers and pupils, and made it difficult to monitor progress.

A lack of psychosocial support was one of the challenges. Although mentors provided pedagogical support, they were not trained to work with traumatised children. Ministry representatives stated: "We had the idea somehow and we tried it in the previous project; we tried to have counsellors – psychologists, but it didn't work out for us, its importance wasn't recognised (by the Ministry)." The tragic case of a Russian pupil's suicide indicates that some groups of pupils





who had migrated had needs that far exceeded the capacity of the education system and required multi-sectoral support.

Inadequate teacher training was also a challenge. One mentor noted: 'Listening to the needs of the schools and listening to everything that's happening in the schools, I'm convinced they're fed up with training. They're just no longer open to learning'. This comment does not necessarily mean that teachers lack will or interest; it is possible they feel overwhelmed and burnt out by training that has not always been practical enough.

Geographical distance presented a logistical challenge that limited the intensity of direct support. "You have the city of Novi Sad, the area around Novi Sad, South Bačka, you have all of Srem... so it's quite a sprawling territory" (Mentor). This distance meant that mentors could not visit all schools regularly, which affected the quality of support, particularly for schools that preferred direct support in the form of visits and lesson observations.

Administrative burden was a challenge for both mentors and schools. Representatives of the Ministry noted a drop in motivation when writing reports. On the other hand, schools expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency: "I think the intervals for submitting reports on work with migrants should be longer. Writing monthly is not productive because there are no particular changes" (School). This tension between the need for regular monitoring and the burden that reporting creates highlights the importance of finding a balance that would ensure quality data without overburdening schools. Administrative burden was particularly pronounced regarding grants, while coordination with the Commissionerate for Refugees also created problems. The closure of centres without notification created problems: "They didn't even inform us, we would just find them without children. The children don't even get to say goodbye at school. I mean, that really wasn't fair on the children and the teachers" (Mentor).

Changes in the mentor team presented a challenge for the continuity of support. The reduction in the number of mentors from 12 to 8 meant that the remaining mentors had to cover a greater number of schools: "We have too many schools that we cover and children spread out..." (Mentor). These changes affected the quality of support, particularly for schools that had developed a trusting relationship with a specific mentor and had to build new relationships with new mentors. Lack of resources and financial constraints were a constant challenge. Ministry representatives explained that they had to prioritise and focus on types of support not covered by other systems. Financial constraints affected both the number of mentors and the types of support that could be provided, raising questions about long-term sustainability without project funding.





The dual role of educational advisers, who were also mentors, represented both an advantage and a challenge. One mentor noted: "My personal dual role... I don't know whether I am fundamentally perceived as an adviser from the school administration or as a mentor." This duality sometimes created confusion for schools, but at the same time it enabled mentors to have greater authority and better insight into school practice. However, the advantage was that mentors, as educational advisers, already had established relationships with schools and were familiar with their context, while the challenge lay in the potential perception that mentor support served a controlling function rather than a developmental one.

### 3.3.4. Effects of the support and user perceptions

#### Schools' perception of mentor support and its effects

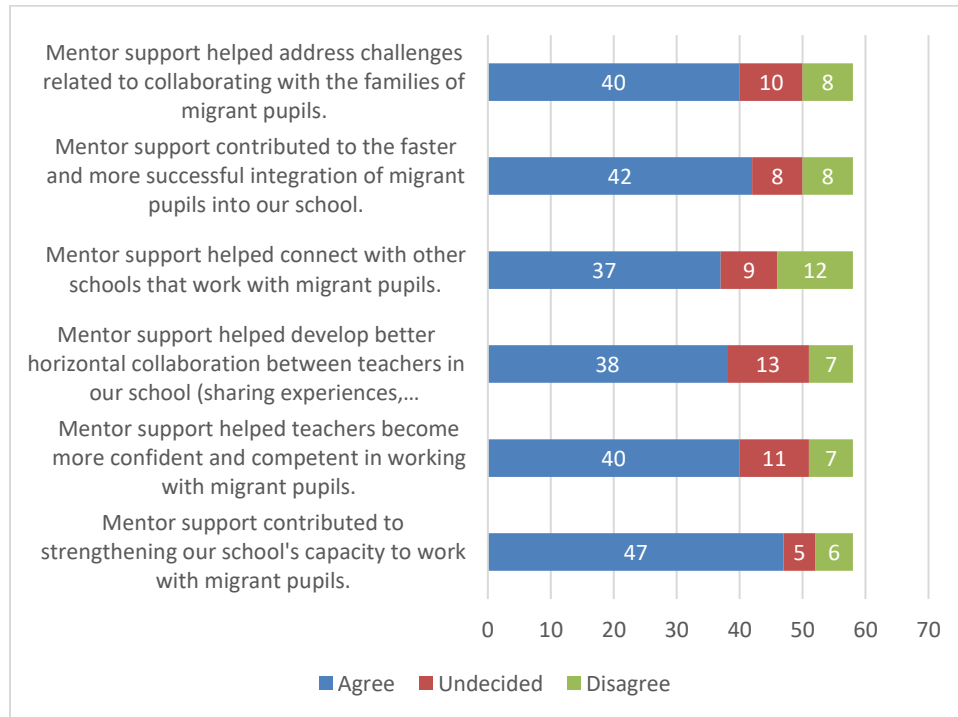
The results of the questionnaire conducted with schools show the positive effect of mentor support on various aspects of the schools' work with migrant pupils. Figure 5 shows that the highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that mentor support contributes to strengthening the school's capacity for the faster and more successful integration of migrant pupils, with which 47 schools (81.0%) agree. Only 6 schools (10.3%) expressed indecision, while 5 schools (8.6%) disagreed. This finding indicates that schools recognise mentor support as a key factor in the integration process of migrant pupils, with the high level of agreement suggesting that the support was relevant and effective in the eyes of its direct users.

The following are statements about faster and more successful integration of migrant pupils with 42 schools (72.4%) agreeing, as well as helping teachers to become more confident and competent and assisting with resolving challenges related to working with families, with 40 schools (69.0%) agreeing with each of these statements. These data show that mentor support had effects not only on pupils, but also on teachers and on the general school climate. Strengthening the capacity of the school as an institution, increasing the competence of individual teachers and improving collaboration with families are interconnected effects that together contribute to a higher-quality educational experience for migrant pupils.





Figure 5. Effects of mentor support from the perspective of schools



A slightly lower, but still high, degree of agreement was recorded for the development of better horizontal collaboration between teachers in 38 schools (65.5%) and connections with other schools in 37 schools (63.8%). These data indicate that mentor support had a positive effect on both the internal dynamics of the schools and their networking. Dissent was relatively low across all statements, ranging from 10.3% to 20.7%, which indicates that the majority of schools had a positive experience with mentor support. However, the minority voices expressing disagreement or indecision deserve attention, as they may indicate specific situations where the support was not adequately tailored or did not achieve the expected results.

When schools were asked which type of mentor support was most useful to them, the responses revealed clear priorities. The most frequently selected option was remote consultations (phone, email, online meetings), chosen by 35 schools (60.3%). This was followed by help with administrative tasks (projects, reports, plans), chosen by 25 schools (43.1%), while connecting with resources (other mentors, schools, organisations) was selected by 20 schools (34.5%). Direct in-school support (visits, meetings, lesson observations) was useful for 16 schools (27.6%), as was expert support for teachers and motivation to work for 16 schools (27.6%). These data show that schools valued most highly the practical, concrete help that eased their day-to-day work, but at the





same time recognised the value of different forms of support, suggesting that the diversity of approaches was an adequate strategy.

Qualitative comments from the schools provide further insight into the perception of mentor support and reveal nuances that quantitative data cannot fully capture. One comment reads: "Our mentor was exceptionally fair to us. We collaborated regularly and she was prepared to help in any way. We communicated at least once a month. We could turn to her for any clarification at any time" (School). This comment illustrates the importance of regular communication, mentor availability, and a trusting relationship. The sense of having a person who could always be relied upon was perhaps just as important as the specific activities the mentor carried out.

The second comment shows the downside—the experience of schools that did not have mentor support: "I didn't have mentor support. Everything I managed to achieve was through Google Translate. The children were regularly doing their schoolwork, but communication was very difficult" (School). This comment shows how important mentor support was and how the schools without support had to manage on their own, often with limited resources and tools.

### **The Effect of Mentor Support on Teachers and the Improvement of School Capacity**

Mentor support had a significant effect on teachers, both in terms of developing their competencies and in increasing their confidence and motivation for working with migrant pupils. Mentors described how they helped teachers develop new skills and approaches. The effects were multi-layered, as can be seen from the mentor's words: "With that, you were simultaneously strengthening the school's inclusive practice, and yet you also had, how shall I put it, in a way, that internal horizontal exchange which is extremely important. I saw a really good contribution from all of this for the young colleagues who had just come to the schools and who are in unfamiliar situations and simply have to cope, to swim, and you immediately strengthen their teaching competencies" (Mentor). This quote shows that mentor support was particularly important for young teachers who had no experience working with diverse groups of pupils. For these teachers, working with migrant pupils presented an opportunity for accelerated professional development, but also a challenge that required the support of more experienced colleagues and mentors.

Mentoring also helped teachers to overcome their fear of the unknown and to develop more positive attitudes towards working with migrant pupils. One mentor explained: "It's very important for schools to have someone to ask questions, because the fear of the unknown is always the biggest fear for them" (Mentor). This 'fear of the unknown' was a natural reaction from teachers who had no experience working with pupils who do not speak Serbian or who come from completely





different cultural contexts. The presence of a mentor who was available for questions and support helped to reduce this fear and for teachers to gradually gain confidence in their work.

One of the significant effects of mentor support was the development of better horizontal collaboration between teachers within schools. Mentors explained how working with migrant pupils created a need for teamwork and collaboration. One mentor described: "It just strengthened that collegial collaboration. When you have children like that in the school, you all have to work together. So there's no *'I'll work on my own, you work on your subject'*—we simply have to act together... You're just driven to exchange information, to have that horizontal exchange" (Mentor).

Connecting schools and the exchange of experiences were one of the most common and most valued forms of mentor support. According to the questionnaire results, linking with other schools and exchanging experiences was the most common form of support, received by 26 schools (44.8%). Mentors actively worked on linking schools, organising study visits and creating networks of schools that work with migrant pupils. One mentor described: "A school in Kać, a school in Gložan, a school in Novi Sad, a school in Šid, I think there is a living communication there and that in the meantime they will practically become sister schools and will continue their cooperation."

This quote shows that the networking had long-term effects and that the schools continued to collaborate after the formal activities had ended. The creation of these networks enabled schools to have partners with whom they could share challenges and solutions, which reduced the feeling of isolation and created a community of practice.

### **Effect on pupils, interculturality and peer support**

Although it was difficult to directly measure the effect of mentor support on pupils, there are indirect indicators that suggest the support had positive effects. Ministry representatives pointed out: "What is important for us is that, for example, we have not had a single incident of violence in the last five years involving migrant children, either as perpetrators or as victims." This is a significant indicator that migrant pupils were successfully integrated into schools and did not experience discrimination or violence. The absence of violence is not an end in itself, but an indicator of the quality of integration and the acceptance of diversity within the school community.

One of the important effects of mentor support was the development of inclusive practice and interculturalism in the schools. Although working with migrant pupils was the focus of the support, the effects were broader and influenced the general climate in the schools and the access for all pupils from vulnerable groups. One mentor explained: "Horizontal practice within the





school means interconnecting the staff, strengthening them. In that sense, we are all focused on enhancing inclusivity" (Mentor). This quote suggests that working with migrant pupils served as a catalyst for wider changes in the schools, strengthening inclusive practices that benefit all pupils.

One of the unexpected but very significant effects of working with migrant pupils was the role of peer support. Mentors and teachers noted that local pupils were often the best 'mentors' and support for migrant pupils. One mentor noted: "The first impression I got was that their peers provide exceptional support for these children. They just sensed how to approach them, and then that opens up the space for further progress. Often, even language was not a barrier; it really wasn't a barrier. And despite their limited language, they communicated perfectly" (Mentor). This quote shows that the pupils had a natural ability to overcome language barriers and to form bonds with migrant pupils. The spontaneity and authenticity of this peer support made it particularly valuable, as it stemmed from genuine interest and empathy rather than formal obligations. Peer support took various forms—helping with the Serbian language, explaining school rules and procedures, involving them in extracurricular activities, and socialising outside of school. One mentor described: "For example, that school is an example of good pupil adaptation precisely because almost all of them are involved in extracurricular activities. So, they are participants in the choir, orchestra, drama club, chess club, so chess players, sports teams" (Mentor). This involvement in extracurricular activities created opportunities for informal socialising and the development of friendships between local pupils and migrant pupils. Engaging in activities together that were not directly related to academic success allowed relationships to be built on common interests and for migrant pupils to be seen as whole persons, not just as pupils with language difficulties.

### **Self-reflection by the actors within the system**

Mentors generally had a positive perception of their work and the effects they had achieved. One mentor expressed her satisfaction: "Believe me that any school that goes through any project related to migrants can only be a winner." Mentors also emphasised the importance of continuity and long-term support. One mentor noted: "The support of a mentor is really significant; it is much needed by schools that are just getting involved and are only now receiving pupils, both in preparing the staff and the pupils and in the actual work with these pupils." This suggests that mentors understand the importance of their role and recognise the schools' need for ongoing support. This awareness of the importance of continuity is particularly important in the context of sustainability, as it indicates that mentors do not see their work as a short-term intervention, but as a long-term investment in the schools' capacity.





One mentor highlighted the importance of a relationship of trust and partnership with the Ministry: "We had incredible support from the Ministry throughout; from the contact person and their colleagues. We really felt that we could turn to them at any moment, that we could count on their support at any time." The feeling that there was institutional support and clear points of contact enabled mentors to feel more confident in their work and to know they were not alone in facing challenges.

Representatives of the Ministry of Education also had a positive assessment of the effects of mentor support, stating that the system had been successful in providing access to education for almost all migrant pupils. They illustrate this with the high inclusion rate of migrant pupils in the education system: "Enrolment has reached as high as 95% and has never dropped below 85% of that migrant pupil population, which is represented both in asylum and reception centres, as well as in private accommodation" (Ministry). This high level of enrolment is particularly significant when considering the population's fluctuation and the complexity of the logistical challenges.

Representatives of the Ministry also emphasised the importance of coordination and cooperation between the different levels of the system: "There was a constant, rapid flow of information. You know, one link cannot function without the other. The Ministry, ZUOV, the school administrations, the school itself – there was no chance that a school would be overlooked and left without information or any kind of support" (Ministry). This coordination was one of the key factors of success. The effective flow of information and a sense that all links in the system were working together created the conditions for a rapid response to needs and problems, which was crucial in the dynamic context of working with a migrant population.

### 3.3.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned

Mentor support for schools educating migrant pupils has proven to be an important component of the support system developed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia in response to the migrant crisis. An analysis of the implementation of mentor support from October 2023 to the present reveals significant positive effects but also challenges that require systemic solutions for the future.

During the period under review, support was delivered through a network of mentors deployed across five school administrations, with the number of mentors varying from 12 in the earlier phases to 9 in the current period. This change reflected dramatic changes in the migrant population—70% the pupil migrant population today is made up of Ukrainians, unlike in the earlier period when the majority came from the Middle East. The change in the population's composition





required an adjustment to the form of support—from a focus on translation to a greater emphasis on integrating pupils into their new environment. Additionally, 70% of migrant pupils were no longer in asylum and reception centres, but in private accommodation, which also influenced the nature of the support required.

The results of the questionnaire conducted among schools show a high evaluation of the effects of mentor support. The highest level of agreement was recorded for statements about the contribution of mentor support to the faster and more successful integration of migrant pupils (81.0%), followed by strengthening the school's capacity (72.4%), helping teachers to become more confident and competent (69.0%), and helping to resolve challenges related to collaboration with families (69.0%). Schools learned about the support mainly through the Ministry of Education and the school administration (45.2%) or through direct proactive contact from the mentor (35.5%). The most common forms of support were connecting with other schools and the exchange of experiences (44.8%), and participation in school activities and events (41.4%), consultation on grading (41.4%), help with translating materials (39.7%), and support with project writing (37.9%). When schools were asked what they found most useful, they highlighted help with remote consultations (60.3%), administrative tasks (43.1%), connecting with resources (34.5%), and in-school support (27.6%).

Mentor support had a significant effect on teachers, particularly young ones who had no experience of working with diverse groups of pupils, helping them to overcome the 'fear of the unknown' and develop more positive attitudes. One of the significant effects was the development of better horizontal collaboration among teachers, as working with migrant pupils required teamwork and coordination. The networking of schools and the exchange of experiences had long-term effects that went beyond the project's duration, creating networks of schools that continued to collaborate. The strengthening of schools' capacity was reflected in the development of knowledge and skills, material resources (teaching materials, support plans, procedures), organisational capacity (teams, enrolment and monitoring procedures), and networking capacity. The development of inclusive practice and interculturality had positive effects not only on migrant pupils, but also on local pupils, while peer support demonstrated the pupils' natural ability to overcome language barriers.

An analysis of the experiences identifies several aspects that worked well and represent good practices for the future. Mentors' proactive approaches proved to be a key factor in success—mentors did not wait for schools to come to them, but actively contacted schools and worked preventively on their preparation. The flexibility and adaptability of mentor support were equally





important—mentors tailored their support to the specific needs of each school, recognising who within the school was best to work with. The variety of support forms enabled different school needs to be met, and mentors' continuous communication and availability gave schools a sense of security. The psychological effect of knowing there was someone to rely on was perhaps just as important as the concrete help. Networking between schools and the exchange of experiences proved extremely useful, enabling horizontal learning which was often more effective than formal training. Support from the Ministry of Education was crucial—mentors highlighted that they had a clear point of contact, timely information, and a sense of institutional support.

Despite successes, the implementation of mentor support faced several challenges. One of the significant challenges was the lack of systematic psychosocial support. Although mentors provided pedagogical support, they were not trained to work with traumatised children. The tragic case of the suicide of an 11-year-old Russian pupil demonstrates the seriousness of this shortcoming and the need for multi-sectoral support that goes beyond the capacity of the education system. Insufficient teacher training, geographical distance which limited the intensity of direct support, and the administrative burden of reporting and grants, were occasional challenges in the mentors' work. Changes to the mentor team and a reduction in the number of mentors from 12 to 8 affected the types and scope of school support. The dual role of the educational advisers, who were also mentors, potentially created confusion for the participants.

Experiences from implementing mentor support provide valuable lessons for the future. Reporting should be less frequent but of a higher quality, focusing on reflection and analysis. The dual role of educational advisers as mentors requires a clearer delineation of roles or the engagement of mentors without inspectorial functions. Psychosocial support must be integrated into the system through multi-sectoral cooperation. Greater direct support for teachers in the classroom is needed, although it is resource-intensive. Teacher training should be carefully designed to be practical and directly applicable. Coordination with the Commissionerate for Refugees requires more formalised mechanisms to ensure that the decisions of one institution do not create adverse situations for others.

The question of the sustainability of mentor support after the project's completion is a key issue for the future. Institutional sustainability remains an open question. One suggestion is to integrate mentor support into the regular work of educational advisers and external collaborators, but the Ministry acknowledges that it would be more valuable if it were someone with a specific mentoring role, due to the educational advisers' overload with other duties.





The sustainability of school capacity can be ensured by expanding the model of resource schools, where schools that have developed good practices become resources for other schools. The development of a professional community—a network of mentors, teachers and specialist teachers—provides the basis for informal support that can continue to function, but it requires formalisation through regular meetings, online platforms and institutional recognition. Finally, sustainability depends on political will and priorities. It is important that achievements and lessons learned are documented and that the case for continued support is clearly articulated, highlighting not only the benefits for migrant pupils but also the wider benefits for the education system in terms of developing inclusive practices and intercultural competencies.

### 3.4. TRANSLATION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

#### 3.4.1. Context

The fourth component of the project funded by the European Union relates to the translation of educational materials for migrant pupils. This component arose as a direct response to a challenge consistently highlighted in working with this pupil population – the language barrier, which was by far the most dominant problem in teaching practice.

The translation of educational materials involves translating teaching content into the home language of migrant pupils, in order to ensure a better understanding of the material and to facilitate the delivery of lessons. The scale of this problem becomes clearer when looking at the questionnaire data: as much as 37 schools (52.9%) cited the language barrier as the biggest challenge in working with migrant pupils, significantly more than any other issue. This finding is not surprising, given that most migrant pupils come from countries with completely different language systems – from Arabic and Farsi to Ukrainian – and that at the time of enrolment in Serbian schools, they typically do not know a single word of Serbian.

The translation of educational material had several key objectives that built upon one another. The primary goal was to enable migrant pupils to follow the curriculum despite the language barrier, particularly in the initial phase of their time in the Serbian education system, when they have not yet mastered the Serbian language. This initial phase is critical – pupils are faced not only with a new language but also with a new education system, culture and way of working, and a translation into their mother tongue allows them to have a sense of security and understanding in at least one area.





The secondary objective was to support teachers by providing them with a concrete tool for working with pupils who do not know the Serbian language. Teachers often found themselves wanting to help migrant pupils but lacked adequate resources. The translated materials provided them with not only a practical tool but also the reassurance that the pupil was receiving accurate information in a language they understood.

A tertiary objective was to ensure continuity of learning, particularly for children in transit who could remain in the system for varying periods – from a few days to several years. This fluctuation in the migrant population presented a particular challenge, as it was important to ensure that every child, regardless of the length of their stay, had access to education in a way that enabled them to acquire some knowledge and skills.

Translating materials was not intended to be a permanent solution that replaces learning the Serbian language, but rather temporary support that facilitates the transitional period until the pupil acquires sufficient language competence to follow lessons in Serbian independently. It is also important to note that the translation of materials was never intended as an isolated solution, but as part of an integrated support system.

### **3.4.2. The implementation of support for the translation of teaching materials**

The system for translating materials functioned as a well-organised network of various actors, where each link had a clearly defined role. At the top of this network was the Ministry of Education as the umbrella and base organisation. School administrations played a key role in identifying schools with migrant pupils, as they regularly collected data on foreign pupils enrolled in their area. This communication was particularly facilitated by the fact that school administrations were linked to the asylum and reception centres in their area, which enabled the swift flow of information about newly arrived children.

The Ministry engaged mentors – educational advisers and external advisers – who were the key link between the system and schools. Their role in the process of translating the materials was multifaceted: they acted as intermediaries between the schools and the translators, collected materials from teachers, prepared them in an appropriate format, forwarded them to the translators, and then returned the translated materials to the schools.

In addition to sending materials directly to schools, the translated materials were made available on a dedicated website (REMIS - <https://remis.rs/resursi/>), which functions as a resource centre. This site allowed the materials to be used not only by the schools that had requested them





directly, but also by all other schools with migrant pupils. The materials were organised by teaching units, for both primary and secondary school.

The materials were translated into the languages most prevalent among the migrant population. In the initial period (2015-2019), the focus was on Middle Eastern languages – primarily Arabic for children from Syria and Iraq, followed by Farsi and Pashto for children from Afghanistan. Following the start of the Ukrainian crisis in 2022, Ukrainian was added. However, the demand for translation into Ukrainian was significantly lower than for the Middle Eastern languages due to the linguistic similarity between Serbian and Ukrainian. In addition to these languages, there was also a need for other languages such as Turkish and French (for children from Burundi), but the number of translators for these languages was limited. As for the types of materials being translated, these were mainly teaching materials organised by lesson units, worksheets, homework, and practice materials.

Data from the questionnaire show that almost half of all schools (51.4%) used the services of the Project for Translating Teaching Materials or already translated materials from the relevant website. The largest number of schools, 31 (44.3%), report that they did so occasionally, while 5 schools (7.1%) used these materials 'often'. A group of 21 schools (30.0%) stated that they did not need to use these materials. It is possible that some schools did not need the translation because the pupils had already mastered the Serbian language and did not need the material, as one of the mentors states: "This year we did not need the translated materials, because the pupils from Ukraine have already been here for four years and have learnt Serbian, they can follow the lessons." Finally, in the questionnaire, 10 schools (14.3%) stated that they had not been informed about this possibility.

Regarding geographical distribution, the translated materials were most frequently used by schools from the School Administration of Belgrade, 17 of them (47.2%), followed by schools from the School Administration of Leskovac with 8 institutions (22.2%), schools from the School Administration of Novi Sad with 5 institutions (13.9%), as well as schools from the School Administration of Valjevo and the School Administration of Sombor with 3 institutions each (8.3%). Regarding the type of institution, out of a total of 36 schools, the largest number are primary schools with 25 institutions (69.4%), followed by vocational secondary schools with 6 institutions (16.7%), and then gymnasiums with 5 institutions (13.9%).

However, it is important to note that a significant number of schools, 36 (53.7%), stated that they found alternative solutions, such as using Google Translate or colleagues who speak the





language. An additional 16 schools (23.9%) state that the pupils quickly mastered the Serbian language and that there were no major problems.

### 3.4.3. Challenges in implementing the translation of teaching materials

The system for translating teaching materials was well-designed and organised, but its implementation in practice faced several challenges that affected the efficiency and coverage of this support component.

One of the key operational problems was the time lag between the teacher recognising the need for materials and the translated materials arriving back at the school. Teachers often needed materials almost immediately, for a lesson they would teach in a day or two, whereas the translation process—which involved sending the materials to a mentor, forwarding them to a translator, translating, returning them to the mentor, and finally sending them back to the school—took significantly longer. One of the mentors describes this problem: "Everything works fine when a teacher anticipates something they need in a month or two, but when someone needs it for tomorrow or the day after, that material is late."

Data from the questionnaire partially confirms this problem. Regarding the statement that the process of obtaining translated materials was fast and efficient and that the materials arrived on time, 23 schools (63.9%) agree, while 8 schools (22.2%) are undecided, and 5 schools (13.9%) disagree. This indicates that the majority of schools were satisfied with the speed of the process, but that a significant number of schools still experienced challenges with the timings.

An additional challenge was the need for teachers to plan their teaching content in advance and prepare the materials they would need a month ahead, which did not align with the working dynamics of the schools. This need for long-term planning was at odds with the fluctuating nature of the migrant population and the unpredictability of their needs.

Technical challenges related to certain languages presented an additional obstacle to using alternative solutions and highlighted the importance of professional translation. The Arabic language was particularly problematic. One of the teachers describes this problem in detail: "Google Translate can't translate Arabic, I mean it can, but when you copy it and paste it into another file, you don't get that translation, you get completely different meanings." This technical problem was a consequence of the right-to-left orientation of the Arabic script, which created problems when copying the text. In such circumstances, a professional translation was an invaluable aid for teachers who wanted to enable pupils to follow lessons in their mother tongue, particularly for specialist subjects in secondary schools where the precision of terminology was





crucial. An additional challenge was posed by the linguistic nuances within a broader language group. One of the mentors states: 'Slavic languages are similar. On the other hand, it took us a while to grasp the difference between Farsi, Pashto, Arabic...' Although they are similar too, there are a lot of differences and you have to be very careful which language the materials are in."

One of the challenges that arose in practice was related to the preparation of materials for translation. Teachers were instructed not to send just the copied text but to adapt the material and focus on the essence. For many teachers, this represented an additional burden and a demotivating factor, especially in situations where they were already overloaded with their regular teaching duties.

#### 3.4.4. User effects and perception

##### **Schools' perception of the usefulness and quality of the translated materials**

The data from the questionnaire presented in Chart 6 provide a detailed insight into schools' perceptions of the various aspects of the use and effects of the translated materials. This data is particularly valuable as it comes from those who have directly used this support and can assess its real-world usefulness in teaching practice.

The highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that the translated teaching materials significantly helped pupils to master the learning content, where 25 schools (69.4%) agree, 10 schools (27.8%) are undecided, and only 1 school (2.8%) disagrees. This is the clearest indication that schools recognised the value of the translated materials for the pupils. The fact that only one school disagreed with this statement speaks to the broad consensus on the materials' positive effect on learning. However, the relatively high percentage of undecided schools (almost a third) may indicate that the effect of the materials varied depending on specific circumstances – perhaps the pupils' motivation, the length of their time in the system, or how well the materials were tailored to their prior knowledge level.

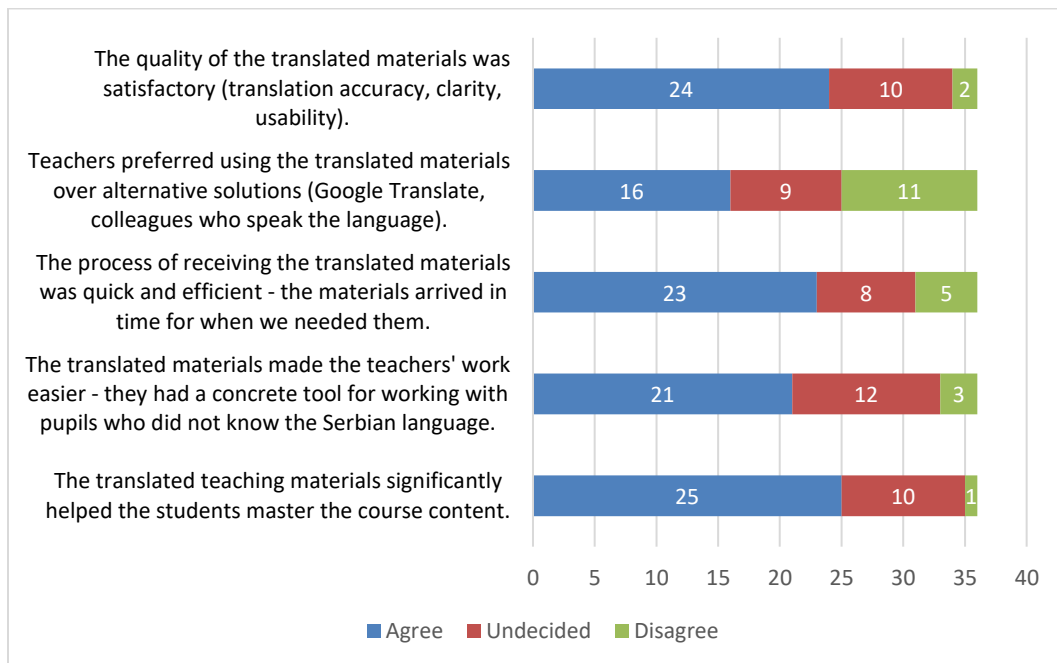
High agreement was also recorded for the quality of the translated materials in terms of translation accuracy, clarity, and usability, where 24 schools (66.7%) agree, 10 schools (27.8%) are undecided, and 2 schools (5.6%) disagree. This indicates that the translators did the job well and that the materials were usable in teaching practice. The quality of the translation was crucial not only for understanding the content but also for teachers' confidence in the materials they provide to pupils.





Regarding the effect on teachers' work, 21 schools (58.3%) agree that the translated materials have made the teachers' work easier by providing them with a concrete tool for working with pupils who do not know the Serbian language, 12 schools (33.3%) are undecided, and 3 schools (8.3%) disagree. This slightly lower percentage of agreement compared to the effect on pupils may indicate that teachers had mixed experiences – while some found the materials to be a useful support, others may have felt that the process of preparing and using them required too much time and effort.

Figure 6. Use of translated teaching materials and the effects of their use



Alternative translation solutions were often used in schools. Thus, just under half of the schools, a total of 16 schools (44.4%), agree that teachers preferred to use translated materials rather than alternative solutions such as Google Translate or colleagues who know the language, while 11 schools (30.6%) disagree, and 9 schools (25.0%) were undecided. These figures indicate that alternative solutions were still the preferred option for a significant number of teachers. This is not necessarily a negative finding – it may indicate that teachers have developed the capacity to solve the language barrier problem independently, which is more sustainable in the long term than relying on external support.





## Effect on pupils

The translated materials had a multifaceted effect on the migrant pupils, ranging from the immediate educational effect to broader psychosocial implications. The primary effect was to enable them to keep up with the teaching content despite the language barrier, particularly in the initial phase of their time in the Serbian education system. The materials served a dual purpose: 'It was important that they had material to work on at home. When they receive support at school from teachers and their peer mentors, the lessons are still conducted in Serbian, a language that is unfamiliar to them at that point. These materials meant a great deal to them, as in their accommodation, where there were volunteers, they would have support with their learning and the pupils could study at home (Resource Centre).

The translated materials also represented a link to the pupils' mother tongue and culture, which was significant not only from an educational but also an emotional perspective. For children who have experienced the trauma of war, migration, and separation from family and friends, the opportunity to see their own language written on paper, to recognise their script, provided a certain comfort and sense of continuity with the life they had before migrating. An interesting example is that of a pupil mentioned in the mentoring story. She says: "Those translations had a really lovely effect; one pupil from Ukraine who enrolled in Year 1, for whom her teacher translated learning materials and nursery rhymes, when she got the translation she always put it in a separate notebook and recited it in Ukrainian".

It is important to note that the translated materials were included in the individual school report, which was developed as a model for monitoring the progress of migrant pupils. The transition plan, which included this individual school report, was crucial due to the fluctuating nature of the migrant population, and the translated materials and documentation of the work with them became part of the wider narrative of the child's educational journey. This was particularly important for children who continued their education in other countries, as it allowed their work and progress in the Serbian education system to be recognised and valued.

## Effect on teachers

The effect of the translated materials on teachers was more complex and less straightforward than the effect on pupils. On the one hand, the materials provided teachers with a real tool for working with pupils who do not know Serbian, which reduced feelings of helplessness and frustration. A representative of the resource centre states: "These materials helped both the children and the people working with them, providing them with support, because it is a cohesive





system where it was not just the school that was involved, but it was the key, it was the roof, it was the base and all of that, and that's why these materials were created. The support of the translators was significant for this reason, because we were certain of the accuracy of the information being conveyed to the pupil, for the educational outcomes they would achieve, as in the end you have to assess these pupils in some way." This statement reveals an important aspect – the translated materials not only facilitated communication but also gave teachers the confidence that the pupil was receiving accurate information. This was particularly important in the context of assessment, where the teacher had to be certain that a pupil had failed to understand the content due to a language barrier, rather than a lack of ability.

However, the process of preparing materials for translation forced teachers to reflect on the essence of what they were teaching and to identify the key content, which had a positive effect on the quality of teaching. One of the mentors explains: 'What they found challenging was the instruction they received to "reduce" the material...' Although this was perceived as an additional burden, this process of didactic reduction – of extracting the essence from broader teaching content – represents a valuable teaching skill that can improve the quality of teaching for all pupils, not just for migrants.

It is important to note that a significant number of teachers found alternative solutions, developing the skills to translate and adapt materials independently, which over time reduced their reliance on formal translation support. This teacher autonomy represents a positive outcome, as it shows that the support system has contributed to building the schools' capacity to deal with the language barrier, rather than making them dependent on external assistance.

### **The alternative solutions that schools used**

Schools were extremely creative and proactive in finding alternative solutions to the language barrier, which is a testament to their commitment to the inclusion of migrant pupils.

One of the most common alternative approaches was to engage teachers who speak foreign languages. One of the mentors explains: "They used the resources of the Russian, French, and English teachers in the schools, and that is the only reason translations were not needed." This approach was particularly effective for Slavic languages (Russian, Ukrainian) where there was linguistic similarity. Another common approach was the use of technological tools, primarily Google Translate, although its effectiveness depended on the language – while it was relatively reliable for some languages, for others, such as Arabic, it was practically unusable.





This is confirmed by the questionnaire data, which show that the largest number of schools, 36 (53.7%), stated that they found alternative solutions, such as using Google Translate or colleagues who speak the language. A significant number of schools, 16 (23.9%), state that the pupils quickly mastered the Serbian language and that there were no major problems. Eight schools (11.9%) found combined solutions, while four schools (6.0%) stated that the pupils already spoke Serbian when they arrived at the institution.

An interesting approach was also the engagement of former migrant pupils who had already mastered the Serbian language as translators and mentors for newly arrived children. A representative of the resource centre gives an example: "A young man finished school with us two years ago who spent some time in Turkey on his journey, in their education system where he mastered the Turkish language perfectly. In another school, support was needed to integrate children. At that time, there was no translator for Turkish, so we called our pupil, who stepped up and provided the support. As a result, the children who stayed here really progressed and managed to cope." This example illustrates how migrant pupils can become a resource for the system, and not just recipients of support. Additional support was also provided by volunteers from various organisations who worked in asylum and reception centres, helping children with their homework and facilitating communication with schools.

Finally, it is important to note that these alternative solutions were often combined with the use of translated materials, rather than being used exclusively in their place.

### 3.4.5. Summary of findings and lessons learned

Translating educational material was one of the four key components of the project supporting schools working with migrant and refugee pupils. This component was created as a direct response to the language barrier, which half of the schools (52.9%) identified in a survey as the greatest challenge in working with this population. The system for translating materials functioned as a well-organised network of the Ministry of Education, school administrations, mentors, translators and schools. The materials were translated into the languages most prevalent among the migrant population – primarily Arabic, Farsi and Pashto between 2015 and 2019, and after 2022, Ukrainian was added. The translated materials became available on a dedicated REMIS website (<https://remis.rs/resursi/>), which serves as a resource centre available to all schools.

Data from the questionnaire show that almost half of all schools (51.4%) used translation services for materials. The highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that the translated teaching materials significantly helped pupils to master the curriculum (69.4% of





schools), while 66.7% of schools agree that the quality was satisfactory in terms of translation accuracy, clarity and usability.

A well-organised communication and support system, the role of mentors as intermediaries between the system and schools, and the system's flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances proved to be key success factors. However, the analysis also revealed significant challenges. The time lag between the request for and delivery of materials was the most significant challenge. Although the majority of schools (63.9%) were satisfied with the speed of the process, the remainder were undecided or dissatisfied. Technical challenges related to the Arabic language, a lack of awareness among some schools about available resources (14.3%), teachers' workload in preparing materials, and insufficient coordination with the Commissionerate for Refugees represented additional challenges.

It is important to note that a significant number of schools (53.7%) stated that they had found alternative solutions, such as engaging Google Translate or colleagues who speak the language, while 23.9% of schools state that the pupils quickly mastered the Serbian language. Schools have developed hybrid approaches that combined various resources – engaging teachers who speak foreign languages, using technological tools, peer support, involving former migrant pupils as translators, and volunteers from various organisations. This flexibility demonstrates the system's capacity to adapt and utilise various resources depending on the specific circumstances.

One of the key lessons learned is that translating materials should be viewed as a complementary, rather than a primary, method of supporting migrant pupils. The focus should be on learning Serbian as a foreign language and on creating didactic materials that are tailored to the needs of these pupils, while translation should serve as additional support for homework and for understanding more complex concepts. This balance between translation as temporary support and learning Serbian as a long-term solution represents perhaps the most important lesson learned from the entire experience of implementing this component.

The issue of sustainability presents a key challenge. Key sustainability mechanisms include the role of resource centres that ensure the continuity of support independently of project funding, the integration of support into the regular activities of educational advisers and external collaborators, as well as the resource bank on the REMIS website, which remains available to all schools. Also, an important step towards sustainability is the introduction of Serbian as a foreign language as an optional subject in primary schools, which represents a systemic solution for language acquisition instead of relying exclusively on translated materials.





The experience of implementing this component indicates several key areas for future improvement: accelerating the translation process, improving schools' awareness of available resources, strengthening schools' capacity to adapt materials independently, institutionalising the role of mentors, improving coordination between institutions, and developing mechanisms for horizontal exchange between schools. Looking ahead, it is clear that the need for some form of language support for migrant pupils will continue to exist, but that the form of this support must be adapted to changing circumstances. Only through an integrated and flexible approach can it be ensured that all children, regardless of where they come from or how long they stay, have equal opportunities for a quality education.

## 4. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1. Concluding Remarks

The implementation of the project supporting inclusive education for migrant pupils through four complementary components – teacher training, school grants, mentoring support and the translation of teaching materials – represents a significant contribution to developing the capacity of the Serbian education system to respond to the challenges of student mobility and diversity. The experience gained during the project's implementation provides valuable insights into how the education system can effectively respond to the complex needs of migrant pupils, and more broadly, how it can transform towards greater inclusivity and interculturality.

#### *Building Competences and Transforming Attitudes*

One of the project's most significant effects was achieved in building teachers' competencies and transforming their attitudes towards diversity. Training on the prevention of child and youth trafficking, as well as training on working with migrant pupils, succeeded in building a solid knowledge base for almost all participants. Particularly impressive is the ability to recognise risks and indicators, reported by over 95% of teachers, as well as the development of communication skills for working with pupils and parents. These competencies were not merely declarative – schools launched a variety of preventative and inclusive activities, which demonstrate the teachers' willingness to actively engage with sensitive topics.

Perhaps even more significant than the acquisition of new knowledge is the transformation of attitudes that occurred during the project's implementation. Schools that initially showed resistance to working with migrant pupils gradually developed an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. Teachers who were insecure and worried due to their lack of experience, with the





support of mentors and colleagues from other schools, became more confident and competent. This change was neither automatic nor easy – it required time, support, and concrete experiences of success that gradually built confidence in their own abilities.

### *A Holistic Approach and the Interplay of Components*

A key factor in the project's success was the interplay between the different support components. The mentoring support did not operate in isolation but was woven into a broader system that included training, grants, and the translation of materials. Mentors helped schools to apply for grants, use the translated materials, and participate in the training, creating a coherent system that was more than the sum of its parts. The schools used the grants to implement the activities they had learnt about during the training, with the support of mentors who were available for consultations and to help with day-to-day challenges.

This integrated approach enabled the multi-layered needs of migrant pupils to be addressed – from mastering the Serbian language, through academic achievement and social integration, to psychosocial support and preparation for continuing their education. Schools that had access to all components of the support demonstrated better results and greater sustainability of the achieved effects. The flexibility in using the grants, the proactive approach of the mentors, and the ability to tailor the support to the specific needs of each school were key to the success.

### *Effects on pupils and school communities*

The positive effects of the project are visible at multiple levels. Migrant pupils made significant progress in their Serbian language proficiency, socialisation, and academic achievement, with documented cases of pupils successfully completing their primary education and passing their final exams. Particularly encouraging is that almost 80% of teachers confirm a development in empathy and understanding among pupils towards their peers who are potential victims of trafficking or who come from other countries, which testifies to a deeper transformation in the school climate.

Local pupils developed intercultural competence through joint activities, sports games, theatre performances and intercultural events. Sport and art have proven to be extremely effective means of overcoming social distance and building friendships that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. Local communities became more open and inclusive, with a stronger sense of shared responsibility for all pupils attending schools in their area.

### *Challenges and lessons learned*





The project's implementation took place under extremely complex and changing circumstances. Fluctuations in the migrant population, changes in its composition, and strikes in the education system required constant adaptation and flexibility from all participants. Despite these challenges, the schools, teachers, mentors and all the stakeholders involved demonstrated exceptional commitment and the ability to find creative solutions to the problems that arose.

The experience has shown that there is a gap between the acquired competencies and their practical application, which indicates a need to strengthen support during the phase of transferring knowledge into daily practice. The administrative complexity of procedures, particularly concerning grants, represented a significant burden for schools without prior experience in project management. The language barrier and the lack of psychosocial support for students coming from war-torn areas or travelling without parental accompaniment stood out as areas requiring special attention in future interventions.

The key lessons learned point to several key success factors: the importance of mentoring support and horizontal collaboration between schools; the need for flexibility in planning and implementation; the importance of a holistic approach that combines different types of activities; and the central role of teaching Serbian as a foreign language for successful integration. Translating materials proved to be a complementary, rather than a primary, support method, which is an important insight for planning future interventions.

#### *The question of sustainability*

The key question arising from the analysis is the sustainability of the achieved results after the end of the project funding. Teacher competencies, transformed attitudes, material equipment, and established networks of cooperation between schools show greater sustainability and represent the project's lasting legacy. However, the dependence on project funding represents the greatest challenge to the continuity of support, particularly with regard to teaching Serbian as a foreign language, mentoring support, and psychosocial assistance for pupils.

Experience has shown that the resource centres, the role of external collaborators, and the resource bank on the REMIS website are important sustainability mechanisms that can operate independently of project cycles. Strengthening these mechanisms and their integration into the regular activities in the education system represent key steps towards the long-term sustainability of the achieved results.





### *Towards systemic solutions*

The experience of implementing the project clearly shows that, although project interventions are necessary and worthwhile, a long-term and effective response to the needs of migrant pupils requires systemic solutions that will ensure the sustainability of the results achieved and the further development of the educational system's capacity. The following recommendations cover various levels of intervention – from institutional mechanisms and financial sustainability, through the enhancement of training and psychosocial support, to the simplification of administrative procedures and the recognition of teachers' work. These recommendations are the result of an analysis of the experiences of all stakeholders involved in the project and are aimed at building a sustainable system of support for inclusive education.

#### **4.2. Recommendations for improving the support system**

Based on the analysis of the implementation of the project components, key areas for improvement have been identified that would contribute to greater efficiency, sustainability, and systemic integration of support for the inclusive education of migrant pupils.

The recommendations are grouped into general and specific and are ordered by priority.

##### **General recommendations**

###### *Institutionalisation and financial sustainability*

Mentoring support should be integrated as a standing form of support for schools through the expansion of the mandate of external advisers, the formation of mentor teams at the level of school administrations or the development of a network of resource schools. It is recommended to establish a national-level funding mechanism that would provide basic support to all schools working with migrant pupils, regardless of project cycles. The involvement of local authorities in funding support, particularly in municipalities with a higher number of migrant pupils, would contribute to local sustainability.

###### *Psychosocial support*

The development of a psychosocial support system to complement mentoring support is a key recommendation. It is recommended to establish a network of specialised counsellors for working with traumatised children, who would be available to schools at a regional level. Developing training on a trauma-informed approach would equip teachers to recognise signs of stress and trauma in pupils and apply strategies that create a safe





environment. The development of support programmes for teachers, including supervision and peer exchange, would contribute to the prevention of professional burnout.

#### *From training to practice*

A gap is evident between the acquired competencies and their practical application. Future training should include more practical exercises, simulations, and case studies. Introducing a mentoring model, where more experienced teachers support their colleagues, could facilitate the transfer of knowledge into daily practice. The development of clear, visually designed guides to serve as a quick reference for teachers would facilitate practical application. Organising follow-up sessions several months after the initial training would allow participants to share their experiences and challenges. Furthermore, the development of modular training differentiated by student age and specific populations is recommended, with special attention to the digital dimension and online risks. Training for teachers of Serbian as a foreign language should be mandatory and regularly available through the professional development system.

#### *Coordination and clarity of roles*

Enhancing coordination between various institutions – the Ministry of Education, the Commissionerate for Refugees and Migration, social welfare centres, health institutions and international organisations – is crucial for the timely exchange of information and coordinated action. It is particularly important to establish a formal coordination mechanism that would ensure timely notification when decisions are made that affect the education of migrant pupils. Clearly defining the roles of mentors, educational advisers and school teams, as well as developing protocols for collaboration, would contribute to a systemic approach.

#### *Хоризонтална размена и умрежавање*

Strengthening horizontal exchange between schools has proven to be one of the most valued forms of support. It is recommended to organise regular meetings and conferences for schools working with migrant pupils, as well as support for study visits, which would be funded from the regular budget. Развој онлајн платформе где би наставници могли да размењују искуства и материјале омогућио би континуирану размену. The development of an online platform where teachers could share experiences and materials would enable a continuous exchange. The further development of resource schools that





would provide support to other schools and their networking represents a sustainable solution for the dissemination of good practices.

### *Recognition of work*

The development of a systemic mechanism for valuing the additional engagement of teachers and educational professionals in inclusive education projects is recommended. This could include priority for career progression or financial incentives.

## **Specific recommendations**

### *Administrative procedures and grants*

#### *Administrative procedures and grants*

Simplifying administrative procedures is a priority. The development of simplified reporting forms in the Serbian language, with clear guidelines and examples of good practice, is recommended. Revising the VAT exemption requirements or establishing a list of verified suppliers would facilitate the implementation of projects for schools. Introducing a greater degree of flexibility into budget planning, whereby schools would have the freedom to reallocate funds between categories in line with specific needs, would allow for a more optimal use of resources.

### *Translation and language support*

Accelerating the translation process by engaging more translators or creating a database of on-call translators would reduce the time lag between requests and delivery. Improving schools' awareness of available resources and a more active promotion of the REMIS website would contribute to better utilisation of existing materials. A realistic assessment of which language groups require professional translation would allow for a more efficient use of limited funds.

## **4.3. Conclusion**

The implementation of this project has shown that the education system in Serbia has the capacity to respond to the complex challenges of mobility and diversity, but that this requires coordinated support which includes training, resources, mentoring and systemic solutions. The dedication and creativity of teachers, the support of mentors, flexibility in using resources and the willingness of schools to learn from one another were key factors in the success. The challenges





participants faced – from administrative complexity to pupil turnover – did not discourage them but rather motivated them to find innovative solutions tailored to their specific circumstances.

Although the project was focused on supporting migrant pupils, its effects extend beyond this specific population. The competencies developed by the teachers – the ability to recognise risks, communication skills, an understanding of trauma, differentiated teaching, intercultural pedagogy – are applicable to working with all pupils, particularly those from vulnerable groups. Transforming the school climate towards greater inclusivity and acceptance of diversity contributes to creating an environment where all children can feel safe and accepted. The promotion of interculturality through various activities – from theatre performances and sports games to celebrating important dates from different cultures – has contributed to spreading messages of tolerance and understanding within local communities.

It is important to highlight the contribution of the schools that participated in the project. Despite the daily challenges and pressures, teachers, educational professionals and school principals demonstrated professionalism, empathy and a willingness to step out of their comfort zones. Their commitment to finding solutions to complex situations represents the true value of this project. Schools were not just recipients of support but active participants in developing models of good practice that can be beneficial for the entire education system.

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with international partners, demonstrated the ability to respond quickly to changing circumstances and to adapt support mechanisms to the specific needs of schools. Coordinating multi-layered support in the dynamic context of migration required constant adaptation and the resolution of unforeseen situations, which was successfully achieved through the engagement of all stakeholders.

The competencies developed by teachers, the transformation of attitudes, the established networks of cooperation between schools, and the material resources represent the project's legacy, which will continue to contribute to the quality of education. The experience gained from working with migrant pupils has empowered the education system to better respond to the needs of a more diverse student population. However, the sustainability of the achieved results will depend on the system's ability to integrate successful practices into its regular activities and to provide continuous support to schools.

The implementation of the recommendations arising from this report, coupled with the continued commitment of all stakeholders, can ensure the further development of inclusive education for migrants. This project represents a significant step in that direction, but it is clear





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that continuous work is needed to strengthen the system's capacity, ensure sustainable support mechanisms, and develop systemic solutions that will enable all children, regardless of their origin, to have equal opportunities for a quality education.





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## APPENDICES

**(Available upon request)**

**APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire – Online training on prevention of human trafficking**

**APPENDIX 2. Questionnaire – Mentors and Translation of Teaching Materials**

**APPENDIX 3. Focus Group Guide – Schools (Grant)**

**APPENDIX 4. Focus Group Guide – Mentors**

**APPENDIX 5. Focus Group Guide – Key Informants**

**APPENDIX 7. List of school grant reports**

