

Amalia Creus
Adriana Ornellas (eds.)

Crossing Borders to Connect Routes

**Bridging Transnational
Perspectives to Challenge
Inequity and Racism in
Education**

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Inequity and Racism in Education

This book presents the findings of the transnational research project *Crossing Borders to Connect Routes: Researching with Educational Communities to Promote Equity and Fight Racism towards Immigrants in a Post-Pandemic World*, which was co-led by:



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to Challenge Inequity
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Crossing Borders to Connect Routes: Mapping the Journey

AMALIA CREUS, ADRIANA ORNELLAS, INES MARTINS

1. Introduction: Crossing Borders

In the preface to his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Clifford (1999) invites us to imagine the human condition beyond immobility. He proposes understanding residence and travel, permanence and movement, not as opposites, but as intertwined realities. This idea challenges cultural localism, which associates authentic life with a fixed, closed territory. What would happen—asks Clifford—if travel were assumed as an essential dimension of our existence? And what if we accept that intercultural connection is not the exception, but the natural fabric of human relationships?

Building on Clifford's invitation, this work turns attention to the ways in which migration and education are shaped by interconnected policies, practices, and power relations. To think about human movement in a globalized world is also to follow the interplay of forces that govern it. Freedom of movement is far from equally shared: for some, travelling is a taken-for-granted right; for others, it requires navigating systems and structures that constrain mobility and limit life opportunities, reinforcing historical inequalities. Migration policies are only one way hierarchies are crystallized. Beyond physical or legal borders, factors such as economic status, spoken language, religion, gender, skin color, and cultural origin also shape people's mobility (hooks, 1994). As Fanon (1967) observes, racialized individuals inhabit a geography of inequality, where any movement is mediated by surveillance, suspicion, and control.

In this work, we understand mobility in a broad sense, seeing it not only as geographical movement but also as the capacity to move socially, to grow, learn, and transform one's life trajectory. In this light, education emerges as a key site where symbolic and material borders intersect, potentially opening opportunities for inclusion or, conversely, reproducing exclusion and inequality. In classrooms—from schools to universities—knowledge does not travel alone; it moves intertwined with hierarchies, dominant narratives, and strategic silences (hooks, 1994), shaping what languages, cultures, and ways of knowing are valued, taught, and recognized, and what are overlooked.

This book brings together four chapters presenting the findings of the transnational research project *Crossing Borders to Connect Routes*, funded by the Spencer Foundation under the Racial Equity Research Grants programme, which supports educational research aimed at understanding and reducing racial inequalities. Drawing on a multi-sited case study conducted in the United States, Spain, Uruguay, and Brazil, we examine how borders—whether physical, symbolic, or pedagogical—shape the educational trajectories of racialized migrants, highlighting not only the structural barriers they face but also some experiences and pedagogical practices that, across different contexts and in diverse ways, are contributing to addressing racial inequities.

Thus, our study pursues three main objectives. First, it seeks to make visible the inequities embedded in educational practices and policies, illustrating how discrimination against racialised migrants manifests across multiple dimensions, including institutional dynamics, access to resources, and the design of rules and programmes. Second, it aims to highlight and share experiences that contribute to reducing inequality and fostering more inclusive educational environments. Third, it introduces innovative research methodologies designed to bring together interacting voices from individuals, collectives, and institutions (Daiute, 2014).

In doing so, the book contributes to enriching a broad and diverse body of research that engages in dialogue between education and migration, which has previously documented significant inequities: from the gaps in academic achievement between native and immigrant students in Europe (OECD, 2019), to high levels of school segregation in the United States (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and

to difficulties in accessing and remaining in secondary and higher education in Latin America (Reimers, 2000).

With so much evidence available, one might expect education to be more inclusive and capable of recognising and valuing diversity. However, the reality shows that full equity is still far from being achieved. The experiences of the participants in this research reinforce this observation and serve as a warning. In the different contexts studied, racialised individuals reported facing both overt expressions of racism—insults, comments about their way of speaking, or mockery of their appearance—and more subtle forms of discrimination, often minimised by teachers or peers under the excuse of “misunderstandings” or “inappropriate jokes.” Their accounts reveal the everyday dimension of racialised microaggressions and their profound impact on educational and psychosocial well-being. In many cases, xenophobia and racism are expressed in particularly visible ways through the body: skin colour, hair texture, or physical features become marks onto which difference is projected.

These personal experiences, while immediate and visible, reflect a deeper problem: the structures, policies, and educational practices that reproduce inequalities and racial hierarchies. Unequal access to resources, the formulation of rules, curricula, and assessment criteria all reinforce patterns of historical exclusion that limit the educational and social mobility of racialised students. Added to this are the lack of diverse representation in textbooks and teaching staff, the persistence of Eurocentric perspectives in content, stereotypes that shape academic expectations, and the limited visibility and legitimacy granted to non-hegemonic knowledge and languages.

Moreover, beyond the school, these mechanisms intertwine with broader dimensions of society: barriers to employment, housing, and healthcare; the over-representation of racialised youth in disciplinary and criminal justice processes; and the limited presence of role models in positions of political, academic, and cultural leadership. All of this demonstrates that racism cannot be understood solely as a set of individual attitudes, but as a structural and systemic web permeating the functioning of institutions themselves. Recognising this systemic dimension is essential to move beyond superficial responses and foster meaningful transformations that ensure justice and equity.

Yet alongside these experiences of exclusion, stories of care and support also emerge. Young people recall the assistance of individuals and spaces that opened paths: a teacher who encouraged their talents, a community that provided resources, a peer group that welcomed them and enabled learning in a trusting environment. These gestures, although scattered and often fragile, demonstrate that it is possible to build educational environments in which diversity is recognised and valued as a strength.

Similarly, the examples we have analysed show that there are institutional mechanisms and practices capable of systematically reducing inequalities. Pedagogical methodologies centred on care and emotional support; public policies and mentoring programmes that provide sustained guidance; curricular orientations that integrate diverse knowledge; and the strengthening of community relationships are some of the strategies observed that help create alternative spaces for learning, care, and participation.

The voices of all participants in this research—young people, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and community members—highlight that there is still much to learn and do in order to advance towards full educational equity. Their accounts show how structural inequalities and barriers intertwine with everyday experiences of racism and exclusion, while also revealing gestures, strategies, and practices that open spaces of inclusion and recognition.

This book seeks to contribute to that endeavour: to illuminate inequalities while highlighting actions and practices that help overcome them. Crossing borders to connect routes—geographical, social, and educational—is presented here as a means of opening pathways toward a more just and inclusive education, one that fosters social mobility, personal development, and the creation of diverse communities in which all individuals can recognise themselves and be recognised on equal terms, with equal rights and opportunities.

2. The Research Journey

When we began preparing the proposal for this research in the summer of 2021, the world was slowly attempting to recover from a global pandemic that had caused millions of deaths and profoundly transformed people's lives. At that time, our experience in studies on immigration, racism, and equity led us to ask how this crisis was affecting the educational experiences of migrants in the various contexts where we were working. While the impact on health, the economy, and social life was evident, it was particularly clear that certain groups—the most vulnerable—were suffering disproportionately: higher levels of precarity, exclusion, and difficulty accessing basic resources (United Nations, 2020).

Thus, the question that initially guided this study responded to the urgency of the context: how was the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the education of racialised migrants across different parts of the world? From the outset, we were aware that the crisis would have a profound global effect on educational systems, and we sought to understand closely the specific experiences of those living in conditions of social, cultural, and economic vulnerability, exacerbated in a context of public health emergency.

Unfortunately, early evidence confirmed our concerns. Studies across Europe and Latin America documented that migrants were particularly affected—not only by disruptions to formal education, but also by the precariousness of their living and working conditions. School closures and the rapid shift to online learning exacerbated existing inequalities: many migrant households lacked technological devices, stable connectivity, or an appropriate learning environment (OECD, 2020). These difficulties were further intensified by linguistic barriers, which impeded both pedagogical engagement and access to emotional support—essential for educational development (OECD, 2021). At the same time, the pandemic widened racial and ethnic inequities, disproportionately impacting migrant students. The absence of inclusive public policies and limited attention to their specific needs resulted in higher dropout rates, academic setbacks, and heightened feelings of exclusion (Bonal & González, 2021; UNICEF, 2021).

However, despite our initial focus on the effects of the pandemic, as the research progressed, our attention began to shift. What we first approached as an exceptional situation soon re-

vealed itself as a symptom of much deeper structural problems. The people we interviewed made this clear: the pandemic was just one more obstacle along a path already marked by a long history of racism, exclusion, and inequity. It was not only the impact of a global health crisis, but also the exposure and exacerbation of inequalities that had long existed.

This perspective redirected our research trajectory. We then sought to explore how, in the post-pandemic context, the mechanisms that delineate the boundary between educational inclusion and exclusion for racialised migrant youth persisted and evolved. We were particularly interested in understanding how the health crisis contributed to a social and political climate of increasing criminalisation of migration, and how these dynamics were experienced, narrated, and reinterpreted within educational spaces. At the same time, we aimed to recognise and circulate pedagogical practices that, from within school communities, seek to challenge racism and inequity, demonstrating that alternative forms of co-existence are possible.

The four case studies presented in this book were conducted in countries with very different migratory and educational profiles. From the outset, we were fully aware of the challenges inherent in conducting transnational research across such diverse contexts. Accordingly, our goal was not to generalise findings but to understand how the dynamics of migration, racism, and education are shaped in specific, situated scenarios. As Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) note, comparative studies in education risk falling into oversimplified extrapolations if they fail to recognise the historicity and specificity of each context; our approach, by contrast, focused on acknowledging singularities in dialogue rather than seeking common patterns.

From this perspective, we have constructed a kaleidoscopic view of the phenomenon under study: each case retains its uniqueness and complexity, yet when considered alongside the others, it generates a vision that is both comprehensive and fragmented. The case studies combine an analysis of diverse educational contexts with attentive listening to the voices of those who have lived these experiences firsthand. These voices remind us that borders are not only physical but also symbolic, social, and educational, profoundly shaping the life opportunities of those who cross them. Thus, while we can identify common threads and

modes of exclusion, each setting retains its own focus and particular reality, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how migration and racism intersect differently depending on the context. In this sense, the research adopts a fractal perspective, as proposed by Montenegro, Pujol, and Vargas-Monroy (2015), in which the connections between experiences, contexts, and meanings are reproduced across scales and levels. Each case operates as a “microcosm” that reflects broader patterns of exclusion and resistance, so that the partial relationships between the elements analysed allow for the construction of situated and relational knowledge—knowledge that is consistent with the complexity and diversity of the phenomena under study.

To conduct these studies, we adopted a qualitative narrative approach in all cases. We focused on different types of accounts and discourses that provide a situated and experiential perspective on the educational opportunities and barriers faced by people with migrant trajectories. We sampled the voices of policy, mediators of policies, and individuals subjected to those policies. This approach allowed us to access not only the events and circumstances that shape their educational pathways but also the meanings they attach to these experiences, and the ways in which they construct their identities in contexts marked by mobility, cultural difference, and dynamics of exclusion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute, 2014).

Narrative research is particularly relevant in this field for several reasons. First, it makes visible the voices of those who are often marginalised in dominant discourses on education and migration, as well as those who mediate between marginalised people and policies meant for them. Second, our approach enacts migration systems by including the voices of powerful actors, such as policy makers, thereby presenting them as narratives to which policy subjects, who are marginalised, can respond (Daiute, 2014; Daiute et al., this volume). By taking into account a system rather than isolated voices, our analyses highlight the unique subjective, emotional, and social processes that underpin migrants’ educational experiences, pointing to potential ways to denaturalise inequities. Finally, by placing life stories at the centre, narrative research illuminates practices of resistance, agency, and creativity that would otherwise remain invisible, providing a deeper understanding of

the mechanisms of exclusion and the ways in which inclusion is constructed across different educational contexts.

This approach allows us to combine the diversity of contexts with the richness of personal experiences. Each account contributes unique nuances while also forming part of a collective vision that helps to understand how migration, racism, and education intersect across different settings, revealing both the barriers and the strategies of inclusion that emerge from the everyday lives of educational communities.

3. Case Presentations and Book Structure

The studies presented in this book span different countries and educational contexts, illustrating how migration and education policies shape the lives of people, and how strategies of resistance and belonging emerge in diverse settings. The book is organised into four chapters, each offering a specific perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by students, educators, and communities, highlighting both barriers and inclusive practices.

In the first chapter, Colette Daiute, Dante Salto, Sham Habteselasse, and Madison Parola analyse the DACA programme (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) in the United States. This policy, which initially received broad social and political support, quickly became a contested arena that hindered progress towards greater justice for people who have lived in the U.S. for their entire lives. The chapter examines how different government actors use public discourse—both explicitly and implicitly—to obstruct its effective implementation, while the voices of higher education professionals highlight tensions and strategies they employ in their daily work with undocumented students. Dynamic narrative theory is employed as a framework to invite and interpret these accounts, understood as social, cultural, and political tools through which meanings are created and contested.

The second chapter is set in Uruguay and explores the experiences of Dominican girls and adolescents in Montevideo. Mónica Da Silva, Lucía Martín, and Mauricio Fuentes examine how this group navigates multiple challenges linked to gender, age, racism, and legal status, highlighting the intersection of various forms of inequality in their daily lives. Many of these young people migrate

without their parents and rely on family and community networks that support their projects through remittances and reunification processes. The chapter also underscores the role of religious institutions as supportive spaces in a country with a strong secular tradition, and it shows how these young women develop strategies and forms of belonging that allow them to participate and project their futures despite the barriers they face.

The third chapter takes us to Brazil, where Lilian Ucker Perotto analyses the relationship between migration and education in the state of Goiás. The focus is on Youth and Adult Education (EJA), a key space for promoting inclusion and equity, which illustrates how migrant students are able to integrate into the public education system. The analysis also addresses the effects of the pandemic, which deepened social inequalities but simultaneously highlighted the role of schools as spaces of care and support. The students' own voices reflect generally positive experiences in the school environment, although significant challenges remain, such as high dropout rates. The chapter also identifies initiatives aimed at fostering integration and support for migrant students within the Brazilian educational system.

The fourth and final chapter is set in Spain and addresses early school leaving among racialised and minoritised migrant youth. Adriana Ornellas, Ines Martins and Amalia Creus focus their study on Second Chance Schools, with particular attention to *El Llindar* in Barcelona, where vocational training, personalised support, and emotional guidance are combined to facilitate educational reintegration. The chapter examines the mechanisms of exclusion that increase the vulnerability of these students and demonstrates how pedagogical practices based on care and inclusion can foster fairer educational trajectories. Its contribution is articulated through findings and recommendations aimed at transforming educational policies and practices to reduce early school-leaving and promote greater equity.

Viewed through a transnational lens, these four cases make it clear that inequalities are not static: while many barriers and forms of exclusion have deep historical roots, their intensity and manifestations vary according to social, political, and cultural contexts. The experiences of migrants interact with structures of power and everyday practices of care, support, and resistance. These cases also serve as a reminder of the ongoing importance

of research on migration and education. Inequity affecting migrant populations persists, but its forms and scope are continually evolving. Understanding these inequalities in all their complexity and fluidity is essential for making barriers visible, recognising achievements, and guiding more equitable educational policies and practices.

Readers are now invited to engage with the stories, challenges, and strategies that compose this book. Our hope is that they inspire reflection on how we might imagine and build fairer and more inclusive societies, where education serves as a genuine space for opportunity and social transformation.

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Contested Policies Around Uncontested Immigration Relief in the United States

COLETTE DAIUTE, DANTE J. SALTO, SHAM HABTESELASSE, MADISON PAROLA

1. Introduction: Americans since Childhood, Excluded Indefinitely

Reflecting on migration, Edward Said, a scholar of decolonial theory, wrote that immigrants, along with other minorities, “constitute a real alternative to the state” (Said, 1993, p. 326). The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy and practice (2012–2024) is a case study that reveals the exclusion of a deserving group of young Americans destined to constitute an alternative to the state. This case study, along with other research on migrants’ state of liminality (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012), takes up Said’s observation. While not acknowledged as an alternative state, lifelong residents in locations worldwide remain in legal limbo even as they participate in employment (earning money to support themselves, contributing to the economy, and paying taxes), education (paying tuition), and social networks (raising children, helping neighbours) that benefit the state. Although lacking the power to vote or hold political office, increasing generations of immigrants have been forced to live as alternatives to citizens, despite their obvious interactions with and benefits to those excluding them. Undocumented immigrants, including an estimated 11,000,000 in the United States alone, are a major group living in spite of the state, if not as an alternative to the state.

Drawing from an analysis and findings of a decade-long case study of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policies and narratives of civil society actors working with DACA-eligible youth (Daiute & Kreniske, 2015; Salto et al., submitted), this chapter presents the sociopolitical context, a sum-

mary of our theory-based methodology, and findings revealing dynamics of change in stasis that allow inequalities for the DACA group. We focus herein on how higher education professionals, in particular, narrate with and on behalf of undocumented and immigrant students to create functioning alternatives for meaningful participation amidst stalled justice. We explain how those professionals' narratives interact with policy statements that have caused this stalling. Although not the first group of children brought to the United States without papers—official entry permission—the DACA generation was granted relief from deportation by a 2012 Obama administration memorandum, identifying them as arriving in the U.S. before age 16, attending school or participating in some other way, free from a criminal record, and applying between ages 18 and 30 (as well as other stipulations).

The DACA generation includes an estimated two million eligible individuals, but probably more, since declaring oneself undocumented was a risk even during the most positive period of the policy. We refer to those qualifying as DACA-eligible. The DACA-mented group includes 800,000 who applied for and were granted relief from deportation and other benefits, including clearance for employment, the option to apply for a driver's licence, and other benefits depending on state policies. Because a federal judge blocked the government from approving new DACA applications in 2021 while allowing renewals, the DACA-denied group includes people still qualifying and those whose applications had been rejected. What is so striking about this story is that opinion polls and public statements indicate that the American public and politicians of all parties agree that these so-called "Dreamers" are functionally Americans (Gallup 2018; Krogstad, 2020).

"...They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper..." President Barack Obama, 15 June 2012.

"I love these [Dreamer] kids... And they're in never-never land because they don't know what's going to happen." President Donald Trump, 5 September 2017.

"Dreamers are part of the fabric of this nation. They serve on the front lines of the pandemic response... They've only ever known America as their home." President Joe Biden, 24 August 2022.

Because this DACA group constitutes an American generation, they deserve official recognition so that they can live their lives openly—working, playing, creating families, and contributing to the improvement of institutions as well as to their own lives. We will see how policy has failed these deserving Dreamers. When examined closely, as we discuss in this chapter, policies appear almost whimsical in their twists and turns for the DACA generation, whom politicians of diverse persuasions claim to value.

The policy history from 2012 to 2024 forms the foundation of our account here, with particular emphasis on the perspectives of higher education professionals whose work has navigated that tumultuous period. As interlocutors with the policies, these professionals—like activists in community organisations—have identified circumstances in which possible and impossible strategies could be developed as alternatives to the state across a sequence of topsy-turvy measures. Inequalities have widened as government systems have moved slowly—at times, deliberately—stalling or impeding immigration justice. Policies and laws are ostensibly designed to address injustices, yet ongoing social, political, and economic conflicts have left educational institutions and community organisations to mediate between policy/legal frameworks and immigrants themselves.

Although they are not all heroic, civil society organisations often play a central role, not only in addressing injustices but also in filling the gaps left by failed policies, sometimes providing leadership and innovation.

We draw on perspectives from two sites across the United States, examining the role of the DACA policy in limiting educational opportunities despite its initial intention to enhance equity. After summarising relevant scholarship on DACA, we describe immigration as a system of dialogic interactions among diverse policy and practice actors who implement, defy, and transform policy over time. Consistent with this view, our research design and analyses foregrounded the values enacted by policymakers in pivotal documents and by higher education professionals in their narratives, to illustrate the complexity within, across, and around DACA policy practice over the DACA decade. The aim of this study was to examine how such interactions allow structural injustices to persist, yet also create opportunities for practical action by those acting in spite of the state.

2. Case Context: Institutionalized Injustice

DACA – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – is a 2012 federal policy established as a temporary fix for children brought to the U.S. illegally before age 16. After a cautious uptake by hundreds of thousands of young people, whom the policy allowed to earn a driver’s licence, official employment, in-state tuition (in some states), and relief from deportation. After several unsuccessful attempts to dismantle DACA, a Texas federal court declared it unlawful in 2021, permitting current DACA recipients to renew their status but barring new applications. Federal policy moved from protecting eligible immigrant youth to putting them at risk of being deported.

In spite of numerous requirements and concerns, approximately 800,000 individuals between the ages of 16 and 30 had become DACA-mented before the Trump Administration attempted to end the policy in 2017, sending many “back into the shadows” because of renewed fears of deportation, detention, and other abuses. While providing certain benefits, DACA compromised the lives of children and families, was never a path to citizenship, and presented other challenges, so numerous advocacy organisations stepped up to support actual and potential DACA recipients.

Although from different countries, DACA-eligible youth share origins in lower-income families who did not have official status in the U.S. and lacked certain other resources that could have smoothed the pathway to citizenship (KFF, 2025). Undocumented immigrants are also often people of colour fleeing situations of violence, poverty, and climate change.

Advocates like student services professionals, legal aids, and lawyers have unique mediating positions in the contentious 21st century U.S. immigration crisis, yet little is known about their experiences, knowledge, dilemmas, and suggestions for improved practices and policies. This research, thus, complements reports of the psychosocial climate among and around DACA-mented and DACA-eligible youth, by focusing on the insights of people working with them. These educators, community organisers, and legal volunteers have mediated shifts in DACA (and other policies) to the benefit of society as well as to the individuals involved.

The United States Congress has failed to pass immigration policy for millions of people currently living productively although at

great disadvantage, as well as for some groups of asylum-seekers. The need for executive action became obvious to and with the willingness of President Obama in the impasse of congressional immigration. Congress is the only body that can pass immigration legislation, yet new and hardening barriers emerged against immigration in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on American buildings and institutions. That most of those responsible for the 9/11 attacks were in the U.S. on tourist or business visas ushered in an era of blaming immigrants for violence and other problems, in part reified in government infrastructure with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS was initially designed to control terrorism and eventually extended to implement DACA and other policies. That executive orders, like DACA, become political fodder is precisely because they are enacted in the face of legislative failure. Although executive orders have enforcement implications, they are not law and are thus subjected to different spheres of judgement and politics.

When individuals fall between policies, non-governmental organisations play a role in interpreting and implementing solutions. DHS, with a range of related organisations such as the Department of Transportation, is involved in surveillance, further complicating temporary immigration policies like DACA by implying suspicion compared to more traditional routes through the Office of Refugee Resettlement in Health and Human Services (which is also not free from criticism). Educational and community organisations typically include professionals and volunteers motivated to act with and on behalf of those suffering injustice with whom they have direct contact. Those organisations have official roles in society, like managing language learning, legal instruction, and general education, and financial resources provided across federal, state, local, and private sectors. For DACA youth in particular, educational, civic, and/or even military participation is required, even though participants are not always free of surveillance or control. Professionals in higher education, such as Deans of Students, Offices for International Students, immigrant student services, and previously created Offices of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion interact on the front lines of policy and lives. Community organisations and university legal clinics provide legal services and have information about human rights, thereby also engaging them in the fray of policy chaos.

Many of these advocates had themselves experienced difficulties and discrimination as immigrants and had been blocked from obtaining documentation for various reasons. Higher education professionals act as front-line mediators, operating largely outside the spotlight of most research, journalism, and justice systems, functioning as what some might describe as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). While this notion of the local bureaucrat moves beyond the simple binary of the powerful versus the powerless, it minimizes the role of the policy mediator. Instead, we consider whether and how practitioners interact within the policy system strategically (knowing about it, finding loopholes within, or identifying collaborative bridges to resources), not only outside it. Thus, we understand practical work as relational, innovative, and sometimes successfully transformational, filling gaps left by policy histories. Our research therefore personifies practitioners in dynamic interaction with policymakers. Although those interactions may not take place in the same room or on Zoom, they occur through their discourses and, in particular, the values embedded in their policy documents and experiential narratives. We, as researchers, include ourselves as interlocutors in this policy system, since our questions, analyses, and explanations form part of the ongoing conversation—in this case, about DACA as a tool for social justice.

Scholarly research has identified structural and educational issues relevant to the insecurities faced by DACA-mented and DACA-eligible youth during the decade spanning its inception in 2012 to the final rule in 2022. As noted in our brief review below, previous research has tended to focus on individual stakeholders, such as undocumented immigrants and other vulnerable groups affected by policy. Following the Trump administration's rescission, research on the policies themselves and other stakeholders, including university presidents and teachers, has increased. Scholars examining DACA policymaking have offered concepts to explain the process over this tumultuous decade.

Notable among these interpretations of DACA policy is the concept of a "multi-jurisdictional patchwork", whereby "the federal rules do not require coordination among policymaking bodies, such as at State and Municipal levels, meaning immigration enforcement is vulnerable to cross-jurisdictional conflict and overlap" (Varsanyi et al., 2011, p. 139). These scholars describe how

policies implemented differently across levels of government produce “a kind of no-policy policy,” where protections and enforcement come into conflict.

Such a patchwork allows what other scholars have described as “tectonic incorporation”, in which immigrants “navigate political and institutional structures”, moving unpredictably around them and shifting them toward and/or away from resources and relief from deportation (Silver, 2018, p. 11). This is “a process by which immigrants who have acquired social and economic gains experience a reversal of these gains, resulting in downward mobility and intensified racialisation as stigmatised minorities” (Jones, 2019, p. 1003). These shifts alter attitudes towards immigrants alongside their loss of rights and opportunities.

Legal service providers and their non-profit collaborators in the Greater Houston, New York City, and San Francisco Bay areas have explored how local contexts shaped the immigrant support process, especially during periods of uncertainty at the start of the 21st century (Gleeson & de Graauw, 2023). Researchers identified three different models across local demographic, political, and civic contexts. Immigration issues were mediated by resource-intensive one-on-one consultations assessing the risk of applying for DACA or other forms of relief near Houston, Texas, where migration is more contested than in the other metro areas. In contrast, large-scale workshops for DACA were more prominent around the New York area, which has been declared a sanctuary city protecting immigrants during different periods of political attack (Gleeson & de Graauw, 2023).

Inequities related to DACA were also revealed in an analysis of 44 *amici curiae* briefs submitted to the courts. The study identified “a colour-evasive narrative that failed to account for the complexities of the lives of recipients, emphasised the benefits they brought to the country and others (e.g., monetary), and decentered the recipients’ needs and experiences” (Muniz et al., 2023, p. 297). A critical discourse analysis of letters sent to the government by 80 university presidents during the Trump administration found that, overall, the presidents communicated benevolent intentions but perpetuated expectations that students had to earn their place. This pressure led students to overextend themselves, such as by enrolling in too many classes, internships, and employment, resulting in stress and burnout (Andrade & Lundberg, 2022).

Such prior research indicates that strategies intended to be helpful can ultimately marginalise already marginalised populations. However, it also suggests the need for analyses that adopt a broader perspective across stakeholders in the policy system.

Towards that end, we developed and implemented a research model focusing on interactions among diverse actors (Daiute, 2014). The analysis concentrated on expressive dynamics within and across the four major DACA policy statements, in relation to narratives by higher education professionals grappling with the problematic dynamics of policy reversals and stagnation. This approach assumes that policies are embedded within broader sociopolitical discourses and thus requires analysis of interacting stakeholder discourses (Daiute, 2014; Daiute et al., 2017; Daiute et al., 2020). This understanding of dynamic, interacting power relations is consistent with theories of technologies of governmentality (Foucault, 1988), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1998), and sociocultural developmental and literary theories (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978), as expanded and implemented through dynamic narrative inquiry. It conceives policy as a multi-directional interactive process, rather than a one-way flow of oppression from policy to practice or resistance from practice to policy.

Our guiding research question is: How do DACA policies interact with one another dialogically, with values that may be shared, conflicting, and changing? In particular, how do some higher education professionals navigate the policy twists and turns? And what impact do those interactions across the system have on resolution for the DACA generation?

3. Case Discussion: Navigating Inequity in Policies and Personal Stories

This discussion arises from dynamic narrative theory and methodology, which hold that expressive media—including policies and personal narratives—are activities interacting in life, making sense of life, and enacting change (Daiute, 2014). The Trinidadian-born Canadian poet laureate, Dionne Brand, expressed this idea poignantly in an anecdote related to displacement: “A young Turkish man asks a question about writing: When you start writing because it hurts so much, do you write about racism? I try to

tell him you don't write about racism, you write about life. It is life you must write about. It is life you must insist on" (Brand, 2001, p. 82). Although different genres, policies and personal narratives address life struggles of exclusion and inclusion that are heightened and dangerous in the twenty-first century.

This case discussion highlights a critical analysis of explicit dialogue among diverse government actors to illustrate just how they manage to thwart DACA justice, even though it was a popular initiative across all political spectrums. Also in play are the more implicit interactions of higher education professionals narrating their experience dealing with this policy "hot potato". In addition to exposing policy stalemate, our discussion shows how professionals in practice can enact justice despite stalemates.

Dynamic storytelling inquiry is a theoretical and methodological framework emphasising the interactive nature of narrating as a social, cultural, and political tool and meaning-making process (Daiute, 2014). This methodology posits the mediation of collectives, such as education and community organisations, with individuals and groups subject to discrimination, exclusion, and injustice. Much qualitative research involves interviews focusing on what people say *about* social issues, rather than *how* social relations enact exclusions, resistances, and transformations in discourse—such as with narratives, laws, curricula, community practices, religious texts, and other verbal or visual activities. Identifying interactions like echoing, distancing/rejecting, and transforming knowledge and intention is crucial because some of the most important beliefs and constructions are assumed, implied, and forcefully silent (Billig, 1995). Two decades of dynamic storytelling research have developed and implemented flexible theory-based methodologies with research designs sampling diverse interlocutors around an issue of interest within socio-culturally relevant activities, applying analyses to identify interactions across those interlocutors (Benevento, 2022; Daiute, 2014; Daiute, Stern, & Leliutu-Weinberger, 2003; Fante & Daiute, 2024; Jovic, 2018; Daiute, Kovacs-Cerovic, Micic, Sullu, & Vracar, 2020; Kreniske, 2016; Love, 2023; Zorkic et al., 2021; others).

3.1. Animating the DACA Policy – Practice Dialogue

Shifting to the premise that policy is dialogic, we implement dynamic storytelling by highlighting the perspectives of mediators amid a diverse range of relevant actors.

Data sources include discourses from diverse interlocutors around DACA, such as the original DACA Memorandum of 2012, the 2017 Rescission Memorandum, the Supreme Court Decision (2020), and the 2022 Final Rule, to highlight the values enacted in those documents and, thus, the meaning of belonging and exclusion, as well as the values of those who act on behalf of DACA students in their charge across several universities (in the Midwest and Northeast).

We analyse those discourses as relational: for example, the opening move is the DACA policy, a rescission is a response to the initial policy, an opinion by the Supreme Court addresses the conflict between the first two interlocutors, and a final action in compliance with the Court returns to some of the premises of the original DACA presentation. Higher education professionals mediate between policies, especially with rapid changes such as those across the history of DACA's implementation over a decade.

The work of these pivotal participants linking policies and policy subjects highlights the systemic dynamics in everyday practice. We interviewed four higher education professionals who interact with DACA-mented and undocumented students and, occasionally, with students facing other challenges. Sampling includes a director of immigrant student services at a public university in the Northeast, a Dean of Students at a private university in the Northeast and two directors of advocacy centres at public and private universities in the Midwest. Consistent with dynamic narrative inquiry, the interview design invited participants to share experiences in their work with students during the DACA decade. Among other experiences, participants narrated a positive and a negative experience in their roles. Values analysis provides a means of identifying practical functions across these diverse genres (expressive media).

3.2. Values Analysis Linking Diverse Discourses

Values analysis is especially relevant for discourses enacting contentious issues, such as policies that cause deportation to violent circumstances people had to flee for their lives, and the narratives of experiences of professionals helping people save their lives in their new homelands (Daiute, 2014). While this case study is not generalisable to other situations, our approach advances policy studies into the interpersonal realm of dialogue, revealing consequential rhetorical moves that allow interruptions of justice, thereby leaving the burden of leadership to civil society. Political expression, like artistic communication, is akin to interpersonal dialogue in its purposeful expression with/to actual and imagined others (audiences) and the historical, spatial, and ideological context (Bakhtin, 1986). While the roles and typical genres of such diverse actors differ, considering their interactions leads to new understandings and solutions. With this analysis across the DACA policy system, we extend a social science methodology used previously in studies of violence prevention curriculum interventions, teacher professional development for integrative education, and refugee resettlement. This systems design is a concrete way to advance beyond studying social change policy in terms of binaries like powerful versus powerless actors or narratives and counter-narratives.

Values analysis is a bottom-up process that acknowledges both implicit and explicit meanings in the manner of expression (Daiute, 2014). This process pays close attention to the speaker's or writer's intentions, as we do in everyday communication (Austin, 1962; Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Wittgenstein, 1958). When conducting values analysis, we read or listen to every sentence within a narrative, letter, policy document, social media post, or other form of communication, asking, *"Why was this person or group (speaker/author) saying this at this time and not something else?"* (Daiute, 2014, p. 85). This reflects what we do in everyday interactions—seeking to understand the intentions behind what a friend, teacher, family member, or other interlocutor means, and anticipating an appropriate response (or not).

The values guiding speaker or writer expressions are embedded in the linguistic and para-linguistic details of sentences, in the implications between the lines, and in references to surrounding

contexts. Such details, observable in the cultural expressiveness and spontaneity of everyday communication, are equally relevant in research that engages with natural language as it occurs within institutional roles. In brief, values analysis accounts for both *how* people express meaning and the literal meanings of their words.

Our values analysis process involved all four authors reading the selected policy documents and repeatedly listening to and reading the interview transcripts to familiarise ourselves with the overall meanings. We then parsed the transcripts into sentences, or thought units (t-units), to analyse the pragmatic purpose of each sentence, which we subsequently considered in relation to patterns across the entire document (policy text, narrative segment of an interview, etc.). This approach honours the intentions of the speakers or writers in each proposition, reflecting how the grammatical concept of a sentence, as an active proposition of thought, emerges within each culture and language, while also attending to complexity both within and across expressions.

For example, we examined the following sentence from the Final Rule by asking, “Why did the authors say this, and not something else, at this point?” Like philosophers and sociolinguists who have long noted this pragmatic approach to everyday interactions, we recognise that the meaning of a sentence and larger discourse is often implied through the manner of expression—the composition of words, phrases, and gaps that collectively confer coherent meaning upon individual words.

Excerpt from the DACA Final Rule, 2022:

“Deferred action is a longstanding practice by which DHS and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) have exercised their discretion to forbear from or assign lower priority to removal action in certain cases for humanitarian reasons, for reasons of administrative convenience, or on the basis of other reasonable considerations involving the exercise of prosecutorial discretion”.

This long and somewhat cumbersome sentence includes a subject—Deferred Action—the policy in question as established—longstanding practice—by two governmental organisations—DHS and INS—who have previously acknowledged that living peacefully in our country—discretion to forbear from or assign priority for removal action for certain humanitarian reasons—also highlighting that mere administrative convenience would not override

such reasoned prior judgements. This expressive foregrounding of the deferred action, its authoritative history, and lack of an embedded counter-argument emphasises the importance of forbearance, allowing people who have lived in and contributed to the country to remain, as per the original policy.

The specific value “Legal actors’ role/emphasis on forbearance is important” combines with other specific values that emerged in our analysis to enact a major value: “the Human scale of focus is important”.

We followed a similarly close reading of the following excerpt from a higher education professional’s narrative about negative experiences in their role:

“The issue with that is that because it’s a federal form, I cannot guarantee them that it will not hurt their undocumented parents in any way.”

We understood the specific communicative import of that statement as “understanding how policy affects people’s lives is important” which grouped with other specific values focused on official acts in education that highlight that the “human scale of focus is important”.

This process was repeated with successive documents until the team achieved 80% agreement, analysing each new document. After all the sentences in all the expressions were analysed, one team member examined consistency within the value categories, re-assigned as necessary for tighter agreement within values, consolidated any values with very few exemplars, and grouped values with similar expressive meaning.

The analysis yielded eleven major policy value groups, accounting for the expressions across all the policy documents and higher education professionals’ narratives. A subsequent step was to observe patterns of expression, how they addressed the research questions, and connected with theory. After identifying value categories and exemplars qualitatively, frequencies were helpful tools for observing patterns, considering how values presented across policy stakeholders, including similarities, differences, conflicts, and gaps.

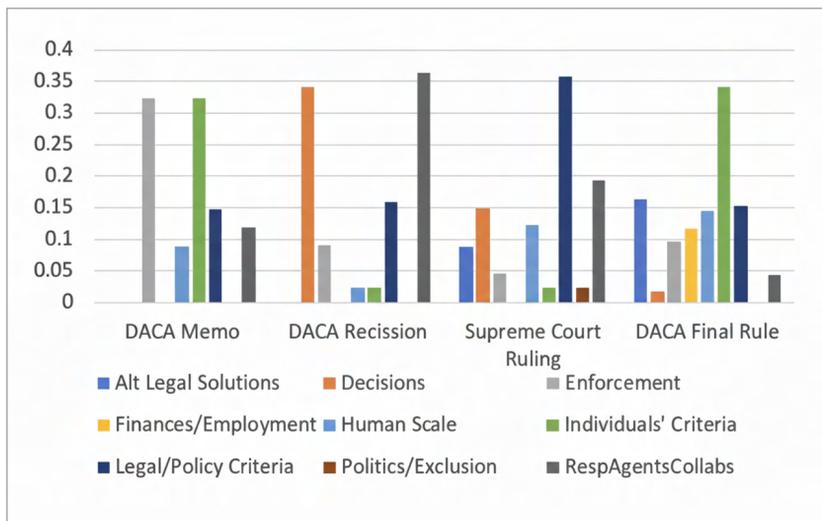
4. What Did We “Hear” in the DACA Policy Dialogue?

Our analysis indicates a process of DACA policymaking, unmaking, and restoring legacy. The values enacted in the 2012 DACA Memo differed dramatically from those in the 2017 DACA Recission, the Supreme Court ruling of 2020, and the Final Rule in 2022. Each policy statement introduces a combination of values—a value orientation—into the DACA policy dialogue over the decade. Each policy expresses a different, complex action relevant to deferred action for undocumented child arrivals.

Figure 1 presents the value patterns across the four major DACA policy positions. The figure shows the types and frequencies of values identified in our sentence-by-sentence reading of the documents as interlocutors ourselves, asking, as described above, about the pragmatic function of each. The combination of values presented for each policy illustrates the complexity and uniqueness of the position—a value orientation.

Descriptions of these nuanced value orientations reveal how each DACA-related policy statement functions as a rhetorical strategy, acting as if in call-and-response to the previous policy, to extant time-space circumstances, and, in some cases, to anticipated future responses.

Figure 1. Values Pattern Differently across the 4 DACA Policies



The DACA decade began with a memorandum from the then Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano. We describe the discursive move underpinning this policy as “Acknowledging DACA Americans while Narrowing the Field of Deportation Relief”. This Obama administration policy can be read as strategically situated in the context of prior failed attempts, even for immigrants who were too young to have committed unlawful entry into the United States.

While it represented a breakthrough in terms of immediate implementation for those who applied, the emphasis on enforcement alongside entitlement may seem surprising, as does the relatively muted reference to the humanity of these young people. Many, for instance, only discovered they were undocumented when applying for federal financial aid to attend college. This complex pattern is illustrated in the following excerpt from the memorandum (bold phrases indicate the value categories):

“The following criteria should be satisfied before an individual is considered for an exercise of prosecutorial discretion [from deportation, sic] (**Exercising federal discretion**) pursuant to this memorandum:-came to the United States under the age of sixteen; (**Individual criteria**) - has continuously resided in the United States for a least five years preceding the date of this memorandum and is present in the United States on the date of this memorandum; (**Individual criteria**) -is currently in school, has graduated from high school, has obtained a general education development certificate; (**Individual criteria**) -or is an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; (**Individual criteria**) -has not been convicted of a felony offense, a significant misdemeanor offense, multiple misdemeanor offenses, or otherwise poses a threat to national security or public safety; (**Individual criteria**) -and is not above the age of thirty. (**Individual criteria**). Our Nation’s immigration laws must be enforced in a strong and sensible manner. (**Enforcement**) (practical enforcement). They are not designed to be blindly enforced without consideration given to the individual circumstances of each case. (**Enforcement**) (enforcement by discretion)”

Although this policy represented an advance for DACA-eligible youth, its implementation created new inequalities and, in some cases, exacerbated existing ones. During the first year, applica-

tions to DACA were relatively few, partly because of the requirement to self-identify as undocumented, which also indirectly revealed information about parents, even if not by name. This sense of separation within families challenged existing support systems; however, over time, families apparently encouraged their youth to apply, and uptake accelerated over the following years, reaching an estimated 800,000.

This division within the undocumented community subsequently prompted the DAPA proposal (Deferred Action for Parents of Childhood Arrivals), which was never implemented. Other inequities associated with DACA included the fact that the policy did not constitute a step towards citizenship. Moreover, some DACA benefits, such as obtaining a driving licence—a widely accepted form of identification—differ by state. Individuals with DACA status are eligible for a driving licence in only 15 states, plus the District of Columbia. Consequently, what DACA leaves to the states—driver’s licence administration and in-state tuition—varies considerably across jurisdictions. These cross-jurisdictional gaps left DACA recipients marginalised in society.

Furthermore, the original DACA policy did not provide access to health insurance, which, aside from certain emergency benefits available to all, perpetuates ongoing inequality in the treatment of otherwise treatable conditions. Structural inequality also persists for DACA recipients whose children were born in the U.S.—and are therefore citizens—creating within-family distinctions that still lack legal remedy. A major inequity of the DACA policy, as with other executive orders, is that it remains subject to rescission by a subsequent presidential administration, as occurred a year after Trump was elected.

Rather than the persuasive mix of values reflected in the Obama administration memorandum, the Trump administration responded with a rescission in 2017. The rhetorical strategy of this executive memorandum can be described as *Claiming Absolute Power while Shifting Authority*. Evidence of this pattern is seen in the relatively equivalent emphasis on the importance of enacting decisions and charging other responsible agents to act. The rescission emphasised legal and policy criteria to roughly the same extent as the original order, enforcement considerably less, and attention to human treatment and individual criteria minimally.

The excerpt below illustrates this value orientation.

“Rescission of the June 15, 2012 DACA Memorandum: Taking into consideration the Supreme Court’s and the Fifth Circuit’s rulings in the ongoing litigation, and the September 4, 2017 letter from the Attorney General, it is clear that the June 15, 2012 DACA program should be terminated. **(Responsible Agents/Collaborations)**. In the exercise of my authority in establishing national immigration policies and priorities, except for the purposes explicitly identified below, I hereby rescind the June 15, 2012 memorandum. **(Legal/Policy Criteria)**. Recognizing the complexities associated with winding down the program, the Department will provide a limited window in which it will adjudicate certain requests for DACA and associated applications meeting certain parameters specified below. **(Decisions)**. Accordingly, effective immediately, the Department: Will adjudicate—on an individual, case-by-case basis—properly filed pending DACA initial requests and associated applications for Employment Authorization Documents that have been accepted by the Department as of the date of this memorandum. **(Decisions)**. Will reject all DACA initial requests and associated applications for Employment Authorization Documents filed after the date of this memorandum. **(Decisions)**. Documents from current beneficiaries that have been accepted by the Department as of the date of this memorandum, and from current beneficiaries whose benefits will expire between the date of this memorandum and March 5, 2018 that have been accepted by the Department as of October 5, 2017. **(Decisions)**. Will reject all DACA renewal requests and associated applications for Employment Authorization Documents filed outside the parameters specified above. **(Decisions)**.”

Rescinding DACA blatantly exacerbated inequities. DACA-mented youth were put at risk, by a combination of factors including uncertainty about whether they would be able to renew their status every two years as originally required, thereby instilling fear, interruption in activities that might expose them (such as attending college where raids were reported), and other issues. The renewal process is, moreover, cumbersome and apparently threatening, given uncertainties about the policies and potential deportation when Donald Trump was elected in November 2024. DACA-eligible youth who may have recently learned of the policy, were stopped in the midst of applying or denied the option, after potential benefits had become almost-realities.

The discursive action of the 2020 Supreme Court Decision on the case brought by the Department of Homeland Security et al. v. Regents of the University of California et al. Use legal technicalities to refrain from deciding. Evidence of this complex pattern is the overwhelming importance of **Legal/Policy Criteria** followed by **Responsible Agents/Collaborations**, sharing reasoning of its **Decisions** with roughly equivalent value at the **Human scale**, suggesting **Alternative Legal Criteria/Challenges** with some attention to Enforcement and Individuals' criteria."

The following excerpt illustrates this pattern of values.

"We do not decide whether DACA or its rescission are sound policies. **(Supreme Court Reasoning)** "The wisdom" of those decisions "is none of our concern." *Chenery II*, 332 U. S., at 207. **(Supreme Court Reasoning)** We address only whether the agency complied with the procedural requirement that it provide a reasoned explanation for its action. **(Agency elaboration/explanation of reasoning)** Here the agency failed to consider the conspicuous issues of whether to retain forbearance and what if anything to do about the hardship to DACA recipients. **(Legal actors forbearance)** That dual failure raises doubts about whether the agency appreciated the scope of its discretion or exercised that discretion in a reasonable manner. **(DACA recipients' reliance)** The appropriate recourse is therefore to remand to DHS so that it may consider the problem anew. **(Supreme Court Reasoning)** The judgment in *NAACP*, No. 18-588, is affirmed.⁷ Decision The judgment in *Regents*, No. 18-587, is vacated in part and re-versed in part. **(Decision)** And in *Batalla Vidal*, No. 18-589, the February 13, 2018 order granting respondents' motion for a preliminary injunction is vacated, the November 9, 2017 order partially denying the Government's motion to dismiss is affirmed in part, and the March 29, 2018 order partially denying the balance of the Government's motion to dismiss is reversed in part. **(Decision)** All three cases are remanded for further proceedings consistent with this opinion. ... Our affirmation of the *NAACP* order vacating the rescission makes it unnecessary to examine the propriety of the nationwide scope of the injunctions issued by the District Courts in *Regents* and *Batalla Vidal*."

The Supreme Court opinion not only reinforced the failure to enshrine DACA rights permanently but also revealed a form of hypocrisy by recognising that DACA recipients—and, by impli-

cation, DACA-eligible individuals—had established lives, livelihoods, families, and futures in the United States. While the opinion acknowledged the need for forbearance in such circumstances, the stronger affirmation of DACA status being referred back to the lower courts highlights the political, rather than justice-oriented, nature of this action.

The discursive action of the Final Rule of 2022 can be characterised as “Emphasising History for Individuals and the Capitalist State”. Evidence of this complex pattern is reflected in the emphasis on Individuals’ Criteria, Human Scale, Alternative Legal Criteria, Responsible Agents, Legal/Policy Criteria, Enforcement, and Decisions.

The excerpt from the Final Rule below illustrates this pattern, with the relevant major value category indicated after each sentence.

“Then-Secretary Napolitano observed that these “young people . . . were brought to this country as children and know only this country as home” and as a general matter “lacked the intent to violate the law.” **(Not expelling productive young people unfamiliar with their birth country)**

She reasoned that limited enforcement resources should not be expended to “remove productive young people to countries where they may not have lived or even speak the language.” **(Not expelling productive young people unfamiliar with their birth country)**. The Napolitano Memorandum also instructs that the individual circumstances of each case must be considered, and that deferred action should be granted only where justified in light of the specific circumstances of each case. **(Considering individual circumstances)** Since 2012, more than 825,000 people have received deferred action under the DACA policy.

The mean year of arrival in the United States for DACA recipients was 2001, **(DACA recipient statistics)** and the average age at arrival was 6 years old. **(DACA recipient statistics)**. In addition, 38 percent of recipients arrived before the age of 5. **(DACA recipient statistics)** For many, this country is the only one they have known as home. **(DACA recipient statistics)** In the 10 years since this policy was announced, DACA recipients have grown into adulthood and built lives for them-

selves and their loved ones in the United States. **(DACA recipients' reliance)** They have gotten married and had U.S. citizen children. **(Building life, family, community in the U.S.)** Over 250,000 children have been born in the United States with at least one parent who is a DACA recipient, **(Building life, family, community in the U.S.)** and about 1.5 million people in the United States share a home with a DACA recipient. **(Building life, family, community in the U.S.)** DACA recipients have obtained driver's licenses and credit cards, bought cars, and opened bank accounts. **(Participating in economic, education and civic institutions)**

In reliance on DACA, its recipients have enrolled in degree programs, started businesses, obtained professional licenses, and purchased homes **(DACA recipients' reliance).**"

The Final Rule exacerbated inequality in several ways. Notably, it cemented the definitive split between those already DACA recipients and the potentially close to one million others who would qualify in the same manner, particularly regarding the opportunities available to establish their lives in the United States. The Biden administration had since proposed measures for the spouses of U.S. citizens, but many—likely millions—of new childhood arrivals, who have known only the United States as their home, remain in limbo, excluded by policy and, even more so, by law.

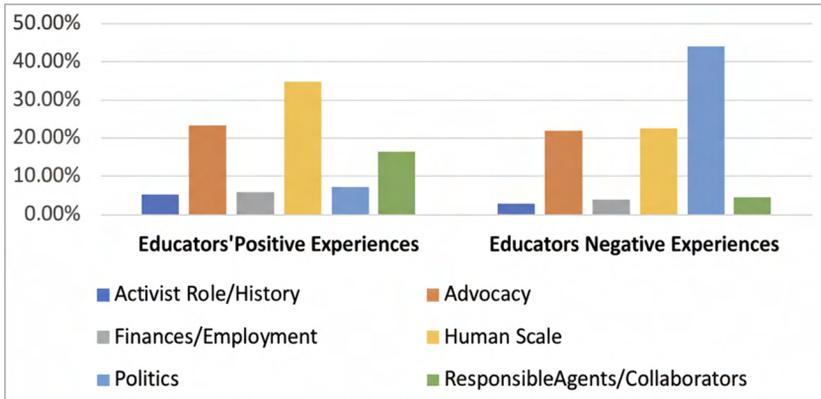
5. How Did Higher Education Professionals Mediate Between Policy Shifts and Students?

Higher education professionals in our study assumed leadership roles within the chaos of a jurisdictional patchwork (Varsanyi et al., 2011) by improvising within the resources, frameworks, and flexibilities of their institutions. Narratives of positive experiences in their current professional roles highlight advocacy strategies that are sensitive to students' life circumstances, as well as the potential for collaboration with other offices to support students in achieving their academic goals.

These narratives of both positive and negative experiences reflect the complex interactions these professionals have with policies that, as described above, changed dramatically every few

years. Values analysis of higher education professionals' accounts of positive experiences with DACA recipients, undocumented students, and immigrant students emphasised their advocacy strategies and the specific consequences, needs, and goals of the students they support.

Figure 2. Higher Education Professionals' Experience Narratives



The discursive strategy emerging from the values analysis of higher education professionals' narratives of positive experiences can be summarised as *Enacting Strategy Collaboratively to Support Students' Goals*. Evidence of this strategy, as illustrated in Figure 2, includes an emphasis on Advocacy (Advocacy Leadership – 30.37%), Human Scale (34.81%), appeals to other Responsible Agents/Collaborations (16.30%), and the promotion of positive Decisions for students (15.56%).

“We also have an undocumented student who didn't know that they were undocumented because they have always worked. **(Human scale)**. They didn't realize that working from the state that they came from is different from working here. **(Politics)**. They applied for a job on campus and were then offered the job. **(Humane treatment)**. While doing the paperwork they couldn't complete it and were then sent to the [student support office]. **(Responsible Agents/Collaborations)**. As I was working with the student, I had to inform the student that they were undocumented **(Advocacy)** and that because they were undocumented, they could not work. **(Politics)**. The student had been relying on that job because one of the benefits of that

position was free housing for the summer. (**Human scale**). Due to personal reasons, that I cannot disclose, they could not return home, (**Humane scale**). It was not safe for them to do so. (**Human scale**). They were stuck (**Humane treatment**) and I had 48 hours to help the student figure out where they were going to live for the summer before the dorms closed. (**Advocacy-Means**). They were also not enrolled for the summer and therefore they were not eligible for the [U01] emergency grant (**Finances**). Additionally, because they are undocumented, there are several services/funding that cannot be used to support them. (**Politics**). So, what I did was, I worked with a team of folks from campus. (**Responsible Agents/Collaborations**)”

Examining the value category *Advocacy* provides additional insights into strategies for enlisting resources—particularly influential individuals within and around the university—to support and encourage the self-determination of both collective and individual immigrant students, and to identify alternatives to legal participation that advance immigrant student equity. The quality of these values is reflected in the following narrative sequences:

“For a while, I had been trying to establish a dreamer scholarship to kind of help supplement some of the struggles the students are experiencing...”

“I highlighted and iterated how important it was for every campus to have a centre [for immigrant students].”

“Bringing to life the challenge that many faculty and administrators do not understand the circumstances of immigrant students, one person whose position includes working with immigrant students said ‘I can think of an example fitting in that sense of like kind of pushing folks [to shift their mindset and their practices in the space].’”

“I ended up doing a lot of translation work for the school and bringing interpreters to parent-teacher conferences.”

“And then I became aware that there’s a way for students to get fellowships that aren’t internships and they’re not work based, but they’re experiential.”

"I think we had great speakers that were like former graduates who are undocumented."

"...reminding folks that New York was a sanctuary city, announcing me as a liaison, pulling together materials for faculty and staff to better understand what it even means exactly to be DACA versus undocumented and just trying to like raise the awareness mm-hmm."

"... but the one thing I always say is that nobody can take your education away from you [you can] build the capacity for more people who are not just safe but also knowledgeable."

Also notable in the expression of advocacy values is the combined emphasis on "Managing / Thriving While Undocumented", which prominently indicates the Human Scale value. Among the examples in the narrative above are statements emphasising the importance of "managing/thriving while living undocumented" in different ways, such as "I navigated K through 12 education as an undocumented student, So, if you're here, take full advantage while you can, and And I just want you to still have hope in humanity", as well as reflections on how to ensure students continue to feel safe within themselves and in relation to their status.

Another major emphasis on humanising immigrant students comprises small stories illustrating how an individual had progressed through education and, as an advocate for others, offered advice on personal strategies.

This discursive strategy across the narratives of negative experiences can be summarised as "Calling Out Injustice for Students' Humanity with Strategy". Evidence of this value pattern includes an emphasis on Politics (44.07%), followed by Human Treatment (22.60%) and Advocacy (22.03%).

The following excerpt from the negative experience narrative of the same educator who provided the positive experiences illustrates this different set of values.

"...and many of them struggle because a lot of undocumented and DACA-mented students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. **(Politics)**. Even if they're from a friendlier state, they're not eligible [for federal financial aid]. **(Politics)**. Undocumented and DACA-mented students are not eligible for any federal aid across the

country. **(Politics)**. On the state level, depending on which state, they may be able to get some; **(Politics)**. ...we have very, very limited resources here and often to remedy that **(Finances)**. ...we have the textbook scholarship for first gen students **(Finances)** and we often direct them to apply. **(Advocacy)**. I know that it's not a lot, **(Finances)** but every small amount helps. **(Politics)**. We direct them to apply for the [textbook scholarship]. **(Advocacy)**.The [Hispanic student center] also has an emergency grant that's up to \$500 that a student can apply for, **(Finances)**.I believe that it's an unrestricted fund. **(Finances)**. There's also an emergency grant by the Dean of Students that undocumented students can also be eligible for, **(Politics)**. but they have to be enrolled to receive it. **(Politics)**. For a while, I had been trying to establish a dreamer scholarship to kind of help supplement some of the struggles the students are experiencing, **(Advocacy)**, but because of what's going on nationally and within the state, we could not establish any scholarship funds that would be strictly for us or that would deal with race or citizenship status. **(Politics)**. We hit a lot of roadblocks and were not able to establish it. **(Politics)**. We were told that we could find an outside organization who could be willing to host this scholarship, **(Responsible Agents/Collaborations)**."

In contrast to the positive experience narratives, these higher education professionals' narratives of negative experiences in their role offered nuanced insights, such as to political dynamics of bias and systemic exclusion. As other scholars have noted (Brand, 2001; Hall, 2011) and as our previous research has shown (Daiute et al., 2020), displaced and marginalised individuals are more likely to express experiences of discrimination through stories rather than explicitly naming racism.

Illustrating the storied quality of expressing discrimination are several statements that zeroed in on intersectional gender/ethnicity, while not stating those categorical labels explicitly.

"And then what ended up happening was that, and so folks will kind of not taking me seriously in that and will continue to dismiss it."

"My feedback on my evaluation was that I was aggressive in how I advocated for students."

“And so I think folks often like deviated my ex my expertise my intellect, my knowledge to to emotion to passion to these things which aren’t bad...”

Simply being aligned with discriminated people like undocumented or immigrant students also emerges as worthy of narration.

“And I often have to think about that when I’m navigating spaces like how I how I’m being perceived when I, when I enter or when I advocate for for these resources that need to exist.”

Challenges also often emerged as conflicting priorities:

“...but because of what’s going on nationally and within the state, we could not establish any scholarship funds that would be strictly for us or that would deal with race or citizenship status.”

“...and many of them struggle because a lot of undocumented and DACA-mented students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.”

“Even if they’re from a friendlier state, they’re not eligible [for federal financial aid].”

“...even the admissions processes for a lot of these institutions hadn’t really caught up with the reality that there was just a proliferation of hundreds of thousands of these students out there who couldn’t navigate the system.”

“...again with the kind of the phasing out of DACA, we’re seeing more and more students who don’t have access to internships, graduate assistantships, all of those kinds of things.”

In citing these challenges, exclusions, and instances of ignorance within higher education, these advocates took the opportunity to share negative experiences, while simultaneously interweaving their advocacy strategies, as illustrated above.

Previous studies have shown that narrating is relational to circumstances and audiences, and such relational affects and cogni-

tions are less likely to be poignantly expressed in interviews where researchers pose questions about inequities rather than experiences. As noted earlier, our interview design for this study invited stories not essays or abstract reflections.

Consistent with our prior research, which highlights positive and negative experiences as a means of inviting complexity in interviews, workshops, and other interventions in contexts of adversity, cognitive neuroscience confirms that emotional memories “are long-lasting (**durable**) and likely to be retrieved (**accessible**)” (Williams et al., 2022, p. 869), and that positive and negative memories represent “overlapping—but distinctly separable—ways” (Williams et al., *ibid*).

Narratives of positive and negative experiences therefore invite participants to share complex knowledge and perspectives, with negative experiences often being particularly detailed. For this reason, the elicitation of memories broadens the range of contexts considered, including potential audiences as well as specific details.

6. Conclusions

We anchor our conclusion with another scholar whose life work addressed the painful dilemma of “home,” especially in the centuries-long aftermath of slavery as well as in more recent migration. Jamaican-born English scholar Stuart Hall wrote, “There exists no history free from disorder and displacement” (Hall, 2011, p. 92). Our case study, which captures extremely diverse perspectives on the highly disordered interactions surrounding one group of displaced persons, reveals the use of powerful and personal discourses, which we examine as interacting. With this approach, we blur the sharp boundaries between policy and practice, power and pain, and policymaker and policy subject. Evidence from this case of stalled justice illustrates precisely how exclusion can occur even for a widely acknowledged deserving group.

This chapter animates dialogue between policymakers and educators across the DACA decade, revealing strategies of policy and practice over that period. Our presentation of an actual and symbolic dialogic system has yielded specific rhetorical moves with major consequences for the lives of DACA recipients, the nearly

two million individuals denied the opportunity to apply, and the potential for longer-term immigration justice had this policy successfully seeded better frameworks. Analysing policy and practice dialogue through a complex analysis of values expressed within it elevates policies and personal narratives from static positions to dynamic relationships, whereby powerful actors are revealed as fallible and those who deal with those policy statements resourceful and in some cases powerful.

The methodologically unique framing of higher education professionals' narratives of positive experiences as dialogic interactions integral to the policy system revealed their improvisations for leadership within the stalled system: "Enact Strategy Collaboratively to Forward Students' Goals". With the invitation to narrate negative experiences, these higher education professionals offered hard-earned critique: "Call Out Injustice for Students' Humanity and Goals."

For further insights into the infrastructure of leadership in policy stalemates, failures, and threats, we are conducting additional inquiry into how activists in grassroots, non-governmental, and a broader range of higher education settings advocate based on the values they bring to, and/or create within, their leadership roles. We invite others in the growing field of advocacy research, particularly around immigration and other democratic goals, to conduct similar systemic studies, personifying the discourses of those who speak through seemingly depersonalised genres, such as policies. Another follow-up study aims to convene the advocates in our research and beyond to reflect on our findings, allowing implications to emerge directly from their experiences.

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Voices Crossing Borders: Narratives of Dominican Girls and Adolescents about Their Educational Experiences in Uruguay

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1. Introduction: Migrant Childhood and the Right to Education in Uruguay

According to data from the “Report on Migratory Trends in South America” (*Organización Internacional para las Migraciones*, 2017), Uruguay is a country of origin, transit, and destination for international migration. In 2019, the country recorded a 60.9% increase in its migrant population. Academic studies attribute this growth over the past decade mainly to people from the Caribbean and Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (Koolhas, Prieto, & Robaina, 2017). Data from the 2023 Census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023) estimate that 3% of Uruguay’s population is of foreign origin, with the largest migrant groups between 2012 and 2023 being Venezuelans (27%), Argentinians (22%), and Cubans (20%).

The *Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia* (Mobility, Childhood and Family Observatory) (OMIF, 2022), based at the School of Social Sciences of the University of the Republic (Uruguay), reported — using data from the 2019 Continuous Household Survey — a total of 32,411 recent migrants (defined as people born abroad who arrived in Uruguay within the last five years). Of these recent migrants, 25% were girls, boys and adolescents under 17 years of age. Among earlier migrants, this figure was 11% (OMIF, 2022). This forms part of a field of study (Spink, 2007) concerned with migrant childhood and adolescence as subjects whose voices and experiences warrant academic attention and reflection.

With regard to access to education, the International Organisation for Migration (OIM, 2023) noted that in 2020, the *Administración Nacional de Educación Pública* (ANEP, National Public Education Administration) reported 5,755 students enrolled in early childhood, primary and special education who had been born abroad. By 2022, records from the *Sistema de Gestión Unificada de Registros e Información* (GURÍ, Unified Management System of Records and Information) of the *Consejo de Educación Inicial y Primaria* (CEIP, Council for Early Childhood and Primary Education) estimated that 5,929 foreign-born students were enrolled in these levels of education nationwide. It is worth noting that between 2018 and 2020, there was a 21% increase in the enrolment of foreign-born students, while the increase between 2020 and 2022 was only 3%.

Previous research conducted by our team revealed that foreign-born children and adolescents in Montevideo face multiple vulnerabilities during their educational journeys. These include discrimination and racist aggression related to skin colour, accent, place of origin, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, and caregiving arrangements (Da Silva & Martín, 2022, p. 6). Our current research is being carried out by an interdisciplinary team with backgrounds in human mobility. Over the past seven years, we have worked on various projects concerning migrant children and adolescents and the intercultural processes within educational contexts. Our work is informed by our own migration experiences, our professional interest in the subject, and our disciplinary training. We seek to move beyond an androcentric scientific model, recognising the role of emotions in the production of scientific knowledge. We believe it is important to acknowledge the emotional impact that research entails — both for us and for participants — and to allow space for these affects to surface. This has involved embracing transparency (Haraway, 1995), recognising emotions as inherent to the research process and as interpretive resources.

In this context, we chose to focus our fieldwork on girls and adolescent young women of Dominican origin. This decision stems from an assessment of the specific vulnerabilities experienced by this group, and aligns with our aim to produce situated, engaged knowledge — as emphasised in emotionally grounded feminist theory.

The overlapping inequalities faced by Dominican women in Uruguay compel us, as committed researchers, to interrogate these dynamics. This critical approach informs our decision to work specifically with girls and adolescents. Since 2015, most Dominican migrants arriving in Montevideo have needed to obtain a visa, are predominantly of Black African descent, and cite economic reasons as the primary driver of their migration. Their local support networks in Uruguay are often connected to religious institutions — a factor with particular resonance in a secular society and state. Few Dominican children migrate with one or both parents; instead, we see the strategic use of family and community networks to support migration projects, including remittances and family regrouping processes.

As a research team, we have previously undertaken projects in a public school in Montevideo. While the accessibility of this school could be seen as a facilitating factor, we chose not to conduct this study within formal educational institutions attended by Dominican girls and adolescents. This decision was informed by three key considerations: firstly, our commitment to avoid overlapping interventions in the same school where we had already carried out other research projects; secondly, the challenges in securing authorisation to conduct research in middle school settings, especially given the national climate of criticism towards primary and secondary education; and thirdly, our interest in exploring what new insights might emerge when conducting research outside the formal education system. These decisions were guided by an intersectional perspective and what we refer to as “*sentipensar*” — a feeling-thinking approach grounded in reflexivity and emotional awareness in the research process (Haraway, 1995; Harding, 1996; Guber, 2014).

We began our fieldwork by contacting two prominent figures within the Dominican community — both of whom were female evangelical pastors. Their support allowed us to gain deeper insight into the community we aimed to engage with and to connect with a group of Dominican girls and adolescents enrolled in primary and secondary education.

We held several meetings with these pastors, during which we conducted interviews where they described their migration journeys, their perspectives on Dominican childhood and adolescence in Uruguay, ethnic-racial identity, education, and their experienc-

es during the pandemic. They also shared stories of family reunification, language use, and religious and spiritual life.

Building on this relationship, we agreed to carry out a research process with a group of girls and adolescent young women who participated in a church-based programme coordinated by one of the pastors.

2. Case Contextualization: Structural Inequalities and Challenges for Educational Inclusion

Numerous studies have documented the various forms of discrimination, xenophobia, and social exclusion experienced by migrant children as they navigate educational systems around the world (Bruehl, Rigoni, & Armagnague, 2021; Estalayo Bielsa, Miño-Puigcercós, Malinverni, & Rivera-Vargas, 2021; Quezada, Rivera-Vargas, & Fardella Cisternas, 2021). In addition to these findings, the literature also underscores how intersecting systems of oppression—particularly those related to race, gender, social class, and migrants' diverse backgrounds—shape the educational trajectories of immigrant students (hooks, 1994/2021; Lalueza Sazatornil, Zhang-Yu, García-Díaz, Camps-Orfila, & García-Romero, 2019; Pavez-Soto, Villegas, & Ortiz López, 2021).

The COVID-19 crisis has further intensified these challenges, with particularly severe and lasting effects on the potential for social inclusion through education. As highlighted in multiple reports (Banco Mundial, 2020; Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2020; Paz, 2020), the pandemic's impact on learning has been disproportionately detrimental to the most vulnerable populations, deepening existing inequalities.

This study seeks to examine how racism and xenophobia shape the everyday schooling experiences of girls and adolescents of Dominican origin in contexts of international mobility. In doing so, we also highlight the pressing need to reimagine and transform key aspects of the educational system: from opening up alternative pathways beyond those traditionally imposed, to implementing targeted programs for the eradication of xenophobia (Neubauer Esteban, 2020) and racism, and ensuring that teacher training incorporates the development of intercultural competencies (Suárez-Orozco, 2017).

As previously discussed, the Dominican population is subject to a complex array of structural and contextual factors that produce and perpetuate educational and social inequalities, both broadly and in specific settings.

According to reports based on the *Etnoencuesta de Inmigración Reciente* (Ethnosurvey on Recent Immigration) (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia, Dinámicas familiares de las personas migrantes en la ciudad de Montevideo*, 2020), Dominican-origin households in Uruguay show the highest prevalence of single-parent family structures (20.7%), in contrast with 11.5% among Peruvian families and 6% among Venezuelan families. Similarly, as of 2018, Dominican and Peruvian women registered the highest levels of labor market inactivity.

In terms of housing access, a significant portion of the Dominican population resides in boarding houses (*pensions*) (71.8%), while a smaller percentage live in borrowed or lent dwellings (8.4%)—a lower figure compared to other nationalities included in the study, such as Peru, Cuba, and Venezuela.

The reports also highlight the violation of the right of Dominican girls and adolescents to live with their families. Many of these family structures are described as “to a large extent, persons with children who stay in their country of origin and who may eventually be reunited” (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia, Dinámicas familiares de las personas migrantes en la ciudad de Montevideo*, 2020, p. 16). In fact, within the Dominican population residing in Uruguay, 48.8% of the children and adolescents who belong to these households remain abroad. This percentage rises to 50.4% when the adult family members have been in Uruguay for less than 12 months, drops to 44.9% between 12 and 59 months of residence, and stands at 31.7% for those who have lived in the country for over 60 months.

These findings are reinforced by other sections of the report, such as the analysis of the economic situation of the Dominican community in Uruguay. It notes: “the high propensity of the Dominican community to send remittances is due to a family structure with a high number of dependent members who remain in the country of origin” (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia*, 2020, p. 37).

Concluding this section, the report indicates that:

“...in the case of the Dominican Republic, the proportion of children who migrate together with one or both parents is a minority. In turn, there is a predominance of trips where the children are accompanied by non-relative adults, and more than a few cases in which boys, girls and adolescents travel unaccompanied. In this community, then, we observe an intensive use of family networks to organize the migratory project and regrouping. In synthesis, in the case of the Dominican Republic, the migration of fathers and mothers, together with their children, is unusual, while the children are regrouped with the parents at a later date.” (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia, Dinámicas familiares de las personas migrantes en la ciudad de Montevideo*, 2020, p. 48).

Likewise, we examine data related to the educational inclusion of this population, focusing specifically on the educational environment within Dominican-origin households, as reported in the *Etnoencuesta de Inmigración Reciente* (Ethnosurvey on Recent Immigration) (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia, Inclusión social de niños, niñas y adolescentes vinculados a la inmigración en Uruguay*, 2020). The data reveal that only 5% of adult household references of Dominican origin who have children or adolescents under their care have completed tertiary education—a notably low figure when compared to 21% among the Peruvian population, 34.6% among the Cuban population, and 49.5% among the Venezuelan population.

Additionally, a particularly relevant indicator concerning access to education among migrant children shows that girls and adolescents of Dominican origin have the lowest rate of attendance at educational institutions among all national groups included in the *Etnoencuesta*. Specifically, the school attendance rate for Dominican children and adolescents aged 3 to 17 is 77.4% (*Observatorio de Movilidad, Infancia y Familia, Trayectorias educativas y acceso a la educación de niños, niñas y adolescentes en Montevideo*, 2021).

These statistical indicators shed light on some of the structural barriers and lived experiences associated with human mobility and access to education for Dominican girls and adolescents. They highlight the particular challenges this group faces within the specific sociocultural and institutional context of Uruguay and its educational system.

Uruguayan legislation is aligned with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as established in Law No. 17.823—the *Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (Code of Childhood and Adolescence)—which applies to all children and adolescents under the age of 18. Article 14 of this law establishes that it is the duty:

“...of the State to protect the rights of all children and adolescents under its jurisdiction, regardless of ethnic, national or social origin, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, economic standing, mental or physical impairments, birth or any other condition of the child or of their legal representatives.” (Uruguay, Ley N° 17.823, *Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia*, 2004).

This legislation guarantees equal conditions for all children and adolescents in Uruguay—regardless of nationality or migratory status—in relation to their inclusion in the education system. Educational inclusion for migrant children is also explicitly addressed in the *Ley General de Educación* (General Education Law, No. 18.437), which in Article 8 states:

“The State shall ensure the rights of those groups that are minorities or that are in an especially vulnerable situation, for the purpose of ensuring equal opportunities for the full exercise of the right to education and their effective social inclusion. For the effective compliance with the right to education, educational proposals shall respect the different capabilities and individual characteristics of the students...” (Uruguay, Ley N° 18.437, *Ley General de Educación*, 2009).

In addition, Article 47 of the regulations of the *Ley de Migraciones* (Migration Law, No. 18.250), established through Decree No. 394/009, determines that:

“The State of Uruguay shall ensure that migrant persons and their families shall have swift incorporation into public educational institutions—whether authorized or accredited—both to begin and to continue their studies. In all cases, they must comply with the requirements set out for domestic nationals” (Uruguay, Ley N° 18.250, *Ley de Migraciones*, 2008).

This law also foresees the possibility of temporary enrollment, with a period of up to one year, while the required documentation is processed to obtain the necessary academic certifications.

In recent years, the need for the Uruguayan education system to provide effective and timely responses to the educational inclusion of migrant children has grown significantly. Some of these responses have taken the form of structural reforms at the systemic level. Others have emerged at the level of specific institutions, which have developed targeted programs to respond to the high proportions of migrant students enrolled. Finally, certain initiatives have originated from the individual or collective efforts of educators who, either independently or in small teams, have worked to address the challenges of inclusion in their classrooms.

In 2018, the *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* (Ministry of Education and Culture, MEC) launched a Migrant Assistance and Advisory Center for educational matters. Located in Montevideo, this office was established with the aim of providing guidance to the migrant population on how the Uruguayan educational system functions, the procedures required to access educational institutions, and the steps needed to submit documentation for validation and certification. The creation of this Assistance Centre enabled the centralization of information originating from the various educational subsystems and administrative departments across the country.

Within this framework, a *Guía para el ingreso de migrantes al sistema educativo* (Guide for the Admission of Migrants into the Educational System) was published. This guide offers a comprehensive overview of the structure of Uruguay's educational system as defined by current legislation, as well as key contact information—such as physical addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers—for each educational subsystem.

Additionally, also in 2018, the former *Consejo de Educación Inicial y Primaria* (CEIP – Council for Initial and Primary Education), under the umbrella of the *Administración Nacional de Educación Pública* (ANEP – National Administration for Public Education), established the *Comisión de Migraciones* (Migration Commission). This body was created with the purpose of addressing the various challenges and dimensions involved in the education of migrant students at the initial and primary levels of the Uruguayan educational system.

To this end, a series of actions were undertaken, including awareness-raising workshops for teachers, specialized training sessions, and the sharing and dissemination of classroom and institutional “best practices.” Additionally, a data systemization effort was developed in collaboration with the *Gestión Unificada de Registros e Información* (GURI – Unified Registration and Information Management platform), the *Dirección Sectorial de Información para la Gestión y la Comunicación* (Sectoral Directorate of Information for Management and Communication), and the *Dirección Nacional de Identificación Civil* (National Directorate of Civil Identification). This initiative aimed to articulate and consolidate the available information on children in contexts of human mobility.

Among the noteworthy initiatives promoted by the aforementioned Council (CEIP), the implementation of the *Curso de Profundización “Migrantes y Derechos Humanos en el ámbito educativo”* (Advanced Course on “Migrants and Human Rights in the Educational Context”) and the *Jornada de experiencias de educación intercultural* (Intercultural Education Experiences Conference) stand out. Both activities were marked by high levels of participation and were positively evaluated by attendees, reflecting a growing interest and commitment within the educational community to address the challenges posed by migration from a rights-based and intercultural perspective.

At the secondary education level, while no specific provisions explicitly address the educational needs of students in situations of human mobility, one relevant mechanism is worth mentioning. In 2014, through Pamphlet No. 3224, the *Consejo de Educación Secundaria* (Council of Secondary Education) recommended that all students experiencing learning difficulties—regardless of their origin or the nature of those challenges—be guaranteed access to an education that responds to their individual capabilities and strengths. This implies the need to remove barriers that hinder the exercise of their right to learn (Consejo de Educación Secundaria, 2017, p. 7).

In this context, the implementation of *Adecuaciones Curriculares* (Curricular Adaptations) has emerged as a key pedagogical tool. These adaptations allow for the adjustment of curricular content in accordance with the specific needs and realities of the students, recognizing the diversity of educational trajectories and experiences, including those shaped by migratory processes.

It is also worth highlighting that, in 2014, the *Departamento Integral del Estudiante* (Integral Department for Students – DIE) was created with the objective of serving as a central support mechanism for teachers, administrators, inspectors, and other professionals within the *Consejo de Educación Secundaria* (Council of Secondary Education – CES). This department was designed to guide and accompany educational actors in developing and implementing strategies that promote the inclusion of all students (Consejo de Educación Secundaria, 2017, p. 12). As previously noted, while no specific structures directly addressed the realities associated with human mobility, there were tools in place that offered appropriate responses to the diversity present in educational institutions.

Finally, at a broader national level, the formulation of the *Plan Nacional de Educación en Derechos Humanos* (National Plan for Education in Human Rights) (Comisión Nacional para la Educación en DD.HH., 2019) represents a significant milestone. This initiative seeks to coordinate and articulate the efforts of various state institutions—including ANEP, MEC, the *Universidad de la República* (UDELAR), and the *Secretaría de Derechos Humanos* (SDH)—in the field of human rights education. Among the objectives established in the plan is the commitment to:

“...promote training activities for the ongoing professional development of teachers, educators, and technical staff in relation to Afro-descendant populations, sexual diversity, migrants, persons with disabilities, and other social groups, using available resources and creating spaces for dialogue with the respective communities.” (Comisión Nacional para la Educación en DD.HH., 2019, p. 37).

This objective underscores the recognition of diversity as a fundamental dimension of human rights education and promotes a pedagogical approach rooted in equity, interculturality, and social justice. It also highlights the State’s responsibility not only to ensure access to education for all populations, including migrants, but also to cultivate educational environments that are inclusive, reflective, and committed to the transformation of discriminatory structures.

3. Methodology: Situated Research and Narrative Work

As previously mentioned, our work builds on the research team's prior experience with migrant girls and boys, the analysis of national policy documents, a review of existing literature on the topic, and relevant international reports. The research was carried out in collaboration with five undergraduate Psychology students from the University of the Republic (Uruguay), who participated in all stages of the fieldwork. Their involvement formed part of a curricular research internship, for which they received academic credit.

We chose to explore the intersection of racism, education, and the pandemic from the perspective of Dominican girls and adolescents, recognising the importance of creating a dialogical space and being present in the field. This approach allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, build familiarity with their conditions and viewpoints, foster trust, and engage meaningfully with their needs and ways of making sense of the world.

Our engagement with the population began through in-depth interviews with two women pastors from the Dominican evangelical church. With one of them, we established an agreement to carry out a process involving a group of girls and adolescents who regularly attended the church. With the pastor's support during an informal chat, we invited the girls to participate in a leisure-narrative workshop aimed at exploring their educational experiences in Uruguay, their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, their emotions surrounding the migratory process, and their perceptions of integration into and navigation through the educational system.

For this workshop, we designed a multipart activity that included the following components:

- Reception and orientation: A map of the Dominican Republic was used to welcome participants and invite them to mark their place of origin, as well as any internal movements within their home country.
- Ice-breaker activity: A participatory game titled "*Where I Was Born and What I Carry in My Suitcase*", encouraging participants to share aspects of their identity and migratory journey.

- Emotional and narrative engagement: A dynamic activity using music and symbolic “stages” to facilitate the expression of emotions and narratives related to migration, their educational experiences in Uruguay as a host country, their feelings about their country of origin, the changes experienced upon arrival, and the impact of the pandemic.
- Closing reflection space: A final moment in which participants were invited to share how they felt during the session, along with any memories and emotions that arose during the activities.

At the end of the workshop, participants who expressed interest in continuing took part in follow-up individual interviews, arranged through subsequent contact.

During the interview phase, we worked with seven girls and adolescents. A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted: one involving two girls interviewed together, and the remainder carried out individually with adolescents. At the start of each interview, we reiterated the research objectives, assured participants of the confidentiality of the conversations, and requested their consent to record the discussions.

The interview guide addressed several key themes, including: the migratory experience, body and gender, current educational experiences, the pandemic, and language. To begin the interviews, we introduced the *Dixit* card game as a creative tool. Participants were invited to select a card that, in their view, responded to the question: *How do you feel now at the school you attend?* They were then encouraged to explain their choice, exploring the feelings or ideas the image represented for them.

To conclude our work with the participants, we held a follow-up group activity—a closing workshop—in which we shared reflections based on the narratives that had emerged during the interviews. This served as a moment of validation and confirmation of the findings we were compiling. As part of the activity, each girl created an individual fanzine, and accompanying relatives (a grandmother and a mother) also participated by collaboratively producing a group collage, following the same instructions.

In summary, our research process with the girls and adolescents comprised: one group-based opening workshop, six in-depth interviews (five individual and one group), and a final group-based closing workshop involving both the participants and some ac-

companying relatives, all originally from the Dominican Republic and currently living in Montevideo.

It is important to note that this fieldwork is complemented by several additional components:

- Collection and analysis of institutional and legislative documents governing the intersection of migration and education in Uruguay, including emergent regulations introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reviewing legal sources enabled us to compare the legal frameworks of different countries using a set of defined categories, and to examine the various ways in which public policy on human mobility is articulated. We are compiling information on legislation related to migration and refugee status, as well as legal provisions that ensure rights for people in situations of human mobility—particularly those concerning access to education in Uruguay.
- Collection and analysis of media discourses relating to migration and education, with specific reference to the Dominican population in Uruguay. For this purpose, we used the database provided by the *Observatorio de Medios sobre Movilidad Humana en Uruguay* (Media Observatory of Human Mobility in Uruguay), available at <https://migramedios.com.uy>.
- A scoping review of prior research at both national and regional levels. This review was conducted using academic resources accessible through the University of the Republic's open-access platforms. The search was guided by keywords such as *migración*, *educación*, and *pandemia* (migration, education, and pandemic), allowing us to map existing studies relevant to our field of inquiry.

4. Findings: Voices of Dominican Girls and Adolescents

We initiated an analytical process with the girls and adolescents during the final closing workshop, where we began to co-construct emerging analytical categories based on their narratives. From these conversations, several key themes were identified: the challenges associated with racism and xenophobia; cultural and linguistic distance within educational settings; the significance of family reunification experiences; the role of religion and spiritual-

ity in identity formation; temporal mismatches between administrative procedures and educational cycles; and varied experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With regard to the challenges linked to racism and xenophobia, it is important to acknowledge the intersectional nature of these experiences. As Crenshaw (1991, p. 98) notes, “women of colour experience racism in ways that are not always the same as those experienced by men of colour, and sexism is manifested in ways that are not always parallel to those experienced by white women.” Within this population, overlapping systems of oppression—relating to race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic conditions, and generational status—shape their lived realities. Pavez-Soto (2017, p. 104) similarly argues that, regardless of place of birth, migratory trajectory, or nationality, migrant children are vulnerable to racial violence due to the inferior social position they are often ascribed.

The girls and adolescents in our study reported both direct experiences of racist language in school settings and more subtle, indirect forms of discrimination, often later dismissed as misunderstandings or jokes taken out of context. These narratives underscore the everyday nature of racialised microaggressions and their impact on educational and psychosocial well-being.

N: “They welcomed me really well at school. Some of them called me ‘negra’, but I didn’t care... well, it did bother me. Because they also discriminate against other classmates — Uruguayan ones, even white ones — and even a substitute teacher did that. The teachers I’ve had have been good, except in first grade, when they told me to tie my hair back.” (Girl, 9 years old)

N: “It wasn’t a fight, but yes... there was an issue, because a boy called me ‘negra’ or something like that, and I didn’t like it. I told Mónica, and after that, we cleared up the misunderstanding.”

E: “And when they called you ‘negra’, was it directed at you or someone else?”

N: “He actually said ‘nena’ (babe), but I thought he said ‘negra’. That’s why I just told the teacher. And the classmate said it was a misunderstanding — that he hadn’t said ‘negra’, but ‘nena.’” (Girl, 11 years old)

The dimension of xenophobia and racism is closely linked to body image—such as hair and skin tone—as a space where identi-

ty is made visible. In this sense, some of the girls and adolescents interviewed defended their racial identity as a way of responding to the comments and situations they experienced.

“I’ve always worn braids because I got used to wearing them. I also wear my natural hair, but I really like braids. They used to say I had fake hair... or they’d say, ‘Eww, your hair colour!’ And I said, ‘My hair colour is beautiful’... like they wanted to bully me, but I didn’t let them.” (Adolescent, 14 years old)

“Sometimes we’d be fighting and they’d say, ‘Go back to Dominican...’ And I’ll tell you, I wish I could go to Dominican... I really wish... It’s like a game. I’m a bit of a fighter, that’s it. There are kinds of Dominicans, like me, who don’t let anyone push them around. Most of us don’t let anyone push us around.” (Adolescent, 14 years old)

On the other hand, regarding aspects related to cultural and linguistic distance within educational settings, the girls and adolescents spoke about receiving comments on their accents, being told that the words they use are incorrect, encountering double meanings, having to explain the meaning of certain terms, or even being directly translated by others (teachers or peers) in order to be understood in certain situations.

“I used up a power strip, and I said to the teacher, ‘May I have an extension?’—because we call it an extension. The teacher said, ‘I don’t understand you. Can you say it correctly?’ So I said it the correct way and explained what it meant.” (Girl, 11 years old)

Among the narratives, some describe moments when the girls and adolescents felt out of place.

“Yes, sometimes the teacher translates what I say if it isn’t clear. And my friend Sofía understands me too. Sometimes some classmates laugh at me, but it’s no big deal. Other friends who came with me don’t have any Dominican words left; they speak like Uruguayans. As time passes, you pick up the words.” (Girl, 9 years old)

These experiences also include certain topics of conversation that are not considered legitimate within the Uruguayan educa-

tional environment, such as the religious dimension, specific linguistic expressions that are censored or dismissed disrespectfully, and the rejection of the tone of voice used in spontaneous conversations—often insisting that the speaker is shouting.

“You can practically see that here everything is serious, quiet, I don’t know, calmer, less noisy. We speak loudly, but not because we are rude; we speak loudly because there’s a lot of noise. We’re supposedly from the noisiest Caribbean country. Of course, they said, ‘Lower your voice.’ And I said, ‘But I’m not yelling, I’m speaking softly.’ And they said, ‘No.’ That’s how, gradually, I moderated my volume over time.” (Adolescent, 14 years old)

Another important aspect to highlight is that all the girls and adolescents we interviewed were participating in family reunification processes—that is, they migrated during a second stage of a family project initially begun by their mother or both parents. We understand transnational families as those whose members live in different countries while maintaining ongoing communication across these locations. Such families consist of people connected by blood, adoption, emotional bonds, or conjugal ties. For these families, international migration does not necessarily imply a definitive separation between those who migrate and those who remain (Aguirre, 2024). The girls and adolescents spoke about the transnational ties they maintain today, as well as those they sustained in the past.

“Once in a while, I do a video chat with my grandmother. Sometimes she’s really busy, but I tell her more than she tells me: what I’m doing, how things are going. She asks me how I am, and I tell her.” (Girl, 11 years old)

The experiences they shared include separations from their mothers lasting over two years, being cared for by close non-blood relatives and direct family members, arriving in Uruguay without prior knowledge about the country, sometimes believing that their caregiver was their actual mother, and strengthening family ties upon arrival. Some also recounted suffering intrafamily abuse during these periods away from their mothers.

"I'm from Santo Domingo. Actually, I came here because my mother had been here for a really long time, since I was little. I came afterwards, about five years later." (Adolescent, 14 years old)

"This style I'm wearing is because my mum bought it for me. When I was there, I had to do what they said because I was a guest in someone else's house."

D: "Someone else's house, your grandfather's house... And you didn't go to school there, according to your teacher."

N: "No, not much, not much."

D: "But was there a school near your grandpa's, or not... was it far away?"

N: "My grandmother didn't want me to go to school; she said it wasn't good for anything." (Girl, 11 years old)

In particular, one girl became very anxious during her interview when she spoke about her mother's recent trip back to the Dominican Republic, which reminded her of the long separation they had endured before their family reunification.

"That's why I'm sad, because my mum left for the Dominican Republic and is coming back in five days... and after four years without seeing her, another five days." (Girl, 11 years old)

Another dimension the girls and adolescents discussed relates to the importance of religion in their free time while in the Dominican Republic, as well as in their social lives. Some girls spoke about continuing to participate in Church activities. Those who did participate described it as a space for socialising with peers from similar backgrounds. Conversely, some recalled spending a great deal of time in Church back home, which limited their rest, and now, without that religious involvement, they have more time for other activities.

They also emphasised how much their religion and spirituality matter in affirming their identities. However, they recounted experiences of being stared at for talking about Jesus or receiving advice not to discuss religion at school to avoid discrimination.

“Yes, my mum says not to talk about it much at school because there are some people who don’t believe in it, and so on, but I do believe.” (Girl, 11 years old)

“Get comfortable. I’m also Dominican, and we’re all equal—not because you’re black and I’m white. You shouldn’t feel bad. If you sincerely want something, you can ask God for it, since he’s always watching.” (Girl, 11 years old)

Regarding the administrative dimension, three of the six girls and adolescents interviewed mentioned experiencing delays in their educational progress. This repetition was linked to the differing academic calendars between the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, where classes begin in March and end in December. They also held other certificates, such as health cards, which they regarded as important since they enable participation in physical education activities at school.

“I had almost finished 5th grade, but since I came here, I had to repeat it all.” (Girl, 11 years old)

When discussing their experiences during the pandemic, the girls and adolescents did not share a singular, strong feeling linked to the place where they experienced it. Their responses to questions about that period varied. In Uruguay, they noted the discomfort of wearing face masks, with one describing it as a horrible time. However, they also reflected that the experience would have been similar in either country, though opinions differed on where there may have been more personal freedoms.

“It was horrible, but it probably would have happened the same way in the Dominican Republic. In the Dominican Republic, it might even have been stricter. Because if they saw you on the street, the police would take you and put you in jail. No, I was fine, all things considered, because here you could go outside with a mask.” (Adolescent, 14 years old)

The girls commented on the notable police presence in the Dominican Republic, and the fear their families had of leaving the house due to concerns about contagion, as well as the higher level

of confinement they experienced. None of them mentioned any memories of household income shortages. Regarding the impact on their education, one girl spoke of having very little contact with her classmates and teacher because of online classes, and she described the difficulties she faced in completing homework on the virtual platform used in the Uruguayan education system.

“What happened was that, when I was in the Dominican Republic, I was also in 5th grade. But when I arrived here... (...) you see, in the Dominican Republic, the school year ends in July. So I was finishing the school year there, and here I had to repeat 5th grade. I already knew everything; it really wasn’t much different. Since we were in the pandemic, I barely knew my classmates. That year I did it online. We had, like, classes a few times per week. And yes, it was fairly difficult to pass because sometimes I forgot to enter CREA, and I had to rush to do my homework.” (Adolescent, 14 years old)

5. Conclusions: Toward an Intercultural and Anti-Racist Education

Among the key learnings, we highlight the importance of the time invested in establishing relationships with the people involved in our research. Building a field-theme required a thorough process of familiarisation, centred on creating relationships of trust and reciprocity to foster genuine encounters beneficial to all. This work demanded commitment and availability to develop a dialogic relationship—an aspect often overlooked in research. We consider this particularly important, as establishing this connection necessitated strategic adjustments but also enabled the continuation of our work with the population.

Another element to emphasise is the need for spaces within the team to discuss the subjective impact of the accounts of racism and xenophobia shared by the girls and adolescents. Their testimonies evoked a range of emotions not only in them but also in us as researchers. Allowing room for our emotions within the research process, and recognising our emotional involvement, aligns us with the epistemic and political value of reflexivity (Bondi, 2005). Knowledge construction is an interplay of feeling and thinking, acknowledging the emotional responses we experience

throughout the research as a fundamental part of the team's work. This requires us to deconstruct hegemonic modes of knowledge production and embrace our positions as affected subjects, recognising our mutual need to share and understand what we have felt during the research journey.

Among the key recommendations for the Uruguayan context, we highlight the need for resources that support the care and response to incidents of racism and xenophobia experienced by migrant children. It is also crucial to contribute to the understanding of the plurality and diversity of migrant children and adolescents within the education system. In Uruguay, representations and imaginaries surrounding migration are closely tied to the construction of the migrant social figure as a devalued label. In contrast, the normative framework governing migration and refugees in Uruguay presents a progressive stance within the region. In particular, access to the education system is guaranteed and should be provided within a framework of recognition, respect, and the full exercise of rights.

However, despite educational institutions serving as reception spaces for migrant children through community initiatives, specific practices often reveal racism, xenophobia, and discrimination based on religious beliefs. We consider it vital to establish welcome and reception strategies that go beyond administrative, assimilationist, or subordinate approaches, advancing instead towards an intercultural process that integrates children's agency alongside the reflexivity of educational actors.

Looking ahead, we believe it is essential to further recognise the plurality and diversity of migrant children and adolescents within public education. This entails advancing processes to systematise and disseminate knowledge about the diverse experiences of migrant childhood and adolescence as a significant field within academic, social, and educational research. Additionally, it requires facilitating the sharing of migrant children's and adolescents' experiences, particularly their capacity to exercise agency in creating intercultural educational spaces. Equally important is promoting critical reflection among educational system stakeholders regarding the educational experiences of migrant children.

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From the Airport to School: The Experience of Being a Migrant Student in the Context of Youth and Adult Education in Goiânia

LILIAN UCKER PEROTTO

1. Introduction: Borders, Migration, and the Right to Education

It was November 2023 when, on my way to the boarding gate for Montevideo, Uruguay, at Brazil's Guarulhos Airport, I noticed a restricted area. People lay on chairs, towels draped over them, and belongings scattered across the floor. Security guards prevented anyone from approaching, and the space resembled a detention zone. I looked on in shock, and a colleague remarked, "Those are refugees!" At that moment, I was filled with two conflicting emotions: first, a sense of excitement at witnessing firsthand a phenomenon I had only seen through social media and news outlets. After all, I was travelling to Uruguay to present my work on the transnational research project *Crossed Borders to Connect Routes*. But that feeling gave way to deep sorrow as I saw the dire conditions in which these people were living. This area, a sort of border, cut off their ability to connect with others, isolating them under constant surveillance.

The airport, with its constant bustle, presented itself to me as a microcosm of lives in transit. The borders were already drawn, extending beyond mere lines on a map. In the faces before me—entirely male—one could perceive feelings of disillusionment, fear, and deep uncertainty. Hope—the emotional state that nurtures positive expectations for the future and is essential for overcoming the challenges of a new life—perhaps was not, in that moment, a fully formed or developed sentiment capable of guiding them to a safe place. After all, "borders serve to invent and defend hierarchies; they structure, prevent, limit and provoke human action; they include and [also] exclude" (Heite et al., 2014, p. 498).

Migration, as an “eminently human” phenomenon (Vianna and Macêdo, 2023, p. 5), refers to the movement of people from one country to another, whether or not they intend to establish permanent residence in the destination country. The migration glossary defines it as “[...] a population movement that includes any displacement of people, regardless of its scope, composition or causes; it encompasses the migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted individuals and economic migrants” (OIM, 2009, p. 40). As an ancient practice, migration is not only complex but also multidimensional, involving aspects that go beyond simple geographical movement. Addressing migration requires recognising that borders are not just lines on a map, but structures that shape and reflect power relations and have a profound impact on people’s opportunities and rights.

Seen as a transitional space, the airport can also be understood as solitary—a place ‘that cannot be defined as either identity-based, relational or historical [...]’ (Augé, 2003, p. 27). A space of limits, yet also the (re)beginning of another story, and, in the case of the experience described earlier, a (re)inhabiting in response to the unexpected and the new possibilities of a socially, culturally, and economically stable life.

Throughout its history, Brazil has experienced migration flows from individuals coming from various countries. The dynamics of migration have evolved, and the chosen destination is not always a neighbouring country. The reasons people migrate from one country to another are complex and varied. Different individuals and groups may have distinct motivations for seeking a new life elsewhere. These reasons include economic opportunities, political and religious persecution, natural disasters, armed conflict, and political instability (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Additionally, the dynamics of immigration can vary depending on the regulatory frameworks and political context of each country.

In Brazil, the law that governs the rights and duties of migrants and visitors, and regulates their entry and stay in the country, is Law No. 13,445, of 24 May 2017. This ‘new’ immigration law revokes the Foreigner’s Statute, which, according to Claro (2020, p. 51), differs ‘in both form and substance’. The Foreigner’s Statute, established by Law No. 6,815, of 19 August 1980, was a set of legal provisions regulating the status of foreigners in Brazil. Created during the military regime, its primary aim was to ‘safeguard na-

tional sovereignty and Brazilian interests in the face of potential foreign threats' (Claro, 2020, p. 41). Comparing the Foreigner's Statute with the Migration Law, Claro concludes:

"While the Statute assumed the immigrant was the 'other', the 'stranger', and imposed restrictions on their rights based on national security and public interest, the Law is grounded in the guarantee and promotion of human rights, using more positive and inclusive language than the Statute. This fundamental difference between the foundations of the revoked Statute and the current Law is reflected in the very title of the new legislation, representing a paradigm shift—from a focus on national interest and sovereignty to an emphasis on the human rights of migrants." (Claro, 2020, p. 51)

The 'new' Migration Law regulates the entry and stay of immigrants, emigrants, border residents, visitors and stateless individuals in Brazil, while aiming to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees, in line with international commitments and frameworks addressing global migration. Law No. 13,445, of 24 May 2017, comprises approximately 125 articles and ensures equality of rights for migrants and refugees, granting them rights equivalent to those of Brazilian citizens, with certain exceptions provided by law. It covers aspects such as documentation and registration, outlines procedures for legalisation and residency, and establishes rules for granting asylum or refugee status in Brazil, among other critical points related to rights and responsibilities.

While the law marks a significant shift in Brazil's approach to migration, prioritising the dignity and fundamental rights of migrants, it is essential to note that effective implementation and enforcement are key to safeguarding the rights of migrants, emigrants, border residents, visitors and stateless persons in Brazil. For instance, Article 4 guarantees that migrants in Brazil will enjoy equal rights with nationals, including access to public education, and prohibits discrimination based on nationality or migration status.

Education, recognised as a universal and constitutional right, plays a vital role in the lives of migrants and refugees, fostering not only social and cultural integration but also personal and professional development. In Brazil, enrolments of migrant and refugee students increased by 160% between 2010 and 2019. According to

a report by *Folha de São Paulo*, based on data from the INEP/MEC School Census, migrant enrolments rose from 40,000 to approximately 105,000 during this period. The report also highlights the lack of research on this issue and the absence of targeted educational policies to address the growing presence of migrants in schools. Oliveira (2020) notes that migrants remain largely overlooked in Brazilian educational policies, or, as Matos-de-Souza et al. (2021, p. 3) aptly describe, migrants are ‘invisible subjects in the eyes of public administration and Brazilian public and educational policies, finding no representation beyond the erasure of their condition as individuals’.

In “Migration and Education: A Study on the Invisibilisation of Migrants in Brazilian and District Educational Policies”, Rodrigo Matos-de-Souza et al. (2021) analyse key Brazilian legal documents, such as the Law on Guidelines and Bases for National Education and the National Curriculum Guidelines, to examine how they address migration, irregular migration and refugee issues. Although education is a constitutionally guaranteed right, the authors conclude that the concept of migration is applied broadly across various contexts, reflecting a lack of specificity in educational policies concerning the unique challenges faced by migrants and refugees. This lack of precision has significant implications for the inclusion and appropriate support of these groups within the educational system.

If migrants are not adequately represented in the official documents governing education in Brazil, what then has been the experience of being a migrant student in the Brazilian context, particularly in Goiânia, the capital of the state of Goiás? What stories do they have to share about their journey to school and their experience within the educational system?

This text, which examines the intersection of migration in Brazil with youth and adult education, presents the institutional context of the case study within the framework of the research project “Crossing Borders to Connect Routes”. In the section “The Context of the Case Study: Goiás and the Theorisation of Migration in Brazil”, I reflect on the complexity of the migratory phenomenon, integrating my personal experiences as both author and researcher with the policies currently in place in Brazil, especially in Goiás. I then discuss the broader Brazilian educational context, emphasising Youth and Adult Education (‘EJA’ in Portuguese) as a space

that promotes inclusion and equity. I also detail my engagement with the research partner schools and present data that help us understand the integration of migrant students into the public education system.

In the section “Case Discussion: The COVID-19 Pandemic, Inequality, and an Inclusive School for Migrants”, I analyse the impact of the pandemic and the growing social inequalities in Brazil. Additionally, I present key themes emerging from interviews with migrants, which revealed a generally positive view of their reception in Brazil, particularly within the school environment, despite ongoing social inequalities and high dropout rates in EJA.

Finally, I conclude by highlighting the challenges the research continues to face and how, after conducting fieldwork, I observe certain experiences and initiatives aimed at welcoming and integrating migrant students within the school system.

The title *From the Airport to School* evokes a narrative that goes beyond mere physical movement, addressing the specific challenges migrants face when entering a new environment, particularly within the educational sphere. The airport symbolises the border, while the school functions as a space for welcoming migrants and providing opportunities for social interaction, language acquisition, and cultural understanding.

2. The Context of the Case Study: Goiás and the Theorisation of Migration in Brazil

In the early 2000s, Goiânia was still a relatively unknown Brazilian capital. What drew attention were news reports highlighting that the city had the largest green area per capita among Brazil’s capitals. I remember that when I arrived to enrol in the Master’s programme in Art and Visual Culture at the Federal University of Goiás, it was common for people to ask why I had chosen to study in Goiás, as Rio Grande do Sul—my home state, located in the southern region of the country—seemed, to many, a more attractive place to live, work, and study.

It was through my move from the South to the Central-West region of Brazil that my interest in studying ‘human mobility’ and the relationship we develop with the spaces we inhabit and move through became central. In my master’s research, the school envi-

ronment became the focus of my study. In a way, migrating from the South to the Central-West transformed how I existed, interacted with, and experienced the spaces I moved through. The school environment in my research became a site for experiences, social interactions, and cultural exchanges—affective, value-driven, and based on shared interests—through the practice of drawing.

During my doctoral studies at the University of Barcelona, my focus shifted to the experience of being a Brazilian student in Barcelona. This time, the move was from one country to another, and this journey fundamentally reshaped my perspective on the world and my relationships within it. Through the question, ‘How can we address and understand the internationalisation of higher education, considering the perspectives of international students?’ I developed an (auto)ethnographic thesis, where the writing of seven letters became a way of connecting with others—and with the self—while in transit.

My experiences as both an internal and later an international migrant have shaped my personal and professional journey, underscoring the complexity of a social and demographic phenomenon that reveals the facets and asymmetries of a globalisation model that, as Martine describes it, is ‘incomplete’ (2005, p. 5). Although Martine’s article *Incomplete Globalisation: International Migrations and Poverty in the 21st Century* was published in 2005, and thus refers to a context different from today’s migration landscape, the author critiques the phrase ‘World Without Borders’, arguing that it ‘is part of the definition of globalisation, but does not apply to the movement of people’. Martine (2005, p. 8) emphasises that borders ‘are open to the flow of capital and goods but are increasingly closed to migrants: this is the great inconsistency that defines the current historical moment regarding international migrations’.

This duality highlights the complex challenges faced by migrants, whether environmental, economic, documented or undocumented. In response to these challenges, countries have developed migration policies influenced by political, social and cultural factors. Such policies play a key role in addressing the issues and obstacles migrants encounter. Many countries struggle to manage migration flows, balancing concerns ranging from security and employment to cultural integration and pressure on public services. Brazil, as a diverse and welcoming nation, has implemented

migration and refugee policies designed to address the complex challenges posed by the movement of people within its borders.

In his book “Migration and Refuge: Convergences and Contradictions in Brazil’s 21st-Century Policies”, Sant’Ana (2022) explores the relationship between Brazil’s migration and refugee policies. Using data on the number of migrants entering Brazil alongside the country’s legal migration framework, he analyses how coordination among key governmental entities responsible for migration and refugee affairs is managed. This coordination aims to ensure that Brazil upholds its international commitments, particularly regarding the protection of human rights for migrants and refugees, while also developing coherent, effective, and complementary public policies. Concerning migration, the author writes: ‘Although it is present in speeches and statements from Brazilian authorities at the highest levels and incorporated into the regulatory instruments that govern the matter in the country, it is still not reflected in concrete actions by the Brazilian government’ (Sant’Ana, 2022, p. 19).

Analysing the documents that regulate migration in Brazil, Matos-de-Souza et al. (2022, p. 5) argue that although Migration Law No. 13,445/17 acknowledges the ‘need for public policies on social integration and the right to education, it does not provide specific guidance on the adequacy of school facilities, much less curriculum documents’. While these federal regulations represent a step forward in emphasising the importance of access to education, Matos-de-Souza highlights that ‘there is a gap between what the law states and its practical application; in other words, the law alone does not guarantee rights—it is necessary to implement what the law mandates in everyday actions’ (et al., 2022, p. 5).

In Goiás, the state where this case study is being conducted, several initiatives and actions aimed at supporting migrants living in both the capital and rural areas have been planned and proposed. These include the *State Plan for Comprehensive Healthcare for Migrants, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Returnees*, published in November 2023, as well as the launch of the e-book *Guidelines*, which offers guidance for welcoming migrant children and students into the Municipal Education Network (‘RME’ in Portuguese), also released in 2023.

Before presenting the institutional context of the case and discussing the education modality for young people and adults, it is

important to note that Goiás does not feature prominently in national statistics compiled primarily by reports from the Observatory of International Migrations, particularly concerning the number of registered migrants in the state. One possible explanation for this is its geographical location (Vianna and Macêdo, 2023). According to a recent study conducted by the Mauro Borges Institute of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies of Goiás, while Brazil recorded 1,569,217 foreigners in December 2022, Goiás ranked 14th among states with the highest number of registered immigrants. This accounts for 1.1% of all foreigners registered in Brazil in 2022 (Vianna and Macêdo, 2023, p. 7). Of the 6,384 individuals registered in the state's Single Registry, 3,398 are women and 2,986 are men. These migrants are distributed across 218 municipalities, with the majority coming from Venezuela, totalling 3,156 people. The next largest groups are from Haiti (503), Colombia (142), and Bolivia (127).

According to the OBMigra report, by the end of 2019, 29.6 million border crossings were recorded at Brazilian entry points, decreasing to approximately 19 million in 2022 (Cavalcanti et al., 2023). The largest group of migrants seeking residence in Brazil came from Venezuela, followed by Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Cuba and Haiti—although these figures have shown signs of decline after 12 years of migration. These migrants primarily settled in the states of Roraima, São Paulo, Amazonas, Paraná and Santa Catarina, with particular concentration in the cities of Boa Vista (RR), São Paulo, Manaus (AM) and Pacaraima (RR). Refugee applicants, found throughout the country, were especially concentrated in Roraima and São Paulo, notably in the cities of Pacaraima, Boa Vista, São Paulo and Manaus (Cavalcanti et al., 2023).

The state of Goiás does not share a border with any other country and lacks direct access to the sea. Located in Brazil's central-western region, Goiás has experienced a significant increase in migrant populations in both the labour and education sectors due to recent efforts to promote internal migration. For instance, between 2009 and 2016, the number of foreign workers in the state grew by 319%. According to *Opção* newspaper (Macedo, 2021), in 2019, the Federal Police's National Migration Registration System recorded around 740 requests for migration regularisation in Goiânia—a 50% increase compared to the 480 requests made the previous year.

In recent years, particularly following the launch of Operation “*Acolhida*” in 2018 by the federal government, Brazilian states and cities have become destinations for migrants and refugees seeking—and continuing to seek—better living conditions. Created by Provisional Measure No. 820/2018 and later enacted into law as Law No. 13,684/2018, Operation “*Acolhida*” aims to assist Venezuelan refugees and migrants through voluntary relocation from municipalities in Roraima to other cities across Brazil.

The law primarily addresses the vulnerability of individuals resulting from migratory flows caused by humanitarian crises. One of Operation *Acolhida*’s main strategies is interiorisation. In his text, *Interiorisation as a Universalisable Social Right*, Xavier (2021) explains that:

“Interiorisation’ refers to the political-administrative measure by which public authorities—either independently or in partnership with private or intergovernmental entities—assume responsibility for relocating foreign migrants concentrated in a specific state or municipality to other parts of the country. The goal is to distribute the population more evenly and reduce the local impact on employment opportunities and basic public services.” (Xavier, 2021, p. 2)

The research titled “Opportunities and Challenges to the Local Integration of Venezuelan Migrants Relocated in Brazil During the Covid-19 Pandemic”¹ provides valuable insights into how Operation *Acolhida* has addressed migration issues and the process of interiorisation. The study examines the opportunities and challenges to local integration and socio-economic inclusion, with a particular focus on Venezuelan nationals.

For this study, 2,000 Venezuelans relocated between March 2020 and August 2021 were interviewed, along with 682 individuals residing in shelters in Boa Vista (RR). In addition, 48 managers, representatives of international organisations, civil society actors, and government officials from federal, state, and local levels involved in Operation *Acolhida* were also interviewed. The

1. The research was funded by UNHCR, UN Women, and UNFPA, and conducted by IPEAD in collaboration with the technical-scientific team from CEDEPLAR/UFMG, PUC Minas, and UFRR.

research highlights key topics such as employment, income, and education.

Regarding employment and income, the UNHCR website notes:

“Of every ten relocated individuals, eight are part of the workforce [...]. However, when analysed by gender, women’s participation in the labour market is significantly lower—72.2% compared with 96.1% for men. This disparity is also reflected in unemployment rates: while the overall rate is 11%, the rate for women is 17.7%, compared with just 6.4% for men.”

The research also provides a detailed analysis of the educational level of interiorised Venezuelans, presented through tables. It concludes that:

“People with a completed higher education degree also represent a larger proportion of those interiorised under the job vacancy modality (20.22%)—as expected, given their higher likelihood of labour market insertion, even if underutilised—and in the institutional modality (17.18%). Overall, those interiorised in the job vacancy modality tend to have a better educational profile (more years of schooling [...])” (Moverse, 2021, p. 21).

In this study, the category ‘state’ is not represented. Instead, the education level of the interiorised Venezuelan population is classified by destination region: South, Southeast, and Other Regions. The term ‘Other Regions’ refers to the Central-West, North, and Northeast. The report notes that “in the South and Southeast regions, people with completed higher education account for 16.78% and 16.65%, compared with only 9.89% in the Other Regions (RG3/Central-West, Northeast, North excluding Roraima)” (Moverse, 2021, p. 20). No structured data for the state of Goiás was identified in this research.

3. Educational Context and Fieldwork: The Modality of Youth and Adult Education

Youth and Adult Education (*EJA*, in Portuguese), within the Brazilian educational context, is an educational modality established under the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (*LDB*, in Portuguese). It is intended for individuals who either did not have access to, or withdrew from, the regular education system. The primary aim of *EJA* is to address educational exclusion by providing young people and adults with basic, vocational, and lifelong learning skills.

According to Article 37, §1 of Law 9.394/96 (*LDB*):

“Education systems shall ensure free educational opportunities for young people and adults who were unable to study at the appropriate age, taking into account the characteristics of the students, their interests, and their living and working conditions, through courses and examinations.”

The *LDB* structures the Brazilian education system into different levels, stages, and forms of education. By level, the law distinguishes between Basic Education and Higher Education. Basic Education comprises three stages: Pre-Primary Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education. In addition to the standard stages, the *LDB* also recognises specific modalities within Basic Education, including Youth and Adult Education (*EJA*), Professional and Technological Education, and Special Education.

EJA is designed for individuals who, for various reasons, did not have access to formal education at the appropriate age. To enrol in *EJA*, students must be at least 15 years old for Primary Education and 18 years old for Secondary Education. This modality encompasses the levels of Basic Education that include both Primary and Secondary Education. For the purposes of the *Crossed Borders* research, the focus is on Primary Education.

The literacy phase in *EJA* lasts for three years, followed by a further three years corresponding to the final phase of Primary Education (equivalent to grades 6 to 9). Unlike the conventional structure, in which Primary Education takes nine years, in *EJA* it is completed in six years. Students demonstrating strong performance may progress more rapidly. Enrolment is open throughout

the academic year, and applicants must submit personal identification, a school transcript, and proof of residence. If a school transcript is unavailable, enrolment can be processed under special conditions.

Access to schools for the research was facilitated by the Municipal Department of Education (SME/GO). The city of Goiânia has 321 municipal schools, of which Youth and Adult Education (EJA) is offered in 55, as well as in nine extension classrooms located within partner institutions. As explained by Maria Emília Rodrigues, the extensions are “*classes linked to a school but held in non-school spaces, such as at the UFG Hospital Clinics, the Goiânia Urbanisation Company (Comurg), or at elderly associations during alternative hours.*” Classes in schools are held in the evening, whereas the extension classrooms provide lessons during the day at different times.

With regard to the number of migrant enrolments in the Brazilian education system, it is important to note that Youth and Adult Education does not account for the highest proportion. For instance, in 2020, while 77,193 migrant enrolments were recorded in Primary Education, only 10,621 were registered in EJA/technical education (Vinha & Yamaguchi, 2021).

From 2010 to 2020, Vinha and Yamaguchi (2021, p. 255) observed “*a significant increase in the number of immigrants enrolled in basic education, rising from 41,916 in 2010 to 122,900 in 2020 [...].*” This increase was particularly marked among male students in 2020, alongside a general rise in enrolments across all levels of basic education.

Although migrant enrolments are concentrated mainly in Primary Education I and II, as shown in the Migrant Enrolment Panel in Brazil created by the Population Studies Group (NEPO) at Unicamp, data indicate that of the 130,067 school enrolments in 2019, 10,102 were in the Youth and Adult Education modality. According to a report and the *Guidelines* materials (GO, 2023), by 11 April 2023, the municipal education network in Goiânia had registered 358 migrant student enrolments, with “[...] *the largest concentration in the Early Years of Primary Education, at 57.7%, followed by children in Pre-Primary Education (daycare and preschool) at 25.1%, then the Final Years of Primary Education at 15%, and, finally, Youth and Adult Education with 2.2% [...]*” (GO, 2023, p. 11).

For the case study, migrants were not concentrated in a single school, neighbourhood, or area of the city. To engage with schools, initial contact was established with professionals from the Youth and Adult Education Management (*Gereja*) team within the Municipal Department of Education. In addition to presenting the research, its objectives, and its timeline, I gathered insights from informal accounts shared by the municipal team responsible for managing this educational modality. These narratives highlighted the experiences of migrants who were, or are, enrolled in the programme. Conversations held at different stages of the research deepened my interest in the topic, particularly in light of the fact that Youth and Adult Education has been undergoing a long-term process of dismantlement.

Rodrigo Thomé, the manager of this modality at the Municipal Department of Education at the outset of the study, expressed strong support for the research. He regarded it as an opportunity to emphasise the crucial role this educational format plays for individuals excluded from the traditional school system. In this context, Brazilian and migrant students share the same classrooms. While some learning projects within this modality are specifically tailored for migrants, integration between Brazilian and migrant students is the norm.

It is my view that both groups—Brazilians and migrants—inhabit the precarious margins of educational exclusion. The 2021 School Census report illustrates this point. Under the race/ethnicity category, it records that Black and mixed-race students predominate in Youth and Adult Education at both the elementary and secondary levels, accounting for 76.7% of students in elementary-level Youth and Adult Education and 69.1% at the secondary level (Brazil, 2021). By contrast, White students represent only 21.1% in this modality (Brazil, 2021).

It is important to note that my engagement with the schools, as well as the initiation of interviews and surveys with pedagogical coordinators, teachers in this modality, and migrants enrolled at this level of basic education, only began in 2024, the final year of the study. Owing to the need for validation of my academic workload at the higher education institution where I am employed, and in compliance with the ethical standards set by Brazilian law, the research was submitted to the ethics committee of the Universidade Federal de Goiás. Approval and official clearance were grant-

ed only in July 2023. The requirement for a new submission—despite the research having already been validated by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya—underscores the seriousness and responsibility of the institutions involved in this research within the Brazilian context.

The first interviews for the Brazilian case study were conducted in October and November 2023 with three professionals working in the management of this modality at the Municipal Department of Education. These discussions provided a deeper understanding of the modality's specific features, the curricular policies being implemented, and the management's perspective on migration within the municipal education network, particularly in the context of Youth and Adult Education.

Following the interviews with managers, I contacted schools by email and telephone. The management team issued an official letter specifying which schools would participate in the research, prioritising those with the highest number of migrant student enrolments. At that time, school headteachers informed me that migrant students were no longer attending classes. In response, I informed the management team, which promptly reassessed the situation and identified municipal schools with migrant students still enrolled. Of the 55 schools offering this modality, 11 had migrant students. Based on enrolment numbers, I selected four schools that could best contribute to the study. The official letter was then sent to these schools, and also to my email and WhatsApp, enabling me to begin contacting the headteachers. Due to the urgency of commencing the fieldwork, I reached out to the headteachers of three schools.

In May 2024, I visited Pedro Costa de Medeiros School, located in the northern region of Goiânia, one of the city's most populous areas. Between May and June 2024, I conducted three interviews at this school: one with the pedagogical coordinator of the modality and two with Haitian migrant students. In late June 2024, I interviewed a Venezuelan migrant student enrolled at Bispo Abigail Carlos de Almeida Municipal School, located in the central-western region of the city. In August and September 2024, I completed the fieldwork at Jardim Nova Esperança Municipal School, in the north-western part of the city. At this school, I interviewed the EJA (Youth and Adult Education) teacher for the first segment, a Boliv-

ian migrant student, and gathered narratives through interviews and questionnaires with three Haitian students.

In total, I visited these schools on 12 occasions, comprising two morning sessions and ten evening sessions.

4. Case Discussion: The COVID-19 Pandemic, Inequality, and an Inclusive School for Migrants

Brazil, which shares borders with 10 of the 12 Latin American nations, has a total land border of 16,885.7 km, making it the third most border-sharing country in the world after China and Russia. According to the most recent census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*IBGE*), the country has a population of 203,080,756. While the number of people living in extreme poverty fell from 19.1 million in 2021 to 12.7 million in 2022, 31.6% of the Brazilian population still lives below the poverty line.

Although Sales (2019) observed that, since the 2000s, Brazil has been recognised as an emerging power due to “economic growth and sustainability, political democratic stability, reduction of social inequality, and energy self-sufficiency” (Sales, 2019, p. 93), the country remains profoundly unequal. Prior to the pandemic, for example, “the wealthiest 10% of Brazilians had an average per capita income more than 50 times greater than the poorest 10%, and the income of the wealthiest 5% was 77 times higher” (World Bank, 2022, p. 2).

The World Bank’s July 2022 report, “Poverty and Equity in Brazil – Looking Ahead After Two Crises”, examines the impact of two major shocks: the economic downturn of 2014–2016 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil recorded more than 22 million cases of COVID-19, making it the most affected country in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the third most affected globally. Furthermore, it reported the world’s second-highest number of total COVID-19 deaths, with over 600,000 fatalities as of January 2022 (World Bank, 2022).

Despite the emergency aid of R\$600—a financial benefit introduced by the National Congress through Law No. 13,982/2020 to provide minimum income to vulnerable Brazilians during the COVID-19 pandemic—poverty reached record levels, with an

unprecedented number of beneficiaries in social transfer programmes. According to a study by PUC in the state of Rio Grande do Sul on Pandemic, Inequality and Poverty, “[...] in 2020, emergency aid reached over 68 million beneficiaries, far exceeding the number of recipients of the country’s main conditional cash transfer programme, Bolsa Família (BF), which had 14 million families receiving aid at the start of 2020 [...]” (Salata & Ribeiro, 2023, p. 3).

The study, which analysed 22 metropolitan regions of Brazil from 2019 to 2021, assessed the role of federal cash transfer policies, particularly during the pandemic. One of its key questions was the impact of the crisis triggered by the pandemic on income inequality and poverty in Brazil (Salata & Ribeiro, 2023, p. 4). The findings indicate that, in the metropolitan regions of the North and Northeast, the groups most affected by the rise in poverty—and, consequently, by the deepening of social inequalities—were Black people and residents of those regions. The publication “O Boletim – Desigualdade nas Metrôpoles” (2023)² reports that “except for Aracaju, the percentage of people living in poverty surpassed one-third of the population, exceeding 40% in the metropolitan regions of Manaus, Macapá, Greater São Luís, João Pessoa, Recife, and Maceió.”

The pandemic undeniably exposed social inequalities, bringing existing disparities into sharper focus. During this period, its consequences were far more severe for certain social groups, while others were able to weather the crisis with relative ease (Silva & Pierro, 2022). In many countries, including Brazil, lockdown measures and travel restrictions led to job losses, reduced economic activity, and heightened financial vulnerability for many families. As a result, poverty rates increased, and the demand for social assistance grew. Salata and Ribeiro (2023, p. 12) observe that in countries such as Brazil, poverty “should be regarded as one of the most visible consequences of inequality, preventing large segments of the population from fully participating in society” (Barros et al., 2000).

Within this context, migration flows—both in Brazil and globally—were affected by the pandemic, not only as a result of entry

2. *O Boletim – Desigualdade nas Metrôpoles* is a collaborative effort between PUCRS Data Social, INCT Observatório das Metrôpoles and RedODSAL. For full data access, visit <https://www.pucrs.br/datasocial/boletim-desigualdades-nas-metropoles/>

restrictions but also in relation to the rights of those who faced the health crisis within Brazilian territory. As in many parts of the world, the negative economic impacts of the pandemic were most severe for the poor and vulnerable in Brazil (Narayan et al., 2022). The World Bank's Executive Report (2022) notes that women, young people, and individuals with lower levels of education were more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic. Furthermore, the pandemic "strongly affected human capital accumulation, which may have long-term negative consequences for poverty and equity" (World Bank, 2022, p. 6).

Due to the severity of COVID-19 transmission in Brazil, schools remained closed for much of 2020. By July of that year, one in five school-age children was either not enrolled in school (4.4%) or had no access to any school activities (15.7%). By November 2020, this proportion was still above 10%, with stark regional disparities: in the North and Northeast—Brazil's poorest regions—27.8% of children were either not enrolled or had no access to educational activities (Paffhausen et al., 2021; World Bank, 2022, p. 6).

A study coordinated by PUC Minas and Unicamp at the onset of the pandemic sought to assess the situation and living conditions of international migrants and refugees in Brazil in response to the COVID-19 crisis, with the aim of informing public policies specific to this group. The publication, released in September 2020 and titled "*Impactos da Pandemia de Covid-19 nas Migrações Internacionais no Brasil*" (Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Migration in Brazil), presents findings from an inter-institutional partnership that surveyed 2,475 migrants in Brazil through an online questionnaire. Of these respondents, 1,209 were Venezuelan (Fernandez et al., 2020).

Migrants from 179 cities participated in the survey, representing nearly all the federal units of Brazil. In the Central-West region, 97 questionnaires were completed, 58 of which indicated arrival in Brazil between 2018 and 2020—likely reflecting the dynamics of Operation Welcome (*Operação Acolhida*) (Demétrio, 2020). The survey focused on four key areas: the general characteristics of the migrants interviewed; migration patterns across states and regions; labour market integration; and access to social rights.

On labour market integration, the study highlighted the "vulnerability faced by a significant portion of international migrants in Brazil, many of whom were already unemployed before the

pandemic” (Fernandez et al., 2020, p. 52). This section also noted a tendency towards informal employment. Regarding social rights, 879 respondents (38% of valid responses) stated they were unaware of their rights as immigrants in Brazil (Fernandez et al., 2020, p. 68). An important finding was the role of support networks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing essential information, such as guidance on emergency aid. It should be noted, however, that the research did not address education-related issues.

The intersection of education, the pandemic, and migration in Brazil reveals a range of challenges and complex dynamics. During the pandemic, schools were closed as a measure to contain the spread of the virus, affecting millions of students nationwide. For migrants—particularly those in situations of socio-economic vulnerability—this impact may have been even more pronounced. Publications specifically addressing this issue remain scarce. It is likely that many migrants encountered additional barriers to accessing education during the pandemic, including language difficulties, financial hardship, and inadequate infrastructure for remote learning. Moreover, for those relying on educational programmes designed specifically for migrants, the closure of schools and educational centres may have disrupted their integration process, including language and cultural learning, as well as access to school meals.

The amendment of Law No. 11,947 (16 June 2009) by Law No. 13,987 (7 April 2020) permitted the exceptional distribution of food purchased through the National School Meals Programme (PNAE) to parents or guardians of students in public basic education during the suspension of classes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, a study³ found that 30% of public-school students did not receive school meals during this period (*Agência Câmara de Notícias*, 2021).

State and municipal governments, particularly in Goiás, implemented various strategies to mitigate the pandemic’s impact on students’ education. However, these measures were not specifically targeted at migrant populations but rather addressed the broader school community.

3. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/820583-pesquisa-aponta-que-30-dos-alunos-da-rede-publica-nao-receberam-merenda-escolar-durante-a-pandemia/>

According to Siqueira and Gomes (2020), the State Secretariat of Education of Goiás (SEDUC) adopted three main strategies: distance learning supported by digital technologies, including WhatsApp groups, digital platforms for synchronous meetings, and printed materials for students without internet access; the NetEscola portal, which provided resources and activity lists for all levels of primary and secondary education; and live broadcasts of video lessons via television and radio. Siqueira and Gomes (2020) further note that the Municipal Department of Education's internal studies revealed that 80% of families with enrolled students had access to some form of social media, and 97% had access to free-to-air television. Based on these findings, the department introduced the Conexão Escola portal, regularly updated with activities, content, and videos produced by education professionals, as well as the SME Chatbot—a Telegram-based tool delivering weekly text, multimedia, photo, and video materials.

A report published by the Municipal Secretariat of Goiânia on 13 March 2023 described education in the city as 'a model for recovering students' learning in the post-pandemic context'. According to a technical study conducted by the Centre for Public Policies and Education Assessment (CAEd) at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), the municipal education network successfully resumed the learning process after the pandemic. The Basic Education Development Index (Ideb)—Brazil's principal tool for evaluating education—showed that Goiânia rose from 9th to 4th place among Brazilian capitals in Ideb rankings for the early years of primary education.

Silva and Di Pierro (2022), in their article *The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Educational Rights of Adult Migrants and Refugees – Research Notes*, analyse how the restrictive measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the educational rights of adult migrants and refugees. The term 'educational rights' is used to highlight the importance of access to education for this population and to reflect on the consequences of these restrictions for the realisation of such rights. The authors' analysis is based on a bibliographic and documentary review, offering valuable insights into the challenges faced by adult migrants and refugees during the pandemic.

When the authors refer to ‘adult educational rights’ in the article, they are specifically addressing Youth and Adult Education, which has historically:

[...] been associated with marginalised populations who were unable to attend or complete formal education at the age considered ideal. This association with excluded groups helps explain why, over the years, this form of education has often been relegated to a secondary priority in Brazil’s educational agenda. (Silva & Di Pierro, 2022, p. 8)

The authors also emphasise that with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic:

[...] the realisation of these rights – which was already difficult, particularly due to the gap between what is legally guaranteed and what is experienced in the daily lives of these populations – became even more distant from reality and effectiveness. (Silva & Di Pierro, 2022, p. 8)

In 2019, the Curricular Document for Goiânia, specifically for Youth and Adult Education (DC Goiânia – Eaja), was developed, with plans for implementation in 2020. However, this process was not fully realised due to the suspension of in-person classes as a result of the social distancing measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, in 2020, the pedagogical proposal was implemented primarily in virtual form, with activities designed by teachers and the technical team. These activities were made available to students through online platforms such as AVAH (from the SME), the Conexão Escola Portal, Conexão Escola TV programming, and WhatsApp. This model remained in place until the end of the first half of 2021. In the second half of 2021, with the relaxation of health protocols, a hybrid system combining in-person and online learning was adopted, eventually leading to the resumption of in-person instruction in November of that year.

In interviews conducted with migrant students for the *Crossed Borders* research, the school experience during the pandemic emerged as a central theme. Prior to commencing the fieldwork, it was anticipated that these students would not share their school experiences within the context of the pandemic in Brazil. Of the

seven students interviewed, only one had been in Brazil during this period, and this student reported no significant difficulties with what is referred to as 'emergency remote learning'. Classes were delivered via mobile phones, a WhatsApp group was created to facilitate daily communication with students, and educational materials were distributed through scheduled appointments at the school.

Silva and Di Pierro note that, for EJA, "[...] in general (both for migrant learners and for Brazilian learners), the greatest concern expressed about emergency remote learning was the imminent risk of further disconnecting this group from the formal educational process". (Silva & Di Pierro, 2022, p. 8)

The Haitian student, in particular, returned to school as soon as government regulations permitted the resumption of in-person classes. In an interview with the teacher of the first segment of EJA at Escola Jardim Nova Esperança, she highlighted that, during the pandemic, many migrant students were enrolled, and WhatsApp played a crucial role in keeping them connected to the school, as also noted by Silva and Di Pierro (2022).

Migrant students who had been in their home countries during the pandemic were able to share their school experiences from that period. While space was provided for such accounts, these experiences were not explored in depth, as the study focused on the post-pandemic context. Managers, headteachers, and pedagogical coordinators had already indicated that it would be difficult to obtain detailed accounts of migrant students' experiences during the pandemic in this educational modality within the municipal schools of Goiânia. Unfortunately, many of these students had stopped attending classes, moved to other areas in search of work, and eventually dropped out of school. Although some continued to communicate regularly via WhatsApp, many changed their phone numbers, resulting in lost contact.

During the interview with the pedagogical coordinator of the modality, I witnessed the exchange of voice messages filled with warmth and affection. Although the students no longer attended school, the coordinator conveyed closeness, care, and concern in her messages. She shared stories about some of the students and showed their photographs. Both the pedagogical coordinator and the teacher of the first segment attempted to arrange conversations with students who could share their school experiences dur-

ing the pandemic. However, these meetings did not take place due to time constraints.

It is important to highlight that school dropout rates among migrants in this modality are as significant as those of Brazilian students. As Fernandes and Oliveira (2020) observe, dropout in Youth and Adult Education (EJA) is a longstanding challenge and, with its various complexities, continues to be debated by scholars and education professionals in the field. One of the main difficulties is undoubtedly the reduction in investment and the discontinuity of public policies. This was evident at the beginning of President Jair Bolsonaro's administration with Decree No. 9.4655, which abolished the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI), where the Directorate of EJA Policies had been located since 2004.

From the perspective of defending the right to education for diverse groups, Jakimiu notes, "[...] the creation of the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI) in 2004 represented a significant step forward by giving visibility to historically silenced and excluded groups in the educational process." (Jakimiu, 2021, p. 116)

To conclude this section, I return to the notion of 'welcoming'. As noted earlier, Brazil faced numerous challenges during the pandemic, which further exposed its social inequalities. While the health crisis affected all sectors, the most vulnerable groups – such as informal workers and marginalised communities, including migrants – experienced the most severe impact. Limited access to quality healthcare and precarious living conditions intensified the difficulties faced by these populations.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that Brazil has a long tradition of welcoming migrants. During the pandemic, many, particularly those from Venezuela and other parts of Latin America, sought refuge in the country. Various institutions, including NGOs, mobilised to support newcomers. This duality – a Brazil marked by deep inequality but also by acts of solidarity – illustrates how crises can simultaneously expose structural weaknesses and reveal society's capacity for resilience and hospitality. Such a combination of challenges and support reflects a complex social reality that warrants deeper attention and reflection from a research perspective.

It is common to hear Brazilians describe their country as welcoming. In an interview with *Jornal da USP*, Professor Cynthia Soares Carneiro, coordinator of the Migratory Studies and Immigrant Worker Support Group, explained that ‘legally, Brazil is considered a welcoming country due to Article 5 of Law No. 9,474/1997 (the Refugee Law). The law mandates the protection of the fundamental rights of every person, prohibiting discrimination between Brazilians and non-Brazilians’. However, it is important not only to consider the legal framework but also to reflect on how migrants are actually received and embraced by society as a whole.

The seven migrants I interviewed shared diverse experiences of their arrival in Brazil. All of them arrived by plane, except for one Venezuelan student who undertook a different journey. She spent a few months in Roraima before moving to Goiânia, where she now lives with her family near the school she attends. Two Haitian students also passed through another state before settling in Goiânia and reported having faced xenophobic situations during their time there.

During the interviews, I asked how they felt about the treatment they received in Brazil, particularly in Goiânia, and whether they felt welcomed in the city. As a researcher, I initially expected negative responses, influenced by my own perception shaped by what I had witnessed at Guarulhos airport in November 2023 and by the many xenophobic incidents I had heard about, particularly involving Venezuelans. However, I was surprised by every interview. All of the migrant students responded, with conviction: *‘We are treated very well in this city!’*

Unsatisfied with such a concise answer, I followed up by directly addressing the issue of xenophobia. Once again, they assured me that they had not experienced prejudice related to race or nationality in Goiânia, and some even shared stories of warm hospitality. I clearly remember interviewing the two Haitian students in the courtyard of Pedro Costa de Medeiros School. One recounted that, while walking down the street in Goiânia recently, a police officer had embraced him. The Venezuelan student also emphasised that her experiences had been overwhelmingly positive and that she often noticed Brazilians’ curiosity about her country’s culture, particularly its cuisine. She said people frequently asked her about her homeland.

I concluded the interviews by asking about their experiences as migrant students in Brazil. It was in this context that the concept of 'welcoming' took on greater significance. Both the pedagogical coordinator and the teacher of the first segment of EJA expressed admiration for the respectful and responsible behaviour of the migrant students towards them and the school. They noted that many of these students arrived well-prepared in terms of curriculum content, as most had already completed their basic education in their home countries. Their primary motivation for enrolling in school was to learn Portuguese. Upon arriving in Goiânia, all the migrant students interviewed for this research immediately sought out a school.

In a recent article, Antonie and Amaral (2022) examine the trajectories of Haitian young people and adults who enrolled in the Youth and Adult Education (EJA) programme in the city of Cambé, Paraná. This master's research focused on their migration journey, their socio-cultural experiences in Haitian schools, the process of displacement to Brazil, and their integration into basic education through EJA. The authors note that Haitian students are motivated to join EJA for various reasons, including the desire to become proficient in Portuguese, the aspiration to obtain an international diploma, and the opportunity to attend school without financial cost (Antonie & Amaral, 2022, p. 1).

Within the school context, the migrant students highlighted the importance of having a space not only to learn the language, but also to integrate and familiarise themselves with Brazilian culture and customs. They particularly emphasised the value of the warm reception and support they received from teachers and school staff. Students reported that teachers and school leaders assist them in navigating everyday challenges in the city, such as completing forms, but above all, they offer a compassionate ear and encourage them to persevere in their learning with the hope of building a brighter future.

5. Final remarks: a Brief Conclusion to Continue the Research

Before concluding this article and addressing some key points, it is important to reflect on the challenges I faced while writing it. The process involved numerous revisions and adjustments. The research is still ongoing, which led to continuous modifications throughout. When I began drafting this text in November 2023, I had no idea who the migrant students would be or what their experiences might reveal. At certain points during the research and writing, I even considered abandoning the educational focus of the case study due to the difficulties in initiating fieldwork. Ultimately, however, my reasons for continuing with Youth and Adult Education (EJA) proved stronger.

Before becoming a university lecturer, I taught in the Youth and Adult Education programme at the Municipal Education Department of Goiânia, which undoubtedly influenced my decision to investigate this educational context. In 2004, I taught Visual Arts at a school in a peripheral neighbourhood of Goiânia, then considered a violent area. My evening commute involved taking two buses and walking for 20 minutes, as the bus stop was far from the school. I recall the many challenges faced by students in this programme. One key point, as Silva and Di Pierro (2022) observe, is that EJA comprises *working students* rather than *student workers*.

I also do not recall having migrant students in my classroom at that time, and it is likely that there were none. In 2004, Brazil's migration landscape was very different from today's. The country was still in a period of transition, with relatively modest migration flows. A turning point came with the creation of the Observatory of International Migrations (OBMigra) in 2013. As Cavalcanti (2023, p. 9) explains, it was a time when immigrants from various parts of the Global South, primarily Haitians, as well as Senegalese, Congolese, Guineans, Bengalis, Ghanaians and others, began arriving at Brazil's borders. Over time, these immigrants increasingly settled across Brazil during the early 2010s, marking a broader geographical spread of migration within the country. At that time, migration management bodies were urgently working to develop policies for this new reality. Moreover, the 2010 census data did not reflect this population (Cavalcanti, 2023).

Cavalcanti notes that OBMigra's launch and early work in 2014 were pivotal in fostering a deeper understanding of migration in Brazil, sparking discussions and investigations into migrants' experiences and the public policies affecting them. However, publications specifically addressing migrant experiences in education remain limited. Even obtaining data on migrant student enrolment proved challenging. During a conversation with administrators from the Youth and Adult Education Department of the Municipal Education Secretariat of Goiânia, I learned that the enrolment system was not configured to record an '*international migrants*' category. As a result, there were no official statistics on migrant student numbers in this modality. The information was eventually obtained through official letters from school headteachers, which enabled me to identify the partner schools.

The *invisibility* of migrant students—particularly within the EJA system—is another critical issue that demands attention. Matos-de-Souza *et al.* (2022, p. 2) discuss this invisibility in relation to curricular documents in Brazil's Northeast region, noting that social invisibility is linked to migrants in multiple ways and becomes firmly entrenched, approaching the idea of the pariah, where migrants are marginalised from society and excluded from Brazilian public policies, especially in education.

This situation is especially troubling in EJA, where many migrants seek opportunities for learning and integration but often face barriers that hinder their access to and retention in education. Nevertheless, there are examples of good practice. One such initiative is the 2023 document developed by the Municipal Education Secretariat (SME) entitled *Guidelines for the Reception and Welcoming of Immigrant Children/Students in the RME of Goiânia*. This guide, intended for immigrant learners in the Municipal Education Network of Goiânia, aims to provide guidelines for the reception and welcoming of immigrant children/students in the RME of Goiânia, with the aim of creating a pleasant, receptive, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for foreign children, adolescents, youth and adults attending the educational units of the RME of Goiânia." (Goiânia, 2023, p. 6)

The Youth and Adult Education Management Team (Gereja) played a central role in developing this material, demonstrating a commitment to addressing migration issues despite the considerable challenges faced by Brazil's public education system. One of

the key concepts underpinning the document is *welcoming*—and it is through this lens that I conclude my contribution to this article.

As is widely acknowledged, research requires careful attention to avoid overgeneralising situations and experiences. The intersection of education and migration is particularly complex in countries such as Brazil, where inequality is widespread. But why should schools not be welcoming? The *Guidelines* document stresses the importance of involving the entire educational community—including professionals, students, parents or guardians, and local residents—in implementing actions that foster inclusivity and equity between Brazilians and foreigners in a country defined by its multicultural and multi-ethnic diversity (Goiânia, 2023). The interviews conducted with the seven migrant students, the teacher, and the pedagogical coordinator show that when a school community is composed of individuals attuned to these issues, it can become a space that builds emotional connections and fosters respect for diversity.

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Finding the Way Back to School: Exploring the Pathways of Early School Leaving among Migrant Youth in Barcelona

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1. Introduction: the Pathways of Early School Leaving

Early school leaving (ESL) is a complex social phenomenon that impacts the lives of thousands of young people in Europe and particularly in Spain, as one of the European countries with the highest rate of youth leaving education and training early¹. The consequences of this phenomenon are significant. Research on this topic has long shown that young people who do not complete their schooling are at higher risk of social exclusion, as they often encounter difficulties in obtaining and retaining employment, experience greater job insecurity, and therefore tend to be socially and economically disadvantaged in the long term (OECD, 2021). In addition to the individual impact on the lives of those affected, the social consequences of ESL are also important to mention, such as highest rates of poverty and youth unemployment and a growing risk of social division (Freeman and Simonsen, 2015; Gitschthaler and Nairz-Wirth, 2018).

Considering the relevance of this phenomenon, it is essential to approach it from a deep and critical perspective, understanding that ESL cannot be reduced or explained solely in terms of the

1. Early School Leaving (ESL) is a term coined by the European Commission, within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy 2010, to establish objectives for educational policies. It refers to people aged 18 to 24 who have completed, at most, lower secondary education and who are no longer involved in any further education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey (Eurostat, 2024). In this sense, while the concept of school dropout refers to the lack of compulsory secondary education certification (ISCED level 2), ESL refers to the lack of certification of post-compulsory education (ISCED level 3).

number of people who do not finish schooling in regular times and ways. Indeed, a greater problematization of the concept reveals that the experience of a truncated school trajectory is often nonlinear, full of twists and turns, generally fuelled by a context of inequality and exclusion and frequently marked by a history of school failure, demotivation and disaffection towards educational institutions (Garrido and Polanco, 2020; Rodríguez, 2019)

It is also important to highlight that most ESL in the European Union has historically been - and remains - concentrated in disadvantaged and vulnerable socioeconomic contexts, with an especially significant impact among students with a migratory background. In fact, thanks to preliminary research, we know that premature school leaving is a challenge that has accompanied formal educational systems for a long time, rooted in historical inequalities and multiple processes of exclusion and marginalization that have affected many children and young people. We also know that, despite the undeniable advances in raising awareness and shaping basic education as a universal right, regular school attendance continues to be affected by a selective and exclusive organizational culture, exacerbated by inequalities and prejudices of race, gender and social class that limit the educational opportunities of many, and continuously challenging even the most progressive educational policies (Peterson et al, 2016; Lufton, 2019).

Furthermore, when looking at the trajectories of young migrants within formal educational systems, we must also mention the enormous challenge for social justice that their inclusion represents, as many migrants continue to experience oppressive forms of integration, based on linguistic and cultural domination, usually translated into a folkloric vision of cultural differences (Sedmak et al, 2021; Tarabini, 2018). Such a perspective often permeates multiple dimensions of the school, such as the curriculum, the school climate, the expectations that the teachers project onto migrant students, the ways to understand educational success and failure, relationships with families, the values and views of teachers, formal and tacit school norms, and many others.

This case study explores the causes and consequences of early school leaving in Spain, seeking to discover the reasons why ra-

cialized and minoritized² students with a migratory background generally experience higher rates of ESL. In the framework of the Crossing Borders project, the case tackles two specific questions related to the general aim of identifying and contributing to reduce educational inequities that impact migrants' educational trajectories:

1. What structural educational exclusion mechanisms lead to significantly higher early school leaving among racialized migrant youth in Spain?
2. What educational strategies, practices and policies capable of ameliorating early school leaving can be identified and transferred to other educational contexts?

The study is framed in the context of Second Chance Schools, a network funded by the European Union in the 90s as a means of addressing early school leaving from mainstream educational centres by promoting students' re-engagement and transition to work through vocational training. In this context, we approached the particular case of *El Llindar*, a Second Chance School located in the Province of Barcelona in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, a region with one of the highest rates of early school leaving among young migrants in relation both to Spain and to the European average. Using a qualitative approach, based on the study of educational trajectories, the case pursues two main objectives:

1. To examine the mechanisms of production of exclusion from educational policies and practices that explain the greater vulnerability of racialized students in the context of compulsory secondary education.
2. To explore and learn from the experience of *El Llindar*, an organization that fights education inequity by placing care and emotional support at the centre of its pedagogical practice.

2. By using the term minoritised (Gunaratnum, 2003) we embrace a social constructionist approach to understanding that people are actively minoritised by others in a social process shaped by power relations, rather than naturally existing as a minority. Following this approach, by racialized and minoritised immigrants we refer to specific profiles of immigrants who suffer inequality, racism or exclusion rooted in the historical and contemporary racial prejudices of society.

The chapter is divided as follows: First, we present the theoretical foundations that guide the study as well as some contextual data on the inequalities that impact the educational trajectories of migrant youth, analysing the evolution of early school leaving in Spain, and particularly in Catalonia. Next, we introduce the Second Chance Schools approach to fighting school dropout and unemployment among young people in vulnerable situations and at risk of educational exclusion, also describing the specific context of *El Llindar* school, where the fieldwork for this case study was conducted. In the methodology section we explain the epistemological and ontological positioning that underpins our research practice, as well as our data sources and the method followed in collecting and analysing the information. Finally, we discuss the main findings of the case study and conclude the chapter with some recommendations for future educational policies and practices.

2. Case Contextualization

2.1. Early school-leaving among migrant youth in Spain

Goal 4 of the global Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG) for 2030 seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. To this end, one of the specific objectives set out in the strategic framework of the European Education Area is to reduce the average proportion of students who leave school and training early in the EU to less than 9% by 2030. Although by 2023 more than half (16) of all EU countries have reached this target, the gaps between Member States are significant, ranging from 3.3% (in Greece) to 16.6% (in Romania), with Spain having the second highest early school leaving rate (13.7%) (European Commission, 2024).

Focusing on the situation of students with migrant backgrounds, the figures remain worrying both in the European Union and in Spain, showing that much remains to be done to improve the educational success of the most vulnerable student groups. According to Eurostat (2024), the proportion of students who leave education and training early is significantly higher among foreign

students than among nationals, for both young men and women, with the highest rates among young non-EU men.

Data also shows that Spain continues to lead the share of early school leaving among students with migratory background with a rate of 33% in 2023. Focusing on the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, where the study is based, despite the significant reduction in ESL over the last two decades (from a peak of 34.3% in 2003 to 14.8% in 2023), the figures remain above the Spanish and European averages. And if we look at the figures among students of migrant origin in the same context, the data are even more discouraging: a rate of 36.1% in 2023, which shows that ESL remains one of the main challenges facing the Catalan education system³.

As several authors have pointed out (Tarabini, Jacovkis, & Montes, 2017; Escudero, González, & Domínguez, 2009), ESL is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon caused by a set of social, systemic, institutional, relational, and subjective factors, and which occurs in a procedural and cumulative manner throughout the student's educational trajectory (Mena, Fernández-Enguita, & Riviere, 2010). Furthermore, ESL rates are closely linked to problems of social inequality and are not distributed equitably among all social groups: in Spain and Catalonia, it is more frequent among young men, with low socioeconomic and cultural status, and belonging to certain ethnic minorities or migrant groups. According to Curran and Montes (2022), this unequal incidence among students of foreign origin could be explained by the administrative, linguistic, socioeconomic, and symbolic barriers that directly affect them.

Experts also point out that the term ESL is imprecise for analysing the phenomenon, since the same term includes: a) young people who drop out of school without a compulsory secondary education certificate; b) young people who graduate from compulsory secondary education but do not continue their post-compulsory education studies; or c) young people who enrol in post-compulsory education but drop out before obtaining the certificate.

This overlap of diverse ESL profiles represents a barrier to the design of effective educational policies, as it makes it difficult to know at what point in their educational trajectory a student drops

3. Source: IDESCAT and Active Population Survey. Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2023).

out (Curran and Montes, 2022). As Escudero, González, and Domínguez (2009) highlight, ESL “is constructed day by day in an endless number of events experienced, felt, acted out, and valued by specific and singular subjects in precise and delimited contexts, linked to structures, actions, and processes” (p. 50). Therefore, when analysing ESL, it is important to focus not only on overall figures but also on educational trajectories and transitions.

Following this idea, many authors (Curran & Montes, 2022; Tarabini et al. 2017, 2021; Perrenoud, 1990) highlight the need for research from qualitative perspectives in which, beyond measuring the ESL phenomenon, we seek to delve deeper into the experiences of young people and the other educational actors who accompany them throughout their educational path. Thus, in line with the recommendations of several experts (Tarabini y Curran, 2019; Daniels & Cole, 2010; Escudero, 2005; Escudero, González & Domínguez, 2009), we approach the ESL phenomenon by understanding it as a progressive disengagement process (Mena et al., 2010) caused by the interaction of several factors of educational exclusion that occur in the educational system.

This approach allows us to distance ourselves from other perspectives that attribute the success or failure of young people’s educational paths to their personal or familiar circumstances. It also underlines that far from being a natural phenomenon, ESL is produced by a certain school system order. This school system order consists not only of what happens within it, but also of the discourses with which it is supported and legitimized (Escudero, González & Domínguez, 2009).

Thus, this case study examines the school trajectory of a group of racialized and minority youth in Catalonia to understand their experiences of school disaffection, examining the mechanisms by which exclusion is produced by educational policies and practices. In the following sections we present the context in which the research was conducted: the Second Chance Schools, a European initiative to promote school reintegration and the transition to work through different educational paths.

2.2 Second Chance Schools: a European response to early school-leaving

Second Chance Schools (SCS) emerged in 1995 as an experimental measure supported by the European Commission to combat the exclusion of young people from the school system in the framework of the White Paper on education and training entitled *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*. As stated by the commission, the Second Chance Schools initiative was born with the aim of encouraging fresh thinking about the place of 'school dropouts' in Member State education policies. In that sense, "the message and expected results of these projects, in which young people are brought back into a 'virtuous' circle of learning and out of a vicious circle of deprivation and dependency, have been designed to highlight the predicament of this target group as a challenge to education establishments, and not merely a concern of the employment and care sectors". (European Commission, 2001: 11).

The SCS pilot project began with the implementation of thirteen Second Chance Schools in eleven European countries. In Spain, it was initially implemented in Bilbao (1997) and Barcelona (1998). In 1998 the pilot project became a network to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences, and cooperation between the Member States' projects. The European Association of Second Chance Schools is currently made up of three national networks (Spain, France and Portugal) plus 33 schools. The Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools was established in 2016 and currently consists of 47 schools in 10 autonomous communities.

According to the report of the Spanish network for the 2022-2023 academic year, SCS were attended by 8,493 young people throughout the national territory with the support of 957 professionals. Of these young people, 29% were women and 71% were men. The success rate - which measures the situation of students six months after leaving the school (incorporation into the labour market or reintegration into formal or non-formal training at another centre) - was 63%. Of the age groups of attendees, 56% were aged 15-18, 38% were aged 19-25, and 6% were 26-29 years old. These figures are similar to those of the previous four years. The figures show that more than 5,000 educational paths were recovered and confirm what we previously posited: that it is not the students who fail, but the ordinary education system.

3. Methodology: Delving into the Lived Experience of Early School Leaving

This is a qualitative exploratory case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gillham, 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). According to Yin's (2009) definition, we understand the case study as a research strategy that facilitates a deep and enriched comprehension of the dynamics of a singular setting by looking at them in their empirical context. To find out what works in second chance programmes to re-engage young people into a virtuous circle of learning, we analysed the specific case of *El Llindar* Second Chance School, specifically looking at the educational trajectories of racialized migrant youth who have resumed their studies at this educational institution.

Of the 47 schools associated and accredited as members of the Spanish Second Chance School Association, 10 are in Catalonia and 8 in the province of Barcelona. The school of new opportunities⁴ *El Llindar* is situated in Cornellà de Llobregat, a municipality of Barcelona with a population of 91,196 inhabitants in 2024, of whom almost 18% are of migrant origin (16,139)⁵. People from Morocco are the most predominant (17.96%), followed by Peru (9.33%) and Colombia (8.68)⁶. According to the information on its website, *El Llindar* was founded in December 2004 with the mission of offering an educational space to young people who were excluded from the educational and social system, through an educational proposal alternating between training and work, guiding, accompanying and supporting their transition to adult life. In the interview we conducted with the school principal and the teaching director in September 2022, they stated that the school had gone from having 8 students at its beginnings to having 470, and from having 2 professionals, to currently having almost 90.

4. In Catalonia, the term "school of new opportunities" has been adopted due to the negative notation attributed to the term "second chance". According to the school principal and founder of El Llindar Foundation, Begonya Gasch, it is a second chance for the educational system to improve the quality and sustainability of its educational offer, not to the young people.

5. Data from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia for the year 2024 [<https://www.idescat.cat/emex/?id=080734&lang=es>].

6. Data from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia for the year 2024 [<https://www.idescat.cat/poblacioestrangera/?geo=mun:080734&nac=a&b=12&lang=es>].

Fieldwork was carried out in *El Llindar* between September 2022 and June 2023, using the following research techniques for collecting data:

- A. In-depth interviews with teaching staff⁷. We conducted a) one interview on site with the school principal for the first contact and entry into the field, b) a joint interview by videoconference with the school principal and the teaching coordinator, and c) four interviews on site with teaching staff.
- B. A focus group with students. The composition of the focus group was a) 4 boys and 3 girls between 16 and 18 years old, and b) 3 from the second generation (parents who migrated from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Pakistan), 2 who had recently arrived two years ago (from Morocco and Georgia), 1 mixed-race national (father from Spain and mother from the Dominican Republic), and 1 white national (father from Spain and mother from Italy). Photo-elicitation (Walls & Holquist, 2019) was used as a technique to bring to light young people's experiences of early school leaving.
- C. In-depth interviews with students. A sample of 4 students (two boys and two girls) who had previously participated in the focus group was selected for in-depth interviews that allowed us to examine in depth their individual trajectories of educational exclusion from the compulsory school and the new opportunities they found in the Second Chance School to recover their educational paths.
- D. Analysis of reports and documents produced by the European and Spanish network of Second Chance Schools. Institutional documents were also analysed.

In line with the overall methodological framework of the Crossing Borders project, the research conducted a multidimensional and interconnected analysis of the different levels (systemic, institutional, relational, and individual) at which early school leaving occurs. Furthermore, with the aim of expanding and com-

7. Following the ethical protocol of the project, the interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed into text format, anonymized and stored in the project's secure storage system. The results of the triangulation of these techniques are presented below.

pleting the existing knowledge on this complex problem through a qualitative perspective, we delve into the most personal dimension of the educational inequalities experienced by this group of young students of diverse cultural origins, who have seen their educational careers cut short in regular school. Following a phenomenological perspective, we wanted to understand, through the stories told by the youth themselves, the meaning they give to their journey through secondary education, and the reasons that led them to leave school early. We also want to understand their journey back: how they reunited with their expectations and hopes for the future in a new educational context, which through emotional support, helps them reconnect with themselves, face their fears and get a second chance for education.

The research followed a critical research perspective aligned with the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the constructivist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As Montenegro et al (2015) states, "critical research engages with the world from a position that is attentive to power relations and their effects and committed to social transformation." In that sense, the critical perspective provides a series of tools of knowledge and action to analyse and influence the relationships of discrimination, oppression, subordination and social exclusion of different groups and collectives. (Montenegro, Pujol, and Vargas-Monroy, 2015: 1843)

From this perspective, we seek to understand the complexity of the lived experience of early school leaving from the point of view of young migrants who experienced it (Schwandt, 1994). In that sense, to avoid considering participants as *empirical individuals* and to recognize their active role as *epistemic individuals* in the production of knowledge we used a narrative approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Denzin, 1989) as a tool to explore the complexity of the lived experiences of educational inequities.

Perhaps it is also important to remark that the interest in recovering the stories of these young people in their own words has, indeed, a clear political will: to value personal experiences as a rich and relevant source of knowledge that can inform educational policy and practice. Experiences which, as Van Manen (1990) reminds us, are always more complex, more nuanced and richer in layers than we can grasp as researchers, but that allow us to establish a map of convergent and divergent meanings that com-

prise the daily life of schools. In this sense, it is appropriate to remark that the experiences of the most vulnerable students are often marginalized or silenced in mainstream narratives about education, which results in a recurring lack of attention to their particular needs, desires and aspirations, and the reinforcement of the barriers that limit their education.

4. Case Discussion: Echoes from the Data

At the time we were developing the fieldwork for the case study, the interviewed girls and boys were resuming their education at El Llindar after a long journey of progressive disaffection towards schooling. In different ways, all of them arrived at El Llindar with emotional baggage: stories of exclusion and violence, continued academic failures, low self-esteem and lack of motivation. What do they tell us? What barriers and opportunities do they point out as the most notable? What expulsion mechanisms have they experienced in mainstream education? And what path and signs have they followed, and what have they relied on, to recommit themselves to education?

Students' and teachers' answers to these and other questions - all rich in nuances, sensations and emotions - are the main raw materials that make up the following discussion from which we seek to answer the main question of this research: what is behind the early school-leaving of these young people and what enabled their reengagement.

4.1. Navigating school violence between fear, loneliness and lack of emotional support: *“Everything has to be solved with fists.”*

Among the cross-cutting themes⁸ that emerge in the interviews when the students explain their trajectory at secondary education, one of the most frequently addressed is school violence. Violence

8. By cross-cutting themes we mean topics that have a high discursive density - they are repeated recurrently by the youth themselves, as experiences that have had a relevant impact on their educational trajectories.

and bullying are prominent matters addressed by schools due to their increasing prevalence across the world and their harmful effects on students' wellbeing, their physical and mental health, and their academic life (Gusmões et al., 2018). According to UNESCO (2024), every month one in three learners is bullied at school globally. Over 36% of learners experience a physical fight with their peers and almost one in three has been physically attacked at least once in a year. UNESCO also notes that, beyond interpersonal violence, education policies, practices, and processes that disadvantage or exclude certain groups of learners constitute a less tangible form of institutional violence. These include biased curriculum content, normalized violence in school cultures, insufficient support for vulnerable learners, discriminatory dress codes, and unequal resource allocation, all of which may harm their academic and social development.

Faced with this distressing and challenging problem, different authors point out the importance of addressing school violence from the perspective of children and youth, rather than solely through an adult-centred lens. How young people understand violence, how they experience it, where they learn about it, how they feel when facing violent situations, are some of the many questions explored by childhood studies that position young people and children as social actors, exploring how they come to understand the world around them. (see Corsaro 1997; Rosier, Van Ausdale and Feaginm 2003; Burman 2019; Warming, 2022)⁹.

In our case, regular secondary school emerges in the narratives of our interviews as a place in which violence, whether interpersonal, institutional or structural, permeates daily life. Both boys and girls explain that conflicts between students, often accompanied by physical and psychological assaults, were something com-

9. In this field, an interesting example to contrast with our case is the research carried out by Susan Batchelor and Michelle Burman (2001) about the perception of violence of 13- to 16-year-old girls in North America. In her research, Burman found that when asked to define violence, youth girls tended to draw on typical, abstract, normative definitions of violence, such as physical violence (fighting, slapping, punching) or the use of a weapon. But when they began to recount current experiences with violence they revealed a much broader array of behaviour, from stalking and sexual assault, to verbal threats and racial harassment. As Burman remarks, these 'violence stories' reveal a much more layered and nuanced understanding about young people's experiences with violence, and this knowledge is fundamental to develop better classroom management strategies and violence prevention policies.

mon within the school or in its surroundings, also commenting on situations of structural violence involving teachers or school administration.

The continuous repetition in the interviews of some sort of primitive idea of violence, understood as a basic resource to get through a dangerous and harmful context, is remarkable. In many interviews the students directly emphasise that, in order to 'survive' in high school, they cannot show weakness, but rather an image of strength. In these terms, violence emerges in our data as a form of relationship that is naturalized, to which students have to adapt and assimilate, whether they like it or not. This is how some young people explain it:

"At school, although many people want to say no, and there is the idea that it is not like that, you have to survive based on respect. I mean, it's like the movies you see when you're a kid. If others see that you are weak, they will hit you, they will want to find you. And, if you are also a person who has repeated a grade or has difficulties, they will want to bother you even more. At school, at mine, but I think at any other school, there is a lot of violence. Everything has to be solved with fists." (Male student)

"It is true that there are many fights at school. That they wait for you to fight when you go out and you have to defend yourself, or things like that [...] I didn't like fights or anything, but let's see... there is a moment when, if they come looking for you, you strike back... Because that's how it is... (Female student)

I have never liked violence and I have never known how to use it, but there came a point where I didn't know how else to defend myself [...] I'm not proud of it, but I'm not ashamed of it either." (Male student)

Another aspect that emerges strongly in the tales of these young people is a deep sense of isolation in the face of danger. The lack of adult guidance to help them prevent situations of violence or manage emotional conflicts seems to transform secondary school into a traumatizing environment in which young people find no way out beyond violence. Such feelings of loneliness and missing adult guidance not only perpetuate the dynamics of violence, but also erode students' trust in the school's mechanisms for con-

flict resolution. For instance, some of the students describe how the perception that 'no one cares' led them to lack confidence in teachers' and to school disaffection.

"I have seen scenes in which two boys were hitting each other and the teacher was covering her face because she was laughing... She was laughing with the other teachers, and they didn't intervene until the kids were sprawled on the floor. Of course, it could have been avoided much earlier... But I think that they even enjoy it... It's as if the problem has nothing to do with them - they didn't care about us at all." (Male student)

"I would not return to secondary school. Mostly because teachers there didn't do anything. I told them about my problems, but they dismissed them as much as possible, and that's it. There were also many who didn't like me because I wouldn't stay silent. If I had a problem, I said it. For instance: "this person has hurt me, and if you don't make it stop, I'm going to stop it myself." Then they started telling me that I needed to go to a psychologist because I didn't answer others properly." (Female student)

4.2. Exploring the paths of symbolic violence in school: *"Going to secondary school was hell for me."*

The focus on violent interactions among peers or with teachers, however, has the danger of reducing our understanding of school violence to a scale of interpersonal conflicts, which would be an extremely narrow view of such a complex issue. In this respect, cultural approaches to violence offer richer possibilities for analysing our data from a broader perspective, bringing up such concepts as symbolic violence which, like a wide-angle lens, allows us to enlarge our view of the multiple forms of violence that coexist in school.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) referred to symbolic violence as forms of power that manage to impose meanings from a legitimizing perspective that hides the power relationships in which these meanings are sustained and reproduced. From this view, symbolic violence can be understood to be any institutionalized

practice directed to domesticating bodies and consciences, which Paulo Freire (1993) argued in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Using symbolic violence as a framework for analysing school violence helps us to reveal how schools are not just settings where violence occurs between students, but places where institutional actors and structures can constantly perpetuate violence. For instance, in our study, all the young people interviewed reported harassment situations linked to social, cultural, ethnic or gender differences, where being perceived as “different” makes them a target for aggression. In their narratives, violence frequently appears connected to racism and xenophobia, which emerges as a transversal category that crosses multiple spheres of their school experience.

In fact, the students interviewed report experiences of direct discrimination by both classmates and teachers, with skin colour, cultural origin and linguistic discrimination being some of the central axes of these experiences:

“At the Institute, they did not treat me or my Moroccan classmate the same way they treated the typical white, well-groomed boy who comes from a good family and who gets good grades. Since I’m not from here, although I was born here... Once a teacher told me and my Moroccan classmate that she would not give us the exam because she knew we would not do anything right...” (Female student)

“They told me: “You don’t understand Spanish or Catalan, right? [...] ‘Look, sit at the end, don’t bother and that’s it.” So I was like that, sitting for an hour, doing anything.” (Male student)

It is also interesting to note that language barriers or cultural differences are topics frequently mentioned by the interviewees as a focus of conflict and violence at school. Many of them explain how violent attitudes can emerge as a response to the lack of personal resources for relating to an unknown context, frequently hostile to differences. A situation that, as Willis (2017) points out, shows us how schools can give rise to forceful, and sometimes conflictive, forms of social and cultural negotiation between misunderstood young people, and also often misunderstood adults, about the meaning and effects of modernity. In that sense, antisocial behaviour and cultural conflict can be vehicles of expression

and ways of fighting for some space of autonomy when words fail, are not available or are not heard.

“I didn’t know how to speak anything, just a little English. So, when I entered the institute, since they saw that I didn’t know how to speak, they said, ‘look, we’re going to bother him’. For example, I was sitting like this, and I didn’t understand anything, but I tried to listen and understand a little... They would pass by and...boom! they would hit me. I let it go because I didn’t want any trouble. I didn’t know how things were here... how they would treat me afterwards, you know? The laws and all that. For example, in Georgia, if I’m sitting listening to something and they hit me, I grab a chair and... There nobody says anything to me. But, here, I didn’t know what would come next (the consequences)... Until one time I got really hurt, and I almost left a kid with no eye... Just from one punch, his eye was swollen for two hours. And afterwards, since they (the classmates) saw that I didn’t know how to speak but I wasn’t a fool either, nobody touched me again.” (Male student)

Moreover, a cultural approach to school violence also allows us to explore the significance of dominant ideologies in the perpetuation of violence, xenophobia and racism, a topic already explored in previous research. For instance, in the American context, Don Merten’s (1994) ethnographic study of white suburban students and their transition from elementary to middle school helps unravel how dominant cultural ideology can contribute to aggression. Merten argues that middle-class ideology emphasizes success, individualism and competition. This ideological worldview is reinforced in school systems through class rankings, standardized tests, athletic contests and other hierarchy status symbols. This ideology teaches adolescents early that there are only winners or losers, normal or deviants, competent or incompetent, and so forth (Merten, 1994).

Similarly, in our case, several students report having experienced a marked disaffection with the traditional educational system, which is linked to competitive and, at times, classist dynamics depending on the perceived academic level, where groups with greater difficulties were stigmatized even by some teachers. This structure fosters an environment of exclusion and inequality, generating discouragement and disconnection. As they explain:

"In class, I had a lot of problems with my classmates. I was always alone. Problems with the teachers too because when they messed with me they always said the problem was mine. Because the boys were blonde, white, and I was dark. There was a lot of favouritism. I don't know if it was racism, but I think so." (Female student)

"Well, starting with the grades... In high school, when a person got a bad grade, for example, they start to say ugly things to you, like, "it's just that you never study," "it's just that I expected it from you", "you didn't even need to take this exam", things like that... And that discourages me. You think, "well, I'm not going to study again." (Female student)

Understanding the experience of these young people from the perspective of symbolic violence is interesting because it shifts our attention away from just looking at 'problematic' youth and peer-to-peer violence, and instead examines the ways in which schools themselves, through their practices, behaviours and rules, perpetuate violence and racism. In fact, previous studies (Epp and Watkinson 1997; Bowditch 1992) largely demonstrate that racialized students disproportionately tend to be punished, expelled from school, or forced to drop out. This tacit and sometimes explicit movement to 'cleanse the school of bad kids' is a largely unrecognized mechanism through which schools perpetuate the racial and class stratification of society at large. In our study this same feeling emerges many times and in many forms.

"I felt very uncomfortable from the first day. Because the school I went to was very... how would I say?... classist. They put each one above the other... There was class group A, class group B, class group C, D, and F. F was a group class that even some teachers said was for the... well they didn't say 'stupid'... but the most marginal ones." (Male student)

"I began to notice things about my classmates that bothered me, things that they said about me... Like we were gradually leaving childhood, but that was too fast for me. And I would end up fighting and I would start crying. There was a new girl, and I became her friend. Because she was new, I said, "I'm going to become her friend." And two days later, when she started getting along with more people,

I remember that she started treating me very badly, and then she said things about me to people, and that's when everything went south, everything went away." (Female student)

To analyse ESL taking into account these dynamics of structural racism opens a new perspective for understanding the complexity of the problem. It allows us, for instance, to recognize the hidden mechanisms of repression and stigmatization even in language and discourses. As Echieta (2006) suggests, it is common to consider the reasons for school dropout as related to choices. The expressions that 'the student dropped out', or that 'they failed at school' are full of meanings. Grammar teaches us that the subject performs an action, makes a choice, and becomes a victim of his or her own decisions or 'bad behaviours'. When named in this way, students are held responsible and accountable for their choices as a maladjusted subject, weak in will or effort, lacking the capabilities that educational success requires.

However, this and other research shows us that ESL is a phenomenon produced by an intense process of classifications, hierarchies, stigmas and micro-punishments that make remaining in school unsustainable, since the relationships of belonging to learning and socialization spaces are destroyed or harmed. It is what Rosimeire Brito (2016) calls 'soft expulsion', when analysing the academic performance of black students with histories of school failure and school dropout in Brazil. In these cases, she remarks, there are no alternatives, since there is an entire biopolitical strategy that culminates in the exclusion of certain populations that do not align with the economic demands of the benefits of schooling, and that has been operating systematically throughout the history of modern education.

In the same vein, Tarabini (2017) remarks that for years international research has highlighted the key role that teachers play in educational exclusion processes. Teacher expectations, in particular, have been identified as one of the main elements explaining young people's opportunities for educational success. Expectations have the ability to generate real effects on students, since they are transmitted through their treatment and have an impact on self-esteem, interaction, and ultimately, on results. Likewise, there are numerous studies that have shown that teacher expectations are deeply influenced by the social profile of students, which

explains why students of low socio-economic and cultural status tend to be overrepresented as the target of low expectations (Auwarker and Aruguete, 2008; Dunne and Gazeley, 2008).

In our case, what emerges in the stories can be summarized as an enormous emotional distance between students and the school dynamics, where the relationship between teachers and students takes on a very important role. Indeed, the relationship with the teachers was a recurring theme in the interviews. Many students refer to what they understand as a lack of empathy on the part of teachers, within educational tutoring focused mostly on academic results, but without a genuine interest in their well-being. In some cases, this perceived lack of empathy led to aggressive reactions on the part of students, reflecting the magnitude of the internal conflict generated by such dynamics. They also describe how this lack of connection and mutual recognition leads to demotivation, creating an environment where mistakes are not perceived as an opportunity to learn, but as a confirmation of their inability:

“At school, there was a kind of gap between the student and the teacher. I mean, ‘I’ll give you the homework, I’ll give you the exams, you go home’, and that was the only relationship we had. It seems silly, but if I like a teacher, and he helps me, and I have a good relationship, it makes me want to do what you ask me to do more, because if I don’t like him, I’m not going to want to do what they give me... you know? They tend to handle feelings very badly.” (Male student)

“In this photo I see a frustrated child with a book. That’s how I felt at school. I got into the first year of ESO very well. And soon after I didn’t understand anything. And since I didn’t understand anything, I didn’t go to school anymore. And when I did, I had problems with people and with the teachers. And the teachers didn’t help at all. I had anxiety attacks, and the teacher told me “calm down and go back to class”. (Female student)

“Going to high school was hell for me. I fell asleep. [...] I didn’t like it. [...] The teachers didn’t understand me. Once I was falling asleep and the teacher hit the table to wake me up. I got up to hit him back...” (Male student)

4.3. Healing wounds to open new opportunities: “You can, you can, you can”

What hope is left for a possible emotional reunion with school after such deeply damaged feelings? How to rebuild bridges with a vision of education as it should be: a positive, respectful and welcoming environment? At the time we began the interviews with these young students, they were beginning a new educational path in *El Llindar*, which was, for many of them, an unknown port reached after a long journey through disaffection, school violence and loneliness. Their stories required exploring dimensions of the educational experience that are frequently left out of policies and practices around early school leaving, which mostly focus on academic results and standards of behaviour.

However, a fundamental idea that supports this view is that the relationship that links young people with school and learning is not only intellectual, but also – and above all – emotional. It is known, therefore, that school disaffection is not explained only by academic or instrumental difficulties, but precisely by expressive and emotional issues. As Furlong (1991) states, school rejection is almost always a markedly emotional experience. Feelings of anger, fear, frustration and guilt are present in the processes of failure and leaving school, and therefore, any systemic policy that seeks to address these phenomena cannot be designed without taking these issues into account.

From this perspective, it is essential to think of education as a practice where care, accompaniment, listening and emotional support are fundamental pillars of educational success. This area, as Lynch and Baker (2005) state, has received little attention in debates and policies on educational inequality, although according to the authors it is of key importance to guarantee school justice. Schools are key spaces for emotional and affective work. It is therefore urgent to vindicate the role of emotions in the teaching and learning process, recognizing that educational equality requires equality in terms of care. And from this perspective, as Tarabini asserts (Tarabini, 2017), teachers and the relationships they establish with students become a central agent of educational exclusion or inclusion.

All the students we interviewed arrived at *El Llindar* after a trajectory marked by negative experiences in the ordinary education-

al system, with emotional, academic and relational disconnection throughout. In this regard, the *El Lindar* teachers point out that the general profile of the students reflects a deep disaffection towards the traditional school system. This disaffection has several dimensions: from a lack of interest in the content, to the absence of meaningful relationships with teachers. These feelings are aggravated when the only institutional responses to their fears and behaviour have been expulsion or tacit abandonment. Some students mentioned long periods without attending class or “going through an entire school year without picking up a pen.” These experiences of extreme exclusion leave an emotional mark on these young students that negatively influences their self-esteem and confidence. One of the teachers at *El Lindar* paints a fairly explicit portrait of this arrival:

“Our students are young people who come from a long history of failures. The majority of them have not completed secondary compulsory education (...) and almost all of them have had bad experiences in their previous schools. So, they almost always carry in their emotional baggage some words and sentences from the school teachers such as “you are useless”, “you are stupid”, “you can’t do anything in life”, “you can’t manage to do anything”. So, they arrive with a label, with a very powerful label.” (Female teacher)

“At primary school they still make some progress, precisely because in this first stage of education there is more emotional support. But when they reach secondary school, they fall apart as soon as they start. All the kids we have tell us about experiences in high school like, “I spent the whole day being excluded and as soon as I came back, something would happen again.” Or “since they already had me in their sights, the slightest thing was enough to kick me out of class or exclude me again.” Or “they allowed me to be in the back row with my cell phone, going completely unnoticed, as long as I didn’t bother the others.” (Male teacher)

Therefore, it is not surprising that in our first conversations, when we ask the students about their previous school experiences, what emerges are mostly words full of rage, anguish and pain. “...I would never go back...”, “...there are bad people at school...”, “...high school was hell for me...”. As we progress through the interviews and

conversations, these feelings become more nuanced. Their stories open new paths, they tell us about resilience, starting over, losing fear and regaining confidence in themselves and others. What led to this transformation? What promotes this new perspective? In the interviews, the students reveal the key: a different, respectful perspective and a relationship based on care:

“When I got here, I thought it would be the same thing. When you arrive here the first time you have a meeting with the director, with the coordinator, with your family and you. I was sitting like this with an expression like “what the hell do you want? “Where am I?” But in the end... the way they explained things to me, the way they spoke with me... Then I came one day to try, and everyone treated me well...”
(Male student)

“I think it’s the type of treatment, how they treat you, as if they appreciate you, how they explain it to you little by little, even if you don’t understand it, they explain it again. That’s what I’m saying... that in ESO (secondary education) everything happens to you very quickly, whether you understand it or not, they continue. So here it is calmer, everyone has their own pace, there are faster people and slower people, they have a lot of patience, always saying “you can, you can, you can”. (Female student)

As we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, Second Chance Schools such as *El Llindar* were created within the framework of a European initiative that seeks to reverse ESL. To achieve this goal, an essential principle of this initiative is that the ‘second chance’ has to provide a different experience from the ‘first chance’, as students would not wish to return to a ‘place of failure’, nor would they be more likely to succeed unless the main characteristics of the education offered differed significantly from their experience in the regular school system. Educational innovation is therefore at the heart of Second Chance Schools, which need to implement strategies capable of transforming pedagogical relationships and strengthening the links between students and the educational centre. It is well known that much of the dramatic change that can take place in a young person’s life occurs in the individual microcosms that link them to a caring adult. Constructive relationships between teachers and students in Second

Chance Schools are therefore a key ingredient for their success. In this context, individualized learning paths are important, as is the recognition that teachers' commitment and emotional skills are essential to the success of this challenging approach.

In our case study we have been able to see how these principles are put into practice through pedagogical care and support that lead students to re-engage with their educational expectations and renew their motivation. As the teachers remark, although not all students achieve such immediate changes, in several cases they experience a significant improvement in their attitude, behaviour and commitment to education, as soon as they perceive that at *El Llindar* they encounter a new perspective that welcomes them in their differences.

"These boys and girls come from being invisible, or looked at too much by disruptive, violent people. A very classifying, very segregating gaze. What you find here is the complete opposite. That is, they are looked at, but with a good gaze. When they arrive at the first reception - which is an individual reception, with each child, with each family - the director and I, as the pedagogical coordinator, welcome them. We give them a tour of the school, and we have a conversation. And we always tell them: "this is a blank page, you have the opportunity to start from scratch and show us what you really want to show us." "We are not going to take into account all these previous experiences, we do not care what happened at your previous school... We care about what happens from now on. And we will accompany you to be able to do it another way." And I believe that this introduction changes things radically, in some cases, from the first minute. Of course there are kids who continue to have many difficulties, and we are still there, fighting every day... But there are some cases where we see that the change is radical, from the first moment they see that here they can find something different, something welcoming."
(Female teacher)

The pedagogical approach at *El Llindar* is based on a deep understanding of the personal and emotional trajectories of these young people, offering comprehensive support. Educators highlight the importance of providing a balance between limits and affection, creating relations based on trust so that students can express themselves and grow. Such a supportive environment aims

to help them deal with their stories of abandonment and build a sense of belonging in the educational system. Educators also emphasize the need to ensure a climate where students can feel safe to talk about their concerns and experiences. This act of listening is not simply passive but happens through explicit reflective practices that aim to encourage students to verbalize their thoughts and engage in authentic dialogue. It is a process that helps students move away from passive and self-deprecating attitudes and take responsibility for their own acts.

“Here, they listen to the problems, and never, never, as far as I know, have we ever got violent with anyone in class. Sometimes, maybe people have insulted each other, but the teacher stops them, talks to them, and in the end everything ends well. I don’t know how they do it. At school, they would call your parents, start telling them that you were going to be expelled and so on, and you already had the idea that that was going to happen. But not here. I think that here, if you hit someone, you would never be able to sleep again... Because it is very bad to hit someone like that.” (Female student).

At *El Llindar*, the emotional bond between teachers and students is presented as a fundamental pillar in the reconstruction of students’ emotional reengagement with education. This bond does not arise automatically, but is built on trust, active listening and the recognition of the other as an individual with unique stories, needs and potentialities. This pedagogical approach involves a deeper understanding of students as individuals, with educators striving to see beyond initial difficulties and avoid paternalistic attitudes. An approach that, as both teachers and the young people themselves remark, inspires desire and motivation to learn:

(At school) “I was just another kid, and that’s it. But here... Look, for example, a visitor comes, there’s an activity... they call me to help, they call me for everything. And that motivates you. When you see that people want to see you, that they want you for many things. So you want to go further and do more things. At school, we didn’t have those opportunities.” (Male student)

“There are always moments of tension. It doesn’t have to be between them, but because of their personal situations. You always notice

when there is tension... There are few of them in class, and you immediately notice who is not doing well that day. And when you offer to listen, and they use it and trust you... Then, sometimes you can take what they told you well, and sometimes not. But when you notice that trust, you feel that they have accepted your offer, that they count on you... These are things that happen every day, but they never cease to surprise me in a positive way." (Male teacher)

A particular focus of the research was to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these young people's educational trajectories and how the school dealt with this particularly disruptive moment. In the case of *El Llindar*, a school so focused on mentoring and close personal relationships, we were particularly interested in learning what strategies they implemented to continue supporting students when physical presence was not an option. Indeed, the lack of physical presence itself was, according to school staff, the biggest challenge they had to face:

"Since we couldn't be there in person, we provided our voices, we provided our words... [...] But we were left without the most important thing, which is being there for them. These kids need someone to be there for them physically so they can calm down, so they can give, and we couldn't be there for them." (interview with the school principal, Begonya Gasch)

It was a moment when teachers took on the primary role of emotional support. Avoiding leaving young people isolated at all costs and remaining present, albeit at a distance, was at that time the school's most important effort.

"At the time the pandemic broke out, and we went into lockdown [...] personal accompaniment really took precedence over educational and academic aspects. The academic aspect was an excuse to stay connected with them and with the situations they were experiencing." (interview with the teaching coordinator, Cristina Gómez)

"If school is truly connected to life, at that time, life was the pandemic. [...] The educational aspect was to continue living, to continue existing, when the world was paralysed." (interview with the school principal, Begonya Gasch)

4.4. Promoting a sense of belonging and mutual commitment: *“we always help each other... it’s like a chain that never breaks”*

Building strong and positive relationships among peers is another essential component of the success of this Second Chance School. Although, as teachers remark, the relationships among students are not always homogeneous or free of tension, the feeling of belonging to a group, mutual recognition and cohesion is a tangible reality in the day-to-day life of the school. Achieving it is, however, the result of constant hard work. Teachers emphasize the importance of the role of the administration and the school culture in fostering a sense of community, through policies that seek to reinforce the message that all students share a common space and face similar challenges, which can be a significant point of union. This approach contributes to making *El Llindar* a learning community, where differences are valued as an asset and not as a barrier.

Research on inclusive education has widely demonstrated that one of the essential characteristics of inclusive schools is a sense of community cohesion, acceptance of differences and response to individual needs (Stainback and Stainback, 1999). These approaches are based on the idea that each individual is an important and valuable being in the community, with responsibilities to assume and a role to play in supporting others. All of this contributes to fostering self-esteem, pride in the expectations achieved, mutual respect and a feeling of belonging to the group as an active and participating member of the community. This approach, however, is not what is usually experienced in ordinary secondary schools. As Enchieta (2006) points out, it is evident that many barriers can arise in teaching and learning processes when a competitive climate of interindividual relations prevails or when the prior knowledge of the students or their specific difficulties are not taken into account; there is a need to work to create an educational structure capable of accommodating heterogeneity from an academic, linguistic, racial, ethnic and social point of view, making the school experience attractive and challenging for all students.

In our case, a recurring story in the interviews is the students’ feeling of belonging to a group united by the fact of sharing trajectories of exclusion or educational failure. This recognition, far

from representing a stigma, functions as a form of acceptance of their current situation and as a starting point for a personal and academic transformation.

“It’s something that takes time to build, and as an educator and as a school you can always help. In the end, what the students see is: Why are you in El Llindar? You’re in El Llindar because you have your emotional, academic, personal baggage, etc. You’re in El Llindar because you didn’t do well in high school or because you didn’t go to high school. And then they themselves say: Well, there’s a reason I’m here. If I were an exemplary student I would have finished high school when I was supposed to, I wouldn’t be here, right? I would already be in higher education, or whatever. So, it is from this point, I think, consciously or unconsciously, when they start accepting the situation in order to change it.” (Male teacher)

“I mean, in El Llindar, this should be war, but it’s just the opposite. I would say that there is much more violence in normal schools than here. But here we have experiences that I think make us empathize with others. [...] I think that the majority of us have a lot of problems on the street [...] So, it’s like, knowing what we have, we don’t want to add more shit to the school [...] Since I arrived, I haven’t had any bad feelings with anyone. We get along well with each other. We take care of each other.” (Male student)

What we have seen in this case is that peer relationships not only provide emotional and social support but also contribute to learning and motivation. Students find in their peers models of resilience and overcoming challenges that inspire them to keep going. What these young people tell us is that they feel welcomed in an environment of solidarity and mutual understanding where they can rebuild not only their educational paths, but also their confidence in others and in themselves.

From this perspective, the understanding of what educational success means is completely transformed. Here, traditional metrics and conventional academic achievements are not sufficient and do not reflect the reality of these young people. Instead, educators emphasize that success must be understood as a deeply personal process, in which students face and overcome their own challenges.

“I wouldn’t use the word success, because for us, for me, every story of these young people is a success, right? They are overcoming personal challenges, they are overcoming difficulties, they are learning with concrete and practical examples, and they are doing things they have never done before... All of this is already a success.” (Female teacher)

“My goal is not to secure their future. My goal is to offer them opportunities that will put them in a better position for their future. And then they will make their choices and be as lucky as they are. But the real goal for me is that when they look back, they think, “there is something good in school.” Because I am convinced that some of them, who are now parents, take their children to school convinced that there is something good in school. Others who have not been here, I am convinced that when their children say to them *I don’t want to go to school*, they will say *well, I don’t care, you don’t want to go to school, it’s crap*. I would like my students, when they become parents, to say to their children *that there is something good there. Because being qualified is better*. And for them to understand what being qualified means – that it is not learning about the Russian Revolution, but having tools for a better life.” (Male teacher)

This focus on individual processes highlights the value of small, daily victories, from attending class regularly to acquiring a practical skill. For many students, simply participating in school activities is already a big step, given their backgrounds of previous exclusion. This desire to learn and be part of something positive becomes an indicator of the programme’s impact; the examples underline that success at El Llindar is not measured only by tangible results, but by the ability of students to find stability, dignity and meaningful inclusion in society.

Although of course achievements are not always as expected. Despite all the efforts, dropping out of *El Llindar* sometimes happens, and remains a painful challenge. As a teacher explains:

“Negative experiences usually have to do with students who do not complete their course, who, for whatever reason, stop coming. In some cases, these situations are linked to complex personal circumstances that students cannot overcome. We normally saw it coming... We try to approach the case, discuss it, try to find new strategies...

but sometimes we do not succeed. These extreme situations are always difficult, because you think: if you can't do it here, where are you going to be able to?" (Female teacher)

These cases represent a source of frustration and reflection for teachers, who often question what else they could have done to avoid dropout. However, they also recognize that some young people need time and additional experiences outside the school environment to process their experiences and find their way. Taken together, these stories highlight the emotional and professional complexities faced by teachers in educational contexts like *El Llindar*, where experiences of gratitude, trust, and frustration are constantly intertwined. While students' gratitude and trust in teachers fuel teachers' motivation and commitment, dropout situations and constraints outside of school pose ongoing challenges that must be managed with empathy and reflection. This educational environment highlights the importance of education not only as a means of transmitting knowledge, but as a comprehensive process of emotional and personal commitment.

5. Conclusions and Final Remarks

This chapter analyses the causes and consequences of early school leaving (ESL) in Spain, with a particular focus on the experience of racialized and migrant students, who face a significantly higher risk of educational exclusion. This complex and multifaceted phenomenon is deeply rooted in structural dynamics of exclusion that operate at both the institutional and cultural levels. Among the mechanisms that perpetuate this exclusion are institutionalized racism, symbolic violence, and a lack of adequate emotional support. These factors, when combined with conventional educational practices that lack flexibility and sensitivity toward diversity, generate environments that not only hinder young people's integration but also perpetuate their emotional and academic disengagement. This distancing negatively impacts their sense of belonging and connection to the educational process, further deepening inequality.

The data collected show us that the most widespread traditional educational practices, by remaining rigid and unreceptive to

diversity, contribute to students' emotional and academic disengagement, generating a vicious cycle that reinforces exclusion and perpetuates structural inequalities. Recognizing these barriers is essential to understanding why ESL so significantly impacts racialized migrant populations, as well as to identifying alternatives that promote inclusive and sustainable educational trajectories.

This analysis is part of the Crossing Borders project, whose overall purpose is to identify the educational inequities that impact the educational trajectories of racialized migrant youth and develop effective strategies that can be transferred to other educational contexts. From this perspective, two fundamental questions were posed that guided this analysis:

1. What structural educational exclusion mechanisms lead to significantly higher early school leaving among racialized migrant youth in Spain?
2. What educational strategies, practices and policies capable of ameliorating early school leaving can be identified and transferred to other educational contexts?

In response to these questions, *El Llindar's* pedagogical model offers us relevant lessons. We have been able to verify the benefits of an approach based on active listening to students and the co-construction of meaningful educational paths that prioritize empathy, understanding, and subjective support. This inclusive methodology is presented as a powerful tool to confront both structural racism and the exclusions generated by the traditional education system.

Furthermore, the model of *El Llindar* underscores the importance of specific support during the transition from primary to secondary school, a critical time when many young people face adaptation difficulties that, if not adequately addressed, can lead to dropping out of school. This ongoing support builds confidence and rebuilds young people's self-esteem, facilitating their continued retention in the education system.

El Llindar also offers a comprehensive support model for its teaching team through three fundamental spaces: case development, methodological triangulation, and collective pedagogical analysis. These spaces provide a solid framework for reflecting on educational challenges, designing effective strategies, and contin-

uously improving pedagogical practices, ensuring a more equitable and personalized response to the needs of each student.

The lessons learned from this case suggest that adopting an educational approach based on emotional care, pedagogical flexibility, and the co-construction of personalized trajectories is essential to ensuring the educational inclusion of youth at risk of exclusion. This approach requires moving away from rigid, one-way models and instead adopting collaborative and culturally responsive practices that recognize diversity and promote active student participation.

Finally, this case highlights the urgent need to implement inclusive policies that eliminate the structural barriers that perpetuate educational inequality. The experiences and methodologies developed at *El Llindar* provide practical tools that can be replicated and adapted in broader educational contexts. These proposals align with the overall objective of the Crossing Borders project to identify and mitigate the inequalities affecting migrant youth, thus promoting a more equitable, accessible, and inclusive education system.

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Connecting Routes toward Educational Equity

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1. Tracing the Journey Back: Reflections across Borders

When we began the project *Crossing Borders to Connect Routes*, our aim was to understand how migration and education intertwine in a historical moment marked by profound contradictions. It was a time defined by global tensions: accelerating climate change, widespread conflicts, a pandemic that transformed the ways we live and learn, and the multiplication of visible and invisible borders that shape human mobility. Within this context, we sought to examine closely the experiences of those who cross geographical and cultural boundaries, and how schools, communities, and educational policies can function both as arenas of exclusion and as spaces where relationships, learning, and new opportunities can flourish.

To this end, we explored educational contexts in four countries—the United States, Uruguay, Brazil, and Spain, which, despite their historical, social, and political differences, reveal common threads in the experiences of racialised migrants and in the structural frameworks that shape their life opportunities. As James Clifford has noted, mobility is an essential dimension of human existence, a concept that resonates throughout the narratives collected in this research. Yet freedom of movement—geographical, social, or educational—is unevenly distributed. Far from being a neutral arena, education frequently reproduces the hierarchies it ought to challenge. Nonetheless, within these same systems, policies and practices emerge that point toward potential transformation. Our inquiry aimed precisely to highlight these tensions: per-

sistent inequities alongside strategies and pedagogies that expand opportunities for participation, recognition, and social justice.

The preceding chapters present a mosaic of accounts shaped by exclusion, resilience, and creativity. Taken together, they show that although borders continue to define who gains access to rights and recognition, they can also become sites of encounter where new pedagogical, social, and ethical pathways emerge. This final chapter revisits those pathways, reflecting on educational equity as a shared horizon and on the challenge of advancing—both individually and collectively—toward a future without exclusion or boundaries that limit the right to learn and belong.

2. Common Threads of Persistent Inequities

What common threads can be traced across educational experiences in contexts as diverse as the United States, Uruguay, Brazil, and Spain?

A transnational research perspective allows us to cross local and national boundaries, bringing into view connections and recurring dynamics that might otherwise remain invisible. While each context is unique, shaped by its own history, legal framework, and cultural configuration, certain aspects repeatedly emerge, reminding us that inequities, though locally expressed, often share global roots. These common threads do not form rigid patterns but they help us understand how exclusion persists across borders.

The role of law and legality in the construction of otherness is one of the many cross-cutting themes evident across contexts. The United States' Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme illustrates how well-intentioned policies can reproduce precarity when lacking permanence. By offering only temporary relief, DACA has produced a generation of young people who are simultaneously protected and excluded: functionally American, yet perpetually foreign in the eyes of the state. Legislative paralysis regarding their future has not only hindered their life plans but also perpetuated a form of institutionalised waiting. This liminal status freezes mobility and turns rights into privileges contingent on political change. Such instability demonstrates how bureaucratic systems can function as instruments of slow violence,

dispensing justice only to suspend it. As Kitty Calavita (2005) observes, laws are neither neutral nor purely technical; they actively participate in creating social categories and in constructing “others” within society. Legality shapes identities, assigns rights and privileges, and draws symbolic boundaries separating those considered full citizens from those perceived as permanent foreigners. In this sense, DACA not only regulates access to legal benefits but also produces a hierarchy of belonging, illustrating how law contributes to institutionalising otherness and exclusion.

Similarly, the Brazilian case reveals another way in which laws and policies can perpetuate inequality: invisibility. Despite progressive legislation guaranteeing migrants equal access to education, implementation remains uneven. Migrant students frequently appear as “absent subjects” in policy documents and statistical systems. This absence is far from neutral; it renders their needs invisible to the very institutions that are supposed to serve them. Likewise, curricula continue to prioritise Eurocentric perspectives, marginalising non-dominant knowledge and linguistic diversity. When education erases rather than reflects the plurality of its students, it reinforces historical hierarchies of knowledge and belonging. In this context, Quijano (2000) addresses the “coloniality of knowledge,” showing how colonialism established a hierarchy of knowledge that positioned European thought as universal and superior—a form of epistemic coloniality that still shapes educational, scientific, and political institutions. Our data show that epistemic racism remains a tangible reality in Brazilian educational and political systems, as in many other parts of the world, with a direct and lasting impact on the educational trajectories of migrants.

Structural racism and symbolic violence—often subtle, yet ever-present—also appear as constant features across the narratives. Participants’ testimonies reveal that racism is not an anomaly but a structuring principle within institutions. Beyond explicit acts of discrimination, subtler expressions—derogatory jokes, lowered expectations, the silent assumption of deficit—accumulate and shape students’ identities and sense of belonging. In Spain, for instance, racialised youth described experiences in conventional schools marked by stigmatisation and symbolic violence, a concept Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) define as the imposition of meanings that obscure power relations. Teacher expectations,

filtered through socioeconomic and racial stereotypes, became self-fulfilling prophecies, pushing many toward early school leaving. Exclusion often occurs through an erosion of belonging: a quiet, continuous form of expulsion in which remaining becomes unsustainable.

As bell hooks (1994) observed decades ago, education is not neutral in the face of racism; it is permeated by social and cultural hierarchies that shape learning and classroom relationships. Yet hooks emphasises that education can become a practice of freedom, a space where critical thinking, care, and solidarity allow the confrontation of oppression and the generation of transformation. From this perspective, recognising and dismantling subtle forms of symbolic violence in education is a first step toward inclusive environments where all students can thrive, acknowledging their value and right to belong.

Intersecting and compounded inequities are also a shared pattern. Across contexts, exclusion does not occur as an isolated event but as an accumulative process. Legal liminality interacts with racism, gender bias, and economic precarity to multiply disadvantages. Migrant students must navigate schools that, too often, mirror social hierarchies rather than function as engines of justice. The result is a global pattern of structural inequity that transcends borders, reminding us that educational injustices are deep-rooted, both local and transnational.

3. Beyond Borders: Pathways toward Hope

However, despite the harshness of the realities we encountered - marked both by old, structural, and emerging inequities intensified by the pandemic - we carry a suitcase full of possibilities. Alongside patterns of exclusion each case study revealed routes of hope, in the critical sense of a “pedagogy of hope,” as proposed by Paulo Freire (1994): an ethical and political commitment to conscious, liberatory action. Viewed through this lens, the research highlights spaces and practices where resistance and resilience can emerge, even within restrictive systems. These stories collected, often fragile but deeply significant, remind us that transformation begins in relationships: in classrooms, communities, and networks where recognition, care, and collective agency are nurtured.

For instance, in the United States, where the ambiguity of DACA policies created a landscape of uncertainty, educators and advocates emerged as frontline mediators. Higher education professionals, working within universities and community organisations, developed what might be called “creative legality”: strategies to support undocumented students by leveraging institutional gaps and informal networks. Scholarships for “Dreamers,” mentoring programmes and non-employment-based supports became tools of resistance within systems offering little formal protection. Their work underscores a critical truth: transformation depends not only on legislation but also on the courage of those who enact justice in everyday practice.

In the same vein, the Uruguayan case, focused on Dominican girls and adolescents in Montevideo, highlighted how community and emotional reflexivity become sources of strength. Facing intersectional challenges of race, gender, and legal precarity, these young people mobilised transnational networks of family and faith to sustain their educational and migratory projects. Religious spaces, often marginalised in the secular public discourse, functioned as key nodes of care and belonging. Moreover, the research process itself modelled inclusion through *sentipensar*, a methodological approach that validates emotional knowledge as integral to understanding injustice. This illustrates that knowledge production, like education, must be relational, affective, and attentive to the emotional weight of lived experience.

In Brazil, despite inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, Youth and Adult Education (EJA) programmes in Goiânia stood out as spaces of care. For many migrants the classroom became more than a site of learning: it was an oasis of recognition. Teachers provided not only academic instruction but also practical and emotional support, helping students navigate bureaucratic systems and everyday challenges. Institutional guidelines for welcoming migrant students emphasised community participation, signalling that inclusion is a collective responsibility. The EJA experience demonstrates that when schools cultivate empathy and connection, they can counter even the deepest social inequalities.

Following this thread, in Catalonia, Spain, Second Chance Schools, such as *El Llindar*, exemplify how education can rebuild confidence and purpose for young people marked by exclusion. By centering emotional care and personalised learning, these in-

stitutions redefine success not as standardised achievement but as the restoration of dignity, self-esteem, and agency. Teachers and students co-construct individual trajectories where progress is measured by re-engagement and resilience rather than academic results. In these schools community becomes both method and outcome: shared experiences of marginalisation foster solidarity rather than stigma.

Collectively, these cases reveal that margins are not empty spaces but fertile ground for creating possibilities. The inclusive pedagogies documented here offer models for reimagining education and point to pathways for change, based on care, trust, and collective responsibility.

4. Closing the Journey: The Imperative of Transformation

The synthesis of these four transnational cases highlights the complexity of educational inequities affecting migrant populations. The systemic nature of racism, where economic status, language, religion, gender, and skin colour shape mobility, demands a commitment to go beyond superficial responses and generate meaningful, structural, and sustained transformations. From what we have learned throughout this journey, we identify three main avenues for action that can contribute to the development of inclusive practices and policies:

4.1. Addressing Systemic and Institutional Inequity

At the structural level, justice requires stability and clarity. Legal frameworks regulating migration must ensure not only protection but permanence. Temporary relief programmes—such as DACA—must evolve toward pathways to full citizenship and inclusion. Governments need to move beyond executive improvisation and adopt coherent rights-based legislation that prevents the perpetuation of legal liminality.

Equitable distribution of resources is equally vital. Racialised migrants face multiple disadvantages due to socioeconomic inequality, lack of documentation, and institutional bias. Policies

must guarantee equity in access to financial aid, housing, health services, and educational support, regardless of migration status. Furthermore, data systems must render migrant populations visible; without accurate information, invisibility becomes policy.

Finally, systemic reform must extend to the curriculum. Education should reflect the multiplicity of cultures and languages that make up contemporary societies. Simplifying enrolment processes, recognising transnational academic records, and integrating critical intercultural perspectives are not administrative details but acts of justice.

4.2. Transforming Pedagogical Practice and School Culture

At the institutional level, transformation begins with care. The most successful practices documented—particularly in Spain and Brazil—demonstrate that emotional well-being is not an add-on but central to pedagogy. Recognising students' emotional experiences, adopting flexible and personalised educational pathways, and building inclusive school communities help counter symbolic violence and rebuild a sense of belonging.

Redefining success is key: it must be measured not only in academic achievements but in personal development, self-esteem, resilience, and meaningful participation. Maintaining high and equitable expectations while countering stereotypes about the abilities of racialised students reinforces this approach.

4.3. Strengthening Networks and Professional Leadership

Effective action also requires recognition of social and community ecosystems. Family networks, religious institutions, NGOs, and other community organisations play a critical role in migrants' trajectories. Public policies and school practices should strengthen these connections through sustained mentoring, community partnerships, and ongoing support.

Moreover, professionalisation in advocacy and pedagogical mediation is essential. Frontline educators and professionals—such as university advocates in the United States or EJA coordinators in Brazil—require training in critical intercultural competencies,

methodological support, and spaces for collective reflection. This enables them to navigate the emotional and social complexity of working with students who have experienced prolonged exclusion.

These three avenues of action, far from offering closed formulas or magical solutions, indicate horizons toward which it is vital to continue advancing. The narrative approach of this research, centred on stories and experiences of resistance, illuminates dimensions of exclusion that quantitative data alone cannot capture. It reminds us that educational inequity is not an abstract phenomenon but a progressive, painful, and often solitary process of marginalisation.

The experiences documented—from the interrupted hopes of DACA youth in the United States to the search for belonging of Dominican girls and adolescents in Uruguay, the resilience of EJA schools in Brazil, and the emotional reconstruction in Second Chance Schools in Spain—demonstrate that building more inclusive educational environments is possible. The routes are mapped, though still incomplete, and connecting them requires commitment, sustained effort, and collective action.

Crossing borders to connect routes entails recognising the structural dynamics that perpetuate exclusion while also assuming shared responsibility to transform them. Educational systems and public policies play a decisive role in ensuring equity, resources, and recognition; alongside this, the everyday engagement of educators, communities, families, and students sustains change on the ground. Listening to these voices, valuing these strategies, and promoting practices grounded in respect, care, and educational justice is essential for advancing toward a future where the right to learn and belong is truly universal.

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Crossing Borders to Connect Routes

Bridging Transnational Perspectives to Challenge Inequity and Racism in Education

Crossing Borders to Connect Routes: Bridging Transnational Perspectives to Challenge Inequity and Racism in Education brings together a collective reflection on how migration, race, and education intersect in a world marked by mobility and division. Drawing on research conducted across the United States, Brazil, Uruguay, and Spain, this volume explores how borders—geographical, institutional, and symbolic—shape the educational experiences of racialised and migrant communities.

The book examines how schools, policies, and everyday practices can simultaneously reproduce and resist systemic inequities. It brings to light the subtle mechanisms through which exclusion takes place, from epistemic racism to linguistic hierarchies and the invisibility of certain groups in policy frameworks. Yet, alongside these persistent forms of injustice, *Crossing Borders to Connect Routes* reveals spaces of hope and transformation: classrooms, communities, and initiatives where relationships of care, recognition, and collective action take root.

This transnational project invites readers to consider education as both a mirror of broader social structures and a potential catalyst for change. By weaving together experiences and perspectives from diverse social and cultural contexts, the book highlights the power of collaboration and shared reflection in confronting global challenges. At its heart, *Crossing Borders to Connect Routes* is a book about connections: between people and places, between research and practice, and between critical awareness and ethical commitment. It asks what it means to educate in times of uncertainty, and how, through dialogue and collective imagination, education can open pathways toward greater equity and justice.