

## INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION

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### Interkultúrne vzdelávanie ako prostriedok integrácie migrantov

***Abstract:** The paper aims to point out the significance of intercultural communication and competence in the time of perceived migration and asylum crisis. We argue, familiarization with the principles of intercultural communication may be viewed as a crucial step towards successful migrants' integration. In the first part of the paper we illuminate the concept of intercultural communication and competence. Next, we discuss the experience of the European Union Member States with intercultural education, frequently understood as certain principles or a cross-cutting theme embedded in the general education process. In some countries, inconsistency between the objectives of education policies and the praxis has been reported. Our research indicates certain deficiency of concrete learning units focusing on intercultural communication and competence development in the European Union countries.*

***Keywords:** migration, integration, intercultural education, intercultural competence, intercultural communication*

**JEL Classification:** F22, I21, Z18

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## 1 Introduction

As a consequence of globalisation, the contact with people with different cultural backgrounds has become an everyday reality (Kumbier and Schulz von Thun, 2016). Migration influences “*the rhythm and the tempo of the contemporary modern society*” (Kuo, 2014, p. 16). The tendency to migrate may considerably impact culture and the structure of the society, as the elements of the host culture and the culture of immigrants collide. Such intercultural encounters can happen without complications, or, on the contrary, can induce occurrence of intercultural problems or conflicts (Štefančík and Lenč, 2012). These situations can be avoided or at least mitigated, but that requires a certain mental framework of the participants of the intercultural encounter. The mental framework – or intercultural competence – is no inherent trait of an individual; normally, it takes certain time and effort to properly develop it. As a matter of fact, people are not always aware that their attitude and a way of communication should be tailored to the communication partner.

Intercultural communication and intercultural competence have been receiving attention of the academic community for a while now; they are no new topics in scholarly work, and neither is the need for intercultural competence in Europe. Hoskins and Sallah (2011), for instance, stress the prominence of intercultural competence and dialogue in Europe already in their paper from 2011. Even in 1994, Campani and Gundara (1994) recognized the need to initiate dialogue on intercultural education between Northern and Southern European countries, the need for which was intensified by ongoing economic, political and social changes. Furthermore, policy makers have started to realise the impact intercultural communication may have on integration processes. Intercultural communication sometimes serves as a kind of tutorial for migration governance and management. In Italy, for example, the migration governance process was based on principles of intercultural communication, as discussed by Del Percio (2016). The concept of intercultural *mediation* linked to migration is utilised by Diaz (2018).

Migration as an interdisciplinary phenomenon is currently studied from different perspectives (Čiefová and Raneta, 2018a). Due to the changing migration patterns and new forms of migration, the overall concept has been repeatedly challenged (Faas, Hajisoterioub and Angelides, 2014). Contemporary academic and political discourse understands migration as the arrival to already founded sovereign nation states (Némethová, 2018). Obviously, also the term

*migrant* is used in various contexts and hence vague. This is crucial mainly when analysing the consequences of migration (Stradiotová, 2019). To avoid confusion, we are particularly interested in the period of the perceived migration crisis in Europe, i.e. the year 2014 onwards. Hence, when referring to migrants, we mean mostly individuals who entered Europe during the recent years. Nevertheless, the ideas presented herewith may be applied to migration processes in general.

The primary objective of our study is to point out the significance of intercultural communication and competence in the era of perceived migration crisis. Additionally, we attempt to provide an overview of how intercultural education is (or is not) reflected in learning curricula of selected European countries, and to propose measures how to improve the current state. Accordingly, the paper is divided into two interrelated sections. In the first part we outline the definitions of the concept of intercultural communication and intercultural competence as a specific set of skills required in the era of migration and globalisation. In the second part, we describe and assess the experience of selected European Union Member States with the implementation of intercultural education as a prerequisite of migrants' integration, with special attention being paid to Slovakia. In order to facilitate integration, both sides of the process should be equally involved, i.e. the host community as well as the incoming individuals or groups.

The research presented herewith is mostly of qualitative nature. We apply the method of analysis, mainly policy analysis, and synthesis based on an extensive literature review. The collection of a significant amount of qualitative data concerning the studied phenomena allowed us to assess the ongoing policies and propose feasible recommendations.

## **2 Intercultural Communication and Competence Revisited**

Intercultural communication is examined for instance in relation to language acquisition, international trade, or cross-border cooperation. Those involved in intercultural dialogue should realise the mutual benefit it can bring (Helmová, 2018). However, this is not always the reality.

Průcha (2010) approaches the concept of intercultural communication in a threefold manner. According to him, intercultural communication is:

- a) a process of exchange of verbal and nonverbal contents;
- b) research and scientific disciplines;
- c) educational and support activities focusing on practical applications.

Concerning the nomenclature, all three denotates carry the same name. Therefore, it is necessary to always specify the context in which the notion is utilised (Průcha, 2010).

In scientific literature, we even encounter the principles of intercultural communication being compared to IT processes. In this case, intercultural communication is thought to be a sort of *software interface*, allowing two distinct operational systems – cultures - to collaborate (Čiefová and Raneta, 2018b). Nevertheless, it needs to be remembered that intercultural communication happens in a context, meaning the communication process and its success is not dependent exclusively on the participants, but on many more other factors, such as the political or economic situation (of the country or of the individual) (Keding, 2016).

Indeed, there have been many attempts to properly define the term intercultural communication, and some researchers were ambitious as to summarize the available definitions (e.g. Čiefová and Raneta, 2018b). The reason for existence of numerous definitions might be the obvious interdisciplinarity of the concept.

## 2.1 Intercultural Competence and Its Constituents

Intercultural competence can be simply defined as the ability of an individual to communicate effectively with representatives of distinct cultures. The individual needs to utilise knowledge of national cultures. Besides, respect for cultural differences is a crucial prerequisite (Průcha, 2010).

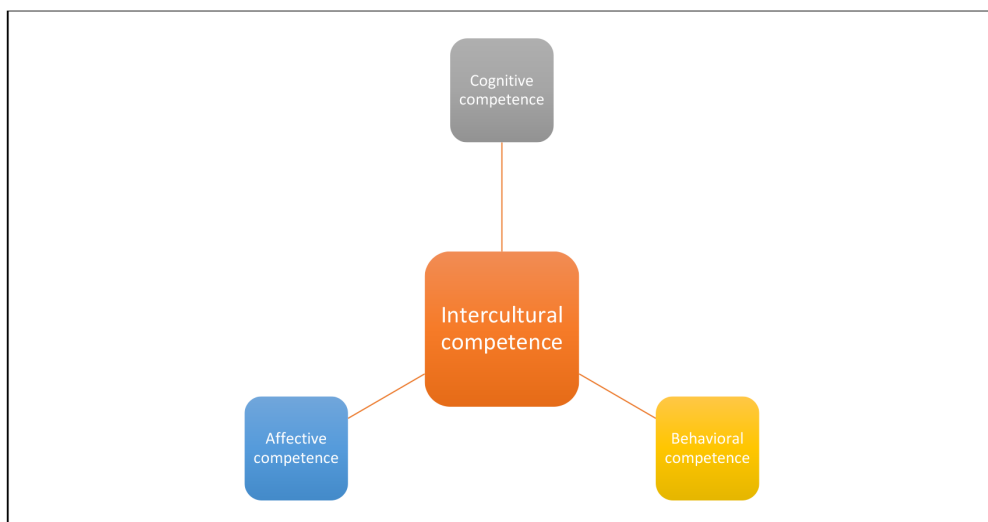
Several models of intercultural competence have been developed by scholars so far. Matveev (2017) summarizes intercultural competence models as follows: compositional, relational, behavioural, developmental, causal and collaborative. For the purpose of this article we have decided to refer to one of the compositional models to characterise the construct. Compositional models summarize traits and skills enabling smooth intercultural communication (Matveev, 2017), as they consist of various elements creating the overall concept of intercultural competence (Jeleňová, 2017). Due to their structure,

we consider compositional models of intercultural communication to be both eloquent and comprehensible.

One of the most frequently cited models of intercultural competence is the one shown in Figure 1 below. According to this model, intercultural competence is composed of three equally important dimensions, namely cognitive competence, behavioural competence and affective competence. In addition, each one of these further incorporates several components.

The cognitive component of intercultural competence includes mainly the knowledge of an individual. It refers to the need for collecting relevant information about a country and its culture, whereby this mainly concerns businessmen, politicians, diplomats, or students. One of the abilities falling under this category is self-reflection. Affective competence represents primarily the attitude of a communicant towards representatives of distinct cultures, which involves for instance the ability to tolerate ambiguity (*Ambiguitätstoleranz*) (Erll and Gymnich, 2008), adaptability and people orientation. Another crucial element of affective competence is (cultural) empathy as a part of human emotional intelligence. To foster empathy is one of the main objectives of intercultural training (Morgensternová and Šulová, 2007). Behavioural competence entails applications of adequate and appropriate communication patterns (Erll and Gymnich, 2008).

**Figure 1:** Components of intercultural competence



**Source:** Author's own elaboration based on Morgensternová, Šulová et al. (2007, p. 10).

Some authors use the term of *cultural intelligence*, as being “*modestly related to but distinct from emotional intelligence and personality and correlates positively with several indicators of multicultural experience,*” and relating to intercultural effectiveness (Thomas et al., 2015). Indeed, empirical experience of an individual may significantly impact their attitudes towards migrants, and thus the level of intercultural competence.

As Puškárová and Dancáková (2018) point out, previous experience with working abroad seems to affect one’s attitude towards migrants much more than being exposed to them at home.

One should distinguish between *intercultural competence* and *intercultural communication competence*. The former stands for skills needed to be competent regarding cultural issues; the latter primarily refers to skills demonstrated in intercultural communication situations (Matveev, 2017). In our opinion, however, the two concepts overlap, or complement each other. We believe, skills and characteristic traits ascribed to intercultural communication competence may, in certain situations, be equally applied to intercultural competence in general. This is, for instance, the case of skills and elements as revealed in research by Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), which encompass motivation, knowledge, listening skills or having a global outlook. Barker’s qualitative research (2015) detected differences concerning development of intercultural communication competence across cultures. Certain differences were found in both verbal and nonverbal component of communication.

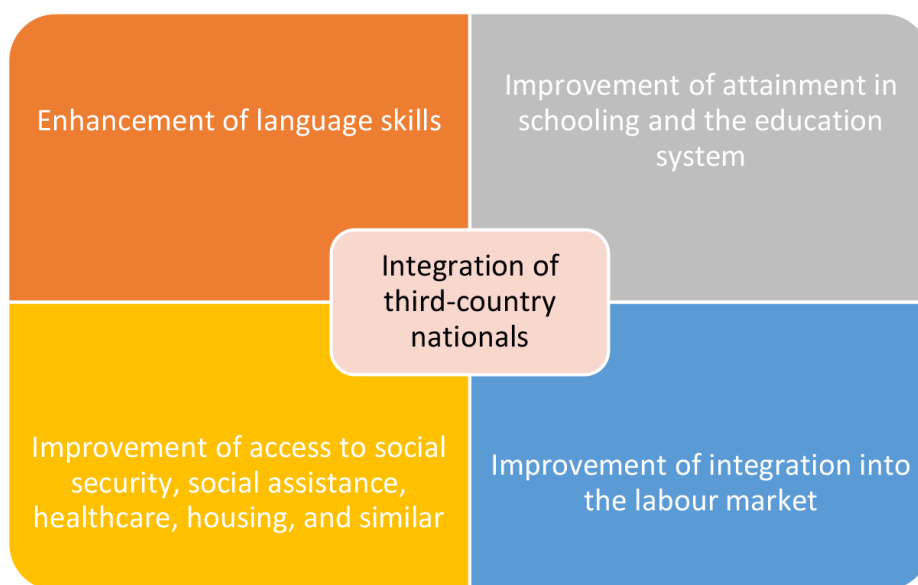
### **3 Migrant Integration and Intercultural Education**

People are born with a set of skills and competences that are subject to further influence by the outside world and education (Setnická and Chmelová, 2018), which equally applies to competences required in today’s diverse and mobile world. Intercultural competence can be viewed as one of the prerequisites of successful integration of migrants into host communities. Looking at Europe (or, more precisely, the European Union), some of the countries have long-lasting experience with immigration. On the contrary, other countries may still be marked as homogeneous as far as their population is concerned. Typical examples of countries with long history of immigration are Western European countries. The co-existence of immigrants and host communities, however, is not always flawless. Integration of immigrants appears to be one of the most

evident issues the typical immigrant countries of Western Europe need to tackle (Štefančík and Lenč, 2012).

Currently, the debate on integration is spread through the whole European Union, although policies applied within the Member States are not identical. The European Commission largely supports the Member States in the field of integration, which has recently been oriented mostly on third-country nationals. In 2018, all but one (Hungary) Member States either adopted or amended their legislation and practices concerning integration of third-country nationals (EMN, 2019). The measures taken by the countries may be divided into the categories as demonstrated in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2:** Areas of integration of third-country nationals



**Source:** Author's own elaboration based on European Migration Network (2018, p. 42 – 44).

According to the EMN report, Slovakia seems to underestimate the importance of language acquisition for immigrants. On the other hand, Slovakia belongs to the EU Member States that took measures aimed at social security, social assistance and similar essential services in 2018, with special attention being paid to healthcare services, as well as labour market integration. As for the integration at local level, in Slovakia and several other EU Member Sta-

tes, “*policy recommendations or guides were developed for municipalities or local authorities to support the integration of (specific groups of) third-country nationals.*” More than a half of the EU Member States reported on their attempts to implement new practices and processes focusing on engagement and understanding of the host community, with the objective to facilitate migration awareness (EMN, 2019, p. 42 – 46).

Integration policies of the Member States have also become a topic frequently found in academic works. Frame (2019), for instance, evaluates currently implemented integration processes in France and proposes feasible amendments to the measures. Foerster (2015) discusses integration policies and processes in Germany concentrating on gender issues. Through the lens of the National Integration Plan, the author detects areas hindering inclusion of women.

Integration should be considered a two-way process, meaning it requires participation of both the host community members as well as the incoming foreigners (Štefančík and Lenč, 2012). One of the areas in which the active approach of both sides is necessary for successful integration is the labour market. Being an active part of the workforce may facilitate the integration of an individual, as they are constantly engaged with the representatives of the host culture. Hence, the immigrant can acquire the language of the host community as well as cultural patterns much more easily (Štefančík and Lenč, 2012). However, the reality shows that migrants sometimes tend to collaborate within a community, thus not engaging sufficiently with the host society (Puškárová and Dancáková, 2018).

### **3.1 Objectives and Practices of Intercultural Education in the European Union**

The historical experience with immigration to Western Europe as well as Northern Europe has been transformed into the objectives of the education systems. Luciak’s research pointed out the focus of old EU Member States on migrant minority students in the education process, compared to “new” EU Member States, in which the education is primarily oriented on the autochthonous populations (Luciak, 2006). It should be noted here that we put the word new into inverted commas on purpose, as the research of Luciak comes from 2006. We therefore believe, it is no longer necessary to refer to the concerned countries as “new” EU Member States.



„Migration is the most visible and audible form of plurality and is perceived as the most challenging in many national educational discourses, both in research and in policy,” (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009, p. 137). Within the European Union Member States, there is no unified concept of intercultural education being included in obligatory education. In some countries, intercultural education has become a regular component of general education; in other cases, it is not necessarily a learning unit of its own, however, the intercultural component in education is understood as a principle reflected in the educational process. Skubic Ermenc (2015, p. 110), for example, characterises interculturality in education as a pedagogical principle accompanying the overall education process, i.e. preparation, implementation and evaluation. We believe, the inconsistency results from the fact that EU Member States still retain autonomy concerning education, and thus also structuring of learning curricula, which contradicts “unifying calls from EU institutions and the Council of Europe for an intercultural dimension in the wake of increasing migration-related diversity.” In spite of that, the European Union has been rather active in the field of education, and complementing national initiatives. Moreover, research has showcased increasing tendencies of European collaboration concerning educational policy (Faas, Hajisoterioub and Angelides, 2014).

As available data and previous research findings demonstrate, the EU Member States approach the topic of intercultural education differently. Furthermore, concepts of intercultural, multicultural, transcultural and cultural education are utilised in literature and policy discourses. To avoid confusion, we use exclusively the notion of intercultural education when referring to the policies and practices aimed at command of intercultural competences and turning away from xenophobia and ethnocentrism, if the cited works do not state otherwise. In the following, we provide a brief overview of selected EU Member States and their approach towards intercultural education and integration. When selecting the countries to be examined, we paid attention both to geographical representation (i.e. Nordic countries, Mediterranean countries, Western Europe...) as well as the year of their accession to the EU. Hence, in our research, countries that first constituted the Community and those that entered later are represented.

One of the traditional target countries of immigrants is Austria (Čiefová and Raneta, 2017), where intercultural learning has been a principle incorporated into general education since 1992. As for vocational and specific education, this often involves both implicit as well as explicit references to intercultural

education, as declared by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMfBWuF, 2018).

Belgium as a country with a demonstrated history of immigration recognized many years ago how critical intercultural competence and intercultural education are. Works already from the '90s accentuate the necessity to provide learners living in a multicultural society with a set of intercultural competences. Also the idea was considered that immigrant children should be given guidelines for successful integration into the host community, and, vice-versa, Belgium pupils should learn how to understand foreign cultures (Verhoeven, 1992). Regarding the language education, the objective is to reach not only communicative competence, but intercultural communicative competence (Sercu, 2005).

In Bulgaria, which can be considered a multicultural society from the historical point of view, intercultural issues have been addressed in university education of future teachers as a reaction to *“the social need to prepare teachers that could work successfully in a heterogeneous educational environment,”* (Chavdarova-Kostova, 2019, p. 71 – 75). Apparently, discussions about intercultural education in Bulgaria are nothing new, as some works appeared already several years ago (e.g. Fay and Davcheva, 2005).

Cultural diversity in education is a reality also in Cyprus (Hajisoteriou, 2012; Papamichael, 2008); however the research of Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2013) suggests a gap between practical applications of intercultural issues in education and the policies behind. Moreover, the authors' research reveals inconsistency between objectives and outcomes of such policies.

Bačáková in her study from 2011 asserts that even though access to education is one of the children's fundamental rights in the Czech Republic, refugee students encounter barriers when performing their right (Bačáková, 2011). On the other hand, multicultural education has been a component of learning curricula in the Czech Republic since 2004 (Moree, 2015).

Papers concerning Finland (or Nordic countries generally) seem to utilise both notions - intercultural and multicultural education. Some scholars such as Dervin et al. (2012) view them as synonymous, although inclining to multicultural education, marking it a relatively new field in Finland (Dervin et al., 2012). According to Holm and Londen (2010), multicultural education in Finland is oriented solely toward immigrant students. Mikander, Zilliacus and

Holm (2018) focusing on Nordic countries argue, social justice and diversity represent the core of intercultural education (the term preferred by these authors).

France is considered an example of a country with a long history of immigration. The political arena of the country and centralization limited effects of multinationalism in education (Bleich, 1998). Throughout the decades, however, the country has altered its trajectory from a country attempting to achieve assimilation of immigrants, to a country more open to the idea of diversity (Soysal and Szakács, 2010). Several policy changes since the 1970s have explicitly recognized the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country, even though most of them intended to turn immigrants into Frenchmen. In the 1980s, weak steps towards multiculturalism were taken (Bleich, 1998).

The Ministry of Education and Research of Germany refers to cultural education (*kulturelle Bildung*) (BMfBuF, 2020). This concept, however, mostly applies at the level of projects and programmes aimed at providing and improvement of culture-related knowledge, with culture being understood predominantly as arts, not as a group of individuals with the same values and worldview. Activities falling under this are designated both for children and the youth with migration background as well as for the autochthonous population. As for the concept of intercultural education, Germany was first ignoring the fact that it was an immigrant country. In the 1960s and 1970s, the assimilationist approach was prevailing in education (*foreigner pedagogy*); intercultural education was introduced in the 1980s and 1990s (Faas, 2008).

In Italy as one of the countries most impacted by recent migration events, research on intercultural education appears to be extensive, yet still ongoing. There is an evident need to transform the learning curricula and adopt a new model reflecting the principles of interculturalism, predominantly empathy and open-mindedness to dialogue (Pasquale, 2015). Similarly as in case of Cyprus, there appears to be disharmony between governance and teaching and learning practices and experience, since the country has not always managed to safeguard the same opportunities for immigrant students. On the other hand, interculturalism is to be found in discourses already from the '90s (Santagati, 2016).

According to Pratas (2010), education policies in Portugal have embraced the challenges linked to intercultural education, however, there is still some room for improvement. In conjunction to the so-called migration and refugee crisis,

a *Refugee Support Platform* including an online course has been created, with the aim to adequately respond to the challenges connected to the refugee influx (Vieira et al, 2017).

In Slovakia, intercultural education has not been incorporated into the compulsory education as a subject of its own so far. Elementary schools, however, do provide classes on citizenship and ethics (or religion), where some aspects of intercultural education may be discussed, as can be seen in the framework learning plan issued by the Slovak Ministry of Education (2015). Intercultural (or preferably multicultural) education in Slovakia represents a cross-cutting theme, and can be also a separate subject (Rosinský, 2011), but probably just an elective one. Slovakia was provided with study materials for learners aged 6-12 years by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which include language units, stress and trauma-related materials, and similar, as well as various activities (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, 2020). Such specific learning modules may be considered an instrument for successful inclusion of the incomings.

In Spain, an *intercultural tutoring action program* was developed to strengthen intercultural competence of students of elementary schools. Assessment of the research results spoke in favour of its implementation (Hernández-Bravo, Cardona-Moltó and Hernández-Bravo, 2017). Intercultural topics used to be covered within the course *Education for Citizenship and Human Rights*, which was proved to be more effective than a cross-curricular way of learning as applied in Nordic countries (Fernández, De Luna and Eisman, 2014).

Sweden, which has a long tradition of immigration, integrated intercultural issues and language education into education processes long time ago (Dančáková, 2019).

Except from intercultural education being a compulsory and a fully anchored element of general education in some countries, other institutionalised means of intercultural training exist. These are usually provided by networks of internationally operating organisations, such as Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR). SIETAR's mission is "*to encourage the development and application of knowledge, values and skills which enable effective intercultural and interethnic relations at individual, group, organisation and community levels*" (SIETAR, 2019). SIETAR operates worldwide; they are present in several European countries, too. However, there is no SIETAR representation in Slovakia. In some cases, organisations aimed at

intercultural competence training are simultaneously involved in research of intercultural phenomena.

Surely, a high (or at least sufficient) level of intercultural competence can also be achieved by unofficial, non-institutional means, such as by constant engagement with foreign colleagues, or by living abroad. Apart from that, intercultural trainings have been developed.

## 4 Results and Discussion

Our research pointed out deficiency of concrete learning units focusing on intercultural communication and competence development and improvement. In most of the EU countries we researched, intercultural education is encompassed in the learning curricula rather as a set of principles, a cross-cutting topic, not a specific subject or a course. In some countries, the reason can repose in their not being typically immigrant countries, meaning they had not been as attractive for immigrants as for instance countries of Western Europe, hence they did not feel the need to actively engage in the issue. Another reason may be restrictive immigration policies hindering influx of immigrant into a country's territory in the past, which, again, might indicate no or only marginal interest in addressing the issue of inclusion and diversity. Nowadays, however, intercultural education seems to be at least partially included in policies of all the EU countries we have analysed. In the course of the last decades, some countries have switched from being proponents of assimilation policies to the intercultural (or multicultural) approach.

Intercultural competence acquisition as a EU objective deserves, in our opinion, a specifically designed learning unit with clearly articulated objectives and its EU-wide incorporation into general compulsory education. The classes should be aimed at relevant culture-related topics and concepts, such as cultural diversity or xenophobia, in order to explicitly explain the crucial phenomena. Simultaneously, the anti-racism, anti-discrimination approach, cultural empathy, tolerance and other concepts should be reflected within the overall education process as a cross-cutting theme. Moreover, in order to facilitate migrant integration, the emphasis should be put not only on children's education but also on adults. Hence, intercultural education should be meant for whole societies (Siroskaya, 2017). We suppose, courses on intercultural education should contain both theoretical and practical elements, such as role plays or

case studies. Additionally, as integration is a two-way process, we would suggest, on the one hand, to focus on the autochthonous population in respect of introducing intercultural education from an early age to develop tolerance and an ethno-relativistic worldview; on the other hand to provide immigrants (and their offspring) with tailor-made learning units to facilitate their integration into the host society, including practical information about the life in that particular country, introduction to its history, political system, or even language. In order to achieve mutually favourable conditions for co-existence, intercultural competence and its acquisition is of crucial importance, and thus for both sides of the interactions, i.e. for representatives of the host community as well as for the incoming foreigners.

Due to Slovakia's being one of the most open countries in the world, with numerous international enterprises and foreign workers, introduction of intercultural education as a subject with properly defined objectives could be beneficial. In favour of the need for intercultural education in Slovakia speak also data of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (2019) concerning stays of foreigners in the country. At the end of 2019, 143,075 persons in total disposed of a valid residence permit, thereof 57,248 being EU nationals and 85,827 being third country nationals. Currently, workers from Ukraine or Serbia are employed at several Slovak enterprises, whereby they normally commute to Slovakia as larger groups. Providing them (or any other workers or students from the abroad) with a course on intercultural communication could be highly beneficial for them, as it would be much easier for them to become an integral part of the society, even if many of them perhaps do not intent to stay in the country forever.

In some countries, the problem of disharmony between policies and their practical applications has been reported. Mutual collaboration and sharing of best practices among the EU Member States can be recommended. Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2013) argue, countries of Southern Europe could cooperate with other European countries with a longer tradition of immigration and intercultural education to properly respond to diversity. Similarly, Campani and Gundara (1994) emphasise that countries of Northern Europe initiated discussions on intercultural education much earlier than Southern European countries, which results in a necessity for a dialogue between them. Obviously, the recommendation can be applied to any country that is not that "skilled" when it comes to dealing with diversity and inclusion of migrants. For this purpose, international fora would be an appropriate setting to discuss the matter.

Based on our research, the interest in intercultural education does not necessarily correlate with the so-called migration crisis, since the countries with a long history of immigration had established the principles of intercultural education long before the outbreak of the perceived migration crisis in 2014. However, the need for intercultural dialogue has undoubtedly intensified by this latest development. It is therefore crucial for the countries to adequately respond to these recent circumstances.

## 5 Conclusion

Migration and globalisation should be regarded as driving forces of societal changes. The last years in Europe are not completely in line with what could be called “*a period of peaceful, harmonious development of multicultural societies where citizens appreciate cultural diversity,*” (Sikorskaya, 2017, p. 10). Global migration and mobility of people is a source of new opportunities and challenges (Kuo, 2014), ranging from cultural, economic, political, ethical and legal (Orgonáš, Šetaffy and Rak, 2017) issues related inter alia to international business and labour migration as well as cultural industries (Baculáková, 2018). With increasing migration, intercultural encounters have become much more frequent. Ignoring cultural values and differences can raise the probability of intercultural problems and conflicts. The occurrence of intercultural disputes may be limited by adequately engineered and appropriately implemented intercultural education targeted at development of intercultural competence, supporting cultural diversity and inclusion. We cannot but agree with Portera (2008), who is an advocate of the idea of intercultural education being the most suitable answer to globalisation processes.

To conclude, migration and creation and implementation of education policies are dynamic and complex processes, it is therefore recommended to regularly monitor how countries respond to challenges that the current developments in the society bring. We expect visible future amendments to the current educational curricula as a reaction to contemporary migratory and globalisation tendencies.

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