

# Breaking Stereotypes Concerning Remigrated Children — A Multinational Possible Intervention Plan Through School

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**Abstract:** The article is based on a multinational study involving five countries (Romania, Portugal, Italy, North Macedonia, and Iceland) facing the return migration or remigration situation. Pupils ( $n = 1615$ ), teachers ( $n = 370$ ), future teachers ( $n = 166$ ) and youth workers ( $n = 30$ ) were questioned about various aspects regarding the subject. Among the matters, cultural needs appear to be the most important. Based on the statistical analysis, the article describes the dynamics of the dependent variables, with highlighted interest on cultural needs. Psychological and social needs, cultural needs, and educational needs are discussed and link conclusions appear. Following the analysis, an intervention plan is built and tailored activities for teachers are proposed. Breaking stereotypes is a sensitive aspect of the intervention for the integration of remigrated children in the country of origin. The paper presents a possible intervention plan, with the elaborated activities and argues the elaborative process by calibrating each interference with the dynamics of the studied variables.

**Key words:** return migration, stereotypes, school intervention, interculturalism teacher training

## 1. Introduction

Social mobility is a sound reality of today's world. More than ever, people have the possibility of settling in another place than their homeland. The relocation decision is justified by various reasons: lack of opportunity for advancement in job, lack of suitable employment, inadequate income, desire for travel or adventure, close family outside, earn money for family responsibilities, inadequate educational facilities for self and/or children, poor standard of living, dislike of atmosphere in home country, unpleasant climate, crowded living conditions, family assets insufficient, inadequate housing, political problems, religious discrimination (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2015; Gordon, 1982).

Many of the reasons that mobilize individuals or families to relocate are, as Ibrahim and Heuer (2015) argue, external. Once established in the new living space, the external arguments, resolved or not, enter intensify dialogue with the internal ones, which prove to be more sound and sensitive (Bhalla, 2010; Straut-Eppsteiner, 2017; Wilson, 2002).

The inevitable changes arose in the process face the individual with personal cultural identity aspects, that maybe until that point weren't noticed because of the uniformity and sense of belongingness that the homeland gives to one. But in a new space, differences are more obvious. And people deal with differences in an interval of

manners, from acceptance to rejection (Deal & Prince, 2003; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

In this adaptation-integration dance, individuals find themselves going in two directions. Some treasure a new place to live in, some not. The second scenario urges a decision. Here appears the possibility of returning home.

Returning in the home country is not as easy as it may seem (Constant & Zimmermann, 2012; Gmelch, 1980; Huskey et al., 2004; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2016; Lados & Hegedüs, 2016; Lundholm, 2012; Zaiceva & Zimmermann, 2016). Especially when children are involved in the process (Dustmann, 2003; Hatfield, 2010). To young to understand the variables and yet not fully psychological equipped, children may find themselves asking *are we leaving home or going home* (Stoller & Longino, 2001)?

Once arrived in the homeland space, the process of readaptation or, for some who do not remember the home country, for they were to little when parents migrated, just adaptation. School can help within the process and can be a significative support if it understands which variables need more attention.

As mentioned above, cultural identity aspects are sensitive variables when discussing integration strategies (Neumann, 1998; Phillimore, 2011). This paper focuses on a specific trait of cultural identity that makes all its components sensitive: stereotypes.

## **2. Understanding Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are category-based reactions targeting people in groups perceived to be significantly different from other groups, articulates Fiske (1998). According to this definition, when we are put in the position of real or imagined interaction with someone who is part of another group than the one we belong to, we will have a reaction. This response can be positive or negative. The positive one is of benefic interaction, filled with understanding and openness, where simultaneously the verticality of each individual is endorsed. The negative one generates tensions, violence, prejudices and discrimination.

In this discussion, we should ask *what do we see first* when interacting with another person? That we are alike or that we are different? We can choose to look at one person by establishing bridges based on what we have in common, such as the fact that we are human, we have emotions, feelings, desires, behaviors that, although different, have the same need underneath, that is to engage in interaction and be accepted. Or we can cover the person with stereotypical information, not giving them a real chance to reveal themselves and interact with us.

Regarding the problem mentioned above, maintaining all our good intentions in order to deal with stereotypes, we should seize the flavors of multiculturalism and interculturality. In the first concept, the *differences* between people from diverse cultural backgrounds are noticed. These differences are seen with positive nuances, which can add beauty to the diversity. In the second concept, respectively in interculturality, the *similarities* between people are noticed and enhanced, with the intention of establishing beneficial connections. Although both concepts carry a good intention, on closer inspection we will realize that multiculturalism generates separation and is a fertile ground for stereotypes. Interculturality is not (Lee et al., 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

There is a turning point in this debate, generated by the recent global culture of resisting in diversity. Many times, when we meet new people, we experience a feeling of anxiety (Beier et al., 2005; Hofmann et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2020; Nomura et al., 2020; Watson & Friend, 1969). It's natural. Instinctively we are programmed to defend ourselves in front of the unknown. In the rush of looking for information we can grab on about the

person we are interacting with, in order to know how to relate to him or her, we tend to quickly reach to negative information, that presumably will give us an advantage to help us stay in control. But that information may or may not be a reality concerning the person in discussion. And we have to also mention that the other one is passing through the same process. We do not create information; we extract it from general data that at some point reached us from various and questionable sources. We may be aware of this process, or not. But at this the very point where stereotypes appear.

Social mobility is a current reality, which is also faced by the school, in all its levels. This reality is happening on the certainty that with all the information so easily available, the school is more than ever an accumulation of attitudes. If these attitudes are calibrated, learning will occur. It is therefore important for teachers to have a proper, knowledgeable attitude towards the issue of stereotypes. *The approach should start from similarities*, in order to really bring together students of different nationalities, ethnicities, religions, etc. It is a continuous exercise and a challenge that teachers must first respond to in order to be able to pass it on to students as well.

The activities presented in this article start from this basic idea and propose engaging in challenges in which, constantly, those involved (teachers, students, school counselors etc.) are directly or subtly asked to notice the similarities and to interact based on them with others who are different by human nature itself and, perhaps, by ethnicity, religion, nationality, skin color etc. as well.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

The article is based on a multinational study involving five countries (Romania, Portugal, Italy, North Macedonia, and Iceland) facing the return migration or remigration situation. Pupils (n = 1615), teachers (n = 370), future teachers (n = 166) and youth workers (n = 30) were questioned.

#### 3.2 Methodology

Table 1 presents the variables of interest in this study.

**Table 1 Variables**

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Dependent variables</i>
1. status, with two levels: pupils (children) and specialists involved in education	1. psychological and social needs;
1. gender, with two levels: male vs. female.	2. cultural needs;
	3. educational needs;

The questionnaire aimed to collect data regarding the perception of the most important educational needs of the remigrant children. Also, the research investigated the most effective educational activities that answer those needs.

The reliability of each scale was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951), alpha for the items (2141 valid cases) being over 0.7.

For this paper the variable cultural needs is of interest, for it is the one under which we find the stereotype problematics.

It is also important to clarify the core concept of the research. A remigrant pupil is "a child that was born in one country, then migrated to a foster country with the intention of staying there (therefore he was enrolled in education in the foster country), but now returned in his home country and restarted schools there" (Luca, Foca, Gulei & Brebuleț, 2013; Brebuleț, 2018).

### 3.3 Results

Cultural needs (marked with green in Figures 1, 2 and 3) are considered to be the most important aspects to handle regarding remigrated children and their school inclusion.

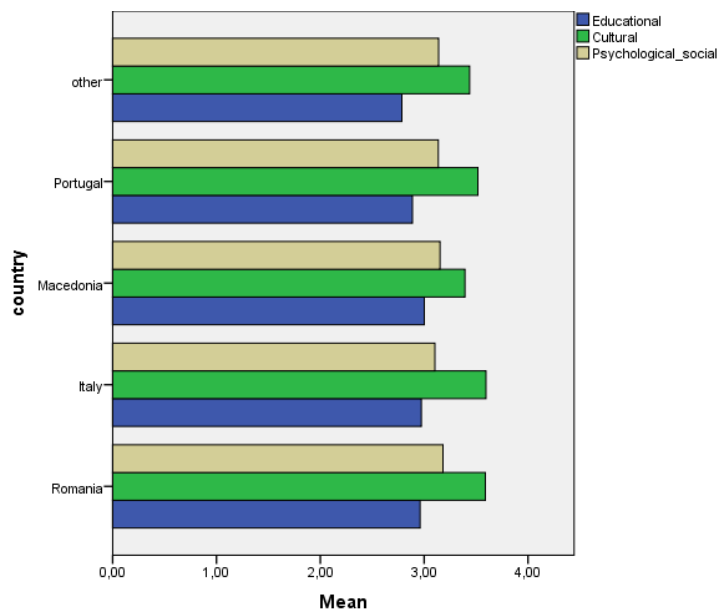


Figure 1 Remigrant Needs Regarding School Inclusion/By Country

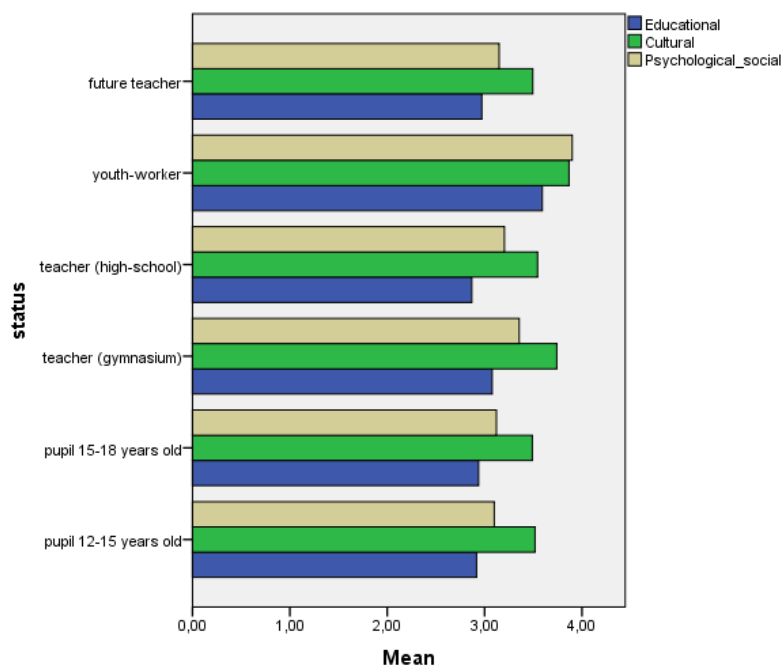


Figure 2 Remigrant Needs Regarding School Inclusion/By Status

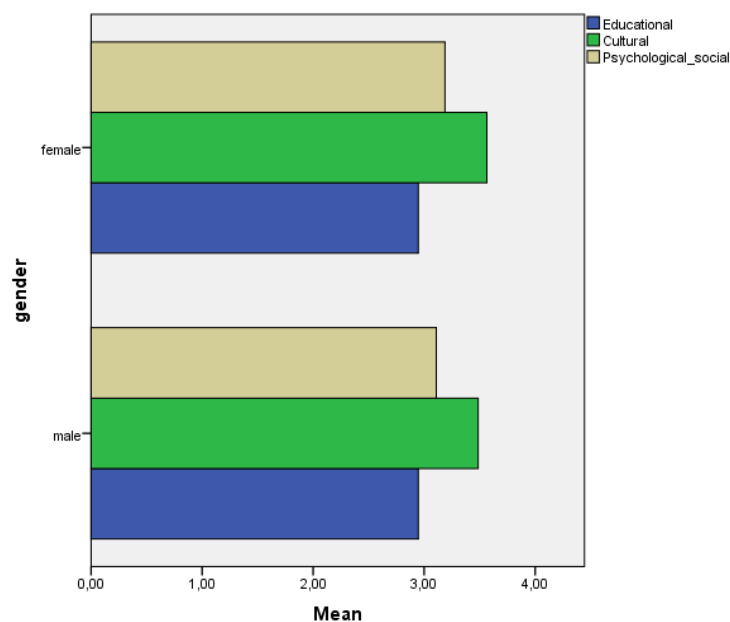


Figure 3 Remigrant Needs Regarding School Inclusion/By Gender

The graphs above point out to the cultural zone as a significative area to observe and search for causes that may generate problems in inclusion interventions. The components subscribed to this large category include ethnicity, age, developmental stage, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural background, migration status, language(s), religion/spirituality, family composition, geographical environment, and social class (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2015). All these sensitive aspects are fertile ground for stereotyping.

#### 4. Discussion and Intervention Plan

Based on the data analysis, numerous activities were elaborated, all with the same purpose: breaking stereotypes. Below, five of these activities are detailed.

##### 4.1 Diary

This activity can be done individually by teachers in order to raise awareness of the susceptibility of stereotypes and their intentional or unintentional appearance when regarding students.

The activity aims to develop the capacity of teachers to be aware of human similarities and variety. Straightening their own awareness in this matter, teachers will participate authentically in developing the consciousness of the students with whom they interact.

The objectives of this activity is to build an accurate understanding of stereotypes by noticing their intentional or unintentional occurrence in everyday situations, such as a conversation. Also, to be aware of one owns stereotypes.

For this activity teachers have one week to individually complete the challenge.

Teachers will receive the following instructions:

- Make notes for a week in a diary that you will keep in hand. The challenge of the activity will be to write impressions about the new people you met that week.

The notes will be done according to the instructions below:

- Each new acquaintance will have at least one descriptive page and no more than two.
- You will specify the name of the new known person or you will provide a name, if this is not known.
- You will specify the date you met the person, the time, what was your first impression and other beliefs related to clothing, behavior, the emotional state created in the interaction with that person or in the absence of interaction.
- It is recommended that the noting is done immediately after meeting the person, so opinions and reactions are not forgotten, but if this is not possible, it can be written at the end of the day.

The idea of writing in a minimum and maximum space is to be aware of the limits that teachers have when interacting with students. Most of the times, the interaction happens or is absolutely necessary in the school context. Teachers are asked for feedback on students, they are the ones who evaluate their school activity and participate consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily in the development of students' personality. This aspect is a fact even for students they do not directly interact with. And most of the times teachers are not aware of the echo of the stereotypes they carry with them in relation to students, especially regarding minorities.

Participants will become aware of the nature of the information underlying the formation of stereotypes.

#### **4.2 Behind the Press**

This activity can be performed individually by teachers by interpreting statistical data.

The aims are to raise awareness over the situation of various nations. The accumulation of knowledge in this area will allow the teachers to respond informed and conscious in various intercultural situations in school. Information can also help break down stereotypes and prejudices.

The instructions are:

- Read for an hour and a half five magazines or newspapers, online or on paper, official websites, or watch various international television news.
- You will make the selection of reading materials in advance. They must cover at least five nations.
- If you do not know a language of international circulation, you can analyze five national newspapers/magazines.

After reading, try to group the information to answer the following two questions:

- 1) Which of the information could generate stereotypes?
- 2) What data were surprising and could combat stereotypes if they were better known or promoted?

For this activity, teachers will need two hours.

#### **4.3 For One Day**

This activity can be done individually by teachers in order make them aware of the emotions arising from discrimination based on stereotypes.

The activity aims to develop the capacity for empathy. Through their own awareness, teachers will participate more authentically in developing the empathy of students with whom they interact and who they can train in calibrating their own relationships with colleagues who may be discriminated.

The objectives for this activity are to experience the emotions of a discriminated person based on stereotypes and to be aware of the impact of collective behavior on a discriminated person.

The instructions for teachers are:

- You are challenged to play, for two hours, the role of a person who can be discriminated. Start the game by asking a thoughtful question, respectively: Who is discriminated in my city / country?

- Make a list of at least three possible options to choose from. Try to transform yourself through clothing, behavior in that person and to experience the emotions that appear in that role make.
- The game can also be played online, by creating a profile of a discriminated person. The profile can be left active for a few days.

Another variant of the game, much less invasive, but with fewer effects in terms of authentic experience, is the imaginary game. In this version, the participants create an imaginary scenario, with a concrete situation in which he or she is subjected to discrimination based on a stereotype. After the participants record themselves answering to the question: *How did I feel?* In the latter version, for more authenticity, it is recommended to record the voice and re-listen to the recording, and not just writing it down.

#### **4.4 Diversity Rap**

This activity aims to increase the level of awareness over humanity, as a generally valid and common feature of people, despite their diversity.

The objective is to be aware of the common factor of people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other characteristics with a high degree of coverage that could generate stereotypes.

The instructions are:

- Choose a musical genre that you listen to most often.
- View as many photographers with people from as many different places on the planet as possible. Analyze the photos you see. People are different! However, they share a common place: the Earth.
- Compose a song that conveys the message: We are different, but also the same. In the song, try to harmonize as many different aspects of people around the globe.
- The song should have at least two stanzas. For the negative, you can choose one from the Internet or you can keep your rhythm through a simple percussion, depending on the chosen musical genre.

#### **4.5 The Profile**

In this activity students and teachers can experience the impact of prejudices by knowing the perceptions of colleagues about their own person.

The objective is to experience the impact of various opinions of acquaintances and strangers about personal human characteristics that could also describe yourself.

The instructions for participants are:

- Read media sources (online or on-paper) that contain articles discussing issues related to persons that have your personal characteristics (issues related to age, gender, job, social status).
- Take at least an hour to read as many sources as possible. Extract at least three common characteristics (clothing, gender, social media communication) that are treated differently in various areas of the globe.
- Think about differences in perspective and culturally impregnated human behaviors. Complete the table below. If you think sections can be added, complete the table with other columns.

Country	Clothing	Gender	Communication through social media
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## **6. Summarizing**

Stereotypes engender unjustified behaviors generated by our own individual assessment of those we interact with. Based on the information we have and that, most of the times, has not been verified, we act without looking

at the person in front of us as an individual, but as part of a group about which we have heard good things or less good things about.

People are different and, at the same time, similar. It is normal to learn to relate to them in terms of general knowledge that rises to the group to which they belong. For example, it is good to know how far we have to stay from a European Nordic and a Latin.

But when it comes to negative aspects, it is necessary to understand that they cannot be attributed to a person just because he or she is part of a group. It is an assumption that separates and generates destructive emotions.

Many times, when we meet new people, we experience a feeling of anxiety. It's natural. Instinctively we are programmed to defend ourselves in front of the unknown. In the rush to look for information about the person we are interacting with or not (it can be a discussion about someone), in order to know how to relate to him or her, we quickly reach negative information, which can be or not applied to the person concerned. Here we have an important decisive moment.

We can choose to look at the person in question by establishing bridges based on what we have in common, such as the fact that we are human, we have emotions, feelings, desires, behaviors that, although different, have the same purpose, to create interaction. Or we can cover the person with stereotypical information, not giving each other a real chance to interact.

We are all responsible for the world we create. There is no option to not participate. Silence, indifference or lack of reaction can be discriminatory behavior in itself. Let us notice, therefore, the similarities that unite us and, based on them, let us seek the understanding of those around us.

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