# Students' Attitudes towards the Inclusion of Migrant and Asylum Seeker Students in the Education System of Serbia

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| Section - Education for social and cultural diversity | Paper number: 23 | Category: Original scientific paper |
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## Abstract

The inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of the host country represents an important aspect of the migration and asylum policy of the EU and beyond. Previous research confirms the importance of the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in school since it respects their rights, improves their social status, and provides opportunities for later successful participation in society. By starting from the education policy towards migrant and asylum seeker children in the EU and Serbia as well as the concept of inclusive school, the research was conducted with the aim of investigating students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia. A descriptive-non-experimental research method, survey technique, as well as two specifically designed research instruments were used. The sample was drawn from the population of students majoring in education (N=261) from five Serbian universities. The research results show that the majority of the students have moderately positive attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system, and the structure of their attitudes can be perceived through three factors: the importance of inclusion and social participation, support resources for inclusion and barriers to inclusion. The obtained results suggest the need for introducing innovative study programmes into faculties of education and for the increased presence of professional application courses for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and developing competen ces for future work with migrant and asylum seeker students.

*Ključne riječi:*

factor analysis; faculties of education; inclusive school; migration; students' attitudes on inclusion

*"Whenever I travel and meet the people whom we care for – be they students, families or children – I invariably witness the transformational power of education. And I see how the rhythms of refugees' lives, like ours, are also built around the everyday routines – and the predictable safety – of going to school. Of studying for exams. Of being with friends. Of learning"* (United Nations, 2024: 6).

Filippo Grandi
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

## Introduction

Children make up a substantial portion of the global migrant population, with an estimated 14.8 million being school-age refugees, of which about 7.2 million are outside of formal education (United Nations, 2024). In the contemporary social, geopolitical, and cultural context, the inclusion of migrant students and asylum seekers in the educational systems of EU host countries and beyond is considered one of the important aspects of immigration policy, as well as other policies (educational, social, etc.). In recent years, especially after the closure of the Balkan route in 2016, Serbia, as a transit country, has seen a significant increase in the number of migrant children and asylum seekers due to various conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (Đorđević, Šantić and Živković, 2018). According to some data, over 5,500 migrant students and asylum seekers have passed through the education system in Serbia (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, *2023*). Migration trends have contributed to the intensification of discussions and research in recent decades on improving the quality of education for migrant children and asylum seekers through further development of legal regulations and direct pedagogical practices. Since laws form the foundation for planning and organizing educational work, the public and educational policy measures supporting the education of migrant children and asylum seekers will first be mapped, followed by an examination of the concept of the inclusive school as a reference theoretical framework for implementing and improving the practice itself.

International and national legal frameworks are designed with the intention of ensuring all children, especially those from vulnerable social groups, the right and access to quality education, as well as equal educational opportunities, alongside their peers, regardless of their origin, language, ethnicity, or legal and other status. Numerous international (*Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951; *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989; *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*, 2000; *Council Directive on the education of children of migrant workers from EU countries*, 1977) and national legislative frameworks (*Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, 2006; *Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection*, 2018; *Law on the Foundations of the Education System*, 2017; *Professional Instructions on the Inclusion of Refugee/Asylum Seeker Students in the Education System*, 2017) support the inclusion of migrant students into educational systems. Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948) and Article 13 of the *International*

*Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations, 1966) emphasize education as a fundamental right of every child, as well as equal access to education, regardless of nationality and migration status. Achieving the right to education is crucial for the development and realization of other rights. Article 22 of the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (United Nations, 1951) defines refugees' access to education at all levels and support for education. Similarly, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) emphasizes the right of children to education, highlighting free and compulsory primary education, as well as accessible secondary education. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations, 1966) requires signatory countries to eliminate racial discrimination and ensure equal access to education for all. In addition to international conventions, strategic frameworks such as the *Sustainable Development Agenda* (United Nations, 2015) underscore the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all as one of the sustainable development goals. The UNHCR Strategy for Refugee Inclusion outlines key goals for refugee and displaced children and youth to achieve by 2030, in the areas of access to education, quality of education, and the development of skills and opportunities to build a better future (UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019) for the implementation of the lessons, as well as measures to improve teaching of the children's mother tongue and culture of their country of origin.

Article 14 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (European Union, 2012) defines that everyone has the right to education (the possibility of free compulsory education), as well as the freedom to establish educational institutions in accordance with democratic principles and their religious, philosophical, and pedagogical beliefs, as well as national laws regulating the exercise of such freedom and rights. Similarly, Article 2 of the *Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms* (Council of Europe, 1952) emphasizes that, in ensuring the child's right to education, the right of parents to provide education and teaching in accordance with their religious and philosophical beliefs must be respected. Furthermore, the *Common Framework for Integration: Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union* (European Commission, 2005) provide guidelines for strengthening integration policies in the EU, emphasizing the importance of education, equal access to services, and non-discrimination in institutions, employment, as well as knowledge of the host country's language and history.

Similar to international legislative frameworks, the key characteristics of national frameworks supporting the educational inclusion of migrants are reflected in the provision of: a) the right and access to inclusive educational opportunities, i.e., preschool, free primary, and further education for all children; b) protection from all forms of discrimination – based on race, ethnicity, migration status (*Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, 2006; *Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection*, 2018; *Law on the Foundations of the Education System*, 2017), as well as (c) clear procedures and processes for including migrant and asylum-seeking students in schools and other educational institutions (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2017). The *Professional Instructions on the Inclusion of Refugee/Asylum Seeker Students in the Education System* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2017) have been in use since 2017 in schools attended by migrant students. These instructions define in more detail the enrollment conditions, methods, and models of support at the school level (for teachers and school staff, regular class students, and their parents), ways of providing language, psychological, and educational support to the student and their parents/guardians, monitoring their progress and development, as well as the process of maintaining pedagogical documentation. The school-level Support Plan focuses on preparing the school community, including homeroom teachers, parents/guardians, and students, for the integration of a new student. The Pupil Support Plan is more individualized, addressing the student's specific needs, and includes an adaptation program to manage stress, intensive language learning in Serbian through supplementary classes, and integration into regular and extracurricular school activities. This plan also emphasizes the individualization of teaching activities, adjusting schedules, didactic materials, and teaching methods to

better support the student's learning process. Since the right to education is linked to ensuring other rights (such as the right to health and social protection, protection of personal data, freedom of thought, etc.), support for migrant students, refugees, and asylum seekers includes provisions and measures for ensuring access to necessary support services in the community.

The concept of an inclusive school, developed by Booth and Ainscow (2011) and systematically presented in the *Index for Inclusion*, encompasses three main areas: creating inclusive cultures, creating inclusive policies, and creating inclusive practices. It is a comprehensive tool and a means of support for school staff to critically reflect on their practices, identify areas for improvement, and implement changes that promote inclusion. In addition to self-assessment, this framework can also be useful in developing action plans to improve the inclusivity of the school and ensure dynamism and continuity of the process. The first area – *Creating Inclusive Cultures* – focuses on building a school culture that values diversity and supports the participation of all students. This includes fostering a sense of belonging, promoting respect for diversity, creating a culture of collaboration among teachers, students, families, and the broader community, as well as building trust and relationships. The second area of an inclusive school focuses on creating inclusive policies to support inclusivity at each level of the school system. Inclusive policies encompass: equal opportunities (e.g., ensuring all students have equal access to quality education), non-discrimination (preventing all forms of discrimination, such as racism, xenophobia, etc.), developing an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students, ensuring that learning becomes relevant to everyone. The third area – *Creating Inclusive Practices* – focuses on the practical actions that schools undertake to implement inclusion in everyday teaching and extracurricular activities. This aspect of developing an inclusive school includes: adapting teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of all students, providing peer support and collaboration, creating a supportive physical and emotional learning environment, involving families and communities, and addressing barriers (such as language difficulties, cultural differences, or socio-economic challenges) in the learning and participation process of all students. The nurturing of an inclusive school culture is reflected not only in creating inclusive policies and practices but also in the positive attitudes of staff, students, parents, and the community. By focusing on creating inclusive cultures, policies, and practices, schools can ensure that every student has the opportunity to fully participate in their education, i.e., learning and participation in a formal context, to feel accepted and valued, and to achieve their maximum potential and development.

Although there is concern worldwide for the living and educational situation of migrants, attitudes toward their inclusion in regular school classes are often inconsistent and vary significantly, with some expressing resistance and fear, while others show openness, acceptance, and solidarity. The inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the educational system has become particularly relevant in relation to the concept of teacher professional development and other educators (Abacioglu, Fischer & Volman, 2022; Prentice, 2023; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). The attitudes of teachers, future teachers, and other educators towards the educational inclusion of migrant and asylum-seeking students in regular schools vary depending on a range of factors, including cultural background, personal experiences, broader social and political context, media portrayal, systemic solutions, and the level of support during teacher professional education and development, etc. Understanding the attitudes of students from pedagogical, philological, and philosophical faculties toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in schools is essential for fostering an inclusive, tolerant, and supportive educational environment and overall school climate. This paper examines the perceptions of students who are future educators and explores the implications of their attitudes on the concept of professional education. Systems of

professional education for future educators worldwide (Abacioglu, Fischer & Volman, 2022), as well as in the Western Balkans (Pantić, 2008), have traditionally been structured as monocultural. As a result, they cannot sufficiently prepare future teaching candidates for educational work with students from diverse cultural identities and backgrounds, with different migration statuses. Given the importance of educational inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students, on the one hand, and the current concept of professional education for teachers, educators, and pedagogues in national frameworks, the primary problem of this research is highlighted – the attitudes of future educators towards the educational inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the educational system of Serbia.

**Method**

By starting from the education policy towards migrant and asylum seeker children in the EU and Serbia as well as the concept of inclusive school, the research was conducted with the **aim** of investigating students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia. The general aim of the research was specified through *two tasks*:

(1) determine the degree of expression and the factor structure of students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system; and

(2) investigate the differences in students' attitudes towards inclusive education in relation to independent variables (university, year of study, study programme, contribution of studies to acquiring knowledge about the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the education system).

Based on the previous research results (Glock et al., 2019; Đorđević, Šantić and Živković, 2018; McCorkle, 2019; Prentice, 2023; Saglam and Ilksen-Kanbur, 2018), *two research hypotheses* were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The majority of students have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia;

Hypothesis 2: In relation to the independent variables, students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia differ.

**Research sample.** The research was conducted on an appropriate sample of 261 students of undergraduate academic studies (UAS) at the faculties of education, philology and philosophy in Serbia, aged 19-36 (89,7% are females and 10,3% are males). The structure of the students' sample according to the singled out demographic and education characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Structure of the research sample in relation to the independent variables

| Variables | Modalities | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| University | University of Belgrade | 51 | 19,5 |
| | University of Kragujevac | 100 | 38,3 |
| | University of Novi Sad | 29 | 11,1 |
| | University in Priština | 13 | 5,0 |
| | University of Niš | 68 | 26,1 |
| Year of study | First year | 105 | 40,2 |

| Second year | 54 | 20,7 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Third year | 42 | 16,1 | |
| Fourth year | 60 | 23,0 | |
| Study programme | UAS Primary school teacher | 119 | 45,6 |
| | UAS Serbian language and literature | 46 | 17,6 |
| | UAS Pedagogy | 96 | 36,8 |
| Contribution of studies to acquiring knowledge about the educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students | Yes | 192 | 73,6 |
| | No | 69 | 26,4 |

**Research methods, techniques and instruments**. A descriptive-non-experimental research method, survey technique, as well as two specifically designed research instruments were used: (1) A questionnaire about students' social and educational characteristics; and (2) A Likert-type assessment scale. In the first instrument, data were collected about the students' gender, the year of study, university, study programme, contribution of studies to acquiring knowledge about the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the education system. Within the second instrument including 18 statements representing the operationalization of the three aspects of inclusive education, namely the importance of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the education system, educational inclusion resources and obstacles to educational inclusion, i.e. the reduction or removal of the obstacles to social participation and learning of migrant/asylum seeker students. The initial scale meet the theoretical reliability requirements ($\alpha = 0.83$). The first subscale – **The importance of inclusion and social participation** – included six items (Item 1: "*The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in education is important due to their right to education.*" Item 6: "*Inclusion implies migrant/asylum seeker students' contributions to the development of our society in the future.*"). The second subscale – **Resources to support inclusion** – included seven items (Item 7: "*The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes implies removing various barriers (prejudices, language barriers, institutional barriers, etc.)*" Item 10: "One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is the promotion of cooperation with their family. The third subscale – **Obstacles to inclusion** – included five items (Item 15: "*In practice, the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students amounts to their being physically placed in regular classes.*" Item 17: "*Migrant/asylum seekers should receive education within asylum and reception centers.*"). The students expressed their assessment of the consent with the statements on five-point Likert scale ( 1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree), and the larger total result indicates greater expression of more positive students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers in the educational system.

**Data processing and analysis procedures**. A group and online survey was conducted during the 2023/2024 academic year. Student participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The following descriptive statistics measures were used in data analysis and interpretation: mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis measures. For investigating statistically significant differences in the students' attitudes with regard to university, year of study and study programe, we used a one-way analysis of variance for non-repeated measures (ANOVA). T-test was used to test the differences in the students' attitudes with regard to contribution of

studies to acquiring knowledge about the educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students. An exploratory factor analysis was applied to determine the factor structure of students' attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system.

## Results

The average response value of students on the scale on the scale for assessing attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system is 68.73 (Table 2), which, in relation to the theoretical range of the scale (18-90), indicates a moderate to high value. This descriptive indicator suggests that, on average, students have moderately positive attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the Serbian educational system.

Table 2

Descriptive parameters on the scale of attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia

| | M | SD | Sk. | Ku. | Theoretical range of the scale | Cronbach's Alpha | Number of items |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scale of attitudes towards inclusion – Total | 68.73 | 7.92 | -.680 | 1.490 | 18-90 | .83 | 18 |

The standard deviation values (SD = 7.92) indicate some variability in students attitudes toward the educational inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students, but generally, most responses are clustered around the mean value. The distribution of results is slightly skewed to the left, suggesting that most students express positive attitudes. The attitude scale toward inclusion is reliable, and a Cronbachs alpha of 0.83 indicates that the items within the scale are highly correlated and measure the same underlying construct—attitudes toward educational inclusion.

Exploratory factor analysis identified three dimensions of students attitudes toward the inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers in the Serbian educational system, which, when placed in a Promax rotation, explain 51.36% of the variance, i.e., more than half of the variation in students attitudes toward educational inclusion (Table 3).

Table 3

Characteristics of the identified factors on the scale of attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students

| Name of the factor | Characteristic value | Accounted variance (%) | Cumulative variance (%) | Number of items |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The importance of inclusion and social participation | 5.472 | 30,40 | 30,40 | 7 |
| Resources to support inclusion | 2.568 | 14,27 | 44,67 | 6 |
| Obstacles to inclusion | 1.204 | 6,690 | 51,357 | 5 |

The characteristic values of the first factor – *The importance of inclusion and social participation* – show that this factor makes the largest contribution to explaining the overall variance in the data, accounting for nearly a third of the total variation in responses. A significant portion of the items on the scale relates to the importance of inclusion and social participation, as the dominant factor groups 7 items. The characteristic value for the second factor – *Resources to support inclusion* – indicates a moderate contribution to the overall variance. This factor consists of 6 items, focusing on the necessary resources for successful inclusion (e.g., cooperation with families, intercultural education, and peer acceptance, etc.). The third factor – *Obstacles to inclusion* – has the smallest characteristic value. This factor explains 6.69% of the total variance, suggesting that obstacles to inclusion have less influence on shaping students overall attitudes compared to the first two factors. This factor groups 5 items, which are focused on barriers to the development of inclusion, such as cultural differences, institutional challenges, and inadequate conditions, etc.

Table 4

Descriptive indicators of the first factor structure

| The items within Factor 1 – **The importance of inclusion and social participation** | M | SD | Saturation |
|---|---|---|---|
| The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in education is important due to their right to education. | **4.49** | .872 | .811 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Including migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes contributes to developing interculturality in schools. | 3.97 | 1.062 | .800 |
| Migrant/asylum seeker students have equal rights to education as other students in our country. | 4.27 | 1.059 | .735 |
| Including migrant/asylum seeker students in extracurricular activities is important for the demonstration of their talents and the appreciation of their different interests. | **4.28** | .993 | .725 |
| Including migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes contributes to preserving their tradition and customs. | 3.44 | 1.146 | .707 |
| Inclusion implies migrant/asylum seeker students' contributions to the development of our society in the future. | 3.15 | 1.182 | .671 |
| Migrant/asylum seeker students should receive education within regular classes. | 3.72 | 1.239 | .549 |
| Characteristic value – 5.472 | Accounted variance – 30,40% | | |

The factor that predominantly explains the attitudes of future educators relates to the importance of inclusion and social participation (30.40% of the variance). The average values for each statement (Table 4) indicate that students assess the significance of each aspect of educational inclusion for migrant and asylum seeker students: from the right to education, through the expression of talents and interests, the development of interculturality in schools, to their future contribution to society. Most students – future educators – agree that the right to education for migrant and asylum seeker students is a key aspect of their inclusion. This is reflected in the statement with the highest mean value: *The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in education is important due to their right to education* (M = 4.49). Students also agree that the importance of educational inclusion for migrant and asylum seeker students is reflected in the opportunity for them to express their talents and different interests (M = 4.28), and the equal right to education as other students (M = 4.27). The lowest level of agreement was expressed regarding the statement (*Inclusion implies migrant/asylum seeker students' contributions to the development of our society in the future*) suggesting that students are less confident about the future societal contribution of migrant and asylum seeker students. The standard deviation values indicate the greatest variability in students attitudes regarding the integration of migrant and asylum seeker students into regular school classes (SD = 1.239), on one hand, and general consensus on the importance of their educational rights (SD = 0.872), on the other hand. The results further suggest that students perceive the importance of inclusion for migrant/asylum seeker students, with particular emphasis on their educational rights, but do not have unified views on all aspects of inclusion, such as integration into regular classes and societal contributions.

Table 5

Descriptive indicators of the second factor structure

| The items within Factor 2 – **Resources to support inclusion** | M | SD | Saturation |
|---|---|---|---|
| The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes implies removing various barriers (prejudices, language barriers, institutional barriers, etc.). | **4.30** | .885 | .800 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is the promotion of cooperation with their family. | 4.12 | .893 | .765 |
| Successful inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in education is impossible without a united action of the educational, social and health sectors. | 4.03 | .933 | .752 |
| One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is peer acceptance. | **4.30** | .848 | .654 |
| Inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is impossible without the development and preservation of intercultural education. | 4.11 | .933 | .631 |
| One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is to learn the language of instruction. | 3.94 | .921 | .531 |
| Characteristic value – 2.568 | | Accounted variance – 14,27% | |

The second factor, *Resources to Support Inclusion*, includes 6 items related to the resources necessary to ensure the effective inclusion of migrant students in education (Table 5). Students express the greatest agreement with two statements: *The inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes implies removing various barriers (prejudices, language barriers, institutional barriers, etc.)* (M = 4.30) and *One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is peer acceptance* (M = 4.30). These statements

indicate that the most crucial resources for inclusion are overcoming barriers (e.g., prejudices, language barriers, institutional obstacles) and ensuring peer acceptance, suggesting that peer relationships are seen as essential for successful inclusion. Students expressed the least agreement with the statement: *One of the most important aspects of inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes is to learn the language of instruction* (M = 3.94). The mean value of this item suggests that while language learning is considered important, it is not viewed as the most critical resource compared to other aspects, such as cooperation with families or peer acceptance. On the other hand, the standard deviation values indicate significant variability in students; attitudes regarding the necessity for unified action in the educational, social, and healthcare sectors and the development and nurturing of intercultural education. While some students view this cooperation as essential, others do not see it as a top priority. Similarly, while some students consider the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in regular classes impossible without the development and maintenance of intercultural education, others do not perceive it as crucial. The second factor accounts for a smaller portion of the variance in students responses (14.27%), suggesting that although resources are important, other factors play a more dominant role in shaping their attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students.

Table 6

Descriptive indicators of the third factor structure

| The items within Factor 3 – **Obstacles to inclusion** | M | SD | Saturation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seekers is not possible if there are great cultural differences. | 3.25 | 1.043 | .791 |
| In practice, the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students amounts to their being physically placed in regular classes. | **3.50** | .946 | .785 |
| Migrant/asylum seekers should receive education within asylum and reception centers. | 3.09 | 1.321 | .636 |
| Migrant/asylum seeker students should receive education in special classes, together with other migrant students. | 3.09 | 1.412 | .625 |

| | | 3.76 | 1.156 | .477 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| There are no adequate conditions (institutional, staff, material, etc.) for quality education of migrant/asylum seeker students. | | | | |
| Characteristic value – 1.204 | Accounted variance – 6,690% | | | |

The third factor encompasses 5 items related to various obstacles on the path to educational inclusion for migrant/asylum seeker students (Table 6). It explains a relatively small portion of the variance in responses, suggesting that obstacles to inclusion have less of an influence on students attitudes compared to the other factors. The mean values indicate that students agree that the lack of adequate resources (institutional, personnel, or material) represents a significant barrier to the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the educational system (M = 3.76). On the other hand, items with the lowest mean values suggest that students are less supportive of segregating migrant/asylum seeker students into specialized classes or limiting their education to reception centers. However, some students do support the idea of separate education for migrant/asylum seeker students, while others oppose it (SD = 1.412; SD = 1.321). This finding can be interpreted by the fact that students are not sufficiently certain whether segregation in special classes, with students who share similar experiences, would be more beneficial or harmful for these students. In summary, while students recognize the challenges and resource limitations in integrating migrant and asylum seeker students into the educational system, there is significant variation in their views on whether separate education or inclusion in regular classrooms is the best approach. This suggests that students are uncertain about the advantages and disadvantages of segregation and its potential impact on the educational experience of migrant students.

Table 7

The significance of the differences in the students' attitudes towards the inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students in the education system in relation to the independent variables

| Variables | Modalities | M | SD | F | LSD test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year of study | First year UAS | 69.59 | 10.38 | F=3.978; df=3; p< 0.05 | 1-3 1-4 |
| | Second year UAS | 60.73 | | | |
| | Third year UAS | 56.38 | | | |
| | Fourth year UAS | 55.19 | | | |
| Study programme | UAS Primary school teacher | 66.11 | 10,13 | F= 5.731 df=2; p< 0.01 | 1-2 1-3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| UAS Serbian language and literature | | 70.37 | 8,5 | |
| UAS Pedagogy | | 70,92 | 8,94 | |
| Contribution of studies to acquiring knowledge... | Yes | 67.81 | 9.99 | T=-2.608; df=259; p<0.01 |
| | No | 71.30 | 8.19 | |

The results of the one-way analysis of variance for repeated measurements, shown in Table 7, indicate that there are significant differences in students attitudes based on their year of study (F = 3.978; df = 3; p < 0.05) and study program (F = 5.731; df = 2; p < 0.01). The results of the independent samples t-test indicate a significant impact of the contribution of the study program to acquiring knowledge about the educational inclusion of migrants/asylum seekers (T = -2.608; df = 259; p < 0.01) on students attitudes towards the educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students.

In terms of study year, subsequent tests revealed significant differences between first- year and third-year students, as well as between first-year and fourth-year students. A trend was observed where first-year students expressed more positive attitudes towards the educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students than their older peers. These differences in their attitudes should be considered in relation to the study program itself and the content of both general academic and professionally applied subjects. Students in the Serbian language and literature and Pedagogy programs generally have more positive attitudes towards the educational inclusion of migrant/asylum seeker students compared to students in the Teacher Education program. Contrary to expectations, students who did not evaluate their studies as significantly contributing to their knowledge about the educational inclusion of migrant students expressed more positive attitudes.

**Discussion**

The importance of education and attending school for migrant and refugee children has been documented in numerous studies – in the domain of academic achievements, language learning, health, socio-emotional well-being, and fostering a sense of identity (Burrone, D'Costa & Holmqvist, 2018; Mock-Muñoz de Luna et al., 2020). Exercising the right to education is crucial for their overall development, social participation, and the realization of other rights in the areas of health and social protection. By ensuring the right to education and equal access to quality education, educational inclusion can improve attitudes among students and school staff, mutual interaction and communication, as well as educational outcomes for all students. Educational policies, including laws and strategies, aim to enhance the integration of migrant and asylum seeker students into education and find solutions to the problems and barriers migrants face. However, these policies often fail to consider significant practical realities that play a key role in the integration process (Taylor et al., 2023).

Taking these insights into account, it is necessary to place the results of this research within the broader context of related studies in the field of educational inclusion and migration, with a focus on the attitudes of future educators and teachers, as well as the specifics of the educational system in the context of migration and the concept of teacher professional development.

Teacher professional development that includes training on intercultural competencies and teaching strategies for inclusion in a multicultural classroom can improve educators attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant students (Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). Migration trends, as well as the demands of modern pedagogical practice, increase the need for educator training and professional development, as "teaching now requires knowledge and understanding of students' diverse backgrounds" (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 1). Furthermore, even highly internationally recognized teacher education programs are not sufficiently designed to help future teachers develop the skills and competencies needed to work in multicultural environments (Biasutti et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2023), and opportunities for professional development and further training related to working with immigrant students are often lacking (Alisaari et al., 2019; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014).

In the small number of studies conducted to examine teachers attitudes toward the inclusion of migrants and refugees, mostly positive attitudes have been found (Prentice, 2023), which is also confirmed by the results of this research. One study (Prentice, 2023) discovered that educators have relatively positive attitudes toward refugee students, and their previous experiences were associated with positive attitudes. Other authors reached similar conclusions, i.e., teachers with experience teaching refugee students express more positive attitudes regarding interactions with them (Sa?lam and Kanbur, 2017). Rissanen, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) discovered that primary education teachers in Finland who had more interactions with diverse cultures had more positive attitudes toward Muslim students. Additionally, Glock, Kovacs and Pit-Ten Cate (2019) found that preservice teachers have more negative implicit biases toward students from ethnic minorities than in-service teachers with experience in different schools. A positive correlation was also found between teachers inclusive beliefs about migration and their attitudes toward the educational rights of immigrant students (McCorkle, 2019). Despite the positive attitudes of current and future educators toward the educational inclusion of migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker students, the results of the study by Sa?lam and Kanbur (2017) indicate that teachers do not feel sufficiently competent to teach refugee students and that the curriculum and the created educational environment are not adapted to the needs of these children.

A more comprehensive understanding of the intensity and structure of students attitudes toward the inclusion of immigrant and asylum seeker students in the educational system requires considering the specifics of the educational system in Serbia in the context of educational policy measures for students with different migration statuses, as well as the direct practice. Educational policy measures (*Law on the Foundations of the Education System*, 2017; Professional Instructions, 2017; Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja Republike Srbije, 2017) foresee teacher training, support programs at the institutional level, and language support for students, as the language of instruction and education is crucial for their academic success, well-being, and overall development. To improve the integration of migrant and asylum-seeking students into current educational practice, it is essential to focus on addressing language and institutional barriers, providing training for teachers and students in cultural sensitivity, and creating more opportunities for intercultural interactions. This practice-based approach can lead to the development of a more inclusive and cohesive educational system that is socially relevant for both immigrant and local students.

**Conclusions**

The results show that most future educators have moderately positive attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the education system of Serbia. The structure of their attitudes can be examined through three factors: the importance of inclusion and social participation, resources for supporting inclusion, and barriers to inclusion. The importance of inclusion and social participation is the most significant factor in shaping students' attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students, followed by resources for supporting inclusion, and finally, barriers to inclusion. Together, these factors contribute to understanding students' attitudes toward educational inclusion, with the first two factors having the greatest impact.

The dominant factor focuses on the value of inclusion and social participation, reflecting the attitudes of future educators that inclusion is important for ensuring equal rights for all, talents and interests, social development, cultural understanding, etc. The second factor emphasizes the importance of various resources, such as peer acceptance, systemic support, cooperation with the families of migrant/asylum-seeker students, institutional readiness, and similar factors. The last factor focuses on various barriers and obstacles to the development of inclusion in schools (e.g., cultural differences, inadequate resources, and institutional barriers) that should be prevented or, at least, whose impact should be reduced. Although

students perceive the lack of support (e.g., staff-related, material and institutional conditions) as a significant challenge in implementing educational inclusion for migrant and asylum seeker students, they are less uniform when it comes to different models of their education, i.e., integration into regular classrooms, special classrooms within schools, or reception centers. The lower variance explained by the factor related to barriers in the development of inclusion suggests that students attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students are multi-component, and that barriers represent only a smaller part of their combination. Additionally, one of the key conclusions is that students attitudes toward the inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students in the Serbian educational system vary depending on the year of study, study program, and how they assess the contribution of their studies to acquiring the necessary knowledge for the inclusion of migrants. Students attitudes toward this important educational issue are largely shaped by various combinations of personal and social factors, with pedagogical characteristics of the respondents occupying a particularly important place.

Based on the results obtained, certain recommendations can be made for both teaching practice and future research. Regarding immediate practice, there is a recognized need to innovate study programs at pedagogical and teacher education faculties, with a greater emphasis on professional and applied courses aimed at acquiring knowledge and developing competencies for future work with migrant and asylum seeker students. A better understanding of future educators attitudes toward the educational inclusion of migrant and asylum seeker students, as well as the specific factors that determine their attitudes, can help more carefully design study programs for teacher, educator, and guidance counselor training, aiming to improve not only the goals and outcomes of study programs and course content but also the practical experiences of future educators. By developing curricula that focus on intercultural teaching competencies (Biasutti et al., 2021) and practical training for future educators, students gain a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusion and their professional role in the educational system, especially in the context of contemporary migration trends.

Further research could focus on qualitative analysis to examine students attitudes at different levels of study and how study programs can enhance their competencies, motivation, and readiness to work with migrant and refugee students. Since students' attitudes in this study were understood to include only the cognitive component—i.e., their knowledge and beliefs about educational inclusion—it is also important to investigate the affective and conative aspects of their attitudes, as well as the influence of other potential variables (e.g., previous experience interacting with migrants, type and status of the course, etc.). Given that the sample of respondents was not representative, it is necessary to expand the research to include other students from related faculties across the country, as well as current educators (class teachers, Serbian language teachers, pedagogues) in schools with and without experience working with migrant and asylum seeker students.

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**Odgoj danas za sutra:**
**Premošćivanje jaza između učionice i realnosti**
3. međunarodna znanstvena i umjetnička konferencija Učiteljskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu Suvremene teme u odgoju i obrazovanju – STOO4 u suradnji s Hrvatskom akademijom znanosti i umjetnosti

# Stavovi studenata prema inkluziji učenika migranata i tražitelja azila u obrazovni sistem Srbije

## Sažetak

Važan aspekt migracijske i useljeničke politike u EU i izvan njezinih granica je uključivanje učenika migranata i tražitelja azila u obrazovni sustav zemalja domaćina. Dosadašnja istraživanja potvrđuju važnost uključivanja učenika migranata i tražitelja azila u škole jer se time poštuju njihova prava, poboljšava njihov položaj u društvu i mogućnost kasnijeg uspješnog sudjelovanja u društvu. Polazeći od obrazovne politike prema djeci migrantima i tražiteljima azila u EU i Srbiji te koncepta inkluzivne škole, provedeno je istraživanje s ciljem ispitivanja stavova studenta prema inkluziji učenika migranata i tražitelja azila u obrazovni sustav Srbije. Primijenjena je deskriptivno-neeksperimentalna metoda, tehnika anketiranja, a posebno su konstruirana dva istraživačka instrumenta. Uzorak je obuhvatio studente fakulteta za obrazovanje učitelja, nastavnika i pedagoga (N=261) sa pet sveučilišta u Srbiji. Rezultati pokazuju da većina studenata ima umjereno pozitivne stavove prema inkluziji studenata migranata i tražitelja azila u obrazovni sustav, a strukturu njihovih stavova možemo sagledati kroz tri čimbenika: važnost inkluzije i društvene participacije, resurse za podršku inkluziji i prepreke za inkluziji. S obzirom na dobivene rezultate, prepoznaje se potreba za inoviranjem studijskih programa na pedagoškim i nastavničkim fakultetima te za većom zastupljenošću stručno-aplikativnih predmeta u funkciji stjecanja znanja i razvijanja kompetencija za budući rad sa učenicima migrantima i tražiteljima azila.

*Ključne riječi:*

faktorska analiza; nastavnički i pedagoški fakulteti; inkluzivna škola; migracije; stavovi studenata prema inkluziji