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Migration and educational inclusion in Portugal: Ukrainian immigrant children's experiences of schooling and belonging

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Abstract

This contribution outlines approaches to education of migrant children in Portugal and, connectedly, the influence of children's position in schools on their lives and identity. Specifically, the paper analyses the results of the mixed-method research conducted with Ukrainian immigrant children (aged 12-19) in the context of supplementary ethnic schools in Portugal. The focus is on the experiences of inclusion/exclusion and belonging by young Ukrainian immigrants, their social and educational identities as well as self-perception in the 'host' society.

Key words: *education, belonging, immigrant children, Portugal*

Migration and education in Portugal

Portugal has historically been a country of emigration. This trend started to change with the end of the authoritarian political regime in 1974. The independence of former African colonies brought to Portugal a large amount of post-colonial populations including both Portuguese 'returnees' and native African people. While in 1975 there were roughly 32,000 foreign-born residents in Portugal, by 1990 that figure had increased threefold to 107,767 and to 454,191 by 2009 (SEF, 2009). The national origins of immigration flows have also changed. Immigrants from the African Countries with Portuguese as an Official Language (PALOPs) predominated until 1990s, at which point in time immigrants from the EU, Brazil, Eastern Europe and, to a lesser degree, Asia started to arrive (Góis and Marques, 2009; Baganha, 2009). Migration scholars attribute this shift mainly to the adhesion of Portugal to the European Economic Community in 1986 and the Schengen visa space in 1991. They also attribute it to the increased need for immigrant manual labour determined by the outburst in the construction sector related to Expo-98, the new motorway network building project, and hosting of the European Football Championship 'Euro-2004' (Teixeira and Albuquerque, 2007; Baganha et al, 2004; Peixoto, 2002). By 2009, the main countries of origin of the legally residing immigrant population in Portugal were Brazil (25%), Ukraine (12%) and Cape Verde (11%), followed by other substantial groups of immigrants from Romania (7%), Angola (6%), Guinea-Bissau (5%), and Moldova (5%) (SEF, 2009).

There were 75,990 immigrant children (0-19 years old) officially registered in Portugal in 2009 (SEF, 2011). This group accounts for 16.8% of the total immigrant population in the country. Based on SEF's data and general educational statistics, we can estimate that immigrant children of the school age (5-19 years old) made up over 3% of the total number of children in the Portuguese education system in 2009. The largest number of

foreign nationals attending Portuguese schools appears to be of Brazilian and Cape Verdean descent, followed by Ukrainians.

According to Eurodyce (2004), the model of reception and integration of immigrant children adopted in Portugal involves placing a new child in a mainstream class with her own age group (if possible, alongside another child from the same country) and providing separate language and curriculum support classes. Newly-arrived pupils need to apply for qualification recognition before enrolling in school. If the school certificate from their home country is recognized, children are placed in the appropriate grade corresponding to their age. Otherwise, pupils have to take a diagnostic test. At one point, in 2003, Portuguese teachers, struggling with the inflow of immigrant children, protested against such policies arguing that qualification recognition does not make sense since children do not know any Portuguese. The demand was that such children should be grouped in one school in each city until they know enough Portuguese to follow lessons (Dias et al, 2005).

Key features of Ukrainian migration

Ukrainians are a relatively recent and unforeseen wave of economic immigrants in Portugal who started to arrive in the 1990s. Although most of them entered Portugal on short-term tourist visas and illegally overstayed, they benefited from the campaign for the regularisation of undocumented labour migrants that took place in Portugal in 2001. Subsequently, children were brought to Portugal under the family reunification law (Fonseca et al, 2005). By 2009, Ukrainians became the second largest immigrant group in the country after the Brazilian community, and far more numerous than any other Eastern European immigrant group (SEF, 2009).

Ukrainians are more geographically dispersed than other abundant immigrant communities from PALOP and Brazil. They are present in substantial numbers in rural and farming areas and industrial areas of the northern and central coast in addition to the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon, where only a quarter of them reside (Fonseca et al, 2004; Fonseca, 2008). The analysis of geographic and labour market distribution of immigrants in Portugal suggests that 'employment opportunities have become the determining factor of where [Eastern European] immigrants end up residing' (Sardinha, 2009, p. 108). The unusual geographic locations of Ukrainian migrants create potential challenges for schools and teachers in accommodating the needs of pupils in areas where there were no immigrants whatsoever, let alone those who spoke no Portuguese.

Ukrainian immigrants are concentrated in low status employment with high levels of deskilling. The main sectors Ukrainian immigrants work in are construction, the extraction and manufacturing industry, agriculture, cleaning and domestic work (Baganha et al, 2004; Peixoto, 2009). These are overwhelmingly difficult, low-paying or socially undervalued jobs. However, the educational level of these immigrants is, on average, higher than of other immigrant groups and of the economically active Portuguese population (Marques et al, 2007; Peixoto, 2009).

What is known about Ukrainian pupils?

Ukrainians aged 5-19 represented 11.3% of all immigrant children and adolescents in Portugal (SEF, 2011). Research conducted with parents of these pupils found that most immigrants believed their children were academically successful, which was reflected in the above-average level of achievement (Mirotshnik, 2008). Ukrainian and other Eastern European parents also reported that their children were described by Portuguese teachers as being serious about school work, respectful, disciplined and so on (ibid). In fact, discipline is more heavily emphasised in Ukrainian schools than in Portuguese schools, as well as parental engagement in their children's learning and homework. Moreover, education has been perceived as crucial in facilitating social mobility both in post-Soviet Ukraine and perhaps even more for those who emigrate. Ukrainian migrant parents were found to put a major emphasis on the educational achievement of their children and project their ambitions onto their children for the careers they had lost (ibid). Within parents' perspectives on schooling in Portugal, two distinguishable issues of concern were found: the difficulties their children had with the Portuguese language and, particularly, the relationships with schoolmates (Mendes, 2009; Mirotshnik, 2008). Previous research testified to the high rates of school drop-outs among Eastern European youngsters due to language and social problems during the initial period of their time in Portugal (Mendes, 2009; Marques et al, 2007). This paper provides pupils' accounts of the difficulties they faced in Portuguese schools.

The study

This paper is based on a mixed method research study conducted within Ukrainian supplementary ethnic schools in Portugal during 2010-2011. The first qualitative phase of the study took place in one Saturday school located in Lisbon and lasted four months. Given its exploratory nature, the study was centred on one discrete class of 16 pupils (five boys; eleven girls) in Year 7 (on average, 13 years old). All pupils were born in Ukraine, and the length of time of living in Portugal ranged from six months to nine years, with the average being three and a half years. During 13 full school day visits, information was collected about the school through documentary and secondary sources, nine formal interviews with teachers and observations of school life, events and lessons. Pupils participated in a range of activities, including: (i) four small focus group discussions exploring how young people related to Ukraine and Portugal; (ii) three small focus group discussions on pupils' experiences of Ukrainian supplementary schooling in relation to their experiences within Portuguese mainstream schools; (iii) five paired interviews with two friends focused on pupils' social experiences and self-conceptions, as well as factors that prevented (or facilitated) the young people's sense of belonging; (iv) image-making by 14 pupils who took photographs with disposable cameras representing their views of Portugal, any important people, places or objects in their life, and their experiences in Portuguese schools; (v) the meaning of 287 photographs was elicited in group interviews with a researcher and two-three pupils.

The second phase of the study comprised of a survey of all pupils in Years 7 to 11 across eight Ukrainian Saturday schools located in various geographic areas of Portugal. Between February and May 2011 a total of 184 self-completed questionnaires were

collected. The sample comprised of 42.4% boys and 57.6% girls. The majority of pupils attended the school in Lisbon (64%). The questionnaire aimed to determine young people's attitudes towards Portuguese mainstream and Ukrainian supplementary school, including their reasons for attending supplementary school, their likes and dislikes about mainstream and supplementary school in terms of teachers, classmates, subjects; their ethnic identification and self-perception of their ethnic group in Portugal; their attitudes towards Portugal; their perception on ethnic discrimination in Portugal; as well as other pupil background data. Statistical analyses explored the effect of age, gender, length of stay in Portugal in relation to questionnaire responses.

Schooling, belonging and representations

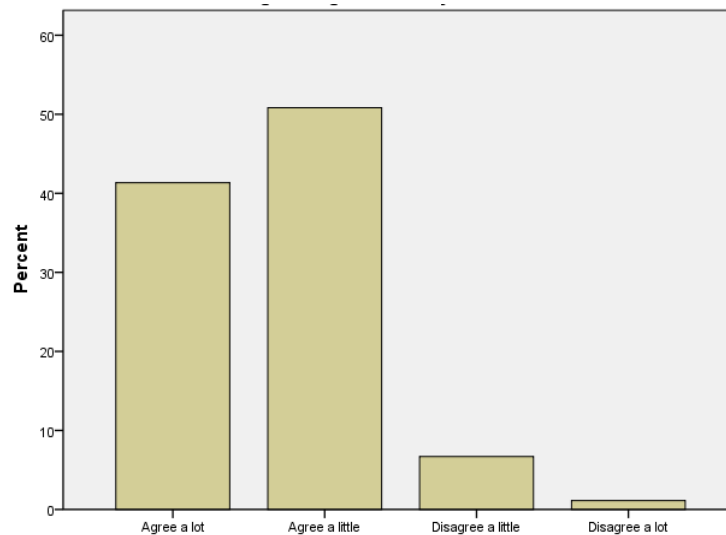
One way to understand the question of belonging for Ukrainian immigrant children was to analyze their feelings about the country of origin and the country of residence. Drawing on the qualitative data from our research, Table 1 summarises the results of the pre-discussion activity, during which children were asked to write on a sheet of paper what they liked and disliked about Portugal and Ukraine, as well as the subsequent group discussions on the topic. The analysis revealed that pupils had significantly more bad things to say about Ukraine than about Portugal (for detailed analysis see Tereshchenko and Araújo, 2011).

Table 1. Summary of pupils' impressions about Portugal and Ukraine

Bad things about Ukraine	Bad things about Portugal
WEATHER. ECOLOGY. SERVICES. GENERAL CULTURE. POLITICIANS. CLOTHING. ECONOMY. CORRUPTION. PERSONAL TREATMENT.	RAINY IN WINTER. FRIENDS.
Good things about Ukraine	Good things about Portugal
LANDSCAPE. LANGUAGE. FRIENDS. FOOD.	WEATHER. CLIMATE. OPPORTUNITIES. URBAN AND NATURAL LANDSCAPES. LANGUAGE. PEOPLE. SERVICES. CLOTHING (for girls). PORTUGUESE GIRLS (for boys).

Figure 1 presents the results in relation to pupils' positive feelings about Portugal obtained from the survey. It shows that 42.2% of Ukrainian pupils strongly agreed and 49.9% agreed with the statement 'Portugal is a great country to live in'.

Figure 1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Portugal is a great country to live in'?



Despite the positive experiences of belonging to Portugal and their emotional connection with the country, the majority of pupils we interviewed portrayed a sense of exclusion experienced in Portuguese schools in the context of personal relationships. Similar to the findings of previous international research on the adjustment of immigrant children to the new school environment (Suárez-Orozo and Suárez-Orozo, 2001; Adams and Kirova, 2006; Mendes, 2009; Pinson et al, 2010; Gilligan et al, 2010), we found that the initial period in Portuguese schools was particularly stressful. Most pupils recalled that their early difficulties were associated with the language:

I first went to kindergarten. I remember there was a woman there and she didn't like me. They all talked and I couldn't understand anything. And she kept shouting at me and I told my dad. He came to the kindergarten and yelled at her. She said that I didn't understand anything, and I said that she didn't know anything, she just yelled at me and she couldn't explain a thing, she could have used pictures or something. (Sofia, 14)

In relation to the incorporation of migrant and refugee children, it is suggested that 'belonging is a reciprocal relationship' (Pinson et al, 2010, p. 168). Therefore, in the words of 12-year-old Maria 'I could feel Portuguese if I wasn't reminded by my classmates every day that I am Ukrainian' it is not only about wanting to belong but also about being allowed to belong. Even Ukrainian pupils who were well adjusted by the time of the study clearly remembered 'the awful negativity in school' (Olena, 12), because they were 'laughed at', 'mocked', 'called names', 'humiliated', 'pushed', and the like. Bullying and harassment endured by the majority of the respondents were directed at the lack of language competence (e.g., 'when you stumble on a word while reading a text aloud or say something and stammer, everybody starts to laugh' – Vlad, 14), an obvious lack of knowledge about the rules of conduct (e.g., the Portuguese way

of raising a hand at lessons to answer the teacher's questions, etc), and/or unusual or 'uncool' dress (e.g., girls came to school wearing skirts and dresses rather than jeans).

Navigating peer culture seems to be the most challenging aspect on the road of adaptation and feeling of belonging in school. Students, especially girls, talked about the difficulties they had in fitting in with their peers, experiences of low-level bullying and harassment directed at the most obvious signs of otherness such as lack of language skills, 'uncool' dress, and lack of knowledge of school and youth cultural norms. Ukrainian school was a much safer place in this respect, which helped to create a sense of security and belonging.

Those children who went to Portuguese school as teenagers were prone to more discrimination than those who migrated as young children (see also Mendes, 2009; Gilligan et al, 2010). Natalia, a relatively recent migrant, captured the sense of exclusionary peer culture towards the newcomers in the following summary of her experience of living through the hostility of classmates:

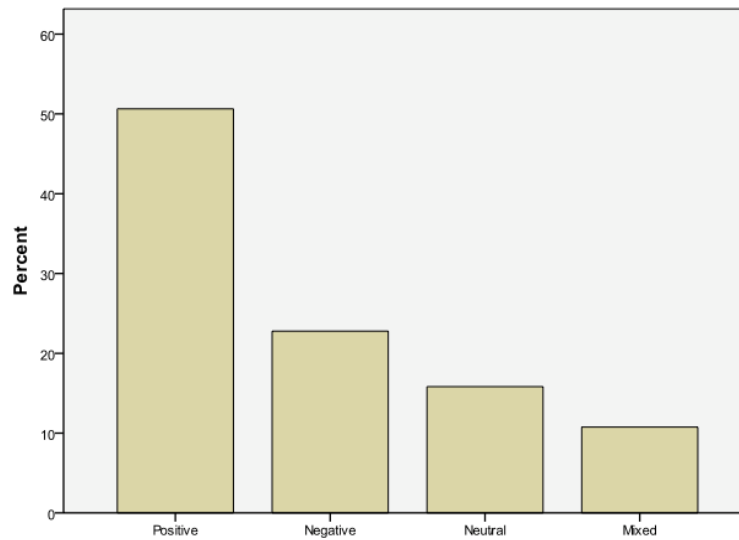
It's like a wolf pack. Someone different comes and they don't like the person. They look at you like a wolf. They cannot just accept. They need time to get used to you. It's the second year that they are getting used to me. (Natalia, 13)

In the questionnaire, a total of 125 pupils (68%) supplied one or more reasons for their feeling of unhappiness in Portuguese school. Table 2 represents the most commonly selected reasons, which appear to be related to social difficulties as well as difficulties with language and, as a consequence, with doing the required amount of school work.

Table 2. Reasons for feeling unhappy in Portuguese schools

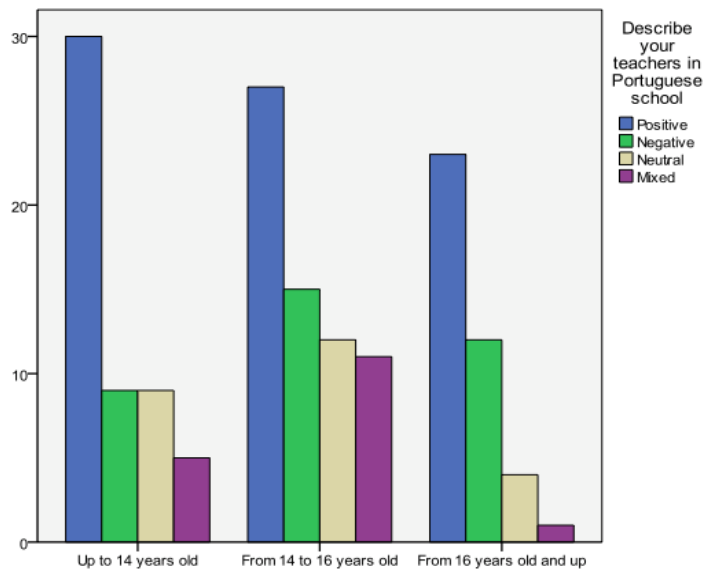
It's hard to make good friends	34.2%
I can't cope with the required amount of work	14.7%
I don't like my teacher(s)	14.1%
I understand almost nothing because of the language	12.5%
I always get into trouble	11.4%
Other kids don't like me	9.2%
Being bullied	7.1%
I worry about things that have happened in my family	6.0%
My teacher(s) don't like me	6.0%
Other reason	11.4%

Although 14.7% of pupils did not like their teachers (see Table 2 above), the general impression we gathered from the study was that the majority of pupils felt included academically due to teachers' efforts. In the survey, pupils were separately asked to describe their teachers in Portuguese school in an open-ended manner. Their responses were coded into four categories: positive, negative, neutral and mixed (both positive and negative) descriptions. Figure 2 demonstrates that half of the Ukrainian pupils (50.6%) held positive views about Portuguese teachers, and 15.8% of pupils described them in neutral terms, using expressions such as 'they are normal teachers', 'they just do their job', etc.

Figure 2. Description of Portuguese teachers

Furthermore, as Figure 3 shows, the tendency to like teachers was equally high in all age groups: up to 14-year-olds, 14- to 16-year-olds and over 16-year-olds described Portuguese teachers generally positively, particularly pointing out that they helped them in class and understood their initial difficulties with the Portuguese language. Those pupils who described teachers negatively complained about the lack of sympathy with their situation as newcomers to Portuguese school. However, unhelpful and unsympathetic teachers seemed to be in the minority.

Figure 3. Description of teachers, by age group (frequencies)



On the basis of both questionnaire and interview data analyses, we found that despite their social difficulties in Portuguese schools, Ukrainian pupils promoted a very positive image of their ethnic group and themselves as high-achievers. The following quotes make reference to how pupils positioned themselves in opposition to their Portuguese peers as smart, respectful and disciplined:

They envy our knowledge. They sit in the test and always ask around: ‘How much is 2x4?’, ‘How much is 5x8?’. They don’t know the multiplication table. [...] Teachers even allow them to use calculators on the test. (Hanna, 13)

They need to be told 20 times by teachers, ‘Sit down, the lesson has started. The bell rang.’ (Olena, 12)

The survey data also provides evidence to pupils’ positive self-perception. Figure 4 shows that the overwhelming majority of pupils (over 80%) disagreed with the statement ‘Portuguese pupils have better grades than Ukrainians’. An equally high percent of pupils (almost 90%) were inclined to believe that Ukrainian pupils were more hard-working than Portuguese pupils (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Portuguese pupils have better grades than Ukrainian pupils'?

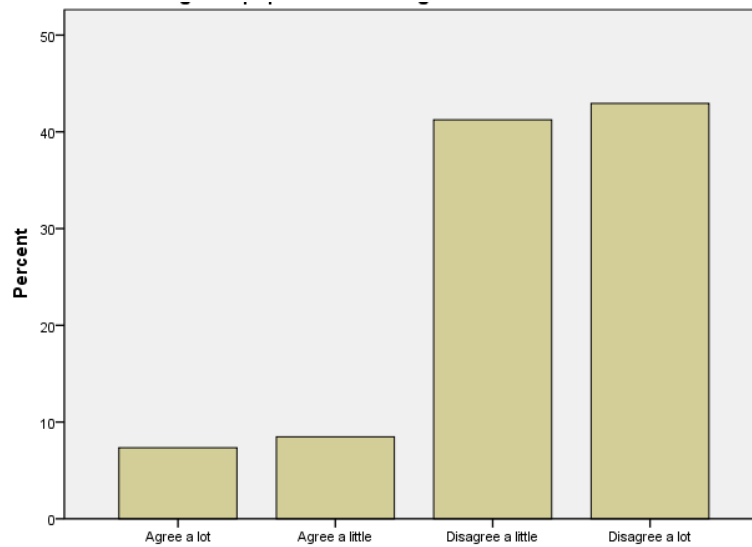
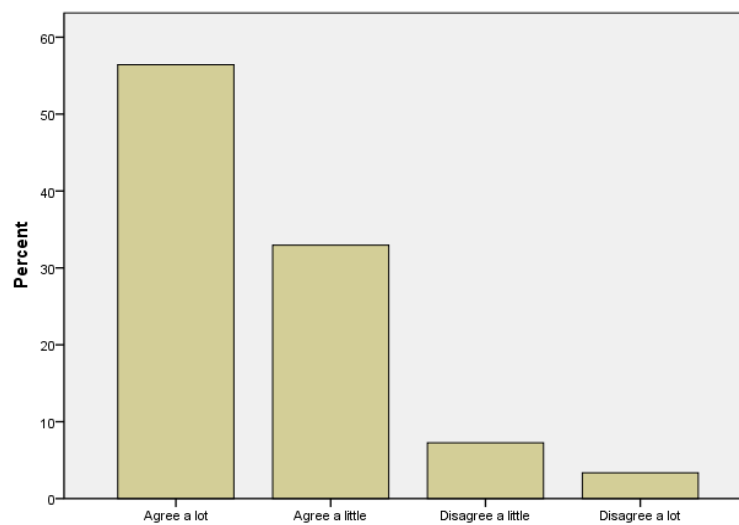


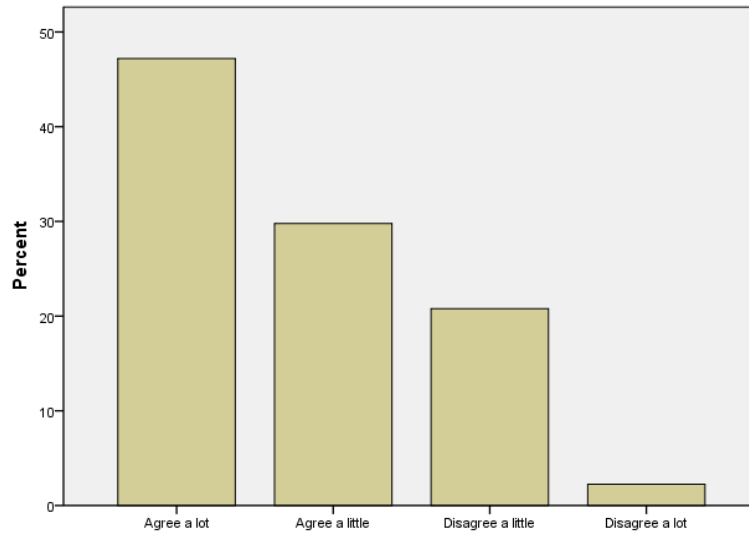
Figure 5. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Ukrainian pupils are more hard-working than Portuguese'?



Finally, we found that Ukrainian pupils had a positive outlook with regards to their future opportunities in Portugal. For example, a total of 77% of pupils tended to think that they had as many opportunities to enter universities in Portugal as the Portuguese (see Figure 6). In the interviews, pupils also talked about corruption in Ukraine and the fact that it was expensive to study at the university there, whereas they believed that if they studied hard they would be able to enter a university in Portugal because the entry

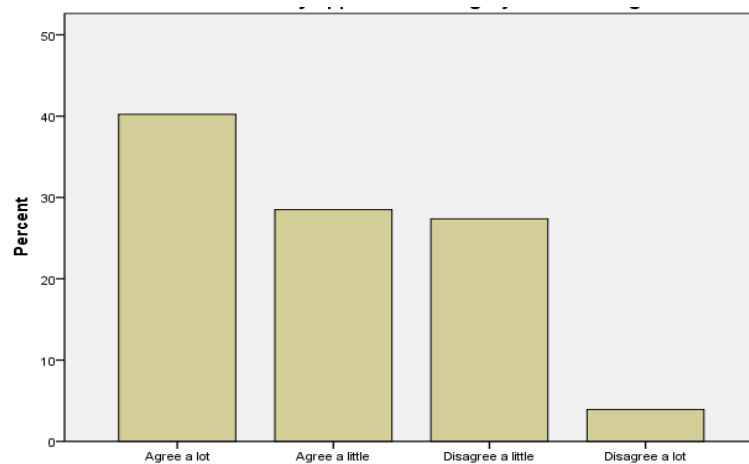
requirements were transparent and higher education was more affordable than in Ukraine.

Figure 6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Ukrainians have as many opportunities as Portuguese to enter university in Portugal'?



Regarding the labour market opportunities in Figure 7, almost 70% of respondents were inclined to agree with the statement 'Ukrainians have as many opportunities as the Portuguese to get jobs in Portugal'. However, 31% of pupils also tended to disagree with this statement that probably reflects the attitudes and the position of their parents in the lower segment of the Portuguese labour market.

Figure 7. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement 'Ukrainians have as many opportunities as the Portuguese to get jobs in Portugal'?



Conclusion

To sum up, this paper highlighted the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion experienced by Ukrainian immigrant children in Portuguese schools and in everyday life. The majority of these children portrayed a sense of belonging to Portugal through displaying loyalty and meaningful relationships to and identification with the place. They identified with Portugal in relational terms against their own country of origin, which was constructed as different and backwards: poor services, economy and politics were cited among other 'bad' things about Ukraine. However, the children's relationships with Portuguese peers seemed to undermine their ability to fully belong, to feel emotionally safe and secure. Ukrainian friends (both in Ukraine and within the inclusionary context of Ukrainian supplementary school) were named as qualitatively different from Portuguese 'friends' (enclosed by pupils in quotation marks to signal irony). Indeed, the only serious cause of non-belonging to Portugal was linked to lack of true friends. While found to value education and striving to achieve, pupils were often excluded in Portuguese school due to being different, not knowing youth cultural norms, and the like. Nevertheless, Ukrainian pupils had positive attitudes towards their future in Portugal. In particular, the majority of them did not expect to encounter ethnic or social discrimination in access to higher education and in the Portuguese labour market. Thus, the empirical findings suggest that school dynamics are among the most important factors affecting immigrant children's sense of belonging to the country. Therefore, schools must be seen by policy-makers and practitioners concerned with immigrant integration as sites from which to strengthen immigrants' sense of belonging.

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