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BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO EDUCATION: OFFICIAL DISCOURSES, INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE, AND EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES WHO MIGRATED TO CHILE

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ABSTRACT

In Chile, many children who have migrated with their families remain outside the educational system. In this context, we aim to analyze national and international policies, as well as scientific evidence on "education and migration," and to understand, from the families' perspectives, the barriers to accessing education. We explore how families approach formal education, their experiences, and expectations. Through a case study design, interviews were conducted with families who migrated to the cities of Santiago and Talca. The results show that although intercultural education policies exist and progress has been made in terms of educational access mechanisms, institutionalized violence persists within the education system. Automated school admission processes through digital platforms present accessibility challenges for families, and the rigid curriculum structure fails to accommodate the specific needs of children and their families. We recommend advancing toward an intercultural approach based on cultural reciprocity that fosters inclusion and greater social cohesion.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Education, Access, Interculturality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to its magnitude and dynamism, international migration has altered migration patterns in Latin America and has become a key topic in national and international agendas. However, this situation has not triggered an effective debate in the field of education (Buratovich, 2023).

Morales et al. (2022) indicate that the official enrollment of foreign students in Chile's educational system includes students from 27 nationalities, with the most represented being Venezuela (16,082 students), Haiti (10,863), Peru (9,586), Colombia (9,015), Bolivia (8,471), and Ecuador (1,803). The regions with the highest enrollment of foreign students are Metropolitana, Bío Bío, Valparaíso, and Maule.

Mera, Bilbao, Martínez, and Garrido (2021) highlight the complex social situation of migrant children in Chile. Official data indicates that 31.9% live in poverty, and 59.1% attend public schools, which generally have high vulnerability rates.

The coverage of migrant children in early childhood education has raised concerns, particularly in the first three years of life (nursery and preschool), posing a significant challenge for public policies aimed at childhood protection.

Table 1. Early Childhood Education Access Situation

Level / Sublevel	Projected Population	Enrolled Children	Non-Enrolled Children	% Enrolled Children	% Non- Enrolled Children
Infant Nursery	2,37,819	21,426	2,16,393	9.00%	91.00%
Major Nursery	2,37,549	60,313	1,77,236	25.40%	74.60%
Minor Middle	2,35,636	74,163	1,61,473	31.50%	68.50%
Major Middle	233	1,42,803	90,197	61.30%	38.70%
Lower Transition (NT1)	2,33,282	2,10,324	22,958	90.20%	9.80%
Upper Transition (NT2)	2,40,651	2,30,083	10,568	95.60%	4.40%
Total	14,17,937	7,39,112	6,78,825	52.10%	47.90%

Source: Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education 2023

As shown, children aged 0 to 2 years are largely outside the educational system, despite the existence of Chile's integral childhood protection policy, "Chile Crece Más," which aims to provide an integrated system of universal social interventions and differentiated benefits for children and adolescents (NNA) in vulnerable situations up to the age of nine.

Various studies suggest that foreign children are at a disadvantage compared to their local peers, not only due to being cultural minorities but also because of increased barriers to accessing favorable living conditions for themselves and their families.

The situation for children under six years old is critical, as families struggle to enroll them in school, which affects their well-being and development. The causes are multiple (Sanhueza, 2023), including the imposition of rigid educational programs, inflexible school calendars, and challenges in balancing work and family life. Alvites Baiadera et al. (2023) argue that state and school mechanisms also impede access to education, as migration irregularity acts as both a social control mechanism and an obstacle to educational integration.

Flores, González, and Garrido (2023) conclude that the inclusion of migrant families should begin in early childhood education, leveraging the flexibility of early education programs to facilitate a smoother transition to higher educational levels.

While progress has been made in recent years regarding the inclusion of migrant children, specific policies are needed to define appropriate ways for families to integrate into both formal and non-conventional educational institutions. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding regarding the expectations, characteristics, and needs of migrant families arriving in the country.

These initial premises lead us to consider migration as a silent and invisible dis-placement for children and their families, a problem that, in future scenarios, will deepen social inequalities. Given this context, our objectives are:

1. To analyze national and international policies, as well as scientific evidence in the field of "education and migration."
2. To understand, from the families' perspectives, the barriers to accessing education, exploring how they approach formal education, their experiences, and expectations.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen through a multiple case study design, which involves understanding reality by being immersed in it and interpreting it from the subjects' perspective. Under this design, the researcher seeks to preserve multiple realities, different and even contradictory views of what happens (Stake, 2007).

2.2 Context and Participants

Since the objective was to approach an understanding of social phenomena and processes in all their complexity, we sought to describe the territory and participants as clearly as possible. The selected cities were Talca and Santiago, with the goal of defining cases that could represent others with similar characteristics. For this reason, we opted for purposive sampling, which, according to Martínez (2012), includes voluntary informants or individuals with whom there is prior experience, ensuring accessibility to hard-to-reach groups.

This type of sampling is used in contexts where the population is highly variable, resulting in a very small sample size, as is the case with migrant families, who frequently move from one place to another intermittently due to their migration status (Otzen & Manterola, 2017). The study included four women and one man, aged between 18 and 35 years.

Case 1

A 20-year-old Venezuelan woman who has been in Chile for 11 months. She became a mother at a very young age and has two children: a two-year-old daughter (born in Ecuador) and a four-month-old son (born in Chile). She left Venezuela at age 15 due to drug use issues, and her mother arranged for an aunt to take her to Colombia. She lived in Colombia for one year and seven months, then moved to Ecuador for two years, and finally arrived in Chile. Her education level is up to the second year of high school.

Case 2

A 21-year-old Venezuelan woman with a three-year-old son. The child was born in Colombia, where they lived for two years before moving to Ecuador and later to Chile, where they have been for a year. She entered Chile through an unauthorized crossing in the north while pregnant. The main reason for her migration was economic hardship due to the crisis in Venezuela, which led to food shortages. She traveled through northern Chile with the help of family connections.

Case 3

A Haitian father with a three-year-old daughter who was born in Brazil, where they lived for nearly three years. He and his wife, also Haitian, have been in Chile for two years. The woman has not been able to find work, and he spends his time doing seasonal fruit picking and occasional construction jobs. Their motivation for migrating was to seek a better life, as Haiti's economic situation prevented them from accessing basic necessities. However, they encountered similar difficulties in Brazil, leading them to move to Chile.

It is important to note that, in these three cases in Talca, the families have irregular migration status despite efforts to regularize their situation. They do not have formal employment and have been in Chile for less than two years. All have transited through other countries before arriving in Chile.

Case 4

An 18-year-old Colombian woman with a 10-month-old child. She arrived in Chile seven months ago and immediately noted that her irregular migration status would lead her to return to her home country. She has no support networks, lives alone with her child, and pays CLP 150,000 per month to rent a small room near the Santiago bus terminal. With no childcare options, she carries her baby in her arms all day while selling sweets on the streets. Her main reason for migrating was to improve her economic situation and quality of life.

Case 5

A 19-year-old Colombian woman with a one-year and three-month-old daughter. She has been in Chile for six years but has left and re-entered twice. She runs a small business with her two younger sisters, aged 16 and 18. She explains that she leaves her daughter in the care of a friend, who charges her per day. When she has enough money, she can pay for childcare; otherwise, she takes her child with her to the streets, leaving her in a stroller while selling goods near Estación Central. Her main reason for migrating was economic.

In both cases in Santiago, the participants are very young women from Colombia who migrated for economic reasons. Their occupations are in the informal commerce sector.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques used in this study was:

a) Document Analysis, aimed at thermalizing the concepts of "migration" and "education" based on scientific articles, official documents, and technical reports from projects funded by public and private organizations. Document analysis refers to a set of operations that allow the representation of a document and its content. It is a process focused on the interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of information from various documents.

b) Semi-structured Interviews with Migrant Families, used as a means to access knowledge, beliefs, rituals, and cultural life, obtaining data in the subjects' own language. These interviews were conducted in an open setting, allowing for flexibility and freedom. More specifically, semi-structured interviews aim to explore the interviewees' symbolic and cultural universe, providing insight into the meaning they attribute to the events they experience and face.

The interviews with families who are outside the education system were conducted in pre-arranged

locations. In Santiago, the interviews took place in spaces where women/mothers engaged in informal commerce (street vendors in the bus terminal area of Santiago).

In Talca, fieldwork was conducted in an informal settlement located in a peripheral neighborhood of the city. Due to its characteristics, this neighborhood aligns with what the literature describes as a cultural ghetto, a place inhabited exclusively by families from Haiti.

2.4 Procedure and Data Analysis

For the analysis process, the Anchored Theorization (AT) method was employed. This method is designed to inductively generate a theory about a social, psychological, or cultural phenomenon based on the reflective understanding and interrelation of empirical data produced by the actors in their discourse. The AT method focuses on studying social life (Clarke, 2003) and can be applied to any topic or area of knowledge. According to Raymond (2005), the object of study in AT is a social phenomenon understood as a process.

After numerous readings and cross-referencing with the researcher's field notes, the analysis was supported using the Atlas-ti statistical software for qualitative data analysis. The procedure included obtaining informed consent from participants and adhering to the necessary ethical safeguards.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Educational Response "for" Migration from the Prescriptive-Declarative Discourse

As previously mentioned, the first objective aimed to analyze national academic literature related to the education of migrant children in early childhood education settings, identifying its scope and limitations. Based on relevance criteria, the review was focused at the local level, as numerous reports and articles disseminate findings from projects, consultancies, and advisory studies funded by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation of Chile.

Thus, conducting a meta-analysis and updating the research was deemed the most appropriate decision for the study's objectives.

At the international level, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023) has raised awareness among governments regarding the impact of educational access on displaced children. In its 2022 report, the agency estimated that 48% of refugee children were not attending school, with asylum applications predomi-nantly submitted by citizens of Latin American and Caribbean countries, particularly Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Honduras, and Colombia.

Children and youth experiencing displacement face stressful conditions linked to health, economic, gender, political, social, and family issues due to their exposure to environments different from those they previously lived in. Baca and Monroy (2023) highlight that in family migration, some parents choose to involve their children in the migratory process. However, family decisions rarely emerge from a democratic process, and participation is neither voluntary nor equally distributed—age and gender determine the extent and manner of involvement. Childhood, often referred to as "dependent minors," becomes a vulnerable condition, with children either persuaded or forced to participate in international mobility, often in an undocumented manner, with all the risks that entails.

Furthermore, regarding the right to education, institutional violence is also ex-pressed through rigid structures that limit the possibility of guaranteeing this right, as well as in societies that do not embrace diversity and interculturality. Amnesty International (2022) states that human rights violations against migrants are largely due to systemic gaps that obstruct or hinder their right to education. These barriers range from denial of access to the lack of instruction and the absence of educational materials in the migrants' native languages or languages they understand.

In international law, the right to education is one of the guiding principles of the global agenda, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4 (UN, 2015), adopted by the international community. In Latin America, several Ministries of Education, including Chile's, have reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

Climate change has also led to new internal and external displacements that have affected children. Rising sea levels, hurricanes, wildfires, and crop failures are forcing more children and families to leave their homes. Displaced children face increased risks of abuse, trafficking, and exploitation (UNICEF, 2021). They are also more likely to lose access to education and healthcare.

Many are forced into early marriage and child labor. Although these children are theoretically protected by international and national regulations, the issue remains highly technical and difficult to access, creating a protection gap for migrant children (IOM, 2022).

The situation is critical, as children affected by inequality and discrimination are more likely to experience the impacts of climate change more intensely. In this regard, investing in better data and analysis is a fundamental step toward

developing more effective and lasting responses, and it should be a priority for governments (Save the Children, 2021).

Given this scenario, we ask: What has been Chile's experience regarding educational access for migrant children? How is the State shaping educational policies to address cultural diversity and ensure the rights enshrined in international agreements and treaties?

Our search led us to the report State of the Art: Migration and the School System in Chile, Argentina, and Spain, funded by the Center for Studies of the Planning and Budget Division of the Ministry of Education (Martínez, 2018). The document provides a characterization of Chile's migrant population, highlighting:

- A higher educational level among migrants compared to locals (12.5 years of schooling vs. the national average).
- The feminization of migration, with 55% of migrants being women.
- Higher birth rates among migrant families compared to Chilean families, leading to an increased demand for school enrollment for children of school age.

This author analyses the socio-cultural dynamics of migration and the school system in Chile based on the following categories:

1. School choice and access
2. Racism and discrimination
3. Relationships within educational institutions
4. Family-school relationships

Although the study includes comparisons among the mentioned countries, this re-ports focuses on findings specifically related to Chile.

Regarding school choice and access, the study establishes that, formally, the system guarantees equal access for both Chilean and migrant students. However, informally, there are mechanisms that operate "almost exclusively against immigrant students from lower and lower-middle socioeconomic groups", indicating that socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity are the key determinants of school access (Martínez, 2018, p. 9).

Along the same lines of educational access for children from displaced families, the study by Joiko and Vásquez (2016) found that migrant families obtain school information through formal channels, such as municipal offices or agencies under the Ministry of Education. However, they also identified informal mechanisms that influence school selection practices. These include visiting nearby schools to inquire about available spots or seeking information through social networks where families and compatriot friends are embedded.

Researcher M. Emilia Tijoux has published multiple studies on education and mi-gration, highlighting the existence of racist logics and discriminatory practices operating within the school system. She attributes these issues to structural racism, which reinforces hierarchical systems that reproduce inequalities. Her work calls for recognition and awareness of racist practices in schools.

The author states:

"We should be shaken by the voices of children who tell us that every day, in the educational context, other children punish them for their skin color. Even more so when they calmly explain that they have already grown used to it, that they prefer to avoid problems by sticking together, that they usually go home together to protect themselves, that they do not want to fight because they could be expelled from school. They also reveal that they keep silent about daily acts of violence in front of their parents to avoid further burdening them. It is disturbing to witness, just a few steps from where we are working, in a small neighbourhood playground, a group of local children expelling them, saying they do not play with Black children and must leave. This exclusion has been taught by adults, learned by children, and spread through a common sense deeply rooted in the bodies that society seeks to erase or ignore." (Tijoux & Barrios, 2019, p. 405).

Salas et al. (2016) identify different categorizations made by teachers regarding migrant children, often perceiving them as a disadvantaged or vulnerable group requiring either compensatory strategies or lower academic expectations in relation to curriculum objectives.

Regarding the types of activities promoted in educational spaces, the findings sug-gest that these initiatives are mainly limited to commemorative events, such as school performances, fairs, or presentations on aspects of their home countries, including traditional food tastings or dances. These activities are intentionally designed to allow migrant children to showcase some of their customs and traditions, rather than being fully integrated into the educational experience.

In the FONIDE (2016) project led by Natalia Salas, attitudes toward multicul-turalism in schools were evaluated. The study concluded that, while most students ex-press a positive attitude toward multiculturalism, tensions exist in intercultural rela-tionships among children. For example, 23% of surveyed students believe that children from different countries should not attend their schools,

and 37% think that immigrant children negatively impact their class's academic performance. A similar trend was observed among teachers, where between 13% and 25% of educators hold negative perceptions of immigrant students, citing their impact on classroom activities and overall academic performance.

Mondaca, Muñoz, and Sánchez (2016) examined differences in school environments for migrant children based on the type of institution they attend. Their study highlights that in rural schools, integration tends to be more natural due to social dynamics centered on equality-based relationships, whereas in urban schools, migrant students are a minority, and no explicit policies exist to facilitate welcoming and inclu-sion processes. An effective strategy for fostering intercultural relationships has been the mediation of fellow nationals within schools. These individuals help with school induction processes, accompany migrant students, and guide them in understanding the school's organizational structure.

The relationship between families and schools has been documented by the same authors based on research conducted in the Arica and Parinacota region. The study highlights that family participation is relatively low and generally limited. Furthermore, the primary activity in which families engage is parent-teacher meetings, which, according to the authors, provide only a limited opportunity for interaction.

In a recent study, researchers Flores, Garrido, and González (2023) explore how educational policies address the inclusion of migrant families in Chilean early childhood education. Their findings reveal the rigidity of the curriculum, which prevents meaningful engagement with families, as well as practices that render cultural differences invisible. The so-called "language barriers" have been mitigated through informal strategies implemented by preschool education teams, such as using translators and internet-based applications. However, these are spontaneous solutions rather than part of a structured and organized plan (Sanhueza, 2023).

A study conducted by the Jesuit Migrant Service (2021) aimed to characterize access to primary and higher education among the migrant population, identifying po-tential gaps compared to the local community. Additionally, the study sought to understand the role of migrants' educational attainment in shaping their socioeconomic and labor opportunities in Chile. One of the key findings is the identification of educational gaps between migrant and Chilean-born students, as reflected in lower school attendance rates among migrants. This disparity could be attributed to factors such as the socioeconomic conditions in which they live, as well as their limited access to social networks and information, particularly during the initial period after their arrival in the country, when there is also a higher proportion of individuals with irregular migration status.

Carolina Stefoni (2018) led a FONIDE project titled "Building Intercultural Schools: A Participatory Roadmap for Educational Assistants, Teachers, and Adminis-trators." The project aimed to assess the migration and indigenous situation in schools located in the Metropolitan and Tarapacá regions and to develop guidelines for the construction of intercultural schools.

At the regulatory level, the author acknowledges that the Inclusion Law provides a regulatory framework to address cultural diversity. However, she argues that it does not offer a clear roadmap to guide the work within the school community. The central critique is that there is no genuine recognition of diversity, which would require deeper transformations within the school system. In fact, when migration is mentioned, it is framed within coexistence policies, primarily aimed at preventing discrimination and school violence, rather than fostering structural inclusion.

On the contrary, excessive control and the rigid application of quality standards through indicators create tensions within schools and hinder the actions of teachers. Another weakness of the Inclusion Law is that it does not explicitly recognize migrant children as rights-bearing subjects. Additionally, it fails to reference the principle guiding various state practices, such as those carried out by the Immigration Office, which is responsible for regularizing the status of migrant children.

In summary, the study reveals that while there have been advances in the education system, policies remain standardizing rather than transformative, suggesting that the core issue lies not only in discrimination but also in the structural conditions that shape the perception of migrant children as "others" within the school system.

Another study funded by the Ministry of Education, led by Dante Castillo (2016), aimed to analyze the inclusion and schooling processes of migrant students attending primary education institutions. Although it does not focus exclusively on early childhood education, it provides valuable insights into teaching practices and classroom relationships. One particularly relevant aspect of this study is its characterization of migrant families, highlighting their socioeconomic conditions. These families generally have lower incomes, live in rental housing without ownership, and experience more precarious living conditions.

Additionally, migrant families have fewer cultural resources at home, such as books, internet access, and computers, and, on average, two fewer years of formal education than their non-migrant counterparts. Regarding perceptions of discrimination, migrant families hold a dual perspective: on one hand, fewer of them explicitly state that Chilean society is discriminatory compared to non-migrants; on the other, a significant proportion report having personally experienced discrimination.

The study reaches an important conclusion regarding intercultural relations, establishing that schools are spaces where violence is normalized. This violence is not necessarily linked to cultural origin but rather to various forms of exclusion and discrimination. Migrant families perceive schools as intimidating environments, where violence is part of daily life. As Castillo (2016, p. 138) states:

"They affirm that the discrimination their children experience is a direct reflection of what they themselves endure in broader society. From this perspective, schools reproduce this dynamic, but do so based on their own institutional characteristics: higher intensity and frequency of violence, targeting specific individuals, and personalizing the aggressions."

In a more recent study, Riedemann, Roessler, and Stang (2021) argue that the presence of migrant students has enriched and added complexity to multiculturalism in schools, further contributing to the diversity represented by the long history and presence of various Indigenous peoples in what is now Chile. This has led to a reassessment of the traditional notion of citizenship. The authors seek to provide an analysis of the Chilean curriculum in relation to civic education and discussions on diversity, citizenship, and civic formation.

The study highlights the administrative difficulties that migrant children have faced in enrolling in schools. The authors specifically point out the shortcomings of the IPE (Provisional School Identifier), which serves as a recognition mechanism for children and adolescents without a national identification number (RUN). While this measure has facilitated definitive school enrollment and guaranteed the right to education, it also presents several limitations. For instance, children and adolescents remain in a provisional status, without regularized migration documentation, which entails multiple restrictions.

An important advancement in terms of children's rights has been the implementation of the Chile Te Recibe Plan (2017), which introduced a new visa for minors (NNA) granted to individuals under 18 years old, regardless of their guardians' migration status. This visa provides a temporary, renewable permit on an annual basis. However, this process has not been free of criticism. The Jesuit Migrant Service has pointed out that this visa does not lead to permanent residency for the child or their family. Additionally, it does not guarantee a visa upon reaching adulthood or access to higher education benefits.

Regarding the curriculum, the authors warn that civic education carries the potential risk of falling into:

a) A unidimensional view of citizenship, where belonging to a nation-state excludes those who fall outside that framework.

b) A simplistic treatment of migration, reducing it to cultural differences and associating it with stereotypes, values, and individual behaviors (e.g., the bully or the discriminator), rather than recognizing it as part of structural, unjust, and racialized power relations at the global level, which manifest locally in neighborhoods and schools (Riedemann et al., 2021, p. 70).

A theoretical category that emerges from the literature review is "transnational migratory trajectories." In particular, a study conducted by Sleiman (2022) in La Araucanía identifies new social spaces mediated by technology. According to the author, new migrants arrive in Chile and settle in these territories with the support of close relatives or extended family. Once established in the region, they begin planning the reunification of mothers, siblings, and nephews/nieces. Maintaining a strong connection with their place of origin is a defining characteristic of this experience. According to this study, one of the most difficult barriers for migrants to overcome is the lack of information, especially from public officials, regarding their rights. This results in migrants themselves being unaware of their rights and obligations. As Sleiman (2022, p. 318) states:

"There is an evident indifference on the part of public institutions when it comes to promoting awareness of these rights."

In the field of early childhood education, the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) published the study "Translocal Childhoods: The Role of Educational Institutions in Inclusion" (Sanhueza, 2023). The author points out that many schools attribute a linguistic deficit to children who speak a language different from that of the host country. However, it is essential to recognize that migrant children do not have "language problems"; rather, speaking differently is a strength and constitutes an essential part of cultural identity, as language is a vehicle for transmitting culture.

The researcher argues that the educational system itself has a "problem" because it is not prepared to recognize and engage in intercultural

dialogue with migrants. Today, many children are excluded from regular classrooms under the assumption that their linguistic differences must be "addressed," often by language specialists, which can have serious consequences, particularly during their cultural adaptation process.

The study also highlights that lack of documentation, such as passports or migration cards, has been a significant barrier to accessing education. Even though international treaties and agreements guarantee children's rights, migration status should not be a barrier to education.

3.2 Forms of Expression of School Exclusion

Public institutions have shifted their focus toward understanding the reasons why families choose not to enroll their children in formal education. We consider this shift an important advancement, as it acknowledges the evident reality of disengagement from educational institutions. Consequently, public institutions must take measures to reverse this failure.

The review of official documents, reports, and technical resources conducted be-forehand has highlighted the weaknesses of the education system, particularly a mono-cultural curriculum, the invisibility of different languages, and the lack of teacher training to address diversity in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2022).

In this second phase of analysis, the interviews conducted with families reveal the experiences of those arriving in the country and, consequently, illustrate the ways in which racism and social exclusion manifest.

The marks of poverty leave families in a state of extreme vulnerability, depriving them of access to education, healthcare, and housing—fundamental rights that should be guaranteed for all children, regardless of their migration status. On the contrary, migrant families tend to settle in peripheral neighborhoods, where children spend most of their time at home, without opportunities to play or establish bonds with other children.

The area known colloquially as "the train tracks", where the Haitian population in Talca resides, is characterized by micro-dumps, streets closed off by residents, unfinished houses made of lightweight materials, and the presence of micro-trafficking for drug distribution. This setting embodies social exclusion, as migrant communities have minimal interaction with the local population.

A Haitian father living in Talca describes these conditions:

"You can't go outside here. She always has to stay inside (he points to his daughter). You can't let her out because of the dogs. It's always dirty outside. It's just not possible anymore." (Father, Haiti, Talca).

Paradoxically, we find it striking that, although these migrant population concentrations recognized in the literature as cultural ghettos are often stigmatized, they also serve as spaces of resistance. One such example is the use of the Creole language, which undeniably fosters cohesion and a sense of identity within these communities.

We would like to highlight that upon arriving at the house, the couple and their young daughter welcomed us warmly, invited us to sit down, showed us their home, and offered us water. When we explained the objectives of the study, they expressed their willingness to participate, hoping that their words might help them secure a spot in a preschool program. In fact, the first thing they showed us upon entering their home was their application documents and identification papers.

In Santiago, both women are situated in environments that have become unsafe spaces. One of them operates a small business set up near the sidewalk, enclosed by cardboard. As we entered the space to conduct the interview, four men approached, staying nearby to watch over her. She reassured us:

"Nothing will happen to you. They are just here to protect me and my sisters."

A similar situation was observed with the mother carrying her baby at the bus terminal, where we saw her feeding her child while sitting on the sidewalk. She shared her experience:

"I have felt discriminated against and judged for working at the bus terminal while carrying my child. People have told me multiple times to go back to my country. Some believe that I am taking advantage of my child, but it's not about that. It's because I have no other choice. I have no one to leave him with." (Mother, Colombia, Santiago).

In migrant networks, elements such as reciprocity, mutual aid, and trust play a central role. These networks provide support for essential tasks such as finding housing, securing employment, or accessing food, forming solidarity structures that sustain the network itself. It is important to consider that these networks serve two main purposes: first, to facilitate the arrival and immediate survival of newcomers in a foreign country, and second, to provide a symbolic foundation that strengthens parental and community belonging.

Interviews reveal that these networks are used to find educational centers for children, secure housing, and arrange childcare.

"When I have to work, sometimes I have to pay a woman to look after my daughter. She charges me

forty thousand pesos a week and takes care of her in her home. They feed her there, but I bring everything—her milk, her food—because I don't like her eating different things. So, I bring her three meals and her bottles. And in the house where my baby stays, there are two other children, the woman's grandchildren, who are younger than my baby." (Mother, Colombia, Santiago).

"I moved directly to Huilquilemu because my father, my mother, my uncles, and my cousin were already here. My children play at home with hers because they are the same age. Sometimes they fight, but then they're friends again." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

In other cases, employers play a key role in support networks. For instance, in the case of a Haitian woman, her landlord accompanied her to enroll her child in school. Similarly, a Haitian father receives help from his employer and the employer's wife whenever needed.

"I have a boss at work. When I need more things, he helps me a lot… also his wife. Whenever I need help, she says, 'whatever you need, just ask.'" (Father, Haiti, Talca).

In academic literature, these types of relationships are referred to as migratory networks, understood as sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants with other mi-grants who preceded them, as well as with non-migrants in both origin and destination areas. These networks, formed through kinship or friendship ties, increase the likelihood of international migration by reducing both costs and risks associated with displacement (Alvarado, 2008).

3.3 When Administration Becomes the Main Barrier to Inclusion

In the interviews, families report that the first difficulty they encounter when trying to enroll their children in preschool or school is the lack of available spots. It is important to highlight that most institutions establish a fixed academic calendar, setting application deadlines well in advance. If families arrive in the country mid-year, they must request a spot, and if none are available, they are placed on a waiting list. This entire process has been digitized and is now managed through an online platform.

Most families indicate that they do not have internet access, nor do they possess sufficient information to navigate public services, understand their rights, or exercise them.

In almost all cases, waiting lists have not resulted in actual enrollment, a situation that families describe as:

"I went to the nursery, took the required documents, and they sent me to get a provisional RUT. They told me they would call me. That was about seven months ago, and just recently, I received a call saying they needed more documents, that I was missing paperwork. Additionally, the schedules didn't match the job I was offered. So, in the end, I haven't been able to enroll him in preschool, and now I have to work while taking care of my child." (Mother, Colombia, Santiago).

"They told me there was a preschool nearby in Mercedes. I went to ask for information, and they told me I had to pre-register online. But when I accessed the page, the application had already closed, and there were no spots left. They put him on a waiting list, but there were already over 15 children on that list. Still, I signed him up, but they never called. I waited until this year and asked again, but they told me there were still no available spots." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

As observed, administrative barriers constitute symbolic violence, with negative effects on individuals, undermining their self-esteem and opportunities for social inte-gration. The narratives reveal situations of power and domination, where the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of state institutions illustrates how dynamics and relationships are shaped by underlying forms of violence.

Families report having to rely on third-party childcare, which often involves significant risks due to the conditions in which care is provided. These settings frequently lack adequate space, have a high number of children under the supervision of a single caregiver, and do not provide environments suitable for meeting the developmental needs and potential of young children. In the cases studied, it is evident that poverty plays a significant role in pushing families toward alternative childcare arrangements, often as a necessity rather than a choice.

Moreover, we were particularly interested in confirming an underlying assumption of this study: understanding families' perspectives on early childhood education in Chile for children under six years old. We aimed to determine whether they perceived it as necessary or important.

The interviews reveal that families highly value early childhood education in formal institutions, highlighting multiple benefits. For instance, it provides them with the opportunity to enter the workforce, facilitates their integration into the host society, and, in many cases, they appreciate that their children can socialize with peers and acquire the foundational knowledge needed to ensure continuity in their education.

"He really wanted to go to preschool because he saw his cousins going to school. He wanted to go to school too, wanted a notebook, wanted to do homework like them. So, I also wished for him to go." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

"I don't like the idea of leaving my daughter at home. If she cannot go to preschool this year, I'm thinking of returning to Brazil." (Father, Haiti, Talca).

"I want him to go so that he can receive a better education, learn many things, and have a future. If he studies, he will have a better future. When someone studies, they have more opportunities in life. Education is important." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

In the case of families who choose not to enroll their children in preschool, their decision is often based on accounts from fellow nationals who have shared experiences of discrimination, inadequate childcare, and challenges with institutional regulations. The most frequently mentioned issue relates to feeding practices.

"My son doesn't like Chilean food; he won't eat it. Our breakfasts include many different things, we eat more, and even the milk tastes different. So, the preschool would call me almost every day because he refused to eat, and I had to leave work to pick him up. That's why I decided to stop working and take care of him at home instead." (Mother, Venezuela, Santiago).

One of the mothers explains that she prefers not to enroll her child in preschool because she feels that the school day is too long, causing her to lose valuable bonding time with her child. She firmly believes that families should spend most of their time with their children rather than "dropping them off" at a place where they would not receive the same level of care and attention that she can provide at home.

"If you send them to preschool, you don't spend as much time with them. They spend the whole day there, and you only see them in the evening. They come home, eat, and go to sleep because they are tired. You enjoy their childhood more when they grow up at home. I wanted a part-time job so I could work half the day and spend the other half with my children." (Mother, Colombia, Santiago).

As observed, some mothers believe they can provide a more personalized education tailored to their children's needs, as they feel that educational institutions lack the resources, staff, or tools necessary to address the cultural differences arising from migration.

Another key aspect we sought to explore was how children who do not attend school and have limited resources learn at home. The interviews reveal that technology plays a fundamental role in children's learning, whether through television (educational programs) or mobile phones (educational apps). While this can serve as a home-based learning strategy, it also carries the risk of essentializing and decontextualizing social experiences, ultimately limiting inclusion and intercultural interactions.

Some participants shared their experiences:

"On YouTube, I look for videos and teach him numbers myself, as well as animals and words." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

"He plays with anything, and when he gets bored, he takes my phone and watches YouTube videos of number songs." (Mother, Venezuela, Talca).

"He has a TV inside, and through television, he learns a lot—many things in Spanish. He knows all the colors and everything… He really learns everything from TV." (Father, Haiti, Talca).

In this regard, Dussel (2014) acknowledges the transformative potential of technology; however, he also highlights the risks of cultural impoverishment, disorganization, and superficiality. Additionally, he warns about the frequent tendency of children to be guided by the directions set by cultural industries, making this a persistent risk.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the presented findings, we would like to highlight several key aspects relevant to the development of educational policies for early childhood education.

Academic literature, studies, consultancy reports, and technical documents re-viewed acknowledge significant regulatory progress regarding the education of migrant children and adolescents, particularly in terms of access. However, they also reveal complex practices within educational communities, training needs, and limited resources to implement inclusive practices.

There is a presidential mandate, aligned with international agreements and treaties to which Chile is a signatory, aimed at educational reactivation to ensure educational trajectories for children and adolescents excluded from the system. In this context, defining mechanisms and strategies to guarantee education for migrant children is both an ethical imperative and a real opportunity for educational communities.

In the cases examined, migrant families have passed through at least three countries before reaching Chile, with some entering through unauthorized border crossings while carrying young children. The average journey lasts at least 10 days by bus. These long trips have emotional consequences not only for the children but also for the families, especially for women, who bear physical, material, and emotional burdens throughout the journey. Gender-based violence manifests in multiple ways during migration, as women are often responsible for making critical decisions, providing food (some breastfeed during the trip), ensuring survival, and maintaining hope for reaching their destination. Many of the mothers

interviewed had children at a very young age (around 17 years old).

At the educational level, the findings reveal institutionalized violence within the education system, particularly when families attempt to enroll their children in school. Migrant families are frequently placed on long waiting lists, despite persistently submitting applications. They also face difficulties accessing the online enrollment platform, lack internet access, and struggle with a school calendar that does not accommodate the mobility patterns of migrant families—many of whom migrate at the end of the year or work in seasonal agricultural jobs, such as fruit harvesting in the Maule region. Additionally, the available information is limited and difficult to navigate.

The experiences examined also highlight the formation of cultural ghettos, characterized by poverty and limited opportunities. From our perspective, these are also spaces of resistance, particularly for Haitian communities, which form strong social and emotional networks in specific neighborhoods. These associative networks foster a sense of security and cohesion, particularly in childcare support for children who are unable to access education.

Regarding discriminatory practices, the study reveals that discrimination originates primarily among adults and is influenced by media discourse. By contrast, children tend to be inclusive, respectful of cultural differences, and curious about learning about other cultures.

Families highly value the work done in early childhood education centers. Multi-lingualism is a reality in classrooms, and communication occurs through various strategies, such as literacy-rich environments, translators, mobile applications, and the adaptation of vocabulary to accommodate different national dialects.

4.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the findings, with some proposals coming directly from the families interviewed:

Modernize the admission system for early childhood education centers, incorpo-rating mass communication strategies that provide targeted information for migrant families.

Implement a hybrid enrollment system, allowing pedagogical teams in schools to assist and guide families through the application process via the online platform, ensuring adequate resources for this purpose.

Address the impact of school calendar differences between home and host countries. An intercultural education model would recognize that school calendars should be flexible and responsive to social and educational practices rather than rigid structures.

Ensure an equitable distribution of school placements, avoiding the over-concentration of migrant students in specific schools. The phenomenon of "mi-grant-only schools" leads to new forms of exclusion.

Develop educational policies (programs, tools, and resources) that promote the so-cio-emotional well-being of children and families, incorporating self-care and preventive measures.

Address discrimination as a social learning issue. Early childhood education centers should incorporate intercultural education programs, highlight diverse cultural traditions, and transform cultural knowledge into pedagogical content that all children can learn from.

Promote alternative early childhood education methodologies, taking into account the specific needs of migrant children, such as flexible school hours, home-based education models, culturally relevant curricula, and multilingual learning strategies.

Strengthen the role of the State as the guarantor of children's rights. This requires intersectoral policies and agreements that prioritize the right to education for migrant children. Key areas for improvement include: migration regularization processes, work-family reconciliation measures, gender-focused policies with an intersectional approach, and quality education initiatives.

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