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## **Migrant Children and Cyber-violence. The Problem of Hate Speech in Italy and Poland**

*Magdalena Ratajczak\* and Elena Galzignato\*\**

### **Abstract**

Cyber-violence has existed for more than 15 years, but there too little attention has been paid to it and too little action in dealing with it. The main aim of this paper is to discuss and analyze the problem of migrant children and cyber-violence. We draw particular attention to hate speech. Which has already been noted as a threat in Italy as well as Poland. The aim of this research is also to put forward some suggestions which could be useful in further researching of migrant children and hate speech. This paper contains the first results of our research. This study is based on reports, academic literature, interviews and case studies. We address the problem of migrants' children as we consider it to be a significant element of public discourse. Unfortunately it has not been subject of significant debate in the public domain to date, either in Italy or Poland.

**Keywords:** *cyber-violence, migrants, hate speech, Italy, Poland*

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## **Introduction**

The economic and political migration that took place post World War II brought about irreversible changes to the ethnic, linguistic and religious profile of Europe. Europe became a sphere, in the geographical and cultural sense, where experiments in multi-culturalism, trans-culturalism and inter-culturalism were experienced. The phenomenon of multi-culturalism is nothing new. However, the methods of managing cultural diversity, including through opportunities to draw on modern communication technologies, have made it one of the more significant symbols of modern societies. Cultural diversity has always been written into human existence. In earlier times, multi-culturalism and, more recently, trans-culturalism and inter-culturalism, which more deeply than multi-culturalism stresses the mutual relationships between cultures, have been recognised as values of modern societies. In order to understand cultural diversity, the concepts of trans-culturalism and inter-cultural dialogue, as well as the concepts of language, culture and identity are of key importance.

We refer to the Sapir-Whorf theory in the article as we see its significance in understanding language, cultural behaviours and stereotypes that appear in language and culture. The way we describe 'others' and our attitude to them is shaped by certain confirmed stereotypes. The definition made of a stereotype by W. Lippmann in 1922 as a, 'picture in our mind' remains relevant to this day. It is a simplified picture, but confirmed and identical for a given group. The main conduit for stereotypes is language. The durability of a stereotype stems from the fact that it is rooted in a given culture, language and social structure. Moreover the role of the media is worth noting, including online media in the process of confirming stereotypes.

The strong relationship between language and culture was something that two socio-linguists- E. Sapir and B. Whorf were convinced of. They drew attention to the fact that the language used determines the way of thinking and is rooted in culture. This means that human thought is determined by language. Sapir and Whorf were convinced that it is impossible to learn a language without an understanding of its culture and the environment in which it is used. On the other hand, an understanding of culture is impossible without getting to know the language of the given community. Language and culture constitute a sort of 'road map', which allows us to function in a given environment (Whorf 1982, 339-340).

Sapir was of the view that every cultural message can be expressed in language. Language categorises particular experiences, thanks to which we can establish a common ground for communication, with the aid of specific symbols (Sapir 1978, 37).

Language, therefore, determines our way of thinking, acting and behaving. Language contains certain views, judgements and stereotypes. People live in a world 'ordered' by their own language. Our interpretation of reality is conducted by means of a language that is a guide through social reality. Language, constituting a system of defined models, influences our way of thinking and acting in a particular way.

Despite the passage of time since the findings of Sapir's and Whorf's research were announced and the debate that has surrounded them, they are still valid in the domain of research into multi-culturalism and heterogeneous societies (Al-Sheikh Hussein 2012; Peltokorpi 2010; Sharifian, Jamarani 2013; Yoo *et al.* 2018). What is more, we are convinced of the validity of the meaning of the Sapir and Whorf approach in the field of study of mass communications involving new technologies. This is particularly the case with regard to study of the users of web-based media, including social media, and related online groups and discussion fora, web sites.

The reference to this now distant concept was intentional in this text. In this paper, we consider the extent to which the way we express ourselves on the web, present particular material, participate in online discussion fora – following Sapir and Whorf – a result of our way of thinking, behaviour and building the reality that surrounds us.

The main aim of this paper is to discuss and analyze the problem of migrant children and cyber-violence. In the article we define a few threats, considered to constitute cyber-violence. We draw particular attention to hate speech which has already been noted as a threat in Italy as well as Poland. While reports have already been published concerning hate speech directed at certain ethnic, religious or sexual groups, there is definitely a lack of studies making reference to migrants' children. The aim of this research is also to put forward some suggestions which could be useful in further researching of migrant children and hate speech.

Hate speech has no particular definition in international human rights; it is a term used to describe broad discourse that is extremely negative and constitutes a threat to social peace. According to the Council of Europe the Committee of Ministers, 'hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance. Along with the development of new forms of media, online hate speech has been brought about. Hate speech in the online space requires further reflection and action on the regulation and new ways for combating it' (Council of Europe).

In general, definitions of hate speech make reference to a number of the following components: the *content* of speech; the (written or oral) *tone* of speech; an evaluation of the *nature* of that speech; the (individual

and collective) *targets* of that speech; and the potential *consequences* or *implications* of the speech act. Legal definitions of hate speech are associated with the race and ethnic origin, religion and philosophical belief in the foreground, with increasing attention being paid to sexuality, but relatively little being paid to gender, or 'disability' (Titley 2012, 9).

Cohen-Almagor presents hate speech as a bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. It expresses discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic and/or prejudicial attitudes toward those characteristics, which include sex, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation (Cohen-Almagor 2019).

This paper contains the first results of our research. This study is based on reports, academic literature, interviews and case studies. We start this paper with a discussion of intercultural dialogue and the role of language, culture and stereotypes in communication. In the second part we define the rights of migrant children and a cyber-violence. In the last part we present two cases with Italian and Polish experiences in the area of hate speech.

We address the problem of migrants' children as we consider it to be a significant element of public discourse. Unfortunately it has not been subject of significant debate in the public domain to date, either in Italy or Poland. Migrations and the influx of refugees is presented by politicians and in the media as a problem, or even a threat for national identity or security. Such rhetoric is often present in public media in Poland and right-wing media. Public opinion in Italy and Poland decidedly more seldom take up the subject of migrants' children as subject for discussion. The migrant crisis did not have the 'face of children' with the few exceptions being children who died in the Mediterranean Sea. Three year old Aylan Kurdi, whose body was washed up on a beach in Turkey in September 2015, became an iconic image.

This problem, however, persists. There was a figure of 1600 children, who died between 2014-2018 given by the International Organisation for Migration. The real figure may be much higher. Millions of children have migrated, within or across borders. In 2017 children made up about half the number of refugees and asylum seekers, estimated at around 12 million globally. In total, some 30 million children were living in displacement within and outside their countries of origin by the end of 2017 (United Nation's Children's Fund 2018). In September 2019 in Geneva three United Nations agencies- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF and International Organisation for Migration appealed to European countries to boost funds for education children of refugees and migrants.

## 1. The Rights of the Migrant Children

It has been 30 years since that memorable date of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1989. That day the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) was unanimously adopted by the United Nations *General Assembly*, and already one year later, it entered into force the 2<sup>nd</sup> September after having received the required 20 ratifications. The history of this Convention is quite impressive, as its rapid and wide ratification by 196 States, with the exception of the USA, which has yet to ratify it. However, many Member States have entered reservations and declarations on specific articles, especially those concerning children's civil and political rights, hindering the efficiency and limiting the extent of the treaty. Italy has not required any reservation; on the other hand, in ratifying the CRC, Poland registered quite a few specific reservations<sup>1</sup>.

Nonetheless, the initial Polish contribution was fundamental. In 1978 the Polish Government was the first to propose the idea of a legally binding convention on the rights of the child in order to fill such a lack in the international system. On 7<sup>th</sup> February of that year, it submitted a draft convention consisting of 19 articles (10 legislative and 9 procedural) to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Poland took the opportunity of the anniversary of the Geneva Declaration in 1979 to propose the adoption of the Convention, but it encountered obstacles and the Treaty took other 10 years before being unanimously agreed (Humanium). The draft text was discussed many times over article 1, namely the definition of a child, which was the most contentious topic at all; moreover, articles 12, 13 and 14, respectively the right of the child to express his/her views, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and article 21 and 28, about adoption and the right to education, caused quite a few problems (OHCHR 2017, XII). Despite that, the CRC is still the most comprehensive treaty ever written insofar as it includes civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. In its 54 articles, it guarantees

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<sup>1</sup> '(a) With respect to article 7 of the Convention, the Republic of Poland stipulates that the right of an adopted child to know its natural parents shall be subject to the limitations imposed by binding legal arrangements that enable adoptive parents to maintain the confidentiality of the child's origin; (b) The law of the Republic of Poland shall determine the age from which call-up to military or similar service and participation in military operations are permissible. That age limit may not be lower than the age limit set out in article 38 of the Convention. The Republic of Poland considers that a child's rights as defined in the Convention, in particular the rights defined in articles 12 to 16, shall be exercised with respect for parental authority, in accordance with Polish customs and traditions regarding the place of the child within and outside the family. With respect to article 24, paragraph 2 (f), of the Convention, the Republic of Poland considers that family planning and education services for parents should be in keeping with the principles of morality' (UN 1994).

over 40 substantive human rights for children, even covering humanitarian law<sup>2</sup>.

The CRC represents an international framework for the protection and promotion of the child, based on the recognition that children are human beings with the same rights as adults: it completely ‘changed the way children are viewed and treated – as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity’. Now, 30 years later, UNICEF reminds us about some positive outcomes achieved thanks to the Convention, such as the declining rate of infant mortality and the rising rate of school enrolment, but much remains to be done, as too many children in the world still do not fully enjoy their rights. Even if children were mentioned explicitly in many of the existing human rights instruments, it was the CRC that for the first time brought the articles concerning children’s rights together in one single document, articulating the guiding principles in order to enable every child to develop their full potential, to ensure their survival and development, and to protect them from neglect, exploitation and abuse: ‘all children have the same rights. All rights are interconnected and of equal importance’ (UNICEF 2014).

In this paper, we have chosen to focus our attention on a vulnerable category, ‘children on the move’, especially migrant, asylum-seekers and refugee children who are outside their country, seeking protection. Our aim is to work transversally between two fields: migrant children’s rights and protection from a particular form of violence against them, cyber-violence.

As the concept highlights, ‘children on the move’ refers to those children who are ‘moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse,

<sup>2</sup> Civil and political rights cover the freedom to form opinions and participate in decision-making and legal proceedings (article 12), freedom of expression (article 13), freedom of opinion, religion and conscience (article 14), freedom of association (article 15), protection under the law (article 16), freedom of access to information (article 17); economic rights (article 4) ensure that States parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures regarding economic, social and cultural rights, especially the right to be protected from exploitation (articles 32 and 36); social rights cover the right to education (articles 28 and 29), health care (article 24) and social security (article 26); and cultural rights recognise the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and to participate fully in cultural and artistic life (article 31). In essence, the CRC is divided into 9 clusters: 1. general measures of implementation (artt. 4, 42, 44(6)); 2. definition of the child (art.1); 3. general principles: non-discrimination (art. 2); best interest of the child (art. 3); right to life, survival and development (art. 6); respect for the views of the child (art. 12); 4. civil rights and freedoms; 5. violence against children; 6. family environment and alternative care; 7. disability, basic health and welfare; 8. education, leisure and cultural activities; 9. special protection measures (UNGA 1989).

neglect and violence'. This definition, provided by the Inter-Agency Group on Children on the Move, covers those children who have been trafficked, asylum seeker and migrant children, and children displaced due to conflicts or natural disasters. Their movement may create new opportunities for them, but at the same time places them in situations of vulnerability and risk, e.g. economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and other different types of violence. These children share some similar needs and deal with common challenges, such as the lack of access to some basic services, for instance protection, education, housing, access to information and healthcare. Yet, many of them have just started their journey.

There is little time to save these children from danger, indeed, criminals are ready to exploit, traffic, and make them disappear in the criminal underworld. Their situation of vulnerability puts them more at risk; moreover, due to their migrant status, they may face discrimination and further difficulties in accessing asylum procedures. Today children constitute a significant part of the migration process in the entire world; according to UNICEF, their number is dramatically increasing and more than half of them come from the least developed and developing countries. Despite their increasing mobility, there is a lack of adequate policies which properly cope with their needs and protect them from violations of their human rights.

UNICEF has called on decision makers in all countries to put children at the centre of their discussions. And they have proposed six policies: protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence; end the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives; keep families together and give children legal status; help uprooted children to stay in school and stay healthy; press for action on the causes that uprooted children from their homes; combat xenophobia and discrimination (D'Costa 2018, 4). As Bina D'Costa suggests, there has also to be close collaboration between researchers, policymakers and activists. 'Research, in particular evidence-based research, can persuade international, regional and State actors that the migration of children is a humanitarian issue and not just a political issue (...). Quality research can also explain to advocates of child migrants how and why certain political decisions are taken, and can support the explicit integration of children's rights and protection into the migration agenda' (D'Costa 2018, 9).

## **2. Cyber-violence Today**

Cyber-violence has existed for more than 15 years, but there has been too little action in dealing with it insofar as there still are many abuses

and cyber-attacks especially towards children, who become more and more vulnerable into this issue as a consequence of the risks arising from new technologies, access to information and growing methods of communication. Indeed, according to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, cyber – violence compromises children’s health, emotional well-being and academic work, moreover it may be associated with long-lasting consequences continuing on into adulthood (UN Bullying and Cyberbullying). On that note, cyber – violence is nowadays a global concern which is involving new categories of victims and including new technological instruments. Migrants, and in particular migrant boys and girls, who every day experience situations of violence and discrimination in the offline world, face the same violence and discrimination even in the online dimension: it is a continuum that involves every aspect of their lives with no means of escape. Due to their lack of information and cultural competences regarding the online world and electronic devices, it is easier for them to become an easy target for attackers. Furthermore, too often these migrant children feel less integrated in the society, and as a result, their vulnerability to a situation of exploitation, abuse and discrimination may increase.

The authors of this text have drawn attention to a phenomenon that has not, so far, been the subject of detailed research, either in Poland or Italy: to be more accurate, the issue of cyber-violence and its various dimensions have been studied extensively and there is a large body of literature on this subject, however this does not apply to the sphere of migrant people and especially migrant children. So, why would we focus on migrant children’s experiences? Because unlike natives, migrant boys and girls have to deal with a double level of integration, offline and online, and struggle every day to be accepted in the real as well as in the virtual world. Some migrant children use technology in a different way than the natives and their peers, or they just do not have the adequate skills or competences for understanding online content. This new generations make use of technology from a very early age, but they often cannot understand some images or contents, leading to increasing exposure to risks.

Cyber-violence makes use of new media and technology, connecting the victims and the attackers through smartphones, laptops and other digital tools, using new tools of communication, especially social networks and online games. Even if cyber-violence is *cyber*, that is, operated through digital technology, the repercussion of it are not virtual, but real (Patchin, Hinduja 2006). Consequences spread from psychological and emotional symptoms to physical ones as well. Moreover, this form of violence leaves

no way out, making more difficult to get rid of it (Levy *et al.* 2012; Smith, Steffgen 2013).

We define cyber-violence as a collective descriptor for a range of harmful behaviours: it includes any online action achieved through the use of new communication tools which have the potential to generate violence with real and tangible consequences. The use of digital tools is characterised by a significant degree of anonymity on the part of the perpetrator but also great speed in the delivery of the message to the recipient regardless of time and place. Cyber-violence, most often is not a one-off incident, but it is repeated violence, which is an extension or continuation of violence carried out beyond the media. New technologies have, in a sense, intensified activities, which had been known earlier but on a much smaller scale.

There are several types of cyber-violence. The widest category is the so-called online harassment, known also as cyber-harassment, cyber abuse or online abuse. It is performed by emails, social media platforms (like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), messaging apps (such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger), blogging platforms and comments sections (Pen America 2019). Online harassment in turn includes the following forms. First of all, cyberbullying is conceived as a wanted and repeated damage caused through the use of computer, telephones, other diapositives, which gives no chance for the victim to escape insofar as there is no safe place to go to (UNICEF 2017); it accompanies the victims in every moment of their lives, due to the lack of refuge. It usually targets young people using threats, embarrassment or humiliation in the online environment. According to Patchin and Hinduja cyberbullying is a 'willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text' (Patchin, Hinduja 2006, 152)

Cyberstalking has been defined as the use of electronic communication devices to stalk another person (Spitzberg, Hoobler 2002). 'Cyberstalking is not only provides more rapid methods of choosing and identifying victims but also created more subtle ways of constantly terrorizing individuals of all ages, races, genders, faiths, and sexual orientation' (Strawhun *et al.* 2013, 141-142).

Doxing is the online release of someone's sensitive personal information in order to harass, intimidate, extort or steal his/her identity. Hacking consists in the unauthorised intrusion into the device or network of the victim with the aim to attack, harm or steal her/his data. Hateful speech is a common form of cyber-violence: it can be explicit or implicit, and it is about 'a form of expression attacking a specific aspect of a person's identity, such as one's race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability'. Revenge porn is a non-consensual sharing of

intimate images and videos; it concerns the distribution of private material regarding sexually explicit contents without the consent of the victim. It is frequently perpetrated towards women and girls. Online sexual harassment targets mostly women and includes every sexual misconduct on digital platforms, such as non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos; exploitation, coercion and threats; sexualised bullying; and unwanted sexualisation. Trolling comprises lots of behaviours, including online hate speech, the distribution of hateful memes and comments in order to attract attention but while harming a victim (Pen America 2019).

Other forms of cyber-violence especially directed towards children and teenagers comprises trafficking of minors, child sexual abuse and sexting.

Trafficking of minors is about sexual abuse and online sexual trafficking; perpetrators of such crimes are usually anonymous, in that they make use of new technology to escape under false identities, reducing their risk of identification and being prosecuted. For them it is easier to contact the child, widen their networks, raise the profits and persecute more victims over time. New tools of communication and modern technologies have reduced the cost of trafficking, facilitating the illicit operation, and creating a new digital market for modern slavery (Pen America 2019).

Online child sexual abuse is today a real and alarming phenomenon, steadily increasing due to the opportunities that new technologies offer to criminal organisations. Online communication has boosted and made it easier the access to child abuse content and multiplied the possibilities to get in touch with children and teenagers. Online child sexual abuse includes the use of the network for meeting other paedophiles, for sharing and tracing paedo-pornographic materials, but also for making contact and organising meeting with children (Cirio 2014). And strictly linked to this type of cyber-violence, there is also sexting, the non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit texts or pictures in a context of abusive relationship. However, the worrying fact today is that more and more minors are self-producing and self-promoting online material of themselves, resulting in a higher risk, uncontrollability and difficulty to prevent this phenomenon as well as to protect these minors.

As Lukasz Wojtasik, coordinator of the 'Children on the Net' campaign, from the DN (no-ones Children) Foundation says, that in the case of cyber-violence the concept of conventionally understood bullying is becoming less significant. This is because the perpetrator uses an ability of harnessing opportunities offered by the electronic media. A very important feature of this problem is the relatively low level of control over such behaviors (Wojtasik 2016, 2-4).

### **3. The Situation of Migrant Children in Poland and Italy**

#### **3.1 The Case of Italy**

In dealing with migrant minors, we should consider two areas of applicable legislation: children's law and migrant law. The Italian Law 47/2017 is a good and rare example of law in the European sphere. It was specifically enacted to protect migrant children, especially unaccompanied migrant minors, in order to fill the gap in the previous legislation. The Law introduced some principles, such as a clear definition of unaccompanied migrant minors (UNAMs) and their right of equal treatment, proper rules on identification and age assessment, rules on first and second reception, request of permit of stay, as well as their rights to health, education, participation in society and legal assistance (Rozzi 2017).

Insofar as their migration status, 'children on the move' are more vulnerable to potential risks of exposure to online harms. For this reason, they belong to a category much more involved in situations of cyber-violence. Children who suffer most from this type of online harassment are especially migrant children, children with disabilities and children who live situation of exclusion and marginalisation for ethnic or sexual reasons. According to UNICEF – Italy, almost 50 million are the 'children on the move'; among them, 28 million were forced to leave their homes because of terrible conflicts, and others are fleeing from poverty and negative consequences of climate change. It is important to recognise the increasing use these children make of digital technology during their travel: UNHCR acknowledges the growing and important role of digital technology in humanitarian crises, inviting all the refugees and host communities to be connected in order to make their lives easier and better. Moreover, these tools help people from minorities to feel more integrated, providing them new instruments for freedom of speech, networking, political activism and social inclusion. At the same time, these digital instruments have a negative side: the most vulnerable children offline are even those more vulnerable online, in that online they are more likely to experience further violence. Among the most vulnerable, there are also girls, those coming from poor families, those who not attend school, those who suffer from depression and health problems, and children coming from marginal or vulnerable groups (UNICEF 2017).

At this point, what we want to focus on is the plight of migrant children in the online context. As said, migrant children and children who live in refugee camps are one of the most exposed groups to cyber-violence. According to research carried out in Italy, these children are at a higher

risk of being victims of bullying than their Italian peers; some of them are at extremely high risk of being victims of violence and abuses. Thus, it is undeniable that there is a clear link between violence online and offline: the use of digital technologies as a tool of communication, access to information and entertainment makes these children more exposed to danger. Indeed, they are used to considering the digital platform as a shelter, a space where make friends or find information, but sometimes this positive space may turn out to be a place of harassment and bullying leading to an exacerbation of trauma and damages derived from these experiences (UNICEF 2017, 79-80).

The Internet has expanded the opportunities for bullies, perpetrators of sexual crimes, traffickers and all those people who damage children. This happens due to the greater facility to contact the potential victims all around the world, to share evidence of their abuse and to encourage others to do the same. Connectivity has made children closer to their captors through social media and online games, which allow the perpetrators to follow their victims until their homes (UNICEF 2017, 69-70). According to Save The Children – Italy, 4 minors out of 10 are witnesses of violence on the Internet: the most severe consequences lead to isolation, refusal of friend and school, and depression. As an example, social media are a common modality of attack for cyberbullying in the Italian Region of Veneto. Some 45% of those who witness this kind of violence report that it is directed towards foreigners (UNICEF 2017, 69-70). Bullying at school is a serious problem with generates high social costs and which has been spreading into the more sophisticated and virtual dimension of cyberbullying. As reported in an Italian survey ‘of a nation-wide sample of adolescents aged 12–18 years, 25.2 percent reported experiencing face-to-face bullying and 10 percent cyberbullying (Eurispes 2011)’. This phenomenon, as well as victimisation, can be reduced by more than 20% not through more control but thanks to a project of intervention. Indeed, according to an investigation within a project for tackling bullying and cyberbullying in Italian secondary schools, in order to end or, at least, to reduce cyber – violence, as well as cyber bullying and hate speech, it is necessary to establish the role of the peer educator. A peer educator can act as agent of change in the broader context, behave as a mediator and give support. Indeed, it is needed to launch project for spreading awareness, generating communication on these online issues, focusing on problem-solving and social skills (Menesini *et al.* 2012, 314-315). In Italy there are some noteworthy projects carried out by associations and schools with this specific aim, and which try to educate the children in the correct use of the Internet and new technologies. Indeed, when violence, especially bullying, becomes cyber and viral, words are transformed into weapons that hurt.

Cyber racism has a strong intentional nature and it is practiced towards migrants and marginalised groups, focusing on their racial and religious belonging. A video spot promoted by ALA Milano Onlus, as a result of a project carried out in a high school in Milan, has been aimed to lead students to reflect about hate speech, indifference and racism in contemporary society. Six students belonging to different ethnic and religious populations have had the strength to produce such a video to sensitise and raise awareness about what they face every day of their life. As the video speaks out, even if genetic scholars uphold that races do not exist, racism still exists and it is even online: indeed, people when they are online write things they would never say in your face, insofar as when they hide behind the screen of a telephone or a laptop, they feel less responsible for their actions. They can share, put likes or comment post of hate speech or contempt without thinking about the consequences and the spreading of viral racism. Cyber-violence, especially cyberbullying, is the new frontier of racial hate against black people, Roma community, Jews, Muslims, and all the other marginalised or despised categories by reason of religious or ethnic prejudice. Social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Ask, are the new vehicle of racial hate: indifference towards episodes of cyber-violence is nothing else than poison (Associazione Carta di Roma 2016).

Hate is not an opinion: both old and new media are virtual fora where hate speech against migrants is carried out. Too many times, news media do not provide a correct image of what is happening: the humanitarian crisis is bringing to Europe thousands of asylum seekers and refugees, who seek protection and shelter from conflict, poverty, violence and persecution. Consequently, due to the distorted picture of the reality, there is an alarming increase of vile expressions and incitement to hate speech towards refugees, migrants and minorities. This phenomenon is difficult to monitor and control inasmuch as it opens the debate about the freedom of expression on social media. Indeed, the strength of social media lies in the possibility to have direct discussion and freely express views; however, the right of expression is too often drenched in comments that incite to violence and discrimination towards the 'other' and the 'unknown' (De Zan). New generations are those more exposed to social networks, and a fertile ground for becoming victims as well as perpetrators of racial and xenophobic practices. It exists within a so-called pyramid of hate, divided into four stages: at the bottom there are the stereotypes, false representations, insults, 'naturalised' hostile language; then, there is discrimination; at the third level there is hatred speech, menace, incitement to denigration and violence against persons or groups which have in common similar characteristics or belong to similar categories; and at the top, hate crimes which may lead to physical violence and homicide

(Mellissari 2017). Sexism, homophobia, racism, religious intolerance, bullying and anti-Gypsyism are only some of the practices which find fertile soil in the Net. A full 65% of Italians think that refugees and migrants are a burden, while the social media and web are full of insults, vulgarities, defamations towards them. They often revert to false news and so-called 'post-truth', the tendency of emotive feelings to take precedence over factual reality. Moreover, many children who use the Internet and smartphones are mocked, ridiculed or humiliated on the Internet (Mellissari 2017). Social networks represent networks of new possibilities, but still many young people declare they come across offensive or hateful comments especially against migrants, foreigners, and Roma people while using them. It is about the sharing of comments, likes, jokes, considerations that at first sight may seem harmless, but sometimes may transform into personal attacks or violent episodes (Arci & Cittalia 2016, 53). According to a study carried out by Vox-Osservatorio Italiano sui diritti, within the space of a few months (May-November 2017, March-May 2018) there has been an increase in hate speech in Twitter: in Italy, tweets which include xenophobic, Islamophobic and antisemitic messages have grown significantly, just consider that one Italian out of three tweets his/her hate online. Of the 6 million tweets reviewed during the study, more than 547 thousand were negative, and among them 326 thousand were against women, 73 thousand against migrants, 64 thousand against Muslims, 22 thousand against homosexuals and 15 thousand against Jews (Smacchia 2018). Another survey conducted by EU Kids Online, a multinational research network which tries to enhance knowledge of European children's online opportunities as well as risks and safety, confirms the unpleasant trend. The survey states that Italian children use mainly Internet from their smartphones and the threats caused by online exposure have increased from 2010 to 2017, shifting from 6% to 13%<sup>3</sup> (LSE). The smartphone is today a multitasking tool able to dilate the spatial-temporal coordinates of the Internet usage. However, using Internet and digital technology do not forcibly mean that there is a risk, and even if it is this does not necessarily lead to negative experiences; to be more precise, Internet risks operate according to the logic 'the more, the more': the more kids use Internet, the more they benefit from online opportunities and acquire digital skills, and the more they expose themselves to risks. Indeed, for many kids, online contact with risky content or communication may result in increased risk resilience and consequently a greater ability to deal with dangerous situations (Mascheroni, Ólafsson 2018; 4, 6, 12). For this reason, it is difficult to catalogue online activities as positive or negative insofar as the online experiences are interrelated both

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<sup>3</sup> The survey was administered face-to-face at home to 1,006 children aged 9-17.

with individual features and the social context where the child is located. Basically, those children who use Internet more than others are more likely to face threats but at the same time are more equipped to deal with them as they are more resilient (LSE). In this regard, EU Kids Online suggests promoting the adoption of social and proactive responses, trying to talk to others, block people, report problems and be more aware of our privacy.

### **3.2. The Case of Poland**

In Poland, discussion about cyber-violence started after the tragic events at a Gdansk High School in 2006. One of the female students committed suicide as a result of the violence at the hands of her peers.

Until today, as the results of research by Supreme Audit Office (NIK), the government control watchdog body, claim there is a problem about counteracting cyber-violence in Polish schools. In 2017, NIK published a report that clearly states that The Education Ministry, The Ministry of Digitalisation along with the school and police are all failing to assess the scale of cyber-violence among children and teenagers and the dangers it entails. As the NIK inspectors noted, (the) 'Ministry of Education has failed to coordinate actions that are to counteract and prevent cyber-violence among students, and has not produced guidelines concerning cyber-violence, including that in schools. 'As a result every school inspected had worked out their own methods of dealing with the problem. The police only carried out preventative actions in those schools that had requested it. It comes as no surprise therefore, that most acts of cyber-violence go unreported, although student and teacher surveys reveal that cyber-violence affects 1/3 of students' (Report of Supreme Audit Office 2017).

We would like also to mention, that in surveys carried out by NIK (among 271 teachers, 814 parents and 737 students) it appears that the phenomenon of cyber-violence among students is a serious problem. Cyber-violence is a phenomenon that almost 40 percent of students have faced, 30 percent of parents and 45 percent of teachers from among those surveyed. What is very disturbing is that almost half of the students surveyed claimed that if they faced cyber-violence they would not turn to anyone for help, just over 13 percent of students would turn to a teacher for help, while 19 percent to parents (Report of Supreme Audit Office 2017).

Surveys by many NGOs and foundations indicate that children, primarily face verbal abuse, which is not isolated in nature. Hate speech is one of the most prevalent forms of violence on the Internet. Hate speech is defined as statement or statements directed to a particular person or group that is characterised by negative emotion. These are both verbal and written

statements that aim to insult, mock, make fun of and curse another person. People experience such verbal violence for, among other reasons, their origins, ethnic background, religion or language. Other reasons for verbal abuse may be age, disability, occupation or where a person lives.

Almost two thirds of young Poles have come across examples of anti-Semitic hate speech in the Internet. Approximately the same number of young Poles have heard friends use hate speech directed against the Roma. Every third adult has come across racist statements on the Internet and 70 percent of young people. Surprisingly many Poles accept the use of hate speech- particularly directed at Jews, Roma, Muslims and hetero-normative people, and see nothing wrong with it. However statements by the minorities mentioned leave no doubt- they find these statements insulting so they should be banned (Bilewicz *et al.* 2014, 6).

The survey mentioned above indicates that 59% of young Poles and 29% of adults have come across anti-Semitic hate speech on the internet. Hate speech against Ukrainians is something that 46% of young people and 26% of adults have experience of. The most frequent place where Roma meet hate is the Internet. This is something that 66% of young Poles and 27% of adults have come across. On the other hand, the authors of the report claim that hate speech against dark-skinned people is most widespread on the internet with 70% of young Poles claiming to have come across racist comments on the internet (Bilewicz *et al.* 2014, 6).

One may ask the question why is this so important and why we devote so much attention to the different manifestations of hate speech? We feel that there are two most important reasons for this. The first concerns those who deal with it on an everyday basis in the net. Psychologists stress that over time 'we get used' to this type of content and accept it. In consequence, what is most important, we show a smaller level of acceptance for minority groups. Secondly and importantly from the perspective of the groups affected by hate speech we are dealing with a phenomenon, which two American psychologists- L. Leets and H. Giles termed the model of hurtful language. As a result of hate speech these people feel sadness, depression and quite frequently also anger. It is often anger directed towards the authors of hate speech. Psychological research shows that it is more difficult to achieve self-acceptance and they feel responsibility for what has happened.

What is missing, however, in Poland is research into the use of cyber-violence with respect to migrant children. Research has been carried out, but not concerning migrants' children. Numerous organisations and associations of ethnic and migrant groups have raised this problem and expressed a need for such a study concerning migrants' children. According to Piotr Tyma, the President of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, 'In Poland we have to

start a study concerning migrants' children. We have already published two reports 'Ukrainian minority and migrants from Ukraine in Poland. Discourse Analysis' to show different forms of discrimination and the problem of hate speech in Internet<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, it is worth noting and pointing to existing projects aimed at counteracting hate speech, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and cultural diversity and meaning of tolerance.

An example of this is the 'Young People Against Hate Speech on the Internet', a project planned for the period between 2012-2017 by youth organisations in cooperation with the Council of Europe's 'No Hate Speech' campaign. It is aimed at combating with racism and discrimination in the form of hate speech in the net by developing the competencies in young people and youth organisations, that are indispensable to recognise hate speech and breaches of human rights. What is relevant, the campaign has been joined by dozens of organisations and foundations from every corner of Poland. Their list can be found on the website of the organisation. The campaign is also supported by state institutions.

Another project is 'ST' (Web of Tolerance), coordinated by the local knowledge foundation. The aim of the project is to create a set of tools, which will allow selected groups, including Ukrainians, Jews, Roma, Muslims, LGBT persons, Africans for more effective protection against hate speech and its effects.

In Poland it was mainly the large cities that became involved in helping migrants' children. The first books have been published, along with materials for teachers on how to deal with migrants' children. The Warsaw Municipal Office prepared a 'Welcome Pack for students and Parents', jointly prepared with Cardiff in Wales. The Pack is available in six languages (English, Polish, Russian, Chechen, Ukrainian and Vietnamese). It covers significant information from the perspective of the new student, also taking into account cultural differences. In Gdansk, for example, since 2017 a multi-cultural meeting day room has been in existence for children from migrant families. This project has been implemented by the Migrant Support Centre and the Municipal Social Support Centre. Children and Youths increasingly frequently take part in lessons and workshops on the subject of cyber violence. In Poland the first reports concerning the use of hate speech to migrants have been published. Finally, we would like to draw attention to

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Piotr Tyma, conducted in Wroclaw, 10th of October 2019. Piotr Tyma is a Polish historian and journalist, President of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland since 2006, He is also a co-author of reports „Ukrainian minority and migrants from Ukraine in Poland. Discourse Analysis”.

actions that are taking place in Wrocław. What is particularly noteworthy are projects being implemented by the group for inter-cultural dialogue at the Wrocław Centre for Social Development in Wrocław, including 'wk.pl' and 'Stop Hate Speech'. The aim of the latter is to educate and raise awareness among Wrocław residents. It takes place in schools in the form of the 'School Relay. Stop Hate Speech' project as well as the Anti-discrimination workshop SPD (Stereotypes-Prejudices-Discrimination).

## **Conclusion**

The report of UNICEF – Italy, *La condizione dell'infanzia nel mondo 2017: Figli dell'era digitale*, takes into consideration the ways in which digital technology has already changed the lives and opportunities of children, as well as their future. Indeed, if correctly used and accessible to everyone, it can be useful for the immigrants, insofar as it helps them to raise from their status of vulnerability. Thanks to technology, children can fully express their potentialities; however, without a free access for everyone, it will create further obstacles and gaps (UNICEF 2017). Governments, as well as international organisations, NGOs, civil society and communities, must provide to every child online access in terms of quality and price, taking into consideration their exigences; moreover, they have to protect children from online risks through a more efficient international and national coordination. It is necessary to take appropriate steps to protect their privacy on the Net, teaching them how to defend themselves from threats to their privacy; in addition, children must be provided with adequate digital literacy for letting them grow up aware and safe. Governments, technological platforms, as well as schools, should collaborate in order to promote better standards for protecting children on the Net, putting them at the centre of digital policies (UNICEF 2017, 6).

Nonetheless, the normative and political environment is not able to keep up with the continuous and rapid change of the Internet: too many delays and shortcomings undermine the protection, the governance and the digital responsibility, underestimating the consequences that the Net has on children. Many times, they do not have neither the capacity to understand some online content, neither informational literacy nor the critical capacity to value the security and credibility of information and relations they live online. Here there is the need to foster their awareness in order to make them able to protect themselves from online threats. For concretely tackling these issues, it is important to fill the gap on the access to online resources in terms of quality, and in the comprehension of Internet by children; we should

do whatever it takes to limit the damage of the Net converting them into opportunities to take advantage, we should always put first their interests (UNICEF 2017, 3-5).

Since Internet was born in 1969, 50 years have passed. Today, in 2019, due to the growing importance of the digital tools and the constant influence of the Net, we should deal with its impact: is it a threat for our way of living or is a precious opportunity for communicating, learning and expressing with freedom (UNICEF 2017)?

Technology is something irreversible, always present in our lives, with the power of shaping them. We should approach it taking into consideration the damages it may lead on children's lives, trying not to underestimate its capacity to incite to violence and conditionate the future and lives of children. Indeed, the internet has two different sides: it is a window of new opportunities and self-improvement, and at the same time, a space where cyber-violence, such as cyberbullying, online paedo-pornography, trafficking of minors, and other illicit activities against children are perpetrated undisturbed and unanimously (UNICEF 2017)

The Internet continues to be a tool used for making the good and the bad. What is needed is to mitigate the damages and increase the opportunities, paying attention at the important contribution and voice of children, which is increasingly important today, in our digital era. Their rights of participation and of being heard should not be forgotten as they will inherit this world, giving it new shape. It is our business to provide them the possibilities to improve and grow in a safe place.

We would like to draw particular attention to the fact that there is an element of hate speech that constitutes public discourse. Similar to other forms of violence on the Internet it is of key importance that inter-cultural competencies should be developed. We understand this as knowledge, communication skills, openness to heterodoxy and need for contact for people that are culturally diverse all being developed. In the introduction we drew attention to the meaning of the Sapir-Whorf theory, bearing in mind the relationship between language and culture. We have stressed the significance of expressing our emotions, attitudes to and relationships with others. Language is a conduit for stereotypes, repeated in groups. Inter-cultural competence is closely linked with inter-cultural education, including media education. It is education, not only in schools, but also in the media. S. J. Magala writes, 'I think of inter-cultural competencies as a sort of rucksack or toolkit, which all educated people build up as they function in different cultural contexts (such as workplace). He adds, at the same time, that intercultural competencies facilitate the effective overcoming of differences

in identification, naming and the implementation of values' (Magala 2011, 40).

J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs draws attention to how important inter-cultural education is from the perspective of ethnic or migrant communities as well as the rest of society. Such education allows the minority groups to become integrated into the main stream of society, reinforcing the processes of integration, teaches about one another and shapes attitudes. Inter-cultural education enriches the experience of children and young people by including the culture of the minority and improves mutual relations in society. 'Multi-cultural education is more than simply recognising differences. It should not be limited to the role of cultural studies- it primarily concerns communication between different groups of people (...) Inter-cultural communication draws attention to the fact that cultural diversity both to those learning and teaching the possibility to attain multi-cultural competencies. The basics and skills required in a multi-cultural world'(Ambrosewicz-Jacobs 2004, 75-76).

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