

Chapter 2

Socio-demographic Overview of Immigrants and Immigrant Children in Italy

The next chapter provides an overview on recent immigration phenomena in Italy, entailing its demographic, social and cultural aspects. Three general developmental issues are singled out: 1) challenges faced by immigrants in adjusting to a new lifestyles, 2) the impact of socio-cultural context of local ethnic communities and 3) the influence of culture on family socialization. These are discussed both to shed light on immigration and ethnic minority contexts and also with a specific focus on children's psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. The themes are developed in order to better address the issues involved in the study on immigrant children as well as to point to the main directions into which the present research is further extended.

2.1 Immigration in Italy

Italy has a long history of emigration and a very short experience of immigration. Even though this country became a destination for significant numbers of migrants later than other European states, currently it is a desirable place of settlement for different ethnic communities. It has been suggested that this shift occurred by the second half of the 1980s, when there were about 100,000 foreign workers in Italy, as a consequence of the borders closure due to the economic downturn in Britain, France and Germany (Martiniello, 1996; Reyneri, 2002).

Italy is a country receiving increased immigrant flows due to a number of reasons. During the last decade, Italian governments, in line with other European countries inspired by the European policies, became more sensitive to the increasing numbers of documented and undocumented migrants. The growth of the informal employment in the "open door" policy in the late 1990s, and the frequent regularization procedures introduced since 2002, have all influenced the processes of migration and settlement in Italy (Reyneri, 2001). Furthermore, Italy has reached mutual agreements with some

countries such as Albania, Morocco and Tunisia, granting annual quotas for immigrants. In fact, the crucial point in immigration policies and social attitudes towards immigrants was marked by the Albanian exodus that started in 1990. In this period, immigration into the country was characterized by sparse migration from the Balkan regions due to the collapse of previously existing political system (Ardizzoni, 2005).

In 2002, the Bossi-Fini Law (Legge 89/02) was followed by the largest ever regularization program in Europe with 700,000 applications and over 600,000 permits granted (Carfagna, 2002). Additional migration-inducing procedure is the sponsorship scheme, which allows anyone legally resident in Italy to invite someone for work or to look for work. This allowed foreign citizens to enter Italy for a determined period of time, thus exhausting the quota of 15,000 sponsorship places in the first year of adoption of the scheme within a few days.

The economic development of Italy, facilitative legislation procedures, and labor demand are all factors that seemed to have influenced mass immigration to the country. As both a result of and a response to these factors, immigration to Italy displays a set of characteristics that clearly distinguishes it from immigration to the rest of Europe.

In order to better understand the relevance of the recent migration developments in Italy, a useful starting point could be the examination of data concerning the registered presence of non-Italian residents with reference to the specific cultural, socio-demographic and territorial distributions. Particular attention is dedicated to the Northern region, because this region presents distinctive characteristics relevant to the national distribution of immigrant population, and because the description of these characteristics contributes to better delineate immigrant children and their families residing in North Italy, which are the main topic of the present study.

In the last decade, Italy registered an increase of about 300,000 people to the present number of more than three million immigrants (3,035,000). The immigrant population is 5.2% of the native Italians meaning that one of each 19 residents is foreigner. Although a substantial proportion of these migrants initially enter the country as transit travelers to other wealthier and more-established migrant communities in Europe, most of them decide to remain in Italy because of difficulties to move further north (Reyneri, 2001).

Italy presents significant regional differences in socio-economic development between the North and the South, which strongly affect the mobility transition. As a result, immigrants are very unevenly distributed geographically. They tend to locate in regions where demand for work is higher and more facilities make immigrants' integration possibilities easier and faster. In fact, the highest number of immigrants resides in North Italy (61%) compared to Central (27%) and South (12%). More precisely, 27% of immigrants live in the North-East Italy, 34% in North-West, 27% in the Central and 12% in the South regions. In the period between 2003-2006 the major increase of foreign residents was registered in the North-West (77%) and North-East (71%) regions (Istat, 2006).

The Italian immigrant population is extremely young. This fact is sustained by the substantial percentage (70%) of immigrants falling in the range of 15 to 44 years of age, which is higher than that of the Italians (47.5%). Another distinctive characteristic is the unequal territorial distribution of the child immigrant population. In the North Italy resides the majority of child immigrants and the mean age average of the total immigrant population ranges between 29 and 30 years.

There is also a variety of regional patterns according to place of origin. Eastern-European immigrants from former Yugoslavia, Albania and Romania became the fastest growing communities, accounting for the most important groups in the recent legalization procedures (Del Bocca & Venturini, 2005). An analysis with reference to data as to July 1st 2005, points out a clear numerical superiority of Eastern European immigrants accounting for 1,500,000 – nearly half of the total (Cesareo, 2006). At present, Eastern Europeans are the predominantly numerous group which resides mainly in the North Italy. They are represented prevalently by Albanians (348,813), Romanians (297,570), Ukrainians (118,000) and Serbians (64,070). Recently, the Albanians have registered a particularly high increase shifting from 217,000 to 349,000 units (Istat, 2006). Other significant presence has been observed for Chinese (128,000 units) and Moroccan (320,000 units) residents as well. Despite such significant presence of foreign residents, still a huge gap exist in their successful integration within the local system and native population.

The literature and debates on migration issues provides evidence for many of the difficulties and challenges immigrants face in adapting in Italy. We wish to focus on five of them, not only because they are the most relevant for immigrants, but also because they offer particularly meaningful starting points for the study of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment outcomes in their children: 1) lack of Italian language and socio-cultural system knowledge; 2) insufficient regularization or illegal status; 3) inadequate housing; 4) lack of education and job opportunities and 5) negative social perception by the host Italian community.

2.2 Challenges Faced by Immigrants in Italy

A large proportion of immigrants arrive in Italy unfamiliar with language, culture, administrative procedures or access to social services. For most of them, it takes time both to gain knowledge of local socio-economic system functioning as well as developing a community support network in order to be part of this system. Those who do not function in the official language face the challenge of negotiating in a foreign language.

A substantial part of all migrants in Italy are affected by mutable or insecure status due to administrative barriers and difficulties. As a result of more restrictive national migration regimes for a growing number of migrants, their migration projects are limited by the amount they afford to pay for them (Schuster, 2005). Still, illegal channels exist allowing people to enter the country. The legal status granted to regularized migrants is mostly short-term because many of the permits are now up for renewal, due to the fact that some of those who had moved from an irregular to a regular status find themselves once again without regular documents (Carfagna, 2002).

Another relevant problem for most immigrants is due to difficult housing and inadequate living conditions. This derives partly from the resistance of householders to let their houses to foreigners and if they do so, the price is usually very high (Agustoni, 2006). According to recent estimates at least 860,000 immigrants experience house uneasiness and another 250,000, even if regularly residing in Italy, are unable to be regularly registered because of missing or problematic housing (Dossier, 2006).

As far as education is concerned, most migrants who enter Italy are not poorly educated or from rural areas, but either middle-class or highly-educated people from large cities. Although recent data report that nearly 60 percent of immigrants have adequate schooling, there are wide differences in their proper job placement. In terms of occupational characteristics, 73 percent are registered as manual workers due to a combination of causes: recognition of their degrees with difficulties in comparing different schooling systems, which induce an under-evaluation of their education and difficulty of finding a job. Opportunities for migrants in Italy are at the lowest occupational level even for the highly-educated ones. Thus, highly-educated migrants are either unemployed or work in undeclared and occasional jobs to an extent even greater than poorly-educated ones (Reyneri, 2004).

An important phenomenon which affects immigration characteristics in Italy is that the regional divide is particularly sharp. In fact, issues of immigrant integration are intertwined with specific regional differences. This divide is reflected in the stronger support for anti-immigrant parties prevalently in the North of Italy in spite of the high demand for migrant labor in this region (Zamagni, 2000). For example, in 2005 the National Unit Against Racial Discriminations (Unar) has dealt with 867 cases of discrimination accused by immigrants regarding labor access, mobbing and housing. The highest percentage (37.6%) of similar acts was registered in the North Italy.

During the last decade, the reactions among the native Italian population towards immigrants have become increasingly hostile. Concern about negative consequences of immigration on unemployment has been frequently expressed, while xenophobic and even racist attitudes have soon led to violent incidents against immigrants. Two economic explanations are provided to account for such attitudes: people's fear of losing their jobs and the poor living and working conditions of immigrants due to their low socioeconomic status (Triandafyllidou, 2000). A study conducted in 2000 found that 42.8% of Italians feared immigration increased crime, while others feared it would threaten their cultural identity (25.2%) and employment (32.3%) (Diamanti, 2001).

Also, Italians are afraid that migrants working in the formal or informal economy could become competitive, thus "stealing" their jobs (Del Bocca & Venturini, 2005). These general reactions of fear from migration to Italy are also associated with security issues regarding the fact that most Italians perceive immigrants' presence as a risk for increased criminal rates. Such security concern reaches the highest levels in Northern

Italy and particularly in the North-Eastern regions, surpassing those related to employment and economic issues (Valtolina, 2006).

The processes mentioned above are complemented by prejudiced views against specific nationalities of immigrants. In particular, immigrants of different nationalities are classified as better or worse. For example, in Italy, the Senegalese community is praised for its honesty, while immigrants of Balkan origins such as Albanians and Serbs are usually linked to organized crime. From a recent national survey emerged that 40% of Italians deem immigrants as mainly involved in criminal activities. Such a phenomenon is considered a matter of increasing concern, especially for members of some immigrant communities such as Albanians (Dossier, 2006).

While many of these difficulties are common, the Italian immigrant population is extremely diverse, according to territorial distribution, language, cultures of origin and perceptions by the members of receiving society. Their experiences vary individually, depending on each of these factors, which may facilitate or aggravate the process of adaptation to the receiving country, region and society. The next section discusses the specific aspects of immigrant population in the area of North Italy, pointing out regional, socio-demographic and ethnic characteristics.

2.3 Regional Immigration Context

Our research is implemented in reference to the Albanian and Serbian immigrants and Slovene minority in Northeastern Italy, specifically in the eastern part of the Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia adjoining the boundary with Slovenia. An important distinction should be made between these ethnic communities. The Albanian and Serbian communities are composed mainly by people who have immigrated to Italy from their home countries. Slovenes are a native population as they represent the most important minority group in the region. The history of this area is characterized by conflict and territorial changes. On the one hand, these are due to tensions in ethnic relations between Italians and the Slovene minority, and on the other, to the breakup of former Yugoslavia followed by massive Eastern European immigration.

The North-East part of Italy is more appealing for immigrant flows on many dimensions. The immigrants tend to locate in the region, because of the higher demand for work and more facilities for their easier and faster integration. Apart from the high demand on the local labour market, the industrial structure is dominated by small firms in which work and legislation procedures are less strict, allowing more flexibility and easiness in the employment of immigrants (Del Bocca & Venturini, 2005).

The current study refers to the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia which represents specific demographic characteristics. The Friuli-Venezia Giulia region borders the Balkan states and has witnessed a great increase in its immigrant population. In the four years between 2001 and 2005, the immigrant population in Friuli-Venezia Giulia grew from 37,000 to 83,411 (Ires, 2005). The main ethnic groups in the region are represented by Serbian (6,767) and Albanian (4,833) citizens.

Facilitative factors for such high increase of the immigrant population in the region are due to the political and social changes in Eastern Europe's political system during the early '1990's and the economical growth in the local economy, offering better opportunities than other Italian regions to the immigrant labor market. Indeed, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region is characterized by a higher presence of immigrant families than is observed nationally (19% vs. 13%), and overall, immigrant children make up to 30% of the students, with the highest rates being observed at the preschool (38%) and elementary (39%) levels.

The Serbian community is the first and the largest immigrant community in the region. The displacement of this ethnic group is facilitated by geographic proximity and has its origin in lack of livelihood opportunities, poor infrastructure or inter-ethnic hostility existing in the Balkans. The community is firmly rooted in the local social and economic context and successfully integrated in the labor market. Moreover, this ethnic group presents high rates of school enrollment and solid socio-cultural knowledge of its host country, given its facilitated geographic position and similar cultural traditions with the local receiving community.

The Albanian community is the second largest immigrant group in the region and it is also one of the most frequently and most negatively represented in the public discourse. Two important aspects of the process of stabilization of Albanians are the growth in the number of Albanian children in the school system, and the high percentage of children recorded in permits to stay. In fact, their community is

characterized by the tendency to re-create family groups; the percentage of Albanians with children is particularly high among these who acquire Italian citizenship.

The main county town of the region, Trieste is among the most representative areas with the highest incidence of the immigrant population nationally (8,1%). According to data provided by the Regional Observatory on Immigration, in Trieste currently there are 12,551 immigrants of whom 6,502 males and 6,009 females. A total of 28% of those immigrants are Serbian and 6% Albanians. More precisely, currently in Trieste there are 1,810 males and 1,703 females for a total of 3,513 Serbians and 298 males and 318 females for a total of 616 Albanians.

For the sake of clarity and thorough examination, the present research is confined to the most important immigrant categories in terms of population and research interest - Albanians and Serbians. These groups are important in terms of population because they form 39% of the total immigrant population of Italy and are the main ethnic communities in the region (Istat, 2006). They are very important for our research, since they constitute the more characteristic cases of different socio-cultural integration in the region, which may account for psychological and socio-cultural adjustment in Albanian and Serbian immigrant children.

2.4 Albanian and Serbian Immigrants

East European immigration in Italy has the traditional characteristics of labor immigration. Thus in the Serbian and Albanian cases, radical political changes took place in the early '90s. The main push factors to settle in Italy are political and economic, with immigrants looking for better labor opportunities and higher income prospects (Del Bocca & Venturini, 2005). There have been documented negative social perceptions for members of these ethnic groups. For example, in 2003 Albanian and Serbian immigrant groups were among the ten more accused nationalities, accounting for 10.5% and 4.2% of the criminal acts, respectively (Di Nicola, 2006).

a) Albanians

Albanians are the most representative nationality in Italy, accounting for 348,813 citizens (Istat, 2006). As a consequence of political changes, Albanian immigration reached a peak in 1991, when thousands of Albanians arrived in boats on the coast of Italy. Such accelerated process appeared to be not going through the normal entry controls and was increasingly the subject of media and public attention. The definition of “boat people” was applied to immigrants coming from Albania who entered as asylum seekers. Albanian “clandestini” were frequently linked in the media to increases in crime.

The recent Albanian migration is an exceptional case with a distinctive characteristics. These include its role in contributing to the economic well-being of the Albanian society; its sudden occurrence after years of political isolation; its connections with trafficking and organized crime and, lastly, the strong stigmatization and perception of rather unsuccessful integration (Mai & Schwandner-Sievers, 2003).

Immigration is adopted by most Albanians as an effective way of coping with their country’s difficult economic conditions, in which over 780,000 residents - nearly a quarter of the population were still below the poverty line in 2002. In addition to income and social inequality, the Albanian migration has some characteristics related to gender inequality, being dominated by young men (Black, Natali & Skinner, 2006). This reflects the strongly patriarchal nature of Albanian society, where the family structure occupies an important place in the migration process (King & Vullnetari, 2003). In fact, another reason for choosing Italy as a destination to migrate is due to the facilitative social network of already settled relatives or friends offering accommodation and assistance in finding employment (Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003).

Regularization remains a constant problem for Albanian immigrants. Even if they arrive legally or manage to regularize their status, they very frequently return to an undocumented status due to lack of job access, stable employment and housing. Indeed, those who did not succeed in obtaining legal status did not return to their home country to visit their families for years to avoid the risks of illegal reentry (Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003).

The process of integration of Albanian immigrants is very problematic and related to difficult labor access and negative stereotyping. In fact, what all of these observations refer to is what is perhaps the most characteristic aspect of Albanian migrants' experience in Italy: difficult social adaptation and negative social image. Unlike many other groups living and working in Italy, Albanians have not gathered in communities (Mai, 2005). For many experts, the Albanian immigrants have no social or community life due to poor labor inclusion, problems related to the social-cultural integration or illegal status (Piperino, 2002).

Studies report that Albanians persist among the foreign groups most strongly stereotyped and stigmatized by native-born Italians. This is a lasting negative image which is a major obstacle to their social and cultural integration to the receiving community (Wal, 2001). From an inquiry carried out on a national representative sample of 700 subjects over 18 in the Italian population, it emerged that Albanian immigrants are seen as mainly linked to criminal activities. Being asked to draw up a list by country of origin regarding the criminality episodes, 36% of the interviewees deemed that Albanians are mostly inclined to violence compared to other immigrant groups (Valtolina, 2006).

b) Serbians

Unlike the Albanians who arrived as labor migrants, the Serbians arrived as refugees from camps after the ethnic conflict in the early '90s in the Balkan area or in some cases as labour force. As a consequence, during the past ten years, the number of immigrants from this area has increased dramatically. These immigrants come from different socio-economic backgrounds, with a diverse range of political and personal experiences in their former places of residence.

Given the geographic proximity of the North regions of Italy, these areas are mainly involved in the Serbian massive immigration. The process of mobility of Serbian to Italy has a long tradition if compared to the Albanians, which started to move in the early 90'. As a result of such long term cohabitation in the host community, there are many facilitative social and cultural factors to the successful integration of Serbian families in North areas. For example, it is important to note that the parents and their children are facilitated in maintaining their "Slavic" cultural values and identity. In

North Italy and especially in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, there are orthodox-Serbian language churches, local business and community organizations serving Serbians. Their community represents the largest immigrant group regionally which is steady rooted in the local social and economic reality, with a deep inclusion in the labor market and socio-cultural traditions.

2.5 Slovene Ethnic Minority

In 1919 the new kingdom of Yugoslavia was created out of part of the collapsed Austro-Hungarian monarchy, bordering with Italy at the northern end of the Adriatic sea. Such new territorial distribution left about 350,000 Slovenes, representing one quarter of the total Slovenian population inside Italian territory. In 1947 following World War II and consequently in 1991 with the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, this boundary was radically revised. In 1991 Slovenia, which had been part of Yugoslavia for 70 years, reached independence becoming a newly independent state bordering with Italy (Erjavec, 2003). Currently, the borderland still holds a significant Slovene minority on the Northern Italian side.

In Northeastern Italy there are more than 100,000 members of Slovene ethnic minority who remained there after the delimitation of the border between Italy and former Yugoslavia. They live mostly in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region formed by Trieste, Gorizia and Udine. In these provinces a substantial Slovene minority is mixed geographically with an Italian population and a large proportion of this mixed population presents a unique opportunity to study the linkages between child and family psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. On the whole, Slovenian parents are likely to have good Italian language skills, employed in skilled and professional positions, and to own their own homes, factors which are significantly contributing to their successful integration in the local area.

The Slovenes in Trieste are considered a very well organized linguistic group with proper activities, such as banks and trading companies. The Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the Provinces of Trieste, Gorizia, and Udine, adapted their legislation to some of the problems of the linguistic Slovene minority. In these three communes, the Slovene language has been declared as a second official language and bilingualism practices have been adopted. This procedure is applied to local council

meetings, community offices, thus introducing bilingual signs and bilingual identity cards. As members of recognized minorities in Italy, Slovenes are allowed to use their language in criminal procedures and when dealing with public authorities.

The Slovene ethnic community in Italy is engaged in social integration activities, thus becoming an important factor in regional development. The Slovene ethnic minority has managed to develop various political, economic, cultural, sports, and other social activities from cultural and educational point of view: theaters, private schools, library, daily newspapers and magazines. There is a daily broadcast of Slovene television mainly in the areas of Trieste and Gorizia (Borezigar, 1999). Moreover, the minority also has its own political movement electing some representatives to the Italian Parliament in Rome.

As it has been shown, the main categories of immigrants in the region (Albanians and Serbs) are subjected to different experiences and they become consequently differentiated in socio-economic and cultural terms. Thus, they give priority to different issues. Albanians, being very much in a state of uncertainty, focus on securing their stay in the country. Serbs, having partially solved the latter issue, assert the granting better sustenance and satisfactory employment. Concerning employment, the two groups are confined to low-wage jobs, usually uninsured and in terms of class, they constitute a distinct stratum of the local working class with weak social and political influence (Marra, 2002).

By contrast, the Slovenians have already acquired Italian citizenship and have been well integrated in the region. Slovenians are the dominant ethnic minority group in the local school, social and political system owing a particular minority status with the adoption of the Law on the Protection of Slovenian Ethnic Minority in 2001. The Slovene ethnic minority in Italy has wide cultural, political and traditional ties with Slovenia which government in turn, offers substantial financial and other types of aid to its Italian-based ethnic minority.

The proposed segregation of Albanian and Serb immigrant and Slovene minority into three categories resulted in important social and economic inequalities among them. It also resulted in the diversification relative to issues of integration strategies and consequent psychological and socio-cultural adjustment for families and their children.

2.6 Immigrant Children and Their Families

Within the framework of an intense growth of immigrant flows in Italy, their younger component plays a major role, thus deserving particular and careful examination. At national level, in the early 1990s the Registry Office has recorded 50,000 minors, who rose up to 284,000 ten years later, reaching 502,000 and 586,483 in 2005 and 2006, respectively (Blangiardo, 2006). The high number of minor immigrants represents one fifth of the total immigrant population, which accounts for an incidence much higher than that in the native population.

Another data, evidencing the rapid immigration growth in Italy refers to the substantial number of non-Italian students in the schools. The estimates available from the Ministry of Education clearly point out that especially in the last decade, this number has increased. From 2000 the annual growth rate has continued to rise, registering yearly increase of 80,000 children in the period 2003/2005. At present, the immigrant students in the Italian schools are 424,683 with a higher presence in the nursery and primary schools. In fact, these two school grades jointly gather over 60% of foreign-born pupils (Giovannini, 2006). The most represented nationalities in the Italian schools are Albanian, Moroccan, Romanian, Chinese and Serbian, which make up 52% of the total immigrant students.

As stated earlier, the general trend of immigrant territorial distribution within the country, considerably affects the presence of minor immigrant in the Italian schools but this presence is differently distributed through the regional areas. For example, the attractive aspects of Northern regions determine higher immigration percentages, while the South regions continue to display a migration distribution deficit. The highest percentages of immigrant students are reported in the areas of North-East Italy, which have gained the first place nationally according to all school grades. The percentage of foreign students out of the total number in this area is the highest in the country (7.38%), followed by North-Western (6.82%) and Central regions (5.67%). In fact, the percentage of 8 to 17 years old immigrants is superior to the national average of 22% in East (23.4%) and North-Western Italy (22.8%).

One of the major issues in Italy, concerning immigrant students relates to their academic achievement. There is only fragmentary data on school performance for immigrant groups, in part because of the absence of national standardized tests, and in part because of the mobility of the students themselves. The few studies available reveal that school performance is poorer than the Italian average (Chaloff, 1999). Language achievement is a central issue for this intake, since almost all immigrant children come to Italy without knowing Italian. Even though Italian language development was found to be much faster when they were placed with others of their own age, immigrant children are often placed in classes far below their age level.

Recently, two school placement strategies were adopted according to the background of the child - continuity and recovery strategies. The continuity strategy places the child directly into an Italian class of the same age despite being unschooled or having received insufficient schooling. The recovery strategy applies to immigrant children who are under-schooled or even illiterate for their age level in Italy. In such cases, an accelerated support programme is established, including tutoring, after-school classes, and special Italian courses provided by schools and community centres which assist immigrant children in learning Italian (Chaloff, 1999).

As stated earlier, immigrants and their children represent an increasing proportion of the Italian population. The 2006 Census found approximately half million minor immigrants, whose numbers had increased tremendously since 2000, slightly more than three times the rate of the growth of the Italian born population. Furthermore, children of immigrant parents born in Italy represent a significant component in the increasing foreign population. In 2005 there were 52,000 new-born with foreign parents, who accounted a 9.4% on the total births nationally. At present, they account for 21.9% of the total immigrant population (Istat, 2006). Moreover, according to Caritas report data, the number of family reunions is increasing at a fast rate. On the total new inflows in 1999, 40 percent were family reunion permits while this type of permit represents only 21% of total permits.

This overview of recent immigration data on children confirms the importance of the contemporary immigration phenomenon in Italy. These demographic data indicate a number of significant issues for children in immigrant families. Firstly, there is the clear contrast between North, characterized by a higher presence of immigrants compared to the Central and South regions. Second, children of immigrants represent a growing component of the Italian population, and will make up an increasing proportion of Italy's population in the future.

The 2006 Census of Italy found that children under 15 make up twenty percent of the total immigrant population. Such emerging trends indicate the need to integrate a number of key issues that include demographic and socio-economic characteristics of immigrant groups, social and cultural differences of ethnic communities and their impact on child adjustment. In particular, research on these populations must take into account this diversity, according to national origin, cultural and racial background, and other differentiating factors between and within immigrant groups.

The recent literature on immigrant children in Italy is remarkable for its paucity. The vast majority of the literature on immigration focuses on adult immigrants, with particular emphasis on their integration into the labour market (Reyneri, 2004). In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the circumstances of immigrant children school experiences, which strongly affect social adjustment of those children (Nocentini & Menesini, 2007). Some sparse studies on immigrant children in Italy have been on psycho-social aspects of adaptation and attachment (Di Pentima, 2007).

The next chapters aim at filling this gap by exploring the complex issues related to the psychological and socio-cultural adjustment of Albanian, Serbian and Slovene ethnic minority children in their peer and family relationships in the host culture. Our purpose is to delineate central aspects of child socialization in order to indicate situations of psychological stress or well-being of ethnic minority and immigrant children compared to native ones, thus enlarging the conceptual and theoretical knowledge of important psychological correlates of immigration in elementary school-age children in North Italy.