Article

"Our Needs Our Solutions": Workshop with Migrant Adolescents on Their Emotional and Relational Needs

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Abstract: Migrant adolescents face unique emotional and relational challenges that can hinder their well-being and development. While prior research has identified many of these challenges, there is limited work exploring migrant adolescents' perspectives on their needs. This study aims to bridge that gap by adopting a participatory approach to investigate the emotional and relational needs of migrant adolescents in Spain and the solutions they propose to address them. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as the theoretical framework, we conducted qualitative participatory research with migrant adolescents. They identified their emotional and relational needs, which were categorised into six thematic areas distributed across the ecological levels. The themes include supporting their families, receiving recognition and emotional support from relatives, improving school and societal experiences, learning the host language, gaining empathy from the local population, and regularising their legal status. The key actors identified to help meet their needs include parents, teachers, peers, society, and policymakers. The participants proposed self-directed solutions to these challenges, such as fostering peer relationships and advocating for policy reforms. The findings suggest that migrant adolescents have valuable insights into their emotional and relational needs, emphasising the importance of involving them in shaping interventions that support their inclusion and mental health.

Keywords: migrants; adolescents; emotional needs; relational needs; participatory research; ecological systems theory

1. Introduction

In 2022 alone, the percentage of arrivals of migrant adolescents aged 11 to 18 to Spain increased by almost 6% compared to the previous year, from 75,748 to 117,875 adolescents (INE 2024). Not only has this trend established itself in the past few decades as a common phenomenon in the country, but it also calls for special attention to these adolescents' needs derived partly from their migration experiences. The academic literature has made great contributions to the identification of the challenges faced by this population when arriving in the host country, such as language barriers, cultural and social isolation, school segregation, family challenges, a lack of support systems, and inconsistent policies, to name a few (Onsès-Segarra and Domingo-Coscollola 2024).

All migrants are susceptible to being somewhat vulnerable due to experiencing such challenges. Nevertheless, being a migrant adolescent poses additional challenges that are characteristic of adolescence. In particular, it is a critical period for emotional and relational development as they forge their identities and strongly rely on their peers and other significant individuals for this task (Berger 2007). When an adolescent must face the

challenges of adaptation to the host country and adolescence itself, several needs arise that, if not met, can negatively impact their overall well-being and development.

In the case of migrant adolescents, their emotional and relational needs described in the literature are closely intertwined. For instance, two reviews in the field identified a few that cover all the important areas relevant to adolescents: learning the host language, successfully navigating an unknown educational system, adapting to new cultural norms, managing emotions and developing coping strategies to face the challenges of the migration process, making friends to be able to count on for peer support, family support, and managing daily stressors (Bennouna et al. 2019; Jaeger et al. 2012). As pointed out by several authors, migrant adolescents' emotional and relational well-being and mental health tend to be worse than their non-migrant peers' (Belhadj Kouider et al. 2014; Gatt et al. 2020; Gutmann et al. 2019; Spaas et al. 2022). This is not only due to the fact that they have diverse needs but also because they often go unaddressed (Bennouna et al. 2019; Belhadj Kouider et al. 2014; McMahon et al. 2017).

Considering that many efforts, such as school-based psychosocial interventions (Chau et al. 2012), targeted support programmes for newly arrived refugee adolescents (Hettich et al. 2020), and the WHO's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) framework (Ventevogel et al. 2015), have been implemented to identify and address such complex needs but have proved insufficient in fully meeting them, we consider that alternative strategies are necessary. Grounding our approach in adolescent participation and evidence from adolescent development studies, we propose that involving migrant adolescents directly in identifying and addressing their needs will lead to more effective interventions. Research has shown that adolescents, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, possess unique insights into their emotional and relational needs that are often missed when adults dominate programme design (Ozer and Wright 2012; Mitra 2018). Including adolescents' perspectives can help avoid the adult-centred assumptions that may inadvertently overlook critical aspects of their lived experiences, such as peer relationships, cultural identity, and the impact of daily stressors (Jennings et al. 2006). By prioritising adolescent voices, we consider that interventions can be better tailored to their specific realities and thereby achieve greater success. Previous approaches to adolescent intervention programmes have primarily relied on adult-driven frameworks, resulting in gaps in cultural sensitivity, long-term relevance, and adolescent engagement (Checkoway 2011; Coyne and Carter 2018).

As discussed above, there is evidence of numerous interventions to help migrant adolescents face the different challenges associated with their migration process. However, to the best of our knowledge, no such programmes nor academic articles focus on the adolescents' evaluation of their needs and the design of solutions to tackle them. We believe this approach is necessary to contribute to the field and think of new ways to help these adolescents successfully face the challenges of their new lives in their host countries. In this article, we aim to explore the emotional and relational needs of migrant adolescents in Spain from their perspective and the solutions they come up with to meet them using a participatory approach through an ad hoc-designed workshop.

2. Conceptual Framework

The Ecological Systems Theory suggests that a person's development across the lifespan is shaped by a series of interconnected social systems, ranging from the closest and most impactful environments and relationships (micro and meso levels) to the wider and more remote socio-cultural influences (exo and macro levels) (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007). This theory is key in identifying adolescents' emotional and relational needs and finding solutions to tackle them, as these needs can be allocated to the different ecological levels, allowing us to point to key actors specific to each level that can help apply the solutions. This is why Bronfenbrenner's theory will serve as the backbone to structure the analysis so that the different needs and solutions identified can be understood within each ecological level proposed by the author, thus facilitating the identification of key actors that

can influence these needs. Furthermore, by taking advantage of the interrelational nature of the different systems, the model allows for these needs to be placed and addressed simultaneously on several levels, as needs can be complex and cross different spheres at the same time. To adapt this theory in a more child-friendly way, we adopted the definition following a child and adolescent perspective proposed by Serrano Sanguilinda et al. (2019), in which (1) the micro level concerns the adolescent and their family; (2) the meso level concerns the school, neighbourhood, and other primary places in their daily life, including all possible relations at this 'local' level, from small groups to formal organisations (e.g., associations, social services, etc.) (McLeod and Lively 2003); and (3) the macro level concerns the policies and large political, economic, and social systems of a given society.

Bronfenbrenner's model, which puts the child or, in this case, the adolescent, in the centre, fits the principles of the Child-Centred Approach perfectly. This approach, alongside other child participation models deriving from the New Sociology of Childhood, puts children in the centre by treating them as social agents and seeing childhood as valuable (James and James 2012; Uprichard 2008). Traditionally, children and adolescents were considered less competent than adults and therefore regarded as 'becomings' rather than 'beings', so their opinions were not considered in matters affecting their lives (Uprichard 2008). These new perspectives allow us to recognise them as agents able to shape their lives and those of the people surrounding them by making their own choices. This is only enabled if proper opportunities are granted to them in the different contexts where they participate so that they can gradually develop their agentic potential and exercise their rights (Liebel 2023). Furthermore, building their sense of agency is core to their understanding of themselves as active members of their communities (Edmonds 2019).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989) holds children's and adolescents' human rights, among which we can find the well-known Article 12, which advocates for children's right to be heard in matters affecting them directly. However, in practice, we find that such rights are not fully respected in daily contexts, including in schools or at home. According to Liebel (2014), children and adolescents can only function as social actors if their human rights are first regarded as agency rights. For that, they have to be recognised as active subjects capable of making changes to their own lives and to those of the people surrounding them, as well as to the community in which they live and the society they are part of (Tisdall and Punch 2012; Percy-Smith 2015; Horgan et al. 2017).

Such opportunities to unravel their agentic potential are grounded in the concept of child participation. Although child participation is a contested term lacking a unitary model (Oswell 2013; Wyness 2013), we have chosen to use it throughout this paper to capture the wide-ranging and multi-dimensional ways in which adolescents exercise agency and interact within their environments. Research on child participation often emphasises formal structures like children councils, yet this term encompasses a broader spectrum of behaviours and contexts. Any action by a child or adolescent—whether through play, verbal production, or everyday interaction in formal or non-formal contexts—is considered an act of participation (Tisdall et al. 2008). Some authors also stress the consideration of dialogue between children or adolescents and adults as a core component of child participation, recognising the relational nature of children's and adolescents' lives and the need for an intergenerational dialogue framework of child participation (Wyness 2013; Leonard 2016). Given these perspectives, we maintain the term to underscore both the everyday and structured forms of adolescents' participation, as well as the essential role of relational engagement in their agency and development (Leonard 2016).

Several central documents support a participative approach in different contexts. As outlined earlier, the celebration of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989) represented a landmark that recognised children and adolescents as being entitled to rights, including some that allude to participation, like Art. 12, which defends the right to be heard in matters affecting them as an active part of decision-making, or Art. 13, which grants freedom of expression by supporting broader

participation, which enables children to express their thoughts and access key information. Almost twenty-five years later, the Council of Europe urged all member states to foster child and adolescent participation in decisions that affect children's and adolescents' lives (Council of Europe 2013). The same council recently released a handbook called 'Listen—Act—Change' addressed to professionals of different institutional contexts to ensure the right to child participation (Crowley et al. 2021).

Nevertheless, such documents do not guarantee that child participation is implemented. While more formal ways of participation usually prove to be successful, most children and adolescents do not feel involved in school decision-making (Davey et al. 2010; Aston and Lambert 2010). A study by Horgan and colleagues (Horgan et al. 2015) assessed children's and adolescents' participative experiences in different contexts, such as their homes, schools, and communities. The children and adolescents pointed to the limitation of their participation by adults and their dissatisfaction with their level of input into decision-making processes at school. They also stressed the need for more opportunities for meaningful everyday participative interactions where their opinions and views are considered.

Boosting child and adolescent participation in schools should range from sharing their opinions about problems they face and proposing potential solutions to encouraging them to work alongside adults to tackle them (Mitra 2008). However, as pointed out earlier, there is no unified guide on promoting child participation in school (Castro-Zubizarreta and Calvo-Salvador 2023). However, Lundy's Model of Child Participation (Lundy 2007) is a well-known proposal. She notes the need to consider four key factors to enable a participatory process that allows children and adolescents to share their concerns and influence decisions affecting them. The four factors follow a chronological order: 1. space; 2. voice; 3. audience; and 4. influence. The model states that children and adolescents require chances to convey their 'opinions' or perspectives (space) and should be supported in sharing them (voice) with adults who actively pay attention to what they say (audience) and give appropriate consideration to their input (influence).

Research has shown that when such participatory opportunities are offered to children and adolescents, it has benefits both at the individual and societal levels. On the one hand, through the promotion of autonomy, it is related to the construction of one's identity and the development of a positive self-concept (Correia et al. 2019; Luff and Martin 2014). On the other hand, it enables participation in diverse social contexts where children and adolescents can exercise their rights, positively affecting not only them but also their families and communities (Unicef 2021).

For migrant children and adolescents, participation represents a challenge since they are not on an equal footing with their non-migrant peers. Several factors contribute to this inequality, such as adjustment difficulties, language barriers and cultural devaluation (Parajuli 2023), segregated classroom settings (Terhart and von Dewitz 2018), or cultural differences (Droessler et al. 2021), among others. These factors, in turn, depend on the course of the inclusion process that the adolescents experience. Although inclusion is defined as a two-way process of mutual accommodation by both the migrant population and the host society, the result of the process depends on the interaction between both parties (Council of the European Union 2004). Nevertheless, it has been found that the role of the host country is more decisive in the outcome than the role of the migrant population (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016).

A common phenomenon experienced by migrants during the inclusion process into a new country is acculturation stress (Berry et al. 2006). While acculturation can be defined as the progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture that can be partial or total depending on the interaction between the migrant and non-migrant groups, successful acculturation entails maintaining one's cultural identity while adopting new cultural values. In theory, this process fosters sociocultural and psychological adaptation and reduces distress (IOM 2011; Ward and Geeraert 2016). However, acculturation can be a challenging process, especially for migrant children and adolescents. Research has shown

that they learn new ways, norms, and customs from the host country that may clash with their family's customs and beliefs, creating tension between both cultures and their own identities and potentially leading to acculturation stress (Khawaja et al. 2017; Mohamed and Thomas 2017; Schwartz et al. 2010). In this sense, acculturation stress can lead to an identity crisis, especially among youth who face conflicting expectations from family and society (UNHCR 2015; Suárez-Orozco and Qin 2006).

Following the stress thread, migrant adolescents are also candidates for suffering cumulative stress (Burgos et al. 2017), which refers to the presence of stressors related to the migration experience that go beyond those expected during the integration process. These include limited or interrupted previous education, unstable housing and insufficient access to basic needs, negative stereotypes, and discrimination, along with the disruption of family and social connections or witnessing traumatic experiences during the route to the host country (Block et al. 2014). The presence of some of these stressors and the ones involved in the acculturation process is an experience shared by all migrants intricately linked with the development of their group identity that protects them against both cumulative and acculturation stress (Liu and Zhao 2016).

Navigating the mentioned stressors characteristic of migration is related to the emergence of several needs that require a response to ensure the well-being of people migrating. During adolescence, emotional and relational needs take centre stage, as these are two key elements for their development (Berger 2007). The emotional and relational spheres of a person's life are considered two key components of well-being. Park et al.'s model of well-being (Park et al. 2023) considers any reference to social connectedness or important relationships as peripheral constructs related to emotional well-being that can potentially act as a predictor or a consequence. Additionally, in accordance with the structural model of child well-being (Minkkinen 2013) and the psychosocial model of well-being (Dodge et al. 2012), both components hold a close relationship and bi-directional connections, affecting one another. All three models emphasise the need to study emotional and relational well-being together, as their interconnection is well documented in the literature. The World Health Organization (2024) highlights adolescence as a key stage for developing social and emotional habits essential for mental health. Studies across populations reinforce this, showing that interpersonal relationships strongly impact emotional well-being. For instance, Ryff and Singer (2000) identify positive relationships as a core component of psychological health; La Greca and Harrison (2005) found lower anxiety and depression among adolescents with supportive peers; Jose and Lim (2014) show social connectedness mediates stress and well-being in adolescents; and Fiori et al. (2006) report that diverse social networks correlate with positive affect in older adults.

These components or spheres are especially central during adolescence, where well-being and mental health strongly depend on the presence or absence of problems in the emotional and relational spheres and how adolescents manage to overcome them. When it comes to migrant adolescents specifically, a positive balance in the emotional and relational spheres directly affects their integration process, which is vital to creating a new life in the host country that is now their new home (Fazel and Betancourt 2018). According to Raabe (2019), belonging and social acceptance are fundamental needs of adolescent well-being, and migrant adolescents are at higher risk of not forming stable friendships.

This study holds the same definitions for emotional and relational problems described in our previous work (Rodríguez-Ventosa Herrera et al. 2024). We consider emotional problems as the presence of depressive and anxiety symptoms as well as mood and anxiety disorders. Furthermore, we understand relational problems as a lack of interpersonal relationships with peers, peer support, friendships, peer acceptance or social competence, or where there are explicit peer relationship problems or peer rejection. Social competence here adopts the definition included in the SSRS questionnaire, which comprises assertiveness, self-control, empathy, and cooperation (Gresham and Elliott 1990).

In sum, these theoretical frameworks provide a structured lens through which to analyse the needs and solutions identified by migrant adolescents. They guide our under-

standing of the data by emphasising the role of multiple actors and systems in shaping adolescents' emotional and relational well-being. As we explore their expressed needs and proposed solutions, the theoretical grounding will be crucial in informing the discussion of our findings, enabling us to critically evaluate the implications of these needs and how different ecological systems can effectively respond to them.

3. Materials and Methods

The present study aimed to consult a small group of migrant adolescents about their perception of their needs regarding their emotional and relational well-being through a three-session workshop relying on participatory methodology and to explore what proposals they come up with to tackle them within the different systemic levels according to Bronfenbrenner's Systemic Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007).

3.1. Sample

The workshops took place in May 2024 for three consecutive days in a subsidised secondary school in the north of Madrid. Participants were part of a preparatory class for newly arrived migrant adolescents[1]. This group consisted of 13 first-generation migrant adolescents aged 13–17 (mean age 15.08), four girls (31%) and nine boys (69%), as detailed in Table 1. The adolescents came from nine different countries (Brazil, Iran, Ivory Coast, Mali, Moldova, Morocco, Philippines, Ukraine, and Vietnam), and the time they had spent in Spain since their arrival ranged from less than a month to 16 months.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of the participants in the workshop.

Participant	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Time in Spain
A1	17	Male	Iran	7 months
A2	13	Female	Brazil	Less than a month
A3	13	Male	Moldova	8 months
A4	14	Male	Mali	7 months
A5	15	Female	Brazil	One year
A6	15	Male	Ivory Coast	One year
A7	14	Female	Morocco	16 months
A8	14	Male	Philippines	9 months
A9	17	Male	Philippines	10 months
A10	17	Male	Philippines	9 months
A11	16	Male	Philippines	2 months
A12	16	Male	Vietnam	9 months
A13	15	Female	Ukraine	16 months

Note: In the 'Participant' column, 'A' stands for 'adolescent'.

Following a child-centred methodology, we designed the sampling strategy respecting every adolescent's decision on whether to participate or not in the workshop freely. We first contacted the school principal, and once she agreed, the adolescents were informed of the aim of the workshop, and they could decide whether to stay at school for the workshop or leave since the workshop took place after their mainstream classes. In research with migrant children and adolescents, it is usual that schools select their 'best' students to project a positive image of the school (Caldwell and Jarrett 2018). To avoid a biased selection of the participants, all students were informed regardless of the time they had spent in Spain or of their proficiency with the Spanish language. In the end, all students agreed to participate in the workshop. Given that both the material and the workshop were conducted in Spanish—a language that was not the mother tongue of any participant and in which proficiency levels varied—we allowed and encouraged translanguaging. This practice enabled adolescents to use their full linguistic repertoire to better understand and engage with the activities. Since we, as researchers, could not control or fully comprehend what they shared in their native languages, this further underscored our commitment to

viewing adolescents as active agents, which aligns with the child-centred methodology we aimed to implement.

3.2. Design

The design of the workshop and the different sessions were strongly determined by the conditions imposed by the centre. This limitation has already been acknowledged in previous research with children and adolescents, where the tensions between the research requirements and the needs and preferences of the schools have been stressed (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor 2015; Collins et al. 2020). In our case, the centre decided on the number and duration of the sessions and the dates they would take place. Nevertheless, the centre respected our approach to the contents, methodologies, and consent/assent process.

Considering that three days were insufficient to conduct training with the adolescents or establish a formalised structure such as a student council or a young person's advisory group, we designed our workshop following Percy-Smith's (Percy-Smith 2010) suggestion of rooting children's and adolescents' participation in everyday environments and inter-actions. In this case, it was in their preparatory class, where they spent most of their time during school. Thanks to this design, we were able to address factors and topics crucial to the adolescents' everyday experiences at school and in other key environments, taking advantage of their everyday context.

To conduct the workshops, we relied on child-centred participatory research methods and, in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989), we followed a rights-based approach and recognised the adolescents as agentic social actors and holders of rights capable of transforming their environment (Tisdall and Punch 2012). To put these principles into practice, we adopted an inclusive–qualitative research paradigm (Nind 2014) that promoted participatory research 'with' children or adolescents instead of 'about' them. We also intended to provide a safe space for the adolescents that would enable them to feel free to participate (Barker and Weller 2003; Miller 2003). The efforts made to reach this goal were to establish a few guiding principles to respect everyone's opinions and understand that there were no correct or incorrect answers, just different perspectives[2], and also to set the focus of the workshop on them as the main characters and the people who best knew their own realities, while we were only going to act as facilitators of the workshop. We, therefore, pursued the goal of designing 'enabling context' that fostered the adolescents' sense of agency (Esteban 2023). The three sessions used strengths-based consultative approaches such as mapping work and discussion. These methods enabled the participants to recognise and investigate issues based on their own knowledge and daily experiences and to consider what they would like to change or improve about those issues. We chose activity-focused research methods such as mapping exercises, brainstorming, and visual organisation, as these kinds of activities have proven to be effective in making the research process more fun and an easy means to work on complex matters while also involving the adolescents as the main characters and 'producers of knowledge' (Eldén 2013; Winstone et al. 2014).

The structure of the three sessions followed the same design where consent or assent was gathered, information on the topic to work on was provided, a group activity took place, and a space for discussion was offered where they could individually explain their decisions during the activity. At this point, the researchers tried to step aside, respecting every opinion and taking every point of view as valid and meaningful. In this way, the adolescents could exercise their agency autonomously, knowing that we were available if they needed our support (Esteban 2022).

Although adopting a participatory approach, we recognise that conducting research with adolescents entails a relational process with a power imbalance between the adult re-searchers and the participants (Horgan et al. 2017; Ceballos and Susinos 2022; Moore et al. 2018). Therefore, to minimise our influence, after adopting a reflexive approach to the matter, we designed the three sessions so that we would only provide information,

and the adolescents would participate in the designed activities in a way in which we could remain impartial on their outputs.

3.2.1. Consent Process

Compliance with the appropriate ethical requirements was guaranteed through the approval of the design of the workshop and the consent process by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas. We designed several information sheets and consent and assent forms for the school principal, the parents, and the adolescents. These were sent to the school two weeks before the first session so the parents had enough time to send them back to the school, and the adolescents could have enough time to decide whether they wanted to participate in the workshop. Different information sheets and consent and assent forms were necessary due to the age of the participants. Adolescents aged 14–17 could provide consent for themselves; however, adolescents under 14 could only provide their assent, and their parents had to provide informed consent for them. Since Spanish was not the mother tongue of any of the participants nor their families, we designed simplified information sheets and consent/assent forms that included all the relevant information explained in a way that would be understandable for everyone. Additionally, since signing a document can generate distrust among adolescents without their parent's supervision, we adapted the documents in a child-friendly way. The participants provided ongoing informed consent or assent during the three sessions to guarantee that they explicitly expressed their desire to participate or withdraw throughout the workshop (Moore et al. 2018; Dockett et al. 2012). All the information sheets, consent forms, and assent forms can be found in the Supplementary Materials, which have been translated into English.

3.2.2. Description of the Sessions

Although a detailed description of the structure of the three workshop sessions can be found in the Supplementary Materials, we provide a brief description of the activities carried out during each workshop session.

Session I—Introduction to the Workshop

The first session focused on establishing a safe environment and explaining the workshop's goals. It began with an icebreaker activity, followed by a PowerPoint presentation outlining the topics and methods for the three sessions. To foster a trusting space, we emphasised that participants were the workshop's main contributors, and we were simply facilitators. After setting some guiding principles for respectful dialogue, we moved to the consent and assent process, thoroughly explaining each point and gathering written consent to ensure informed participation. The session concluded with an activity introducing Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels and the concept of decision-making, where participants brainstormed who made decisions affecting their lives and discussed the Rights of the Child, motivating them to actively engage in the subsequent sessions.

Session II—Identifying Our Needs

In the second session, we recapped the previous session and obtained verbal consent for continued participation. We then introduced the concepts of emotional and relational well-being interactively, encouraging participants to reflect on these aspects of their lives. We presented our previous research findings on migrant adolescents' well-being so that they could find similarities and differences with their experiences. The main activity involved a mapping exercise where participants individually identified their emotional and relational needs on Post-Its and pasted them across three ecological levels (individual/family, school/community, and societal/political). After all Post-Its were pasted, participants collaborated to group similar needs into common themes, facilitating a shared understanding of their collective experiences.

Session III—Proposing Our Solutions

In the final session, we recapped the grouped needs from the previous session and obtained verbal consent for participation. We then opened the floor to brainstorming solutions to their identified needs, focusing on changes and requests they could make. Using different-coloured Post-Its and cards representing key actors (e.g., parents, teachers, policymakers), participants worked in pairs to create solutions for each need, assigning relevant actors to each one. After sharing and discussing their solutions as a group, each participant presented their ideas, allowing for collaboration and discussion. The session concluded with a feedback round, a reminder of their rights and agency, and a diploma to recognise their active involvement.

3.3. Data Gathering and Analysis

Our research combined traditional observation methodology with participatory methodologies. Given the limited time of only three sessions and no prior opportunity to build trust with the participants or establish a comfortable environment before the workshop, we implemented several measures, as previously mentioned, to create a safe and welcoming space. To this aim, we also decided to avoid recording the sessions. We intended to take advantage of the familiar space of the classroom and modify it as little as possible so that the workshop would be organic for them and they could feel comfortable. This decision entailed designing a thorough observational procedure, including two observers and ad hoc observation sheets for each session. We designed the sheets that included fields for each session's sections, including specific aspects to focus on and enough space to fill out any additional comments. The observation sheets can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

The observation procedure entailed two observers being present during all three sessions, filling out the sheets individually. The observers introduced themselves in the first session as colleagues of the moderator. They explained that they would take notes of the contributions so that no information would be lost. After each session, the moderator completed an observation sheet with her impressions. Then, the three researchers held a debriefing session to compile their observations into a single sheet. This procedure allowed us to retrieve the information on each session, resulting from three different perspectives that were merged into a single final output that helped us analyse the work conducted. The complexity of representing the adolescents' voices without imposing an adult-biased perspective is well known in participative research (Kellett 2011; Lundy and McEvoy 2011). This is why we tried to diminish this potential bias as much as possible by retrieving both adult observations and literal productions, discussions, and comments of the participants. The verbal contributions of the participants during the activities, as well as their non-verbal interactions, were written down by the observers, and the results of the activities reflected on the paperboards were photographed to ensure that we could later analyse the conclusions. In this way, the researchers' observations were combined with the participants' production during the activities and discussion to conduct the analysis of the workshops.

Both outputs were analysed jointly. Although they were of different natures, they complemented each other. The contributions of the adolescents during the Post-It activity in which they grouped the identified needs and provided potential solutions were considered as a form of coding the data and defining preliminary themes. This procedure has been used in previous work with migrant children and adolescents (Martin and Buckley 2020). In a way, this process worked as the initial stage of a 'live' thematic analysis performed by adolescents under the three realms of micro, meso, and macro systems of the ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner. The observations of all three researchers were subject to thematic analysis following the systematic proposal of Nowell et al. (2017). After generating initial codes and preliminary themes, thanks to the work performed by the adolescents in the Post-It activity, we analysed the observational inputs, searched for the final themes, and defined them, providing them with names that allowed us to produce the report.

4. Results

After the initial identification by the adolescents of ten needs within their emotional and relational realms distributed across the three different ecological levels, we grouped them into six themes that will be broadened in this section. Table 2 summarises the results of the Post-It mapping activity. The backbone of the activity consisted of the three systemic levels described by Bronfenbrenner (micro, meso, and macro). Each of these levels includes the emotional and relational needs identified by the adolescents, the theme extracted after the thematic analysis, which groups several needs under the same umbrella, the solutions proposed by the adolescents for each need, and also the actors they consider should be involved in addressing the different needs.

Table 2. Identified needs, defined themes, proposed solutions, and actors involved.

Systemic Level	Identified Need	Defined Theme	Proposed Solution	Actors Involved
Micro level	Have an active role at home	Help our parents (duties, listening and not spending money)	Help our parents at home	Us
			Listen to our parents	Us
			Do not spend our parents' money	Us
	Get credit for what we do	Support by our family members (credit, understanding and help)	Do it anyway	Us
	No judgement and understanding		Patience	Parents
	Get help from family members		Ask for help whenever we need it	Us
Meso level	Get respect from others	Receive a respectful and patient treatment	Respect everyone's opinions	Society
			People could talk to us more	Society
			Be nice to me; do not speak about me in a language I do not understand	Peers
			Respect opinions that are different	Peers
	Patience of others		Talk to us showing respect	Teachers
			Listen to us more	Teachers
				Principal
	Learn Spanish well	Getting help to learn Spanish well	Speak with us in Spanish	(Spanish) Peers
			Study and read more	Us
			Get more recess time to speak with Spanish peers	Principal
			Organise more field trips to have the opportunity to make Spanish friends	Principal
			Make Spanish classes more fun	Teachers
			Want to become our friends	(Spanish) Society
Macro level	Patience of Spanish population	Empathy and respect by the Spanish population	Provide spaces so that we can share our life experiences so that they can understand us and start talking about migration in schools to raise awareness	Peers
				Teachers
				Principal
				Politicians
			Respect society so that they will respect us	Us
	Get respect		Be kinder to us	Society
			Help us without having to ask	Society
			Do not mind about society's opinions	Us
	Get papers to be able to stay in Spain legally	Regularise the legal status to be able to stay in Spain	Change the laws for migrants	President
				Politicians

Note: In the 'Actors involved' column, 'Us' stands for the adolescents since they pointed to themselves as potential actors who can implement some of the identified solutions.

4.1. Micro-Level Needs: The Individual and the Family

The first theme identified within this level was "help our parents". Several adolescents pointed out this need, and during the discussion, the remaining peers agreed that they also shared it. They expressed that their parents were always making huge efforts to provide

for the family, such as migrating to Spain and finding a job, and they felt that they owed it to their parents to be helpful and avoid being a burden. In this sense, the solutions they identified were to help more at home with daily duties, to listen to their parents, and not to spend their parents' money. All the solutions were directed towards them taking action and being proactive.

The second theme was somewhat the opposite of the first: "receive support from our relatives". Half of the adolescents stressed the need to receive support from their families, which was expressed in different ways. One adolescent expressed that she would like to receive credit for what she achieved at school and at home. Two of her peers agreed with this need, while others shook their heads, expressing disagreement. When asked to explain why they disagreed, they felt it was incompatible with helping their parents, which they considered more important and necessary. The solution found to face this need was to complete tasks anyway without receiving credit since they felt it was difficult for their parents to change their behaviour. Another identified need shared by the majority was for their relatives to help them when they faced different challenges. The solution found was to ask for help, which many of them did not usually carry out due to not wanting to bother their relatives with their troubles. The last need identified by a few within the micro level was to receive more understanding and non-judgemental treatment from their parents. The suggested solution was for their parents to be more patient with them.

4.2. Meso-Level Needs: School, Community, and Neighbourhood

The meso level was the one in which the adolescents hesitated less in identifying their needs and proposing solutions. They identified three main needs, which were finally narrowed down to two themes: receiving respectful and patient treatment from others and receiving help to learn Spanish well. The need to receive respectful and patient treatment was directed towards several actors, such as Spanish society, their peers, teachers, and the school principal. All the adolescents shared this need, which was specific to being a migrant in Spain. They explained that due to their diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, they had different ways of behaving or completing tasks. For example, cultural norms sometimes influenced their social interactions, making it harder to fit in with peers with different expectations about behaving or communicating in group settings. Moreover, they also stressed that they needed more time to accomplish daily tasks that their Spanish peers could do without burden, like completing their homework. For these behaviours, they often felt judged and misunderstood. They found several potential solutions to respond to this need. First, they felt that if society and their peers respected everyone's diverse opinions more, they would also be respected. Second, they wished that people in society would talk more often to them, while they also stressed that their peers could be nicer to them by speaking in a language they understand. They shared various anecdotes portraying how several people either ignored them or explicitly discriminated them. One boy shared that he once offered his seat to an older woman on the bus and that she refused to take it, while another non-migrant boy did, and she accepted. He claimed this happened most likely because he was black. Third, they proposed that their teachers talk to them showing more respect and that both teachers and the principal listen more to them.

The other main theme at this level was the need to receive help to learn Spanish well. Since none of the adolescents' mother tongue was Spanish, they all agreed that this was a central need to feel better both emotionally and relationally. They placed this need at the meso level since they felt that different people at the school, community, and neighbourhood could help them meet this need. Although they all agreed that they needed to study and read more, they also proposed several solutions to achieve it. First, they wished their teachers would make Spanish classes more fun by introducing games. Furthermore, all adolescents agreed it would make a huge difference if their Spanish peers spoke Spanish with them more often. For this to happen, they also proposed that the principal should provide more opportunities to share time with their Spanish peers by receiving more recess time and organising more field trips to help them befriend them. In this sense, they also

felt that Spanish society should be more open in order for them to want to be their friends. They explained that Spanish society generally had several prejudices towards them, which made it difficult for them to come close to adolescents their age. One male adolescent shared that once, he was playing with a Spanish boy at the park and that this boy's mother interrupted them and told her son not to play with him, giving no apparent reason. The participant explained that this was racist behaviour since the mother let her son play with other adolescents who did not have a migrant background.

4.3. Macro-Level Needs: Society, Institutions, and Politics

At the macro level, we identified two main themes that stemmed from three original needs identified by the adolescents. The first theme was the need to receive empathy and respect from the Spanish population. This need was directed to several actors, and the proposed solutions adopted different strategies. One proactive solution directed towards themselves was to respect Spanish society so that, in turn, they would respect them back. Other adolescents wished that society, in general, would be kinder to them and provide them help without them having to ask for it. Another proposed solution adopted a survival strategy claiming to not mind about society's opinions, which was directed towards themselves. Finally, one female adolescent shared a possible solution applauded by all her peers, which was for peers, teachers, the school principal and politicians to provide spaces at different levels so that migrant adolescents like them could share their life experiences so that the Spanish population could understand them. As a result, she wished that the Spanish population would start talking about migration in schools to raise awareness and promote empathy towards migrant students.

The second identified theme was the need to regularise the legal status of migrants to be able to stay in Spain legally. This need, shared by all the participants, was directed towards both the president and Spanish politicians, and the adolescents proposed that laws should be changed for migrants so that they could legally stay in Spain regardless of their reasons for migrating and their country of origin. This need caused some debate during the group discussion since, depending on the origin of the participants, some had fewer challenges than others in obtaining their legal status due to bilateral agreements between Spain and countries such as the Philippines that grant them certain legal advantages that facilitate their residence in Spain compared to nationals of other countries, which they interpreted as unfair (Boletín Oficial del Estado 2012).

5. Discussion

In the present study, we aimed to explore the emotional and relational needs of migrant adolescents in Spain from their perspective and the solutions they come up with to tackle them using participatory methodology. The adolescent group participating in our workshop enabled us to identify two themes per ecological level described by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007) and different strategies to respond to these needs that we will analyse in light of the existing academic literature following the systemic ecological systems structure. At the micro level, the themes "help our parents" and "receive support from our relatives" show a duality in the adolescents' sense of duty towards their families while also seeking validation and understanding from them. Most of the proposed solutions at this level entailed taking action and actively accomplishing something to fulfil their needs, showcasing the adolescents' resilience. However, only one solution was directed towards their parents. These results align with previous research stating that family relationships are pivotal for adolescents' emotional well-being (Berger 2007; Rodríguez-Ventosa Herrera et al. 2024). Additionally, this tension underscores the complex dynamics that migrant families navigate, reflected in previous research highlighting the emotional burden migrant adolescents carry in balancing family responsibilities with their own needs (Belhadj Kouider et al. 2014). This is visible in several contexts where migrant children or adolescents assume tasks beyond their responsibility, such as acting as language brokers between their parents and other adults in exchanges in which they are not in-

tended to participate (Bauer 2016). These results reinforce the notion that migrant children and adolescents often feel a heightened sense of responsibility and guilt, contributing to emotional strain.

At the meso level, the needs for respectful and patient treatment and learning Spanish were central to how the adolescents experienced their environment at school and within the community. Unlike the micro level, the identified needs at the meso level were specific to having a migrant background. These results support Berry's Acculturation Model (Berry et al. 2006) showing that migrant adolescents often feel judged and marginalised because of cultural and linguistic differences. They also point to the need for better inclusive practices at school and a more active role of different agents in Spanish society. This becomes evident from the proposed solutions calling on peers, schoolteachers, school principals, and society. At the same time, this finding also aligns with prior research that emphasises the role of schools as primary sites for social integration and language learning (Manzoni and Rolfe 2019; Strohmeier and Dogan 2012). The proposed solutions, such as encouraging Spanish peers to engage more in conversation or creating opportunities to interact with them, point to the critical role of friendships and peer relations with the majority population for language acquisition and integration into the host culture (Fazel and Betancourt 2018). These solutions, in addition to receiving respectful treatment from different actors, are aligned with the social capital theory, which establishes that positive relationships with peers and teachers can foster emotional and relational well-being (Lee and Lam 2016). In terms of in-group friendships with peers from the same or similar cultural backgrounds, the adolescents did not propose specific improvements, as these were the primary connections they had successfully formed. They emphasised that these friendships served as one of their most crucial sources of emotional and social support in Spain.

At the macro level, adolescents identified needs such as empathy and respect from society and the desire to regularise their legal status. As in the meso level, all the needs identified at the macro level were specific to having a migrant background. The proposal of legal status regularisation reflects the intersection of legal precarity and emotional well-being and supports calls for policy reforms aimed at migrant inclusion. Both findings are consistent with previous work conducted with migrant adolescents, in which the identified topics were described as stressors for their emotional and relational well-being (Rodríguez-Ventosa Herrera et al. 2024). The adolescents' suggestion to raise awareness about migration in schools aligns with educational initiatives aimed at fostering empathy and reducing prejudice in host societies. Previous studies have shown that such initiatives can positively impact societal attitudes toward migrants (Baauw and Ritz 2018).

Going beyond the individual analysis of each ecological system, Bronfenbrenner's theory is particularly useful for understanding how the intersection between all three levels shapes adolescents' experiences. At the micro level, the adolescents expressed a need to help their parents while desiring more support and understanding from their families. This sense of duty and need for familial support connects to meso-level needs, such as receiving respectful and patient treatment from peers, teachers, and members of their community, and the critical need for language support. These meso-level needs expressed are essential for social integration and academic success. Still, they are often difficult to meet without supportive relationships at home, showing how micro-level and meso-level needs influence each other. Furthermore, these needs are impacted by macro-level factors, like societal attitudes and policies that have an impact on how migrant adolescents are treated and whether they feel accepted in Spanish society. The adolescents' wish for legal status regularisation and greater empathy from society illustrates how macro-level changes could address underlying issues that hinder their well-being and integration. By understanding these interconnected needs across all levels, it becomes evident how improvements in macro-level policies and societal attitudes could positively affect community and family dynamics, fostering a more supportive environment for migrant adolescents across all systemic levels.

We believe these findings can also contribute to expanding some of the theoretical frameworks cited in our study. Our research confirms the usefulness of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in understanding how emotional and relational needs manifest across different levels (micro, meso, macro). The interaction between family (micro), school/community (meso), and societal/institutional (macro) levels highlights how these systems influence migrant adolescents' well-being. For example, the adolescents' internal conflict at the micro level (helping parents vs. receiving support) demonstrates the complexity of navigating multiple roles and expectations. Regarding agency and child participation frameworks, we consider that the participatory approach, combined with the adolescents' ability to identify solutions, underscores the importance of child and adolescent agency theories. This finding supports the recognition of children and adolescents as active contributors to their well-being and the design of solutions rather than passive recipients. It reinforces the need for more solution-oriented research that gives migrant children and adolescents a voice in shaping their experiences.

Moreover, our findings can also have practical implications for several key actors involved in the inclusion process of migrant adolescents in any of the cited systemic levels. On the one hand, for schools and educators, we call on the need to create inclusive educational environments that provide language support and foster a respectful treatment. Schools should implement language support programmes that teach Spanish engagingly and foster intercultural dialogue and peer integration. Educators need to be trained in cultural competency to better understand and respect the specific needs of migrant students. While the recommendation for engaging teaching methods is not novel, it addresses a significant gap highlighted by the adolescents, who expressed that current language support programmes often fail to meet their needs effectively. On the other hand, policymakers should consider crafting immigration policies that address the integration and well-being needs of migrant adolescents and their families, such as helping them regularise their status. While we recognise that these recommendations may not always align with current political agendas, research indicates that policies that leave families in limbo for extended periods can negatively impact children's and adolescents' emotional well-being in the long term. Legal stability is essential for migrant adolescents to feel secure and integrated into society (Derluyn and Broekaert 2008).

The findings presented must be interpreted considering the limitations of our study. Although the study offers firsthand insights into the needs of migrant adolescents in Spain and potential solutions to tackle them, the findings may not be fully generalisable to all migrant groups due to the limited sample size. Moreover, given the limited number of sessions we could conduct with the adolescents due to school restrictions, we believe that the trusting relationship between the researchers and the participants was rather superficial. This may have impacted the depth of the visions, opinions, and experiences shared by the participants. In addition, the fact that the workshop was conducted in Spanish, which was not the participants' mother tongue, may have also impacted their understanding of certain aspects of the activities and their production and participation. Nevertheless, we tried to minimise the language gap by adapting our vocabulary to their understanding, using visual methods, and allowing for informal translation between peers. This measure aligned with our vision of adolescents as active agents within the framework of a Child-Centred Approach, given that we lost some control over the session by not fully understanding what the participants shared among themselves in their native languages. Regarding the participatory nature of the research, we tried to interfere as little as possible to avoid influencing the adolescents' participation. However, we acknowledge two limitations at this level. First, we did not include the adolescents in the conceptualisation stage of the workshop, which would have been more in accordance with the spirit of a Child-Centred Approach, including adolescents as co-researchers. Deriving from the first one, the second limitation was the fact that we are adults and our presence may have impacted the adolescents' contributions, relating to the logic of power relations, although we tried to minimise them.

Taking the findings and the discussion into consideration, we believe that future research in the field should focus on conducting more child-centred research in which migrant adolescents can assume an agentic role and contribute to designing workshops to further delve into their understanding of their emotional and relational needs and the solutions they come up with. Both the academic community in the field and potential participants would greatly benefit from expanding the size of these groups and increasing the number of workshop sessions, since that this would allow access to deeper insights and facilitate the sharing of a greater number of experiences from these adolescents. This approach would help build stronger, trust-based relationships among participants and facilitators, fostering an environment where they feel comfortable to freely share their opinions and experiences. Furthermore, including non-migrant adolescents in these groups would provide an opportunity to conduct comparative studies and gain deeper insights, identifying needs common to all adolescents and others specifically related to being a migrant adolescent. Expanding the sample to include a more representative range of adolescents living in various European countries would also help identify specific cultural needs and challenges related to language acquisition, social inclusion, and legal status.

6. Conclusions

This study has highlighted the interconnected emotional and relational needs of migrant adolescents across the micro, meso, and macro levels, as framed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This theory has been crucial in illustrating how unmet needs and the proposed solutions at one level often influence or are affected by conditions at other levels. For example, adolescents' efforts to support their families (micro) are made more difficult by society's prejudices and restrictive policies (macro) that complicate their integration into school and the establishment of peer relationships (meso).

Our research also stresses the value of adopting a participatory approach, emphasising adolescents as active agents capable of identifying their needs and potential solutions. This underscores the importance of including their voices in shaping policies and practices aimed at fostering their well-being and integration. The participants' proposals, such as fostering respectful peer relationships and advocating for policy reforms, reflect their agency while pointing to structural changes needed at the institutional and societal levels.

Despite the study's limitations, our findings contribute valuable insights into the lived experiences of migrant adolescents in Spain that point to practical implications for professionals working at schools and policymakers. Future research should build on this work by expanding participatory and child-centred methodologies and involving adolescents in designing studies that explore their needs more deeply.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Materials, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   The purpose of preparatory classes is to accommodate adolescents from foreign countries who have low language competence in Spanish to join the age-appropriate group in mainstream classes. Over a maximum period of nine months, they aim to acquire the necessary language competence to integrate into the mainstream classroom (Padre Piquer 2024).

2   The guiding principles presented in the first session of the workshop were four: (1) all opinions are important and interesting; (2) all opinions deserve a space to be listened to; (3) no one should question other people's experiences as every experience is unique and does not have to be shared by all; (4) it is necessary to respect other opinions although they are not shared. Furthermore, a space was provided to them in which they could incorporate additional principles to build a safe space together; however, they felt that the points previously described were enough.

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