



## **Working Group schools – Flash report on the topic “Psychosocial Support for Refugee Learners”**

This paper is one of a set of peer learning outputs from the Working Group Schools 2022-25.

### **1) Psychosocial support for refugee learners**

The current flow of Ukrainian refugees in Europe is unprecedented in its scale. More schools and teachers across Member States will need to prepare to meet refugee learner’s immediate and longer-term needs.

Forced displacement has a profound impact on children. Refugee children and youth are exposed to various stressors which may negatively impact their mental health and well-being before and during their migration journey as well as during their settlement and integration. Refugee children often experience depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. The majority will recover, with the right support.

The longer-term impact of forced displacement is dependent on the support children receive in their host country. Schools provide a haven where refugee children can feel safe and protected and develop a sense of belonging, are able to continue with their education, and are provided with psychosocial support in a non-stigmatising environment. Schools, supported by a wider range of child and family professionals, thus play a pivotal role in providing psychosocial care in all its forms for refugee children and young people.

### **2) Challenges faced by education ministries and stakeholder groups**

Education ministries, schools, and stakeholder groups face numerous challenges in welcoming refugee learners and providing them with adequate psychosocial support. With regard to the Ukraine crisis, a key challenge has been the ‘learning load’ created by the requirement to follow both the UE curriculum and the national curriculum in the host country. This is occurring at a time when refugee learners are adjusting to new surroundings and a new language of instruction. There is also a need to preserve the linguistic and cultural identity of Ukrainian students, while facilitating their inclusion within national school systems and communities.

### **Good practices implemented to address the psychosocial needs of refugee children in school settings**

A number of existing projects, programmes and practices provide support and relevant teacher training to address the psychosocial needs of refugee learners. The [ICAM Programme](#), [PROMEHS Programme](#), [RefugeesWellSchool](#), the [BRAVE club](#) and [Project Shifa](#) take child-centred, whole-school approaches to psychosocial support as schools welcome refugee learners. They provide manuals, guidelines, recommendations, training sessions and workshops to support schools and teachers. These and other good practices emphasising inclusive practices can be found in the [Toolkit for Schools](#) on the School Education Gateway and in Cedefop’s [VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#). The [UNHCR Guidance for Teachers](#) also provides a wealth of materials and activities to support the wellbeing of displaced learners, drawing on humanitarian crises beyond Europe.

In Luxembourg, the example was shared of a satellite schools set up to respond to refugee arrivals. A teacher described the importance of listening to UE refugee students’ needs and making practical adaptations, such as creating emotion cards to communicate feelings, operating a reduced curriculum, and hosting family visits for 30 minutes per day to establish the school as a ‘safe space’. In Iceland, inter-ministerial collaboration and extra funds from municipalities have paved the way for new family centres, providing learning and mental health support. Iceland also provides weekly psychosocial support (12-15 hours) in the first year after arrival.

### **3) Recommended policy actions to support refugee children and youth**

A systemic, multi-stakeholder approach to psychosocial support where the child’s voice is central to any intervention should be implemented. “Active ingredients” for good mental health include peer support, fostering good family relationships, enhancing purpose in life, and helping children to feel safe and protected from abuse, and have a sense of belonging. Refugee learner’s psychosocial well-being must be a collective whole-school responsibility shared by teachers, support staff, professionals providing psychosocial support, the community, parents/carers and students, and incorporating both universal and targeted aspects.



School staff also need adequate training to understand and address the mental health and well-being needs of refugee learners, such as supporting learners to manage traumatic responses and develop nurturing relationships where students feel safe, protected and included, as well as have support for their own wellbeing. Finally, schools need to exchange knowledge and engage in dialogue with support networks such as family, community elders and spiritual leaders, community groups/charities and community organisations to ensure children's wellbeing.