

Considerations for Setting Up Preparatory Education for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees in Iceland

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1. Introduction

According to the UNHCR Global Education Strategy 2030, in 2018 at least 35% of refugee children were not attending primary school programmes and at least 75% of adolescents were not attending secondary school.¹

With 110 million forcibly displaced people globally and with an increasing number of protracted situations that in many cases can go on for more than a decade, many see their education disrupted for long periods of time, with very negative consequences on future career prospects and livelihoods.²

Creating parallel education systems only for the displaced is in most cases not a sustainable solution. Such systems tend to rely on unpredictable funding and often do not provide grades or certificates which are recognized in the host country or country of origin. They also tend to be of poorer quality than face-to-face formal education that are part of the national education system of the host country.

1.1. The Icelandic context

In 2022, 4,516 asylum applications were made in Iceland, 2,343 of which by Ukrainian citizens, 1,209 Venezuelans and 233 Palestinians. The Directorate of Immigration issued 4,003 first instance decisions (including refugees from Ukraine), with 86% of them being positive. In 2022, the asylum applications in Iceland amounted to 0.5% of the number of asylum applications in EU+ States,³ while Iceland's total population compared to the population in the EU+ is 0.1%. Compared to 2021, with 853 first instance applications, the numbers were more than five times higher in 2022.

The increase in number of arrivals has caused a significant strain on the reception capacity, including a shortage of medium and long-term housing. The national education system is unable to absorb forcibly displaced students due to lack of schools, teachers, and experience with multi-cultural education.

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Education*, 2019, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/education-2030-strategy-refugee-education>

² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugee Statistics*, 2023, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>. At the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. An estimate of 43.3 million (40%) are children below 18 years of age. Only 339,300 refugees returned to their countries of origin during 2022 while 114,300 were resettled. Meanwhile, between 2018 and 2022, an average of 385,000 children were born as refugees per year.

³ EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland.

To support displaced learners and to mitigate challenges related to the capacity of schools to include displaced learners in the national education system, the Government of Iceland intends to set up preparatory education programmes for students eligible for compulsory education while providing general language and cultural studies for all migrants, including forcibly displaced persons.

1.2. Inclusion of displaced children into national education systems

Inclusion of displaced children into national education systems of the host country right from the start of displacement is the most sustainable and straightforward approach to minimize time-out-of-learning for displaced children and to create conditions conducive to effective inclusion into the host community and academic success. This is why UNHCR's Refugee Education 2030 vision focuses strongly on inclusion in equitable quality education in national systems that contributes to resilience and prepares children and youth for participation in cohesive societies. Thus, in UNHCR's view, inclusion is the best policy option for refugees, displaced and stateless children and youth and their hosting communities.

Host countries need to include access to education for displaced learners as part of the reception arrangements for asylum-seekers and to factor this in from the beginning of the planning. All services need to go hand in hand with planned education interventions.

When setting up education facilities for displaced learners, governments need to consider the following aspects as essential parts of the process:

- organizing reception and admission processes.
- preparing education institutions and educational staff to include displaced children.
- running targeted activities to include displaced children in education.
- engaging with displaced families and communities and helping displaced children maintain the link with their country of origin.
- taking long-term measures to promote inclusive education.

Inclusion of displaced learners into the national education systems is the goal. Including children as soon as possible in local education programmes at all levels will benefit their integration, accelerate their adaptation to local cultural norms and customs, and increase their academic performance in later stages of education. Early inclusion in the local education system will also offer them opportunities to learn foundational skills as well as the host community language.⁴

⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief, Refugee Education in Europe: Learning After Lockdown*, p 15, 2022, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-education-europe-learning-after-lockdown-july-2022>

Immediate enrolment into regular classes in the mainstream education system is, however, often not possible, for instance, due to capacity constraints in the host country. Setting up well-planned preparatory education classes can both support the displaced learners with learning the language of instruction in the host country, bridging learning gaps, catching up on any education they may have missed out on as a result of displacement, and preparing for longer-term integration into the host country education system.

UNHCR has provided several recommendations and good practices for European policy-makers about the inclusion of displaced children in national education systems.⁵ In post-COVID learning environments in Europe and in particular in countries and regions affected by displacement from Ukraine, UNHCR recommends that refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless children and youth are included in education planning from the very start of displacement.

To support the most vulnerable learners, it is important to provide displaced learners with adequate means and support to access education in a new environment, while keeping their parents or other legal guardians well informed and included in the process. Special consideration should be given to the inclusion of children with special needs and disabilities, and their families, while strengthening referral systems and cooperation with other service providers necessary for them.

1.3. Objective of the Considerations

These Considerations are intended to support Ministries, Refugee Coordination Teams, municipalities, education institutions and other relevant stakeholders in identifying preparatory education solutions and arranging education services for displaced learners. This document reflects lessons learned and good practice with regard to setting up preparatory education programmes for forcibly displaced learners.

⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief, Refugee Education in Europe: Learning After Lockdown, 2022*, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-education-europe-learning-after-lockdown-july-2022>

2. Organizing needs-based education interventions

2.1 Holistic model for educational integration of displaced learners

Meaningful inclusion of displaced learners in quality education requires action to address their social and emotional needs alongside academic support needs. The OECD Report on refugee education integration models (2019)⁶ outlines dimensions that should be considered when it comes to holistic support of the learning process:

- learning needs (includes overall classroom experience, language of schooling, catch up on missed academic content, and the new education system and curricula).
- social needs (communication with others, including host community children, sense of belonging and bonding, and development of identity).
- emotional needs (feeling safe, cope with separation, loss, grief, and trauma by restoring self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills).

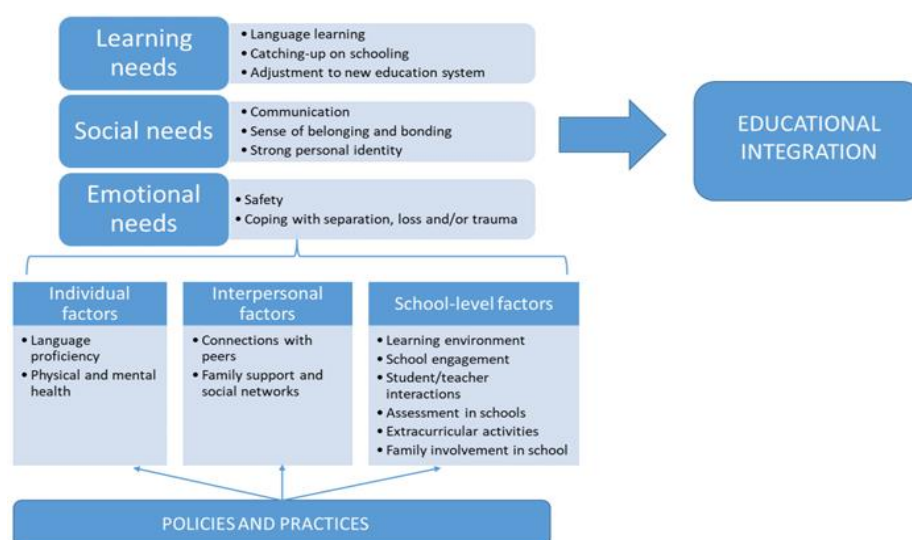


Figure 1: Holistic model for the educational integration of refugee children.⁷

⁶ OECD, Cerna, L. *Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries*, OECD Education Working Papers, No 203, 2019, available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/refugee-education_a3251a00-en

⁷ OECD, Cerna, L. *Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries*, OECD Education Working Papers, No 203, 2019, available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/refugee-education_a3251a00-en

2.2 Needs assessment

A coordinated needs assessment, including a mapping of education infrastructure and services and individual needs assessment of displaced learners and their families is key to the effective provision of education and care, and to identify institutional capacity and the key players. All measures taken to arrange education for displaced learners should be prepared by national and local authorities in consultation with stakeholders such as education providers, health and social services and the services in charge of welcoming displaced people.

The established measures should build on existing regulations, quality frameworks and curricula, while recognizing the need to expand education capacity at national, municipal and/or regional levels.⁸ This means that in order for the host community to be able to absorb the displaced learners into already existing education systems, it needs to be supported with increased financial support and professional capacity.

2.3 Education policies

2.3.1 Legislation

Effective inclusion of displaced learners in a national education system requires barrier-free access to education. Development and implementation of any programme of inclusion of displaced learners in a national education system should be preceded by a thorough analysis of all potential administrative and legislative barriers to access to education for forcibly displaced people. These barriers often include excessive documentation requirements for enrolment, lack of information for refugee parents, costly administrative procedures and tuition fees and inadequate assessment of prior learning.⁹

It is important to review relevant legislation as well as administrative rules and procedures. Regulatory and policy adjustments may need to be made to enable flexibility and facilitate access to education for displaced learners at all levels. This includes recognition of skills, prior learning, as well as grades, certificates and degrees from the country of origin.¹⁰ Recruitment of education personnel, including amongst

⁸ *Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 26, 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

⁹ See an overview of some of the major barriers in education of refugees and migrants in Europe. UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF, *Access to Education for Migrant Children and Refugees*, 2019, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/09/Access-to-education-europe-19.pdf>

¹⁰ UNHCR normally advises against any contact with the country of origin to ensure the protection and safety of forcibly displaced people. Exceptionally, in the context of Ukraine, cooperation between host countries and the Government of Ukraine has included putting in place affordable and swift procedures for mutual recognition of grades, certificates and diplomas, sharing data on academic performance and by putting in place uniform laws and directives.

the forcibly displaced with relevant educational degrees and certificates of skills, should be facilitated in a similar way.

2.3.2 Multi-disciplinary cooperation

Inclusion of forcibly displaced children in national school systems requires intense cross-sectoral cooperation with other policy areas. Policy-makers in services such as health, social services, employment and housing need to work together to build a support system for displaced learners in schools at all appropriate levels as well as between different levels of governance in the education system (national, regional, and local). The conversation should include all relevant agencies, governmental bodies, municipalities, civil society organizations, and stakeholder organizations.¹¹

2.3.3 Access to education and information

According to the EU Reception Conditions Directive, Member States need to make sure that children have access to education within three months after the lodging of the application. Such access to the national education system should be provided to asylum-seekers under similar conditions as to nationals.¹² If needed, schools have to provide children with preparatory classes and language classes before they move to regular classes.¹³

To ensure access of displaced learners, possible barriers that could make displaced families less likely to enroll their children in the local education system need to be identified and addressed. For instance, local and national authorities need to provide clear and accessible information for displaced families (in their mother tongue when possible) regarding their rights and how to access education services.

Removing barriers could also include making document requirements for enrolment more flexible, legislate to allow access to education system benefits outside of compulsory school age brackets (as some learners might have come off age for specific class levels while their learning level still matches with the class for younger students), include displaced learners in child support schemes, school meal schemes, and school transport and putting in place fair and transparent assessment procedures to place

¹¹ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 25, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

¹² European Union: Council of the European Union, Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), 29 June 2013, OJ L. 180/96 -105/32; 29.6.2013, 2013/33/EU, Article 14(1), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51d29db54.html>

¹³ European Union: Council of the European Union, Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), 29 June 2013, OJ L. 180/96 -105/32; 29.6.2013, 2013/33/EU, Article 14(2), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51d29db54.html>

displaced learners in the correct grade and education track.¹⁴ (See more about student assessment in chapter 4.1).

2.3.4 Education Support for Different Age Levels

Primary education

Children in primary education are often still learning their own language and usually learn the language of instruction with less challenges than older children. Young displaced learners in lower and upper primary usually do not need to be separated from host community children and can, if a thorough assessment shows no impediments, usually be placed in regular classes with children of the host community.

Unless specific circumstances or pressing reasons create a need for separate education, displaced children in primary should not be separated, or only for a very limited time, from classes with local children. Adequate psycho-social support should be provided and intense contact between school personnel and parents, if possible through cultural mediators, should be foreseen.¹⁵

The most prevalent model for providing language support to displaced primary school children in Europe is provision of separate language lessons to learn the language of instruction, as well as extra support to catch up on any foundational learning or skills that may have been lost as a result of displacement, such as numeracy and literacy.

Secondary education

Children in secondary education will usually need a longer and more intense period of additional support to learn the language of instruction and catch up on curriculum before they can be placed in a regular class. For early and late teenagers, UNHCR recommends carrying out a thorough pre-enrolment assessment of language and other skills of the child and, if the assessment results call for it, placement in a preparatory programme before guiding the child to a regular class.

Preparatory programmes come in different forms and offer different degrees of integration of displaced learners among host community learners. Some European countries offer separate 'welcome classes' or 'transition classes' in which migrant and displaced children receive intensive language tuition and catch-up education to teach them the foundational skills that will allow them to go to school in a regular class, mostly provided by teachers with specific training or skills. In some education systems,

¹⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief, Refugee Education in Europe: Learning After Lockdown*, p 15, 2022, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-education-europe-learning-after-lockdown-july-2022>

¹⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief, Refugee Education in Europe: Learning After Lockdown*, p 15 - 16, 2022, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-education-europe-learning-after-lockdown-july-2022>

displaced learners share recreation times, mealtimes, pre- and post-school care and some non-language intensive classes with local children right from the start.

Education authorities are recommended to make an assessment of available teaching staff, school infrastructure and other resources before deciding which model of preparatory classes fits their context best. As a general rule, UNHCR recommends to always make sure that preparatory programmes are delivered by qualified professionals, that programmes are geared toward maximizing chances of academic success of displaced learners once they move to regular classes, and to always provide maximum opportunities of interaction with host community children in the school and the wider school community.

Specific care needs to be taken to ensure access to education for displaced learners who have 'aged out' of compulsory education. Displaced learners over the age of compulsory education can often no longer benefit from support such as child support and scholarships. Language, age and social barriers make many in this age category more reluctant to enroll in the local schools of the host country. This leads many to drop out of education with little or no language education and with no diplomas or certificates that may give them access to higher education and certain professions. It is therefore recommended that access to education support services to displaced learners is maintained up until displaced learners can obtain a diploma or certificate, even when they are over the age of compulsory education.¹⁶

Early Childhood Education and Care

Most Icelandic children are offered a place in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).¹⁷ Most pre-schools are public, although self-financing ECEC settings exist, but they are always co-funded by municipalities.¹⁸ Similar access to ECEC should be provided to displaced learners, with the service fees subsidized where necessary.

Cooperation between multiple bodies involved in organising, funding, and delivering ECEC is essential to support provision of quality ECEC to all children. An efficient coordination system should be set up between public services specialised in early childhood development, such as prenatal, postnatal, and preventative healthcare services, social and health services, services welcoming displaced people and other refugees and migrants, educational authorities and providers, community centres and NGOs.

¹⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief, Refugee Education in Europe: Learning After Lockdown*, p 16, 2022, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-education-europe-learning-after-lockdown-july-2022>

¹⁷ ECEC refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age. European Commission, European Education Area, *Quality education and training for all, 2021*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/early-childhood-education-and-care/about-early-childhood-education-and-care>.

¹⁸ Eurydice Iceland, *Key Features of the Education System*, 2023, available at: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/iceland/overview>

2.3.5 Quality assurance regulations

Caution should guide any revision of quality assurance regulations, such as the staff-to-child ratio or other regulations linked to health and safety measures, respecting the best interest of the child as a primary consideration.

3. Pedagogical experts and school staff

Teachers play an essential role in meeting the diverse needs of displaced learners. Teachers may therefore need support in adjusting their teaching methods through training and learning material. They need to be capable of working in intercultural learning environments and be equipped to teach in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context.

3.1 Recruitment and supporting the right expertise

Specific action to support education institutions and staff to integrate displaced learners include:

- Legislating to extend the categories of eligible host-country teachers, including retired teachers, and waiving compulsory traineeship for student teachers if they can demonstrate a set minimum number of hours of study.
- Recruiting additional teaching and support, including staff with language skills of the displaced learners (for instance, teachers, teaching assistants, and interpreters from the displaced community).
- Mobilizing teachers and early childhood education and care staff among those displaced. This could include:
 - Identifying educational staff among forcibly displaced populations.
 - Providing additional language training to teaching professionals.
 - Recognizing prior qualifications.
 - Helping displaced teacher students to access host countries' teacher education and training.

3.2 Teacher Training

Teachers should be supported through targeted training that allows them to build specific skills they need in working with displaced learners, including topics such as:¹⁹

¹⁹ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 13, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

- teaching in multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings.
- teaching children that may experience specific stress or trauma as a result of displacement and referring them to adequate support services.
- provision of general psycho-social support and correct referrals to specific support services.
- working with refugee parents and the host school environment.
- play-based learning.
- safety in and around the school, prevention of bullying, conflict resolution and all forms of bias and discrimination.
- cooperation with parents and families of displaced communities.

4. Setting up the learning environment and preparatory classes

4.1 Student Assessment

With competence assessments, learners can be placed in the right class level and their learning and teaching differentiated according to their individual needs. It is important to offer comprehensive, age-specific, and multi-dimensional assessments of displaced learners when they arrive.

The assessment should include:²⁰

- literacy competence
- numeracy competence
- language competence
- social and emotional competence
- learner's overall well-being

Decisions to place children in preparatory programmes, or in certain grades, should be based on the needs of the child while maximizing chances of academic success (cf. through psycho-social support on arrival followed by intensive language learning and a 'follow-up trajectory' once the child transitions to a regular class).

²⁰ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 8, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

4.2 Differentiation

Individual support for displaced learners is essential to help them bridge potential learning gaps. After formative assessment,²¹ it is essential to monitor the individual plans and provide support where necessary and possible. Individual learning support includes:

- Individualized support and learning plans (learners might need extra tasks, or extra learning tools to support their learning process and problem solving).
- Assisting equipment and technologies for students with specific needs.
- Peer-to-peer mentoring schemes (such as buddy and ambassador programmes).
- Extra learning time, remedial education, and mentoring classes during the school year and/or holiday period.
- Extra support from a multi-professional team (including teachers, school psychologists, social workers, nurses and language and cultural mediators) based on learner's specific needs.

The support measures should always be agreed with the families. Placement in separated settings and lack of the child's exposure to mainstream classrooms should be avoided.²²

4.3 Class structure

It is highly recommended to include all learners, displaced and local, within the same school premises as far as possible instead of building separate education facilities for displaced learners. When separate education infrastructure for displaced learners is absolutely necessary due to local circumstances, specific guidelines should be followed and an assessment should be made of the pros and cons of each model of preparatory programme.

For full immersion of displaced learners into a class of local children without any support, a learner would need to know the local language and culture as well as a local does. This is very rarely the case, therefore more mixed methods tailored to learner's individual needs as far as possible are recommended. These include a fully integrative approach in which displaced learners follow all regular classes while receiving additional language classes or partially integrative approach in which displaced learners follow

²¹ Formative assessment refers to a range of formal and informal assessment procedures conducted by teachers in order to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment. A formative assessment does not normally contribute towards a student's final grade.

²² European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 20, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

part of the regular classes and part of the classes as a separate group in parallel while also attending local language classes.

Preparatory classes can ease capacity constraints in cases where immediate mainstream education is not possible, but they should never be used as a pre-text to keep displaced learners in a separate education stream. However, a completely parallel approach in which displaced learners either first spend some time in separate language and cultural classes before moving to the regular classes, might sometimes be the only feasible option, especially when there is not enough professional capacity to support displaced learners' needs in regular education settings. In this case it is important to ensure that the displaced learners get to regularly interact with the students in the local community during lunch breaks, extracurricular activities and as part of the local school curriculum wherever possible (e.g., sports, arts, handicrafts etc.). This is essential for integration.

To avoid longer-term parallel systems, it is useful to include a phase-out agenda for temporary reception classes right from the start, whenever they are being set up. It is important to actively prepare displaced children to enter mainstream education as soon as possible.²³

4.4 Multi-professional support in learning settings

Multi-disciplinary teams of professionals providing support to displaced learners are important both inside and outside of learning institutions. In schools, such teams would need to include multi-professional learning support capacities consisting of, for instance, teachers, social workers, psychologists, nurses, cultural mediators, and school assistants.

4.5 Mental health and psychosocial support

Displaced children often experience educational and psychological challenges due to recent, often traumatic, experiences that influence their well-being and mental health. Stress and trauma often need to be addressed and, where appropriate, treated adequately to allow children to begin learning again effectively. It is therefore recommended that displaced learners' mental health and psycho-social needs be thoroughly assessed before the child starts participating in school activities. Mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) is also essential to restore and maintain social and emotional well-being.

²³ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 8, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

The following actions can help to address these needs:

- Enabling close collaboration between education providers and social and health services, mental health agencies and all other relevant services and agencies.
- Providing school staff with appropriate MHPSS skills.
- Integrating psycho-social support into educational practices so that well-being and education objectives can be pursued at the same time.
- Prioritizing mental health before learning.

4.6 Language

Although early acquisition of the language of instruction is important for school success, it must be seen in conjunction with supporting the learners' overall literacy development.²⁴ This can include continued learning of the child's native language, since this is known to favour better learning of other languages.

Functional literacy as the most basic foundational skill is crucial for cognitive progress across the curriculum and transcends the linguistic borders between different languages.²⁵ Valuing linguistic diversity includes access to mother tongue and home culture classes (including materials) and creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds.²⁶

In addition to providing intensive (Icelandic) language classes for learners, learning of the local language can be supported alongside subject learning. Innovative, inclusive, and multi-lingual pedagogical approaches and tools, such as, information and communication technologies, offering language education across the curriculum through language-sensitive teaching techniques, and using content and language integrated teaching methods can be helpful.

4.7 Extracurricular activities

Enhancing access to non-formal learning opportunities will help displaced children to catch up in their learning process and integrate with the local community, especially when their education is arranged in a parallel setting separate from the classes that local children take. Extracurricular activities support individuals' overall development, learning ability and mental and physical health. They can also create safe spaces

²⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Teaching About Refugees 2021 - Language Learning Guidebook*, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-teaching-about-refugees-2021-language-learning-guidebook>

²⁵ Council of Europe, *The Language Dimension in all Subjects - A Handbook for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training*, 2016, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/a-handbook-for-curriculum-development-and-teacher-training-the-language-dimension-in-all-subjects>

²⁶ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 19, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

especially for vulnerable children, including ethnic and linguistic minorities, or give agency and needed experiences of success for learners who might otherwise be struggling with catching up in regular classes.

Excellent extracurricular activities to consider include play-based sessions (sports, arts, and crafts etc.) or additional classes/remedial education and summer camps aligned to the national curriculum or provided during holidays.²⁷

4.8 Cooperation with care-takers

It is essential to include the care-takers of displaced learners as well as their whole community in the discussion about education solutions. Collaborative approaches with parents and the displaced communities include:²⁸

- enhancing communication and cooperation with parents and displaced people's communities, by promoting collaborative approaches between schools, parents, local authorities, and civil society organizations.
- promoting schools as learning communities where all families are encouraged to actively participate in school life and decision-making.
- developing activities for and with parents and families to ease the inclusion of their children (such as language learning or involving them in curricular and non-curricular activities), including with the help of cultural mediators.

5. Consideration of possible challenges

When setting up preparatory classes, challenges may arise that will need special consideration.

Integration

As emphasized in previous chapters, preparatory classes are less likely to stimulate interaction between host populations and displaced learners if they are organized in a way that separates host community and displaced children, which may slow down language learning and cultural integration.

²⁷ See UNHCR's Teaching About Refugees teaching materials catalogue, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education/teaching-about-refugees> for suggestions on whole-school activities and social-emotional learning activities with displaced learners and their parents.

²⁸ European Commission, *Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*, p 22, 2022, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

Added burden of learning gaps

The specific academic and life history prior and during displacement of the learner can affect their ability to catch up with studies as they often arrive in the middle of an ongoing academic year. The result of this is that many preparatory classes have pupils in them with widely diverging language and academic skills and often also of different ages. This can cause profound pedagogical challenges for teachers in the preparatory classes and may inhibit class groups from making progress.

Motivation to follow accelerated curriculums in which students must make up for lost school time in short periods of time may be low, especially if their language skills lag behind. For teenagers in particular, this can lead to poor motivation to continue following the lessons, with increased risk of dropouts.

Inadequate support to teachers

Teachers in preparatory classes may not have received adequate training or adequate support to address some of the challenges they are facing in preparatory classes. Sometimes educators in preparatory classes do not receive enough information about the background and academic level of their students before they arrive in the class. Teachers may lack skills and training to work with displaced children and youth, especially if they show signs of stress or trauma. Many displaced children may suffer from stress and trauma, which can cause some of them to demonstrate disruptive behaviors, affecting not only their own learning but also that of their classmates.

Transition to regular classes

If not adequately supported, transition to regular classes will be a challenging process for a learner that switches to a new social, lingual, cultural, and physical learning environment. The transition from preparatory classes to regular classes requires different teachers to work together and well-coordinated information exchange.

Racism and xenophobia

Displaced people are often confronted with racism and xenophobia and negative attitudes and actions. Incidents in the school environment can range from for instance hurtful remarks in the playground to public humiliation and physical violence. It is important for schools to have effective policies to counter racist or xenophobic behavior.

Mental health

Experiences that cause trauma or stress in displaced children include living in and fleeing violent situations, losing loved ones, undertaking dangerous journeys to safety, as well as precarious living situations in the host country. Not knowing if one's status in a new country is permanent, living in poor housing and with limited resources as well as living with parents or other caregivers that may be suffering from trauma or stress

themselves, can contribute to displaced children's daily stress, and may further impact trauma they may have already experienced.²⁹

Enrolment motivation of Ukrainian learners

Displaced learners from Ukraine deserve specific attention with regard to education given their specific situation. Contrary to many other countries of origin of refugees, Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science continues to actively support the education of its population, inside the country and abroad. An online education system is available allowing Ukrainian learners to access Ukrainian curriculum from anywhere in the world. Limited on-line grading and testing is available for some grades. As many refugees from Ukraine hope to be able to return to Ukraine, parents are often reluctant to enroll their children in schools in host countries and continue relying on on-line education.³⁰

While continued online learning through the Ukrainian curriculum can contribute to preventing certain learning gaps during displacement and maintaining linguistic and cultural links with the country of origin, it is not a viable long-term alternative to formal education by qualified teachers in a host country school. Availability of on-line education also prompts many caregivers to enroll their children in non-formal education options that are not aligned with the Ukrainian curriculum.³¹ Many displaced learners from Ukraine are at risk of long-lasting learning losses as a result.

Additional lessons in Ukrainian language and cultural and historical subjects can be provided in addition to enrolment in a host country school, but only if the workload of children is manageable and if complementary learning of Ukrainian curriculum is rewarded with grades and certificates that provide proof of prior learning. Ideally, the host country should work with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science to ensure mutual recognition of learning in both countries and to ensure that learning of

²⁹ For an overview of behavioral symptoms that may indicate stress and/or trauma, see UNHCR, *Teaching About Refugees - Guidance on working with refugee children struggling with stress and trauma*, 2019, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/teaching-about-refugees-guidance-working-refugee-children-struggling-stress-and-trauma>

³⁰ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief - Education on hold: Addressing barriers to learning among refugee children and youth from Ukraine challenges and recommendations*, 2023, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/education-hold-addressing-barriers-learning-among-refugee-children-and-youth-ukraine-challenges-and-recommendations-education-policy-brief-september-2023>

³¹ See among other p. 13-14 of Intention Survey #2, 18% of 21 parents, on average, prefer their children to continue studying Ukrainian curriculum, and 73% indicates an intention to enroll their children in local schools. UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine #2*, p 13 - 14, 2022, available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95767>

Ukrainian curriculum abroad is recognized.³² The Ukrainian Ministry has issued guidance to parents and policy-makers that may be useful in this context.³³

³² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Bureau of Europe, *Education Policy Brief - Education on hold: Addressing barriers to learning among refugee children and youth from Ukraine challenges and recommendations*, p 22, 2023, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/education-hold-addressing-barriers-learning-among-refugee-children-and-youth-ukraine-challenges-and-recommendations-education-policy-brief-september-2023>

³³ on 15 May 2023, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science issued an *Order with methodological guidance on mutual recognition of grades and certificates for secondary education*, available at: <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/pro-zatverdzhennya-metodichnih-rekomendacij-shodo-okremih-pitan-zdobuttya-osviti-v-zakladah-zagalnoyi-serednoyi-osviti-v-umovah-voyennogo-stanu-v-ukrayini>