



Some guidelines for supporting Ukrainian¹ refugee children and youth in Steiner Waldorf schools

Introduction

Martyn Rawson represents ECSWE, as its pedagogical advisor, in the European Commission Working Group Pathways to School Success. Role of this group is to consult the policy making process for the future of education in the European Union. Since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, this group was presented with evidence from experts, researchers and individuals working to coordinate solutions to providing support to refugee students across schools in Europe. Martyn was able to contribute with aspects of the Steiner Waldorf approach, as well as learn from the presentations. These guidelines, that build on these contributions, could serve as ideas relating to good practice in supporting Ukrainian refugee children and youth in Steiner Waldorf Schools.

Each school will make its own pedagogical decisions based on its own experiences and findings, and of course, schools will find different and equally valid solutions. The guidelines summarised here are necessarily general in nature. The European Commission however has extensive resources and has been able to bring together experts from diverse fields, many of whom are currently active throughout the field of working with Ukrainian refugees. Since not every school has the resources or the time to find and explore the research already published, we have summarised the findings and published this paper. In developing it, Martyn also consulted with a number of colleagues within the Waldorf movement who are already working with refugees or are knowledgeable about the medical aspects, such as the von Tessin Center for Health and Education at the Freie Hochschule Stuttgart and emergency educators at stART international in Munich.

These guidelines address what Steiner Waldorf schools can do, within the limitations of their resources. They do not cover the important work that emergency education does, though there are many overlaps. Emergency education and its specially trained staff engage with children and youth in the immediate aftermath of trauma-inducing events. Ideally, schools take on the children and young people after emergency education interventions and offer them longer-term educational and social support. Some refugee students are able to get emergency and trauma support on arrival, though many do not. Therefore, it is helpful if schools are aware of the nature of trauma and how it affects children and young people. Even just leaving one's home and having to go to another country, leaving brothers and fathers behind because their country is under attack is traumatic. But now we are increasingly meeting refugees who have, above mentioned, experienced war directly.

There is excellent advice on emergency education and working with traumatized children from a Waldorf perspective, much of which is relevant to Steiner Waldorf schools taking Ukrainian refugee students (see Ruf, 2013)².

¹ The content is adaptable to all other refugee children and youth in schools.

² There is also a wealth of literature on dealing with trauma and identifying traumatized children and youth in schools (trauma-informed schools, which mainly focuses on child abuse), and some reading suggestions are given in the resources,



The Waldorf perspective on emergency education also identifies ways in which schools can enable children to build up dispositions to resilience, so that if and when they have traumatic experiences, they can recover more quickly. A salutogenic approach based on an understanding of how trauma affects people is undoubtedly essential today and should be part of initial teacher education. However, this paper addresses what can be done to support refugee students coming from Ukraine who have most likely experienced trauma related to war.

As soon as school age refugee children are registered and settled in some kind of accommodation, they are usually required to go to school in the host country, which of course makes sense. State schools are usually obliged to take such students and many countries offer some funding and even special provision for this effort. This support often does not apply to private schools, such as Steiner Waldorf schools, which may have to fund the students they take, or they may have to fund the extra staffing that these students require, for example to learn the language of instruction. This is an extra burden these schools have to reckon with. It makes sense therefore if the decision to take refugee students is well-supported in the whole school community.

Background

There are currently 2,5 million children and youth refugees from Ukraine in European countries. Since 2015, European countries have built up a wealth of new experiences responding to the needs of refugees to add to the knowledge that was already there. There has also been considerable research done, including the experiences of schools and learners during the Covid pandemic and the limitations this imposed on schools. The main outcome of the research is that, in terms of supporting children and youth, school and the personal relationships it enables play central role in integration and providing support.

The role of school

Schools can provide a safe and familiar place, a sense of belonging where children and youth can continue with their education and thus have a much-needed experience of continuity. Schools can help children and young people feel that they are safe, seen, that their voices are heard and their needs are recognized, all of which are essential for healthy development. Schools can provide educational, personal and social support and can protect them from exclusion and stigmatization. Thus, schools become places of protection and prevention, where they can build up their resilience.

The salutogenic approach of Steiner Waldorf education strengthens the health-creating forces in the person and thus supports the growth of dispositions to resilience, the ability to 'bounce back' after adversity, stress and trauma. However, this is never a 'quick fix', it takes a long time to establish new

but there is little on what schools can do. There are however many websites with relevant information (see resources below).



behaviours and embodied memories since psychosocial and physical trauma leave long-term scars in the body and mind of a person.

The trauma of the situation means that many students will inevitably experience a major setback in their overall learning and development. The sooner they can continue with their education, even if it means doing this in another country, the better. This often means that they have to quickly learn the language of instruction.

Uncertainty about the future

One of the key decisions that has to be made is whether we are just offering the refugee students safety for a while until they can go back home or whether we are helping them integrate into our schools and society. Most Ukrainians and the Ukrainian Education Ministry see the refugees as having temporary displacement status. For that reason, the Ukrainian government is offering the Ukrainian curriculum in online learning and many Ukrainian high school students are preparing for Ukrainian exams.

However, even the Ukrainian Education Ministry acknowledges that a very high percentage of educational infrastructure has been destroyed and they cannot start rebuilding until the war ends and resources are available. The reality is that many Ukrainian children and young people will not be returning soon. But it is vital that their education continues and that means they have to be integrated into the host school culture and language. In the class, refugee students who speak some English can translate to others, helping the rest establish meaningful communication with the teacher and the class.

There is evidence that many Ukrainian students are attending their host school in the morning and then spending the afternoon and evening doing Ukrainian curriculum tasks online and this is leading to exhaustion and overload. The intensive reliance on interpreters and the possibility of studying in Ukrainian means that many are tempted to focus on their Ukrainian and not on integrating. Most countries in Europe have taken the policy decision that as from September 2022 and the start of the new school year, Ukrainian students will be encouraged to integrate rather than continuing to study in Ukrainian.

Steiner Waldorf students from Ukraine have the advantage that many aspects of the education will be familiar to them, but most refugee students in our schools will not have a Waldorf background and we are obviously open to taking refugee students from all backgrounds.

Connection and continuity

It is crucial that refugee students be able to continue learning their mother tongue, accessing its literature and developing higher order literacy skills. It is also important that the school values Ukrainian culture and shares this with all the schools' students. This of course applies to refugees from any country of origin.



Cultural maintenance is important. This means students should be encouraged to talk about their country, its traditions and festivals so that they can continue to identify with their land, and they see that we are interested in their country and its culture. This helps them link to their own past whilst helping them accept the new realities of the present and the place they are now in. It is also important that Ukrainian refugee students have regular opportunities in school to talk in their home language about the developments in their country and about their situations as refugees, whether they are to integrate or return to their homes. They need adults with whom they can discuss these issues outside of family.

Refugee students need to know that they are welcome, that they have the right to be here, and that they have the right to learn and that their voice is important.

A multi-layered approach

Research shows that most refugee students and their families prefer that the psycho-social help they receive is embedded in school settings (rather than social services, medical centres etc.). If they require psycho-social support, they prefer to have this in the context of the school, where interventions are understood as educational special needs rather than going to a psychiatric clinic or similar institutions. And while schools can provide first level support for refugee students by providing pedagogical support based on their existing inclusion and learning support policies, this means that in some cases schools would benefit from linking up with other social care providers.

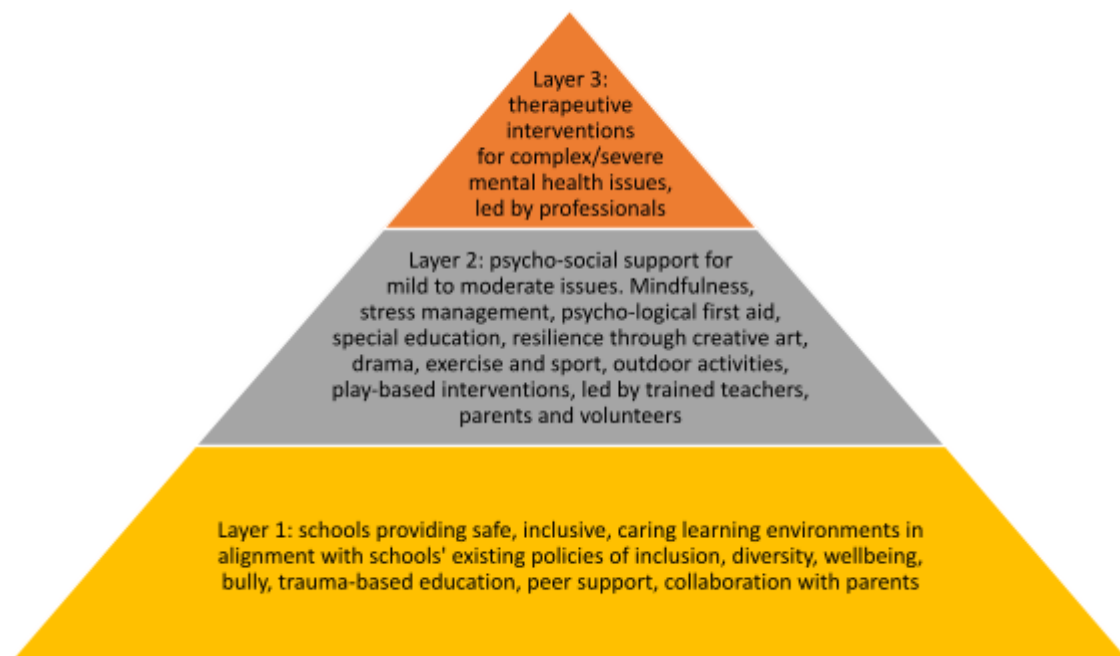


Fig 1. The layered approach to schools as protective contexts (Carmel Cefai, University of Malta Centre for Resilience and Social Emotional Health)



In more detail here we can see what educational integration can mean:

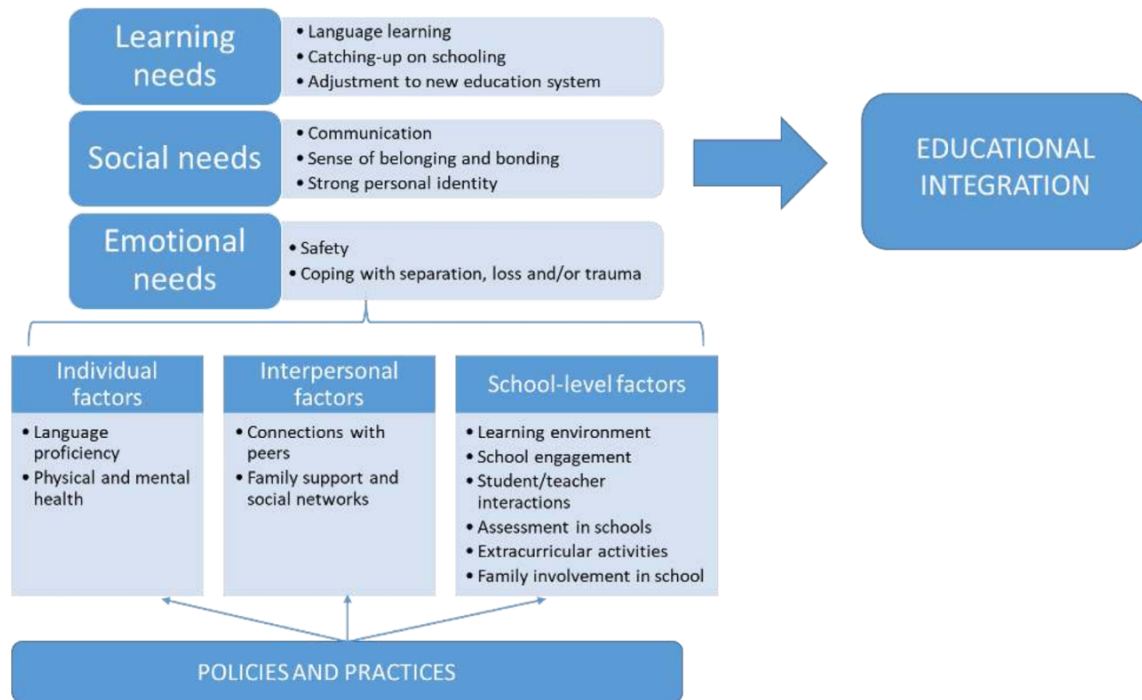


Fig. 2. OECD holistic model of educational integration of refugee students (Lucie Cerna, OECD Working Papers No. 203)

One factor that Figure 2 lacks in the Emotional needs section is the need for relaxing, having fun and enjoyment. Hospital and emergency clowning have shown that people need to laugh, be silly, do enjoyable things despite their trauma and unhappy life situation. In a wider sense, refugee students need opportunities to do things they enjoy, ideally active things involving other people (as opposed to watching online series that may also be enjoyable).

Identifying symptoms

There are many sources of trauma that refugee students hold – e.g. experiences in the homeland, experiences during transit out of the country, at railway stations and borders, the asylum procedures, even the overwhelming offers from NGOs who all want to help, social and language barriers and one of the main problems is stress among the refugee family members (mothers who are worried and struggle with coping, grandparents who are overwhelmed, frightened or sick younger siblings).

The main symptoms to look out for are:

- re-experiencing events
- dissociation and trouble concentrating
- being highly alert, hypervigilant, inability to relax,



- aggressive behaviour even to those trying to help
- behaviour that goes beyond boundaries
- learning difficulties from before are made worse
- fears about the future
- changed attitudes towards other people
- extreme lack of self-worth and self-confidence
- regressive behaviour
- all kinds of psychosomatic complaints (headaches, stomach aches, inability to eat, allergies, sleeplessness, exhaustion).

If any of your students show these symptoms, please refer them to professional social and clinical care. Some Steiner Waldorf schools have school doctors who can be helpful in providing care and advising teachers. Whether school doctors decide to treat these students as patients depends on the circumstances and the wishes of the parents, carers and social services.

Experts agree that teachers should not attempt to diagnose refugee students but should refer them to the specialists. Still, even though teachers are not therapists they can focus on supporting learning and helping to integrate the refugee students into the class and school community. As can be seen above in the pyramid of Fig. 1, school can offer a supportive and caring environment that is vital to the wellbeing of the refugee students. Ideally Steiner Waldorf schools already have active policies in place to deal with inclusion, bullying and providing safe space.

Ways schools can support refugee students

1. Language

Short term:

Obviously, children and young people initially have a great need to understand what is happening to them, what we want them to do and how they can explain their needs to us. Therefore, we have to quickly identify Ukrainian speakers who can interpret. This may be mothers, older siblings who can speak some English or Russian speakers (if applicable) or external interpreters. Expecting children to simply learn the language by participating is probably not enough, except perhaps in kindergarten. As soon as literacy is involved students who can't read or write the language are at a major disadvantage. This is often even the case with children who are not traumatized, e.g. children of foreign students attending teacher training. It is even more the case if the children are traumatized. All children who don't speak or read the language of instruction need support and should not just be expected to swim in the stream (many will sink quickly), causing them and their parents additional stress.



Medium term:

Refugee students need to learn the host language quickly and efficiently. In kindergarten this should be no problem. In the primary school, children will need some extra language support and in the upper school considerably more support. Ideally the language should be initially taught orally, starting with all the words, responses and sentences that are needed for everyday talk in the classroom, around the school and getting to school and back. With some help, peers can be trained to be language helpers. Short periods of immersion can be followed by breaks during which the students can talk Ukrainian with each other or use social media to contact family and friends elsewhere.

Long term:

Refugee students will need to catch up in their literacy quickly so that they can find their natural learning level in the learning process (and particularly if they are at the age when they have to take exams). We need to remember that not all Ukrainians have Ukrainian as their home language, many from Eastern Ukraine speak Russian. Some speak Hungarian and there are other languages.

When teaching children and youth the host language, it is important to remember that some children learn better using picture stories and not just through hearing, others need cards with phrases they can use in everyday exchanges. From the beginning students can participate in sport, crafts and artistic activities, where explanations can be kept to a minimum and much can be taught by showing.

2. Social inclusion

Social inclusion needs support, as it will not necessarily happen on its own. Host students willing to be peer-helpers can be trained in what needs doing (e.g. being patient, quietly persuasive, being prepared not to take offence if help is rejected, staying in touch, inviting to sport and other out of school activities). Parents in the host school can be asked to reach out (inviting refugee students to their home, making contact with refugee mothers, helping with clothing and sports clothing, offering to take them out on visits or helping with shopping).

School also needs to have regular meetings with the mothers and other carers to inform them about the school systems in the host country, length of mandatory schooling, when the key transition from kindergarten to school and from primary to secondary school happen and at what age exams are taken. There may be significant differences, and this can be disorientating.

Schools need to be very vigilant that bullying and exclusion does not occur and that refugee students know who they can go to for help. Some refugee students will be depressed, unhappy, frustrated, uncommunicative and show other symptoms of resenting their situation and this may make them seem as problematic. And also, some children and young people from the hosting environment who themselves are insecure or victims of exclusion might want to take it out on refugee students.

Peer support from host classmates is very important. They also need help and encouragement on how to reach out to the newcomers who may be shy, intimidated, hurt, frightened and possibly even aggressive. The host students need to understand about the nature of trauma in age-appropriate



ways and it may even be possible to ‘train’ some willing helpers who take on the role of pilots, guiding the new students through the school and its social structures.

3. School climate

It is necessary to have a whole school approach, not just one or two motivated teachers because psycho-social wellbeing is a collective quality shared by teachers, students and parents. A learner centred and culturally responsive pedagogy is required, involving positive classroom management, relationship building and ensuring that refugee students can begin to develop a sense of belonging. Sensitive attitude by adults to the refugee students’ needs and feelings and can help support long-term sense of self, language development and ability to form new relationships. This includes giving those students a strong voice.

Many refugee students have inner resources that can be nurtured in an environment of trust, interest and care. A learner-centred approach to teaching is needed in which the students’ individual and cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student learning and well-being.

Integrating refugee students requires good planning and leadership, careful implementation and evaluation.

4. Arts based work

All the evidence suggests that creative arts-based approaches help refugee students both to integrate and to build up their resilience. Music, play, dance, storytelling, group narratives, drawing and painting, poetry and drama can all help in various ways. Artistic expression either in their native language or using images can give symbolic form to the experiences that have embodied and give form to their memories. This can help students find meaning in their situation and can raise awareness among others of their lived experiences (e.g. a drama production in mother-tongue, an art exhibition etc.).

Looking after yourself

Teaching is anyway a demanding task and most teachers are close to the edge of their capacities and resources (not least after Covid). Working with traumatized children can be even more demanding and emotionally draining. Make sure you take care of yourself before you help others (like putting on the oxygen mask in the airplane before you help others).

Teachers need support from their colleagues and regular opportunities to talk about their experiences. They need down-time for relaxation and strategies for dealing with stress in the work situation (deep breathing, watching your breath as you exhale, putting your hand on your stomach and feeling it rise and fall with each breath). Meditation and plenty of sleep and exercise all help with coping with stress.

Coping with refugee students requires conscious decisions and priorities for which time and spaces must be created. Usually this means others must take on more work and responsibilities. Each



EUROPEAN
COUNCIL FOR
STEINER WALDORF
EDUCATION

Rue du Trône 194, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 2 644 00 43
Email: info@ecswe.eu, Website: www.ecswe.eu

refugee child or young person should have someone who is responsible for them in the school, and peer-supporters can be very helpful.

These guidelines were compiled by Martyn Rawson from reports given at the EAC Working Group Pathways to School Success Peer Learning Activities and EU Education Solidarity for Ukraine programme.

Resources

Literature

Bashant, J (2020) *Building a Trauma-Informed Compassionate Classroom*. London. PESI Publishing and Media

Brummer, J & Thorsborne, M. (2020) *Building a Trauma-informed Restorative School. Skills and approaches for improving culture and behaviour*. London & New York. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Dyrefrov, A. (2010) *Supporting Traumatized Children and Teenagers. A guide to providing understanding at help*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Fonseca, C. (2020) *Healing the Heart. Helping your child thrive after trauma*. New York & London: Routledge

Panlilio, C. C. et al. (2019) *Trauma-informed Schools. Integrating child maltreatment, revention, detection and Intervention*. Dordrecht. Springer International

Ruf, B. (2013) *Educating Traumatized Children. Waldorf education in crisis intervention*. Great Barrington, MA. Lindisfarne Books

Rutishauser, B. & Stolz, N. (2018) *Essence of Learning. Learning support in crisis contexts. A practical approach to education in emergencies*. Lucerne, CH.

<https://www.goetheanum-paedagogik.ch/en/news-singleview/essence-of-learning-learning-support-in-crisis-contexts>

Websites

Anti-bully Alliance



EUROPEAN
COUNCIL FOR
STEINER WALDORF
EDUCATION

Rue du Trône 194, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 2 644 00 43
Email: info@ecswe.eu, Website: www.ecswe.eu

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>
<https://www.antibullyingpro.com/>

BOOST - European Commission Building social and emotional skills to boost mental health resilience in children and young people in Europe
<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/755175>

CHILDMOVE - The impact of flight experiences on psychological well-being of unaccompanied refugee minors
<https://childmove.com/>

Dialogic learning and inclusion of refugees
<https://www.child-up.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CHILD-UP-basic-brochure-v10.pdf>

Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners / Emergency Pedagogy
<https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/emergency-pedagogy/>

ICAM - Including Children Affected by Migration
<https://www.icamproject.eu/>

IASC - Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Humanitarian Response in Ukraine and Neighbouring Countries
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-humanitarian-response-ukraine-and-neighbouring-countries>

Integration mapping of refugee and migrant children
https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IMMERSE_D1.3-Short-edited.pdf

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies: Essence of Learning Handbook Beatrice Rutishauser
<https://inee.org/resources/essence-learning-learning-support-crisis-contexts>

Language friendly school (Canada)
<https://languagefriendlyschool.org/>

MINDSPRING - A group programme for refugees about life in exile
<https://mindspring-grupper.dk/about-mindspring>

PROMISE - Promoting Mental Health Minimising Mental Illness and Integrating through Education
<https://eurochild.org/news/heroes-cry-too-colouring-book-for-children-from-ukraine/>

REFUGE-ED - Effective practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support for the integration of refugee children
<https://www.refuge-ed.eu>



EUROPEAN
COUNCIL FOR
STEINER WALDORF
EDUCATION

Rue du Trône 194, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 2 644 00 43
Email: info@ecswe.eu, Website: www.ecswe.eu

RefugeeWellschool - Psychosocial support for adolescent refugees and migrants in schools

<https://refugeeswellschool.org/>

School Education Gateway

<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/including-ukrainian-refugees.htm>

SIRIUS

<https://avior.risbo.org/>

stART international

<https://www.start-international.org/en/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-y0OWQBICQ>

UNESCO, Mapping host countries' education responses to the influx of Ukrainian students. (Last update on April 22, 2022)

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mapping-host-countries-education-responses-influx-ukrainian-students>

UNHCR

<https://www.unhcr.org/6177f8724>

UNHCR special programme for refugee children and youth

<https://www.unhcr.org/5d651da88d7.pdf>

UPRIGHT - Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally implemented in schools to improve and promote mental Health for Teenagers

<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/755175>

War Child

www.warchildholland.org/psychosocial-support