

TEACHERS AND SCHOOL'S ROLE IN THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEES: HOW TO WELCOME UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN HOST COUNTRIES

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Abstract: Refugees face numerous challenges when they arrive in a new country, including language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation. In this context, teachers play a crucial role in supporting the well-being of refugee students. This paper explores the different ways in which teachers can support the well-being of refugees, specifically Ukrainian refugees, as the displacement due to the Russian invasion represents the largest human migration in Europe in recent decades. The results show that teachers should provide a safe and supportive learning environment, foster positive relationships with students through socio-emotional learning programs, and offer culturally responsive and trauma-informed support in order to protect refugee students' well-being. The paper also discusses some of the challenges that teachers may face when working with refugee students and offers some strategies for addressing them. Ultimately, this paper highlights the critical role that teachers play in promoting the well-being and academic success of refugee students and underscores the importance of ongoing support and professional development for educators working in this field.

Keywords: Migration, migrants, refugee education, toxic stress, school connectedness, well-being and socio-emotional education.

Resum: Els refugiats enfronten nombrosos desafiaments quan arriben a un nou país, incloent barreres lingüístiques, diferències culturals i aïllament social. En aquest context, els docents juguen un paper crucial en suportar el benestar dels estudiants refugiats. Aquest article explora les diferents maneres en què els docents poden promoure el benestar dels refugiats, especialment els refugiats ucraïans, ja que és la migració humana més forta a Europa en les darreres dècades. Proporcionar un entorn d'aprenentatge segur i suportiu, fomentar relacions positives amb els estudiants a través de programes d'aprenentatge socioemocional i oferir suport sensible a la cultura i

informat sobre el trauma són algunes de les directrius que els docents poden seguir per protegir el benestar dels alumnes refugiats. L'article també aborda alguns dels desafiaments que els docents poden enfrontar quan treballen amb estudiants refugiats i ofereix algunes estratègies per abordar aquests desafiaments. En definitiva, aquest article destaca el paper crucial que els docents juguen en promoure el benestar i l'èxit acadèmic dels estudiants refugiats i subratlla la importància del suport continu i del desenvolupament professional per als educadors que treballen en aquest camp.

Introduction

In the past five decades the estimated number of migrants in the world has increased significantly. When it comes to refugees specifically, the total estimated number in 2022 was 103 million, according to UNHCR, half of them children. Compared to the end of 2021, this is an increase of 13.6 million (+15%), the largest ever increase from one year to the next, according to UNHCR's statistics on forced displacement (UNHCR, 2022). Children make up half of all refugees from the war in Ukraine, and UNICEF continues to warn of the heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation. Thus, as host countries, and schools, receive children who may have experienced traumatic situations and toxic stress, they must prepare an adequate response. For this reason, schools, educators and other professionals in the field must ensure that they have the skills, strategies and resources to guide the learning process of these refugees.

When refugees arrive in a new country, they often face numerous challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation. These challenges can be particularly daunting for refugee children who must navigate a new educational system and adapt to a different social environment. As such, teachers play a crucial role in supporting the well-being of these students.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the literature on the impact of teachers and schools on students' mental health and well-being, and researchers point out the vital role schools can play in including refugees in their new social context, protecting their emotional and physical needs, and ensuring their education.

Teachers can have a pivotal role in facilitating the inclusion of Ukrainian refugee students, but in order to accomplish this task they must be equipped with the right support. This

paper intends to provide some recommendations for teachers and schools in host countries on how to ease the welcome and schooling process of Ukrainian migrant children based on the latest research on refugee education and well-being.

Theoretical framework

A. CONFLICT AND MIGRATION

Prior to explaining the role teachers and schools can have in welcoming refugees, it is worth giving some background on the Russo-Ukrainian war and the overall concept of **migration**. This will help shed light on the current humanitarian crisis.

a. Current Russo-Ukrainian conflict

The **Russo-Ukrainian War** is an ongoing international conflict between Russia and Russian-controlled separatists and Ukraine. After more than a decade of political tension between the two countries, the annexation of Crimea, a Ukrainian peninsula, to Russian territory sparked a violent conflict. In February 2022, Russia, whose president is Vladímir Putin, launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. By the end of November 2022, Russian troupes had occupied more than 18% of the Ukrainian territory, according to the Center for Preventive Action (2022). Since then, armed violence has remained constant with the intervention of other countries acting as allies, resulting in 7.155 deaths (as of February 2023, UNHCR). Today there are estimated to be 7.824.440 Ukrainian citizens displaced across Europe. This is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war.

b. Migration

i. What is migration?

According to the Council of Europe (2022), **migration** is a process of moving, either across an international border or within a country, encompassing any kind of movement of people, regardless of the causes. In contrast, defining the term "**migrant**" is more complex. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), "the term 'migrants' is used "as an **umbrella term** used to refer to people in many different situations: emigrants, returning migrants, immigrants, refugees, (...) members of ethnic minority populations that have been created through immigration". It encompasses many different situations under the same word.

In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Ukrainian children are considered **refugees**, one kind of migrant. A **refugee** "is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2021). For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, refugees and asylum seekers constitute a distinct group of people, because they have left their homes in response to serious threats to their life and liberty.

ii. **What are the consequences of migration on refugee children's well-being?**

It goes without saying that refugees often suffer severe consequences due to the events they experienced as a result of being displaced. They are mainly stress and trauma. The stress to which most refugee children are exposed can be classified as occurring in three different stages (Fazel, Stein, 2002):

1. **While they are in their country of origin:** Many witness violence, torture, and losses of close family and friends. Children experience traumatic events (loud sounds, community displacement, rupture of their routine and home abandonment). Refugee children might have no memory of this period. Parental distress and general insecurity are common experiences.
2. **While they are migrating for safety:** exposed to new life threats. During displacements, children can fall into the hands of smugglers, human traffickers and abusers – even from institutions that are supposedly there to help. Some may experience parental separation (it is common to separate children from their parents for security measures.)
3. **When they are settling in the host country as refugees:** as immigration policies become more rigid, families can have a hard time claiming their refugee status. Parents might experience depression, poverty and despair. Children might have a hard time adapting to the new culture and language.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that, in general, children are very resilient and can often cope with difficult experiences and events in healthy and productive ways. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Peterson, S. 2018) some children may not display any symptoms and may not need service providers to intervene.

However, for other children, **exposure to traumatic events has a profound and lasting effect** on their daily functioning, resulting in *post-traumatic stress disorders* (PTSD) and *toxic stress responses*. According to the American Psychiatric Organization (2020), post-traumatic stress disorder is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances, which affects their mental and physical health. Meanwhile, toxic stress responses can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity.

Research shows that this **toxic stress** experienced during childhood can have a long-lasting negative effect on their health both as children and later on in their adulthood (Harvard Center on the developing Child, 2015). Toxic stress is considered an **Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)**. The term “Adverse Childhood Experiences,” or “ACEs,” comes from the 1998 Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, Koss, Marks, 1998) which proved the connections between chronic stress caused by early adversity and long-term health issues.

Various studies have shown associations between toxic stress and changes in brain structure. The physical consequences of this are impaired memory, mood swings, higher changes of strokes, asthma and changes in gene expression. The good news is that **the earlier a child is identified to have experienced toxic stress**, the sooner children and families can be connected to the services needed to **prevent and heal the effects**.

As previously explained, exposure to traumatic events such as migration can cause general symptoms of toxic stress in children of all ages, but some signs of distress are specific to a child's developmental stage according to the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** (Peterson, 2018). The table below shows typical symptoms in different age ranges:

Preschool children (3-5 years old)	Elementary School children (5-11 years old)	Middle and high school-aged youth (11-18)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bedwetting ● Thumb sucking ● Acting younger than their age ● Strong parental attachment ● Temper tantrums ● Aggressive behaviour (kicking, hitting, throwing things, biting) ● Not playing with other kids their age ● Repetitive playing out of events related to trauma exposure (recreating migration situations lived) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct changes: aggression, anger, irritability, withdrawal from others and sadness ● Trouble at school ● Trouble with peers ● Fear of separation from parents ● Fear of something bad happening (Anxiety) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A sense of responsibility or guilt for the bad things that happened ● Feelings of shame or embarrassment ● Feelings of helplessness ● Changes in how they think about the world ● Loss of faith ● Relationship problems: with peers, family and teachers ● Behavior problems.

Table 1. Signs of distress shown by refugees according to age.

As it can be seen, children's well-being and mental health can be triggered during and after the process of migration. All of these signs can be observed during school time, meaning that the school system can be the first to detect toxic stress in migrant children.

B. Importance of the teacher role and school in mental health promotion

Teachers play a vital role in the development of children. Their impact, good or bad, has long-lasting effects on human lives, and if their power is used correctly, teachers can play a pivotal role in the protection of child well-being and promotion of resilient behaviours.

According to a survey conducted by the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England in 2017 (Lowry, Leonard-Kane, Gibbs, Muller, Peacock, Jani, 2022), teachers are the most common source of mental health support for children. In this nationally representative sample of 5 to 19-year-olds, it was revealed that teachers are the primary access point for children's mental health support, being contacted by parents for their worries on their child's behaviour. In consequence, teachers ought to be trained to recognise signs of distress and have the support and guidelines needed to address each

situation in the classroom. To accomplish this, they must be equipped with the right resources and strategies to meet the needs of students.

In addition to the role that teachers can play in promoting children's health, they can also become allies in the protection of migrant children from traumatic stress and set the environmental conditions to include them in their new society. According to the UNCHR and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Wu, 2018), schools foster refugees' well-being and inclusion when they offer the following supports adapted to their needs:

- **promoting cultural understanding**, like raising staff and students' awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences.
- **providing language and academic support**, such as providing interpreters and cultural brokers in the school setting.
- **connecting families to resources**, many of which are free due to the welfare system that the majority of the European countries have.
- **providing social and emotional support** through a Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) program.

Adding these practices to a socio-emotional learning program would contribute to the welcoming of refugees as well as the general well-being of all children.

b. Implementation of socio-emotional learning programs (SEL) and school connectedness

Experts believe that one of the ways to boost the emotional well-being of all children is by leading a good socio-emotional learning program (SEL). Social and emotional learning involves processes that help students acquire and apply the information, mind-set and skills that they need to understand and regulate their emotions, create and accomplish realistic goals, engender empathy, and make responsible decisions (Dippold, 2021).

As detailed earlier, SEL programs are recommended for refugee students, as they have a higher risk of experiencing trauma. According to Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, expert on child adversity and toxic stress, SEL programs can help erase the long-term effects of toxic-stress, prevent future illnesses and improve future professional opportunities (Burke Harris, 2019). The ability to regulate one's own emotions and manage successful

interactions with other people is key for later academic performance, mental health, and social relationships.

Moreover, a program like this can increase the earnings of a child by 25%, as it develops students' soft skills needed to progress and evolve in working environments, according to the UK Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine in 2021 (Flèche, 2018).

When teachers promote socio-emotional well-being, all children's sense of being appreciated and loved grows. This feeling is known as **school connectedness**: the student's sense of being valued by their teachers and peers. It has been correlated with lower rates of substance abuse, violence, early sexual initiation, emotional distress and suicide, among others (Kim, 2021). This is especially relevant for vulnerable children as it can compensate for a lower degree of connectedness in other areas of life.

In conclusion, when teachers provide opportunities to work on socio-emotional intelligence during school time, students' well-being increases, which in turn benefits their mental health, their relationships with themselves, their peers and their families, and their academic results.

C. EU policy dealing with Ukrainian refugees in the educational field

The European Union (EU) has provided significant support to Ukrainian refugees, recognizing the challenges faced by individuals who have been displaced by the conflict in that country. The following list highlights some of them:

- **Humanitarian Responsibility:** The EU claims to be a global advocate for human rights and humanitarian values, recognizes its responsibility to assist and protect individuals fleeing conflict and persecution. The situation in Ukraine, particularly in the regions affected by the ongoing conflict, has resulted in significant displacement of people, and the EU has responded by providing assistance and support to those in need. According to Unicef report no.26, which published a humanitarian situation report, budgets of €1.5 billion have been invested in humanitarian aid to Ukraine since 2014, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, children, and women (Unicef, 2022). It is calculated that the funding requirements to face the current crisis scale up to €948.952.326, and that €128.615.383 should be dedicated to Education.

- **International Law and Obligations:** The EU is said to be committed to upholding international legal principles, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its additional protocols, which established the rights of refugees and the obligations of states to protect them. By providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees, the EU fulfills its obligations under these international instruments and sets an example for other nations to follow. They have provided temporary shelter and basic necessities, like food and medical care, as well as support for education and training opportunities for those who have been displaced.

In addition to these measures, the EU has also implemented visa liberalization measures for Ukrainians, allowing them to travel freely within the Schengen Area for short stays. This has made it easier for Ukrainians to access job opportunities and support their families, as well as facilitating people-to-people contacts between Ukraine and the EU.

- **Cooperation among European countries in education:** when a member state faces a significant influx of refugees, the EU aims to provide support to ensure that the responsibility is shared fairly among its members, particularly when it comes to education. One of the main initiatives undertaken by the EU in the Education field is the Erasmus+ program, which provides funding for mobility and cooperation projects in the field of education, training, youth, and sport. In addition to Erasmus+, the EU has also supported the development of partnerships between Ukrainian and EU educational institutions and has implemented measures to recognize qualifications obtained in Ukraine, which makes it easier for Ukrainian students and scholars to access education and employment opportunities in the EU.
- **School and teacher training:** there is a course on integrating migrants and refugees at school offered by the European Commission. During the course, participants reflect on and develop a set of targets, ideas and actions to support migrant and refugee children in their schools.

In spite of the help mentioned, IMF reports (Bird, Noumon, 2022) say that Europe could provide even more to support Ukrainian refugees, like helping them achieve greater integration into economies and the labor market.

c. Eu countries dealing with migrants in education: Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands

Some of the main European countries that have welcomed refugees in other humanitarian crises, such as the Syrian war in early 2015, have developed different strategies to deal with migration.

A study done by the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (Koehler, Schenider, 2019) compares the approach different countries have taken with migrants and their education. It analyzed Germany, Spain, Greece, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Turkey and Sweden. The country which got the best results was Sweden, therefore, this paper will focus mainly on the Swedish strategies.

Sweden

According to the Statista Research Department (Koehler, Schenider, 2019) in 2016 **Sweden** welcomed over 160.000 migrants coming from Syria, doubling the number of migrants in the country. Thus, it accelerated the development of educational strategies to avoid drop-out and educate the young. Here are some of the key approaches:

- **Free education:** Swedish citizens, as well as citizens of EU/EEA countries and migrants who have obtained the travel visa, are entitled to tuition-free education at all levels, including preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary school, and higher education. This means that students do not have to pay tuition fees for attending public schools and universities, nor for the educational supplies such as books, child-care and school menus.
- **Swedish Language Education:** One of the primary focuses of integration is providing language education to migrants. Sweden offers Swedish language courses to help migrants learn the language and integrate into society more effectively.
- **Social Support and Welfare:** The Swedish welfare system provides social support to migrants, including access to healthcare, housing, and financial assistance. This support aims to ensure that migrants have the resources they need to establish a stable life in Sweden.
- **Employment and Skills Training:** Programs and initiatives are in place to support migrants in gaining employment and acquiring the necessary skills for the Swedish job market. This includes vocational training, job placement services, and support for entrepreneurship.

- **Civic Education and Cultural Orientation:** Efforts are made to provide migrants with civic education and cultural orientation to help them understand Swedish society, values, and norms. This includes information on laws, rights, and responsibilities.
- **Collaboration with NGOs and Civil Society:** The Swedish government works closely with NGOs, civil society organizations, and local communities to provide support and facilitate the integration process for migrants. These collaborations help in addressing specific needs and challenges faced by migrants.
- **Anti-Discrimination and Diversity Policies:** Sweden promotes equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background. Policies and initiatives are in place to combat discrimination, promote diversity, and foster inclusive communities.

It's important to note that while Sweden has implemented these effective strategies, the country has also faced challenges in managing the scale of migration. Ongoing debates and discussions are held to balance the integration of migrants while addressing social, economic, and cultural aspects. Currently, fascist right parties are rising in Sweden against migration. Moreover, an interview with a Swedish refugee carried out for this paper exposes the counterproductive Swedish policies to welcome refugees.

d. Other recommended practices to welcome migrants in the European school system

Some conclusions obtained from the analysis above that analyzed the management of migrants and refugees in European countries, emphasized that by following the guidelines below, migrants were more likely to be included in the new society and perform better, which in turn, not only benefits the migrants but also the whole host-country. They consist of the following listed in the table below:

Bringing Immigrant and Working-class Children the Earliest possible	Give Opportunities and Facilities for “late bloomers”	Pay Attention to Parents	Discrimination is a Strong Negative Predictor for Becoming Disengaged
These children are highly likely to not need extensive	Facilitate the re-integration of students	Parents have to carry the emotional	Discrimination makes students apathetic

<p>second language teaching and support in later stages of their educational pathways, and it offers a low-threshold possibility for also making immigrant parents familiar with the educational system. To achieve this early education must be free.</p>	<p>for higher education who decide to go back to study.</p>	<p>weight of adapting to a new country and providing for their family, therefore it is fundamental that they feel integrated in the new community.</p>	<p>about one's school career, but also with society at large. Consequently, schools ought to educate students in tolerance towards the new-coming citizens and transmit the courage to inform against any sort of discrimination that they might ever witness.</p>
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Table 2. Concluded recommended practices provided by the Institute of Migration and Intercultural Studies in Europe study (2018)

Aims for the research

After the research done, a question arose: are teachers in host-countries promoting refugee's well-being? And more specifically, are teachers and schools in Barcelona prepared to meet refugees' needs and protect their well-being?

For the reasons mentioned above, the aims of this study have been classified in the following way:

Aim 1: *To discover the impact a teacher can have on the well-being of its students.*

Aim 2: *To find out how to support refugee children in their education.*

aim 2.1: *to understand the well-being challenges of refugees.*

aim 2.2: *to identify guidelines and strategies teachers can follow to welcome refugees in their classrooms and support their well-being.*

Aim 3: *To design a list of recommended practices for teachers who have refugee students in the classroom.*

aim 3.1: *To identify implemented practices to welcome refugees in host schools in Barcelona*

aim 3.2: *To identify Sweden's implemented practices to welcome refugees.*

Methodology

The method chosen is the **paradigm**, with a **socio-critical perspective**. There is a critical examination of existing social and educational structures to identify challenging situations that could be improved. The data from the questionnaires and interviews on how teachers and schools are currently including refugees in their classrooms in Barcelona and in other countries, serves to discover what is missing, or not, comparing it with the answers given by experts on how to protect refugees' well-being. As a result, a list of recommended practices has been elaborated to support schools that are welcoming refugees in their classrooms that could be used to welcome Ukrainian refugees, for instance.

Therefore, the **data** is **mixed** (from statistics and from the results collected through the questionnaires and interviews). The study conducted is **correlational**, as it observes the current situation, explains it, and comments on it to improve it. Overall, the **research** will be a **field study** since it seeks to describe what is the reality of the school system welcoming refugees.

The participants from the questionnaires that have participated in this study are thirty teachers that have Ukrainian refugee students in their classes, in different schools in Barcelona. The main research tools used have been interviews (to a refugee student and a Swedish teacher working in a school with a high immigration rate) and questionnaires (to thirty teachers). The procedure has been done through data compilation and coding of the collected data.

For the study, informed consent has been obtained by the participants and their names will be protected under anonymity. Moreover, the risk of harm has been minimized as the research has involved the fewest number of tests on the participants while ensuring that the data is scientifically valid. Deceptive practices have been avoided since all participants have been informed beforehand of the aims of this field study. Besides, the right to withdraw from the study has been provided as well.

Results and discussion

Regarding the **first aim**, *to discover the impact a teacher can have on the well-being of its students*, it has been fully developed in the theoretical framework.

The **second aim**, *to find out how to support refugee children in their education*, and their two sub-categories; **aim 2.1**: *to understand which are the well-being challenges of refugees* and **aim 2.2**: *to learn guidelines and strategies teachers can implement to welcome refugees in their classrooms and support their well-being*, they have been partially discussed in the theoretical framework.

In addition to discussing **aim 2.1** with the research, an interview was conducted with a refugee student in a European host country, Sweden, to make further comments on the refugee's schooling experience. (A) provided this paper with a personal perspective on the challenges she faced throughout her educational career when she arrived to Sweden in 2011, despite the support offered (or not) by the school and government.

(A) stresses the linguistic trouble experienced in the first years. The teachers had a hard time understanding her as they did not speak her mother tongue. In addition to this, the classroom in which (A) was placed was all refugees, which made it more difficult to learn the country's language, since there was no one fluent to teach the rest and everyone spoke in English to each other or in the refugee's mother tongue.

Moreover, (A) pointed out the lack of support during the adaptation journey that lasted from 2011 to 2014, according to her. She did not receive emotional guidance and did not want to go to school. As mentioned in the theoretical framework by Harris (2019), refugees might experience strong doses of cortisol, the stress hormone, during the moving and adaptation process. This stress can be extremely detrimental to the health of children and adults, as repeated activation of stress hormones increases the risk of diseases and limits the social and professional development of a person. (A) admitted to having experienced constant stress and "felt upset almost all the time", and "this lasted for about three years". (A) recalled to not have been accompanied by anyone during this process. The school did not assist the refugee students emotionally, and the curriculum did not provide moments in class to work on emotional education or dive into how the students were feeling. This three-year period of emotional distress and unmet emotional needs was quite harmful, as (A) detailed, for her education journey: (A) mentioned to have felt very disengaged from the whole school community and thus, did not want to go to class. As previously explained, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network highlights exposure to traumatic events such as migration can cause general symptoms of discouragement and disconnection from the social group, which are considered signs of distress (Peterson, 2018). Alternatively, students who experience school connectedness - the sense of being valued by their teachers and peers - have been correlated with better

school results and lower rates of substance abuse, violence, early sexual initiation, emotional distress and suicide, among others (Kim, 2021).

Some of these problems have been addressed by the Swedish government in recent years. According to a Swedish teacher interviewed (U), nowadays interpreters or cultural brokers can stay longer periods in schools to help teachers and students communicate. In the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Peterson, 2018), the use of cultural brokers or language interpreters is considered a strong support to welcome migrants into the new educational setting. Additionally, more resources have been invested to provide better guidance inside and outside the school, to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation of refugees and encourage community connectedness.

Another interesting aspect that (A) referred to is the positive change experienced in the family mood after being connected to a community. "Meeting people who could relate to us that we're in the same situations, and then through them when we met like Swedish people who were kind of supporting us to find jobs, definitely helped." (U) also shares the importance that the school gives to migrant families and try to involve parents as much as possible in the education process of children. In addition to this, (A) stated that the most important person in the adaptation journey as a refugee was a supportive friend who taught Swedish and "stayed by my side through it all". Without this friend "I would not have made it out."

Finally, (A) acknowledged that there has been an improvement in the education of refugees in Sweden, even though (A) was not able to reap the benefits of it. The interview also provided some ideas for improvement. (A) suggested teachers place refugees in ordinary school settings, in ordinary classes, if possible separated from other refugee students, because that would incite them to learn the new language and the adaptation process would be accelerated. (A) also recommended teachers provide more information about the education system, what the school expects of students and how to score better grades, since the education system from the home country to the one in the host country can be different.

Concerning **aim 3**: *To design a list of recommended practices for teachers who have refugee students in the classroom*, and its two sub-categories; **aim 3.1**: *To find out implemented practices to welcome refugees in host schools in Barcelona*, and **aim 3.2**: *To find out Sweden's implemented practices to welcome refugees*, a questionnaire was carried out to answer aim 3.1 and an interview to a Swedish teacher for aim 3.2. The

design of a list of recommendations has been written after taking into account the results and discussions of the participants involved and the theoretical framework researched.

To target **aim 3.1**: *To find out implemented practices to welcome refugees in host schools in Barcelona*, questionnaires through google forms were sent to thirty teachers working in private, semi-private and charter schools in the Barcelona area. The coding process was made using Atlas.ti (2023), a software tool to analyze qualitative data. The results can be grouped into three categories.

Regarding the category of teacher training and the concern about under-trained teachers in host-schools, the results revealed that 63,3% of teachers (19) did not receive any training, whereas 36,7% (11) did. This is concerning since it is advised by the European commission to have staff educated for this complex challenge.

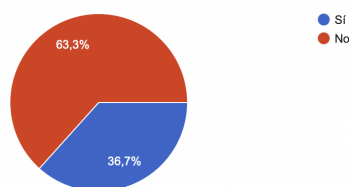


Figure 1. Teacher's refugee training results

Additionally, from the results obtained it can be extracted that *well-being* and *education* is something that is linked and very present to educators who have refugee students: the word *well-being* appeared in the collected answers the most (thirty-three times). As previous studies showed, teachers play a vital role in the promotion of children's well-being and can become allies in the protection of refugee children from traumatic stress and set the environmental conditions to include them in their new society.

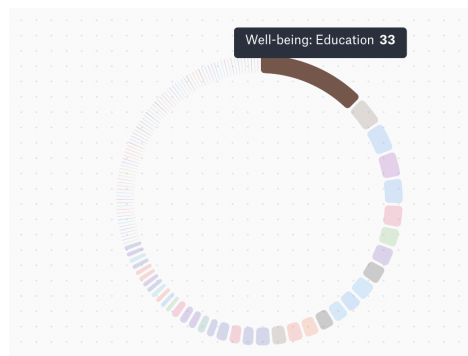


Figure 2. Amount of times well-being and education appeared when coding the questionnaires.

Regarding the second category of study, to analyze the support given to refugee students and the working practices implemented to welcome them, the results showed that all schools offered support at some point. They were mostly related to language; providing cultural interpreters for a while or offering extra language classes. This coincides with the main worry that teachers have when welcoming refugees: the linguistic barrier, which appeared in twenty-five answers. Most teachers, eighteen of them, also provided cultural understanding by talking about the conflict with the whole group and discussing the cultural differences that might arise. Accordingly, the second most used word in the answers was cultural diversity and sensitivity (nine times), which is fundamentally linked to the supports provided mentioned above.

It must be noted that ninety percent of the respondents (27), answered finding the supports given by the government lacking. This goes to show that there is a need to provide more funds to schools to handle refugees. In the question about which government funds teachers would like to receive, cultural interpreters, psychological treatment and more staff were the main demands.

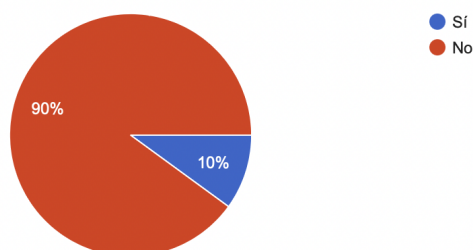


Figure 3. Teachers that find enough support given by the government

As for the third block it consisted of socio-emotional education. In addition to linguistic barriers, the second most common concern was behavioural and emotional issues from children. The words anxiety and depression came up eighteen times in the answers. This corresponds to the found research that explained why refugees behave disruptively, they might suffer severe consequences due to the events they experienced as a result of being displaced (Fazel, Stein, 2002). Nonetheless, in spite of presenting signs of distress, only five schools offered a socio-emotional program as a support for students.

Regarding **aim 3.2**, (U) opens up about the main difficulties that teachers have when they welcome refugees. The language barrier is the strongest adversity. Teachers believe that this must be the reason why many refugee students underscore. (A) also highlighted the

difficulty experienced regarding language. Due to this, (U) explained that the school system should integrate the students' mother tongue to teach certain subjects and use interpreters to communicate with teachers because, otherwise, migrant students have a harder time learning the contents of each subject due to the added language difficulty. (U) explained that the way the school promotes the acquisition of the additional language, in this case, Swedish, is something that must be revised and studied. For this reason (U) stresses the need to have better-trained teachers: they must have the tools to know what is the best way to teach the additional language. (U) states that "while there has been an improvement, it is not enough": not enough migration training which primarily should include additional language teaching. (U) believes professionals in the educational field are not adequately prepared to meet the needs of refugees. The need for better trained teachers can also be seen in Barcelona (questionnaires answers).

Moreover, (U) recognized the cultural shock refugee students experience when they arrive in the Swedish schooling system since it might work differently. That is why (U) pointed out that the school has created a "study support" to land the students into the Swedish curricula, something (A) did not experience as a student. Experts on refugee well-being recall the importance of promoting cultural understanding after they arrive in the host country, such as raising staff and students' awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences (Wu, 2018).

Concerning resources, (U) mentions the aid received by the Swedish government to provide support to the migrant students: computers, cultural breakers of the language of any kind for as long as it is required (though it is usually two months), free education and books, a higher ratio of teacher per student, among other things. This correlates with the analysis done in 2019 by the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies in Europe (Koehler, Schenider, 2019), which analyzed the management of migrants and refugees in European countries and concluded that Sweden children that have obtained a visa, are entitled to tuition-free education at all levels, including preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary school, and higher education, as well as civic education and cultural orientation to help them understand Swedish society, values and norms.

Summing up, (U) discussed that teachers "should take more notice" of emotional education programs, as there are many children who have been through hard experiences. (U) even pointed out that sometimes it is surprising to see "that they don't show more how they are feeling". SEL programs are recommended for refugee students,

as they have a higher risk of experiencing trauma. Social and emotional learning involves processes that help students acquire and apply the information, mindset and skills that they need to understand and regulate their emotions, create and accomplish realistic goals, engender empathy, and make responsible decisions (Dippold, 2021).

Finally, taking into account the data collected from the research tools: questionnaires, interviews and theoretical framework, **a list of recommended practices for teachers and schools** that welcome refugees **has been designed** (Appendix 1), ultimately fulfilling **aim 3: *To design a list of recommended practices for teachers who have refugee students in the classroom.*** The practices chosen have been selected according to their importance in refugee well-being, all equally important. Additionally, the available economic resources of schools in Barcelona have been taken into account, for this reason, this guideline advocates for low-cost but effective practices.

Conclusions

This dissertation arose from the preoccupation of toxic stress in refugee children and the positive role the teacher can have in enhancing their well-being. Specifically, this study sought to discover if the attention given by schools to refugees from Ukraine has been protective enough of their educational and personal development. All of the aims and questions have been answered.

The results of this study concluded that the lack of support given to refugees in education within host countries is a pressing issue with far-reaching consequences on the well-being of refugees. Insufficient allocation of resources, including funding, trained personnel, and adequate facilities, creates barriers that impede refugee students' access to quality education. Language barriers further compound these challenges, blocking effective communication and impeding their educational progress. The limited support and inadequate integration policies often result in missed opportunities for these students to develop their skills, knowledge, and social connections. This is frustrating as it is a barrier that can be eliminated with the implementation of adequate linguistic support such as cultural interpreters, additional language training and extra-curricular language classes.

In consequence, this lack of support has profound effects. Refugee students face difficulties in adapting to new educational systems, experiencing setbacks in their academic progress, and struggling emotionally to integrate into the host society. Educational exclusion perpetuates social and economic inequalities, depriving refugees of

opportunities to rebuild their lives and contribute to their host communities. Furthermore, the lack of socio-emotional support not only undermines the potential of refugee students, depriving society of their diverse perspectives, talents, and cultural contributions, but also declines the opportunity for all students to work through their emotions and their management. Indeed, carrying out a socio-emotional program is especially meaningful to battle toxic stress and all students can reap the benefits from it. As a reminder, toxic stress can be found in all schools and children from all sorts of backgrounds.

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. Host countries should prioritize the allocation of sufficient resources, including financial aid and qualified educators, to support refugee education effectively. Language support programs and tailored educational strategies can help bridge the communication gap and promote academic success. Furthermore, comprehensive integration policies, community involvement, and intercultural understanding initiatives are essential to foster inclusive educational environments that embrace refugees and their diverse backgrounds. The school should act as a weaving agent that connects children and families to the community.

Investing in refugee education is not only a matter of fulfilling basic human rights but also an investment in the future. By providing adequate support, host countries can unlock the potential of refugee students, empowering them to rebuild their lives and contribute to their host communities. Additionally, inclusive and quality education for refugees promotes social cohesion, cultural diversity, and the development of a more equitable and inclusive society.

To truly promote refugee well-being, it is imperative for governments, policymakers, educators, civil society, and the international community to collaborate and prioritize the provision of comprehensive and inclusive education for all refugees. Only through concerted efforts can we create educational systems that provide refugees with the necessary tools to thrive and overcome the challenges they face.

Considering the limitations of this study, it is important to bear in mind that the data analyzed is very small and not completely representative of the current management of refugees by teachers and schools in the catalan education system. To improve the validity and generalizability of this research study on refugee education and the role teachers can have to protect their well-being and education, further research should be done by expanding the participant pool. If this research could be continued, it would be useful to

extend the duration of the study to collect more data from diverse locations in Catalonia and obtain more information on the support that is effective or not and the issues that refugees experience that can be targeted to help their education process.

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Appendice

Appendix 1: List of recommended practices to welcome refugees. For teachers and schools in host-countries.

