

Refugee Week

Day 1: Who are refugee & children and families seeking asylum, & why is it important to support them in schools and education settings?

Key Information & Statistics:

Education for All:

Children aged 5-16, including refugees, must access full-time education (UK Education Act 1996).

Refugees in the UK:

In 2022, 7,324 children (16% of all refugees) arrived in the UK. Refugees in Gloucestershire come from 40 countries.

Challenges:

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are more likely to face school exclusion (7.8% vs 5.2%) and have attainment gaps compared to non-migrants (Education Policy Institute, 2024).

Definitions:

The terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' can sometimes be used interchangeably as they both refer to people who are moving from one place to another, however there is a legal difference between terms.

Refugee:

A person forced to flee their country due to feared persecution or violence, seeking international protection (UN Convention, 1951).

Person seeking asylum

(may be known as asylum seeker)

Someone who has left their country and applied for asylum but whose application is still pending. There is a legal right to seek asylum & they are permitted to stay while this process is taking place.

Migrant

A person moving from one place to another, temporarily or permanently. It can be an umbrella term to cover all types of migration.

Important Considerations

Every refugee child and family has had unique experiences and due to individual differences, such as resilience, past experiences and characteristics, each person will respond differently to their experiences, therefore it should not be assumed they will have adverse outcomes. Many refugees are resilient, can cope well with adversity, and can succeed with the right support (Rutter, 2003).



What is the Process For Seeking Asylum?

The Refugee Convention of 1951 grants everyone the right to apply for asylum in a country who is also part of the Convention, with permission to stay while a decision is made. The application outcome results in one of the following:

Indefinite leave to remain (full refugee status)

Temporary leave to remain for 1 to 5 years or until age 17 1/2

Asylum is refused, which can be appealed

The standard application processing time is 6 months. However, due to delays, many individuals are waiting for longer, with around one-third waiting for longer than a year.

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Some of the challenges for refugee CYP and their families

Trauma & Loss:

Refugee children & their families often experience trauma before, during, and after migration. It was noted that the impact of trauma can vary, with a distinct impact of whether the trauma was experienced in the home country, en-route or on arrival to the country of destination (Hart, 2009). For some, the traumatic events do not end when they reach the UK.

Many refugee families will have experienced time in temporary camps or travelled through countries where they were in danger. They may have experienced unsafe living conditions such as risk of physical harm; inability to meet basic needs including shelter, clean water and food; and loss, bereavement or trauma with no access to support for mental health or wellbeing.

In addition, parents of refugee children may have experienced their own trauma and loss, and may feel helpless when trying to provide the care, safety, and support for their families.

Challenges in a New Country:

Due to being unable to work while awaiting Home Office decisions, refugee families face financial challenges (unable to work), stigma, limited access to services, and language barriers, and the emotional challenges of awaiting a decision will impact on the individuals' wellbeing and sense of belonging.

What can schools and settings do for supporting refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people?

 **Strengths-Based Approach:** Focus on the child's strengths to enhance self-esteem and progress, using 'can do' & 'validating' approaches.

 **Parental Involvement:** Foster clear, welcoming communication with parents.

 **Trauma-Informed Care:** Use trauma-sensitive and culturally-aware approaches to build stability and trust, using collaborative and ethical practice.

 **Recognising Roles:** Staff to recognise what their roles are for supporting refugees and being informed about when and how to seek additional advice and support if needed.

 **Collaborative Support:** Work with educational psychologists to address needs and understand the impact of life experiences.

Teaching Resources:

Amnesty International "Seeking sanctuary" resource packs:

www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/lesson-refugees-and-asylum#.VfMH9n2y7W5

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/activities_-_seeking_safety.pdf

"Schools of Sanctuary" resource pack.

Resources - Schools of Sanctuary (cityofsanctuary.org)

Oxfam (<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources>)

Red Cross - Teaching Resources (www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources)

Refugees & migration teaching resources | Free humanitarian materials (redcross.org.uk)

References/Further Reading

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Mala German and Kimberly Ehnholt(2007)

<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-20/edition-3/asylum-2-working-refugee-children-and-families> The Psychologist.

NET (Oct 2015) Welcoming Refugee Children to Your School: An NUT Teaching Resource

Supporting Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children: An examination of support structures in schools and the community (Hek and Sales, 2002) Middlesex University, Haringey & Islington Education Department.

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