5.1 Working group recommendations for the development of the BKP

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D5.1 Working groups recommendations for the development of the BKP

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Project no. 101004717
REFUGE-ED

Effective Practices in Education, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for the integration of Refugee Children

MIGRATION-05-2018-2020: Mapping and overcoming integration challenges for migrant children

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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

The [REFUGE-ED](#) project identifies, implements and tests effective practices in education and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that promote the educational success, wellbeing, and sense of belonging of children from recent migration cohorts, refugees and asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors. Its main output is a Brokering Knowledge Platform which will communicate and disseminate co-created knowledge, resources and tools in easy-to use packages for people working with these children.

This report makes practical recommendations about the content, design, usability and functionality of the Platform. Its findings are drawn from 24 focus groups held across the project's pilot sites in six countries. The 120 participants involved represent a combination of teachers, support workers, family members, volunteers, and children. In addition, information from two project workshops which discussed the Platform is included.

An online community and resource

There is a clear demand for a platform of resources for those working with and supporting children from a migrant and refugee background. There does not appear to be an equivalent mechanism that currently brings together like-minded individuals in a community of practice, provides a bank of accessible resources, or inspires those involved to further develop their work.

Prioritising usability and practicality

The Platform needs to be easy to use, navigate and understand, as well as being relevant to the everyday experience of people working with and support refugee and migrant children, and to the children themselves. It is equally important to be able to access the Platform on a phone and being able to use it where internet connectivity is limited. Options for offline use need to be explored and a balance between interactive resources and more simple texts should be considered.

Appropriate and sustainable moderation

Careful consideration needs to be given to how the Platform is moderated. This is particularly relevant to any element of online chat or live facilitation which will require some degree of facilitation. Similarly, a need to keep the Platform updated with new content on an ongoing basis will be important, both during the lifetime of the project and beyond. Some form of moderation will likely be required when approving new content, both to ensure minimum quality standards are met and that abuse is prevented.

Adapting to different language and cultural needs

The majority of content on the Platform will likely be in English which will inevitably limit use amongst some groups of people. Options for translation should be explored and effort should be made to include original content in a variety of EU languages and to ensure resources can be quickly identified according to their language. There is also a need to include resources that can be adapted to different contexts and will be applicable to children from a variety of backgrounds.

Maximising the involvement families and communities

Opportunities for the involvement of families, parents and communities in the design and operation of the Platform should be explored, including developing and promoting options to connect schools with families.

2. Introduction

2.1 Work package and task objectives

[REFUGE-ED](#) brings together a consortium of partners from research institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to identify, implement, and test effective practices in education and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that promote the educational success, well-being, and sense of belonging of children (0-18 years old) from recent migration cohorts, refugees and asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors.

The project objectives are to:

- Map and identify best-practice and evidence-based tools and solutions in MHPSS and education for the dynamic, two-way integration of migrant and refugee children and their host communities.
- Engage all actors in a dialogic consultation and co-creation process to identify needs and the ways in which these needs can be successfully met.
- Co-create and pilot evidence-based practices and approaches according to the needs-analysis and considering equally each pilot site's context as voiced by each pilot sites' community itself (educators, stakeholders, children and families etc.).
- Implement pilots of the co-created practices across three pilot settings (reception identification centres/camps, schools, institutional care), in a total of 46 settings, in six European countries.
- Foster cross-intervention reflection and learning across different pilots.
- Monitor, document, and evaluate the consultation and co-creation process and its impact on children, caregivers and educators.
- Develop a Brokering Knowledge Platform to communicate and disseminate the co-created knowledge and tools in easy-to use packages. This Platform will be a new, community-based resource which will provide evidence-based high-quality resources, tools, and solutions for inclusive, supportive, and transformative learning environments and bring the co-created innovations to scale; it is the primarily intended output of the REFUGE-ED project and will be hosted on the project's website (developed in WP6).
- Maximise the reusability, scalability and sustainability of the identified effective practices by exploiting the Brokering Knowledge Platform.
- Maximise the visibility, reach and impact of the project by disseminating its results and outcomes.

This report (deliverable 5.1 of the REFUGE-ED project) informs the development of the Brokering Knowledge Platform (deliverable 5.3) by making practical recommendations about its content, design, usability and functionality. An external agency, [La Tempesta](#), has been contracted to develop the Platform and the findings of this report will be fed back to them.

2.2 Methodology and approach

The design and development of the Brokering Knowledge Platform prioritises co-production and consultation with partners in order to maximise its relevance, usability, and sustainability. As such, 24 focus group discussions and interviews were held with the participants involved in the REFUGE-ED's pilot sites (WP2: Dialogic co-creation and consultation with end users – see Appendix 3 for a short

description of the pilot sites). The participants were potential end users and beneficiaries of the Platform and were therefore consulted on their needs, requirements, and preferences (see Appendix 1 for the full list).

Discussions were held with a total of 127 teachers, support workers and other members of staff working with migrant children and refugees, parents and family members, and children themselves. Nineteen focus group discussions were held in schools and five with reception centres. Reflecting this, teachers represented the largest group of respondents (49).

Participants were asked a series of questions about the design and functionality of the platform and what their needs might be (see Appendix 2 for the list of questions). Partners then wrote up the discussions in a template, which were subsequently analysed to inform this report.

Additional insight for this report has been drawn from discussions held earlier in the project, including:

a) A Brokering Knowledge Platform brainstorming workshop (October 2021) attended by approximately 15 attendees across the REFUGE-ED project. The workshop lasted 90 minutes and took place on Teams using google jamboard as a common workspace and addressed two main questions: Who are the users of the Platform? and What are their challenges?

b) Brokering Knowledge Platform consortium feedback session held as part of the consortium meeting in Athens (December 2022). A mock-up of the Platform was developed during 2022 by an external consultancy which was reviewed by project partners to assess its 'look and feel', the content, its format, and Communities of Practice and Learning.

To maintain the anonymity of participants in the focus group discussions, this report does not name any individuals or attribute quotes directly to respondents. Where relevant, it will, however, note where responses and opinions vary according to the group of people participating (e.g. whether they were teachers or were support workers in a reception centre).

2.3 Limitations

It was not the intention to hold focus groups with every pilot site in the project, partly because the large number of pilot sites in some countries made this logistically challenging. While this deliverable does not, therefore, report on the experiences of every individual and organisation involved in all pilots, it nonetheless draws together a diversity of experiences and opinions across the pilots in terms of location and type. In several cases focus group discussions were held after completion of this deliverable. While the findings are not included in this report, they will nonetheless inform the development of the Platform and the ongoing delivery of the project.

Some participants in the focus group discussions found it harder to comment on the future design of the Platform. This was especially the case for some of those participating from reception centres or whom had less intensive involvement in the pilots. As the Platform has not been developed yet, it remained, to some, somewhat of an abstract concept and many did not have direct experience of using a platform like the one that will be designed in the project. In some other cases, the people involved in implementing the pilots had moved on and remaining staff – especially in the case of some schools – did not feel well qualified to be able to participate in the focus group discussions.

The views and opinions expressed by the focus group participants were often highly diverse and, in some cases, contradictory, offering opposing viewpoints. This report does not seek to quantify their feedback due to its qualitative nature but will, when relevant, note if opinions tended to be represented by a minority or majority of participants.

2.4 Report structure

This report begins with a description of the type of resources that could be usefully included in the Platform, in section three. Section four examines views on the Platforms design and operation, including discussing its functionality and factors that would encourage or limit people's engagement. How the Platform could be communicated and disseminated is explored in section five, before conclusions, recommendations and implications are outlined in section six.

The findings in these following sections report primarily on the views and opinions of the participants of the focus group discussions, but also reflect on the discussions held in the two project workshops described   above.

3. Platform content and resources

This section describes the type of resources and documents that could be included on the Platform, as well as identifying possible gaps that need to be addressed. It does not, however, seek to provide a comprehensive list of resources that could be included as this has been addressed elsewhere in the project (see project deliverable 5.4: *'Tools for training, social exchange and co-creation in inclusive and supportive learning environments for dynamic integration: existing resources and pending challenges'*). Reflecting the nature of the project pilots (WP2) and possibly the fact that some partners had not participated in the MHPSS training at the point of writing this report, most participants of the focus group discussions reflected on the use of Successful Educational Actions (SEA) within the project, rather than MHPSS resources and tools, although these were also discussed.

3.1 Purpose and objectives of the Platform

As has been discussed in section 2.1, the Platform is designed to provide an easily accessible location where practical resources, tools and information can be viewed and downloaded by people working with and supporting children from recent migration cohorts, refugees and asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors. While focus group participants were not asked directly about what they thought the Platform should seek to do, they frequently discussed what they felt its value might be and why it needed to exist.

Three main objectives of the Platform were described:

(a) To create a community and network: the biggest value and purpose of the Platform was perceived to be around creating something to facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge, bringing people together in a community which could help facilitate discussion and create an environment in which users could learn from one another. There was a strong desire for a platform to allow access to those more experienced than the users, with a wish to be able to access experts and their knowledge. Some more specific examples were also provided, including helping to enlarge networks of teachers involved in the implementation of SEAs. In most cases, the main value was felt to be in creating a community of teachers, but other groups of people were also mentioned, including volunteers in one instance (for example, outlining their expected roles and providing detail for them to carry out their responsibilities).

(b) To provide practical information: in line with the project's objectives for the Platform, participants frequently spoke about the value of it providing a practical source of information, tools and activities that were readily available and accessible. Having access to information that could be quickly used in lessons would, it was felt, make the jobs of teachers easier and reduce time spent on lesson preparation. It was also felt that having access to such resources would sustain activities in the future, allowing them to be replicated more easily. One participant referenced [Twinkl](#) as a comparative example of a platform with multiple downloadable resources for teachers. The Edmondo platform was also discussed as an example (this was an online bank of teaching resources, which closed in September 2022 – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmodo).

(c) To inspire: participants also discussed the value of having access to a platform so they – and others – could be inspired to develop and implement new activities, seeing success stories describing the value of delivering new forms of support to children. This would, it was felt, also have the potential to enlarge the network of teachers practising SEAs.

3.2 Demand for the Platform

For those that discussed demand for a platform, there was a high level of interest in using it in the future. Teachers in particular highlighted how it could make their work easier and how it could be directly applied, and that there was nothing currently fulfilling such a function. Teachers often recognised the growing need to provide additional and tailored support to migrant and refugee children in different settings but acknowledged that they did not always feel confident or knowledgeable in the skills, tools or activities required. Others felt that current communication between different stakeholders was often challenging and limited, and as such felt that a platform was needed to help share experiences and build understanding of what different actors were doing:

> *'Now the schools with refugees and migrants are growing in number, so such a platform with these materials will be useful for everyone having even one child from a different background in class.'*

Such interest was, however, subject to a number of important conditions and caveats, which will be discussed in following sections of this report.

A small number of respondents, however, felt less enthusiastic about the need for a platform, having sometimes used others and been somewhat sceptical of their value:

> *'I personally would not use such a platform when working with students in class. In principle, I do not use it, because it must pass through the hands and thoughts of the children.'*

> *'There are too many platforms like this – I enter such platforms less and less.'*

3.3 Content and resources

Respondents described multiple types of content and resources they would like to see as a part of the Platform and that would be useful to them in their roles.

3.3.1 Types of resources

Participants outlined a variety of resources that they felt should be a part of the Platform, including short videos and films, real world stories, downloadable resources such as worksheets and PowerPoint presentations, scientific and academic papers and evidence regarding different interventions and approaches, and texts and handbooks.

3.3.2 Themes, subjects and topics

Rather than discuss specific topics or themes, participants in the focus groups instead tended to focus on the broad type of resource needed, as noted above. However, some did provide examples, although these tended to focus on educational resources (for example, literacy and numeracy, as well as learning languages, supporting children with different learning needs, or how to support children coming from very different educational systems and approaches) rather than MHPSS tools and activities. This is likely a reflection of the large number of respondents from a school setting but also reflects the perceived importance of – and demand for – refugee and migrant children learning the language of their country of residence, as a critical means of integration (for example, tools focused on teaching vocabulary and grammar). It is also possible that it could reflect a limited awareness or understanding of MHPSS approaches and tools.

In other cases, examples included content focused on the wellbeing of children, advocacy, coexistence, integration, how to build and promote solidarity amongst children from different

backgrounds, addressing violence and promoting nonviolent relationships, methods of providing emotional support, how to discuss conflict, for example the Ukraine war, with children, creative materials focused on drawing or music, practical guides on how to deliver performances and shows, how to link to specific cultural or religious events, or assessment tools to determine the needs (especially language abilities) of children. Requests for content for older students were also described, noting that in their experience there appeared to be a greater focus on younger children, as was how to work with school administration to boost interest in the use of SEA methods and how families can support the process and get involved.

3.3.3 Principles of content

For content to be included on the Platform and to be most useful, participants of the focus groups discussions outlined a range of different principles and criteria that they felt needed to be met, which can be categorised as follows:

(a) High quality, trusted and transparent: material that could be trusted and that had fulfilled a minimum quality level was felt to be of particular value, in terms of having been verified or accredited by some mechanism (for example, a peer-reviewed academic article). This also concerned good practice examples which have been shown to work (and thereby helping to inspire those working with children to develop and deliver activities), as well as details of activities that had not worked and what had been learnt.

(b) Practical and relevant: reflecting earlier mentions of a purpose of the Platform being to provide practical information, participants expressed interest in content that was useful and geared towards people who are working with migrant and refugee children:

> *'Maybe it's a kind of practical resource that someone can pull off a website and, there you go.'*

As part of this, participants, especially teachers, noted that Platform content needed to be directly relevant to life within the classroom. Resources connected to the school curriculum were often popular (for example, wellbeing was currently seen to be considerable interest to the Department of Education in Ireland), with teachers feeling that content that they could easily slot into lesson plans, or form complete lesson plans, would be the most useful and popular. As such, simplified lesson plans, handouts, ideas for exercises and games, closing discussions, and questions to stimulate discussion were discussed:

> *'Something that was gonna fit into a model we already had in the school, which means that it's easier to get off the ground and easier to run.'*

> *'I wanted people to show me resources. I actually wanted somebody to say there's that and this is another one, and we use this.'*

Respondents often described a need for activities that could be lifted straight off the Platform and taken straight into a lesson without the need to be adapted or changed, noting that they frequently lacked the time to do design or adapt resources and activities themselves, thereby minimising the need for additional work to be undertaken.

(c) Adaptable and context-specific: participants also described the value of resources that could quickly and easily be adapted to individual circumstances. This could include, for example, being able to adjust to a specific language, a particular educational setting, different age groups of children, or the interests and needs of parents, to help facilitate their involvement.

(e) Outcome-focused: connected to earlier discussions of content that is useful, participants also described the value – and attractiveness – of content that has been shown to have a practical and demonstrable impact for migrant and refugee children, which was also felt to be an important part of convincing decision-makers to get involved:

> *'When people see something tangible...when people can see some sort of tangible resource and they're that the school is actually benefiting from and they're more likely to be positive about it.'*

(f) Easy to use: participants felt that content needed to be simple, easily accessible and at an elementary level, with participants frequently noting that other platforms they had used could be overly complicated or did not present the information quickly and in an easily understandable way, something they noted as being especially important when working with children (see section 4.3 for further information on usability and functionality of the Platform). Videos were seen to be very useful (see also section 4), especially for younger children who's reading ability may be more limited. Similarly, having an interactive component of the Platform to help connect professionals was felt to be useful as well as including creative and interactive activities, as these were often felt to be the most popular when working with children.

4. Use and functionality of the Platform

This section focuses on the Platform's future design and operation. It describes practical factors that would encourage – and limit – use of the Platform and sets out possible ideas to maximise its functionality.

4.1 Structure of the Platform and the overall framework

Participants of the focus groups discussions described different sections or parts of the Platform that they felt would benefit from being included. While very few participants outlined what they considered a full structure individually, the following description brings together elements discussed by different individuals:

- Descriptive information about the REFUGE-ED project, including an FAQ section. Whilst not discussed explicitly, this could also include details of the project's pilots, including good practice and recommendations.
- Practical resources which could be downloaded or shared, including:
    - Academic literature and research.
    - Examples of interactive activities, including videos of how to implement and deliver activities. These were felt to be more useful than theoretical knowledge and written information and viewing it was felt to help staff repeat activities.
    - Top tips.
    - Link to 'The Digital Backpack', a specific example from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education's new educational platform, a resource which is available to all teachers and that has potential to complement the Platform.
    - Self-evaluation content.
- Online chat / online community: a live chat to connect teachers and parents or being able to use live materials directly in the classroom, which could be facilitated by an individual who maintains the Platform and could act as a space to share experiences. This would, for example, allow users' live participation in lessons. Some concerns about the language of discussion were raised, however.
- Connections to other individuals and stakeholders: while this has similarities to an online chat space, it was more focused on facilitating contact between users through the provision of others' contact details and areas of expertise (including teachers), linking to local groups in the area, or providing a mechanism to connect directly to experts in the field. Video connection between participants via conference calls or a live connection to classrooms that enabled people to participate online in groups was also discussed.
- Member area: being able to create a personal profile that could be saved and a log-on area was discussed, including being accessible to parents.
- Feedback section: this could include being able to provide feedback after using one of the Platform's resources.

4.2 Descriptive information required

Participants outlined how they could practically use the Platform in terms of the different search terms, which included being able to filter resources by:

- Level or knowledge required to participate in the activity (e.g. starter / advanced)
- Cost, resources and time required for different activities

- Languages spoken / level
- Topic / theme / keywords
- School grades / class / age
- Setting (e.g. school / reception centre / other)

4.3 Functionality and usability

Participants discussed in detail the factors that would encourage or limit their use of the Platform and the different elements of usability and functionality that would be important for them, including:

- Ability to quickly and easily download resources, and ability to easily upload resources
- Strong visual identity, attractive and a simple and clear design with minimal text and good use of white space
- Inclusion of graphics, animations, illustrations and videos
- Interactive and creative
- Fully functioning on a phone
- Linking to Apps that are used by children
- Use of an App / delivery through an App
- User-friendly and easy to understand and navigate – ability to easily orientate within the site and quickly find the required information
- Accessible language – resources should be described in an accessible way, avoiding technical language (that some felt could be a feature of psychological resources). This was felt to be relevant to all users, but especially families who were felt to be an important part of the audience
- Ability to translate resources in to different languages and an easily identifiable way to show the language of resources (e.g. flags)
- Short and snappy – short materials, so as not to be overwhelming
- Ability to link straight through to the resource / activity
- Ability to send notifications to registered users when new resources are uploaded or adapted

4.4 Challenges of design and delivery

A variety of potential challenges in the development and implementation of the Platform were discussed, including:

- Ensuring content is relevant and up-to-date. Participants recognised the need to continually update content and resources and ensure the Platform is supported technically; a lack of up-to-date material would limit the value of the Platform and people's interest in it. While an easy-to-use mechanism to upload new content was popular, concerns around the potential for abuse of the Platform by individuals uploading harmful content was also expressed.
- How best to moderate the Platform and its chat functions. There was recognition that some level of continuous involvement by project staff would be required for online chat components to function well and that it might not be possible for the Platform to be completely autonomous. This was also felt to be important in the context of quality checking new uploaded content, and avoid anything harmful, as noted above.
- Lack of internet connectivity limiting access to the Platform.
- Ensuring resources are relevant to a variety of different contexts.

- Lack of time to familiarise with the Platform, a challenge that would likely affect teachers in particular, and the subsequent need to have a system that can be used immediately with minimal or no induction required. It was also noted that some parents and family members could find it harder to use digital media and would benefit from some support and training.

5. Dissemination and communication

As has been previously discussed, the Platform will be designed to be used by people supporting and working with migrant and refugee children, as well as their families. This section focuses on how the Platform can help facilitate cooperation between these different groups of people and how it can be communicated, disseminated and promoted to these audiences.

Reflections included:

(a) Use of social media: a variety of opinions were discussed, ranging from the importance of using platforms such as Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp or other informal means of communication to connect teachers to other members of the CoPL from different sites to actively avoiding Facebook, with one school group feeling that it was a negative space dominated by disinformation.

(b) Involving a diversity of users: reflecting earlier discussion of the wide reach and relevance of the Platform, participants noted that having a wide range of users from a diversity of backgrounds could help provide an international and inter-institutional bridge, as would encouraging connections between teachers and social workers.

(c) Involving parents: participants often described how they felt that parents and family members of migrant children and refugees needed to have an active role in supporting their children's academic success and personal wellbeing, and how the Platform could help facilitate this. It was felt to be beneficial to have them as active and comfortable users of the Platform to encourage two-way engagement and communication, with parents, for example, suggesting tools to use via online groups as well as gaining access to established tools. This was also felt to help foster relationships between students and parents, something that could boost mutual understanding of the topics and activities, as well as to boost understanding amongst parents of what their children were engaged with at school, allowing them to better support them. Practically, teachers often described the value of introducing parents to the Platform and its content, for example at parent's evenings, by using the Platform and its resources in family meetings in interactive groups, or by providing information to children to take home to their parents. This would be a means to *'get people talking about it, then people would be kind of engaging with the process more.'*

(d) Promotion between schools: schools were seen to be a key audience but one that didn't always network or share resources between one another. Connecting via the Platform by facilitating online meetings was felt to have potential, something that could progress to face-to-face networking and meetings.

(e) Promoting through a variety of mechanisms: other forms of promotion and communication were also discussed including through fun activities, such as festivals or competitions. Equally, participants mentioned that adverts and flyers could provide a useful function, doing more than simply sending out a link via an email.

6. Conclusions, implications and recommendations

6.1 The value of developing a Platform

This report highlights the demand for and value of developing a platform of resources for those working with and supporting children from a migrant and refugee background; those spoken to did not feel there was an equivalent platform that fulfilled this need. As the number of these children continues to increase in classrooms across many schools, teachers, in particular, often described how they would benefit from having access to guidance and content, helping to develop their capacity and confidence when supporting such children. Respondents also wanted a platform to help form a network and community in which they could exchange ideas and experiences, download and access practical resources, and be inspired in their everyday work. While most reflections focused on educational resources, MHPSS content was also described and seen to be of considerable value to those spoken to.

6.2 Recommendations for the development of the Platform

6.2.1 Prioritise usability and practicality

All participants described that for them to use the Platform regularly, it needed to be easy to use, navigate and understand, as well as being relevant to their everyday experience and that of the children they worked with. There is potential to connect to good practices emerging from the project and from other relevant examples as well as descriptions of common challenges and possible solutions. The importance of being able to access and use the Platform on a phone was commonly mentioned as was how to use the Platform in the context of limited internet connectivity, which may be a practical barrier to use. Options for offline use should be explored and a balance between interactive resources (for example, videos and online tutorials, which were often requested) and more simple texts should be considered.

6.2.2 Build in appropriate and sustainable moderation

Careful consideration needs to be given to how the Platform is moderated. This is particularly relevant to any element of online chat which participants felt needed some degree of facilitation. Equally, there was interest in live discussion with experts, again something that likely would need a degree of human interaction. Similarly, a need to keep the Platform updated with new content on an ongoing basis was seen to be important, both during the lifetime of the project and beyond. While it was felt this needed to be done in a largely independent way, participants also raised concerns that the process could be abused and would need some level of facilitation to approve and maintain the quality and appropriateness of newly uploaded resources.

6.2.3 Ensure it is adapted to different language and cultural needs

Language was a common issue raised in discussions. The majority of content on the Platform will likely be in English which will, unfortunately, limit use amongst some groups of people. Options for translation should be explored, but this may be more feasible for the Platform text itself, rather than the content of the resources which could be too costly and time-consuming to translate into multiple languages. Effort should be made to include original content in a variety of EU languages and to ensure resources can be quickly identified according to their language. There is also a need to include resources that can be adapted to different contexts and will be applicable to children from a variety of backgrounds.

6.2.4 Maximise the involvement families and communities

Opportunities for the involvement of families, parents and communities in the design and operation of the Platform should be maximised. This means drawing from the previous important experience from within the consortium on how to meaningfully link schools with families, and the Platform should be appropriately promoted to them.

Appendix 1: List of focus group discussions

Project partner	Country	Focus group details	Number of participants
Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud (CISS)	Italy	3 FGDs (two schools, one reception centre)	12 teachers, 1 educator, 3 family members
Trinity College Dublin	Ireland	1 focus group and 3 interviews (schools)	2 teachers, 2 teaching assistants, 1 school principal
Automomous University of Barcelona	Spain	5 FGDs (four schools and one reception centre)	15 unaccompanied minors, 10 students, 12 family members, 6 educators, 19 teachers, 1 principal, 2 canteen workers, 1 concierge
Save the Children Sweden	Sweden	3 FGDs (two reception centres and one school)	2 family members, 2 teachers, 5 volunteers, 3 other employees
KMOP – Family and Childcare centre	Greece	4 FGDs (four schools)	2 teachers, 3 principals
New Bulgarian University	Bulgaria	5 FGDs (two schools, three reception centres)	10 psychologists / support workers, 10 teachers, 1 student

Appendix 2: Focus group discussion questions

1. When starting the implementation, what resources were helpful? What other resources would also have been helpful

2. In addition to the information provided in the training, what information or resources are needed to ensure proper implementation of the practices and actions (SEAs/MHPSS)?

3. How do you think you would use the resources available on the platform?

4. What would make it useful for you to use the platform in your daily work? What should the platform have for you to use it often?

5. How should the design of the platform be? What are the three most important functionalities of such platform for you?

6. How can the platform promote interaction between schools, teachers, families, etc.? Any idea? How can you promote the use of the platform for families in educational centers?

Appendix 3: Details of the project pilots

As part of the REFUGE-ED project, pilots were held in 46 sites across six countries as part of WP2 (Dialogic co-creation and consultation with end users). The countries (Italy, Greece, Ireland, Sweden, Bulgaria and Spain) were strategically chosen to achieve diversity in the context of migration and the situation of the refugee children and included a combination of key entry countries into the EU and transit countries, and those that are considered destination countries and therefore have different integration strategies in place.

Pilots were held in three different settings:

- Reception and identification centres;
- Inclusive school environments, and social and learning environments;
- Institutionalised residential care targeted to unaccompanied minors and separated children.

Pilots were held in the following countries:

- Bulgaria (five pilots): three schools and two registration and reception centres
- Greece: (ten pilots)
- Ireland (one pilot): one school
- Italy (14 pilot sites): nine schools, one adult education centre, one reception centre, one community centre
- Spain (13 pilots): nine schools, three residential care facilities (recepton centres for unaccompanied minors), and one after-school program
- Sweden (three pilots): two non-formal education settings

REFUGE-ED

POLICYBRIEF 2

Needs and challenges identified while unfolding the REFUGE-ED dialogic co-creation Process: working with and for refugee children and minors

ABOUT THE REFUGE-ED PROJECT

REFUGE-ED: Effective practices in education, mental health, and psychosocial support for the integration of refugee children (2021-2023): Its main goal is to identify, implement, and evaluate evidence-based practices that can be implemented across diverse educational settings to promote the educational success as well as mental health and psychosocial functioning (sometimes collectively termed, mental health and psychosocial support or MHPSS) of refugee and migrant youth. Our reference to educational settings includes formal educational environments (e.g., conventional schools), non-formal educational contexts (e.g., in the case of youth centres or community groups), as well as to learning which occurs informally (I.e., self-directed learning such as independent research of a topic online). REFUGE-ED commenced with a desk review of effective practices and based on a dialogic co-creative process these practices have now been implemented across approximately 46 sites across Europe. To assess these practices in context, we use widely validated tools focused on academic motivation, well-being, sense of social support, and sense of belonging.

INTRODUCTION

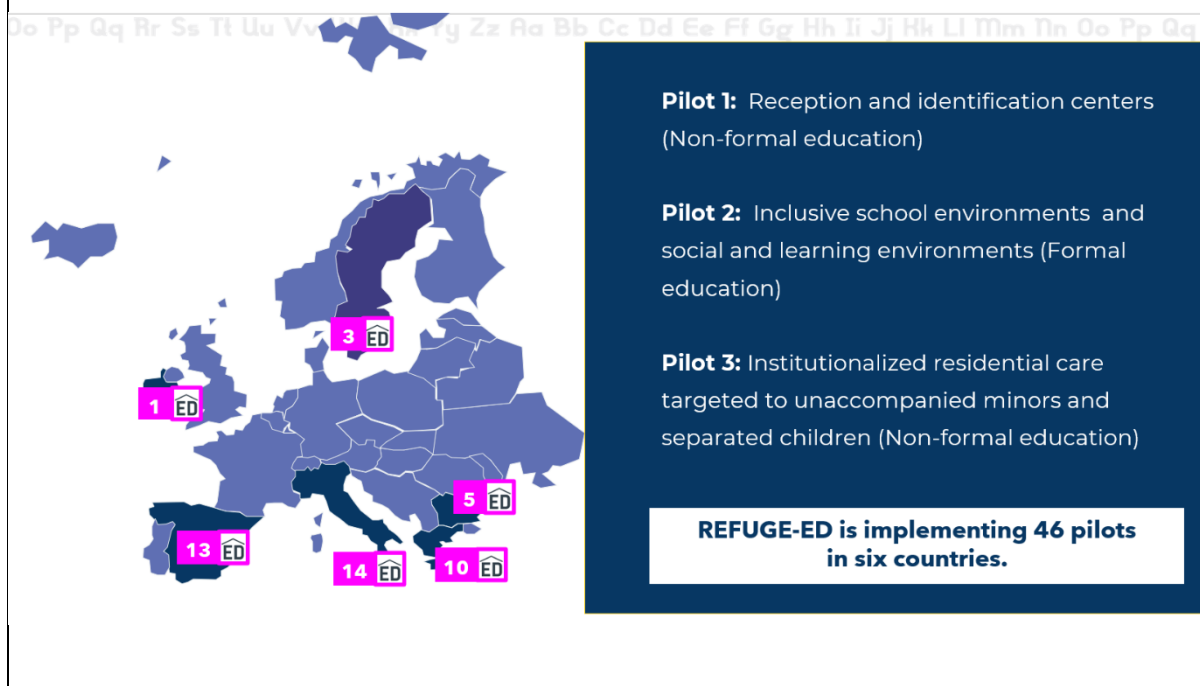The REFUGE-ED project is divided into five phases:

1. The mapping and selection of good evidence-based education and MHPSS solutions with proven evidence of social impact.[1]
2. The development of the REFUGE-ED dialogic co-creation process in which Communities of Practices and Learning (CoP&L) consisting of children, families, local service providers, schools, civil society organisations and policy makers discuss the needs analysis conducted and based on that chose and adapt the best solution for their specific context.
3. The implementation through 46 pilots in sites spread over six countries. There are three main types of pilot sites covering formal, non-formal and informal educational settings.
4. The evaluation of (1) any changes of academic motivation (a key correlate of academic success), well-being, sense of social support, and sense of belonging in pilots and (2) learnings from the process of conducting REFUGE-ED.
5. The development of the Brokering Knowledge Platform, which will make effective academic and MHPSS practices for migrant and refugee youth widely available for implementation across educational settings in Europe (e.g., practice guidelines, resources, as well as information on adapting and co-creating fit-to-context interventions).

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[1] Evidence of social impact is the scientifically supported proofs that have been obtained when a given research knowledge has informed policies or actions and these have generated improvements in society in relation to the objectives that enjoy a broad consensus (e.g. SDGs) and/or that have been set by democratically elected people.

The present Policy Brief 2 provides an overview of the analysis conducted as **Phase 2 of the REFUGE-ED dialogic co-creation process**, in which qualitative fieldwork was conducted to identify the needs and challenges faced across the pilot sites. This set the ground for the implementation of the education and MHPSS effective practices during the period 2022-2024.

Pilot actions were implemented as part of the REFUGE-ED project in six different countries: Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

Figure 1. REFUGE-ED pilot sites and typology

Pilot 1: Reception and identification centers (Non-formal education)

Pilot 2: Inclusive school environments and social and learning environments (Formal education)

Pilot 3: Institutionalized residential care targeted to unaccompanied minors and separated children (Non-formal education)

REFUGE-ED is implementing 46 pilots in six countries.

Fieldwork conducted in each pilot site

Based on the communicative methodology, the approach to fieldwork was flexible and adaptive across the various pilot sites, depending on each site's individual circumstances. In most centres an informal presentation by members of the REFUGE-ED team to teachers, professionals, and the whole community has also taken place as a starting point. Typically, fieldwork consisted of five communicative life stories with minors and families, five interviews with professionals, minors and families, five interviews with stakeholders such as volunteers, NGOs, public workers, and policymakers, and two focus group discussions with end-users and stakeholders. The focus of all the data collection and analysis was two-folded: on the one hand to identify main barriers and challenges, and on the other, what where their inputs and views on how to reverse them.

By May 2022, a total of 818 individuals have participated in the fieldwork across the six implementing countries. Their country of origin included: Italy, Spain. Greece, Bulgaria, Syria Morocco, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Ghana, Bangladesh, Gambia, Iran, Romania, Congo, Albania, Ireland, Guinea, among others.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The data collected have been analysed using a bottom-up approach, meaning that the knowledge has been built looking through the eyes of the interviewed people, summing up their own analysis. In this process, shared mental health and psychosocial support and educational challenges and needs, considering the main guiding thematic issues of the project (academic success, well-being and sense of belonging), have been identified.

These challenges and needs have been categorised into three groups: a) the main challenges and needs faced by end-users, b) the main challenges and needs faced at the centre/organization level, and c) the main challenges and needs faced at the stakeholders' level. In what follows we list some of them.

   a) **Students, end-users, families**
- Language barrier and language acquisition – There is a need to implement and use a structured approach for improving language capacities and communication.
- Fighting absenteeism and broadening the expectations of students and minors in terms of their aspirations for their own futures.
- Building trust between unaccompanied minors, mainstream society, and public services.
- In the case of refugee children, need to improve communication with their environment, i.e., parents, professionals, educators, teachers, and parental involvement in the school.
- Facilitate training on cultural diversity and incorporating families' cultures into regular school life.
- Promoting social interactions with local communities.
- Providing basic legal information to enhance autonomy.
- It is essential to prevent racism, harassment, bullying and other types of violence and discrimination by promoting safe spaces free of violence.

End-user's narratives in Greece, Ireland and Spain

Communication matters, Ireland
>First of all, communication. At the beginning, because that's the hardest process when the children start, and could feel alone. More support and information from the school. For the parents to feel more relaxed about how the process of your son integrating in the school. Communication, meetings. (Interview, parent).

Psychological support, Greece
>Some newly arrived refugee families have shared harsh and traumatic experiences during the daily life stories. Greek schools only have one psychologist and one social worker visiting once a week. Stakeholders clearly stated that one professional does not have enough time on their hands to provide adequate psychological support to refugee students, due to the number of students in each school (both refugee/migrants and locals). This made clearer the fact that extra psychological support needs to be integrated into schools with high refugee numbers. Some of the psychologists that participated in the research also elaborated on their struggles in terms of communicating with migrant/refugee children; the latter's needs are sometimes not covered, due to the absence of an interpreter.

Promoting social interactions with local communities, Spain
>The migration trajectories of the unaccompanied minors who arrive at reception centres are extremely hard. They must travel alone and most of the time without telling anyone in their home country, doing and discovering everything by themselves and dealing with the pressure and pain of all those whom they leave behind. Through the journey and when they finally arrive at the host countries, they find little support for facing cultural and linguistic shock. They develop a tendency to interact according to nationality, often socializing with those who share their nationality based on cultural affinity.

>Also, most public and private services where they can attend are specifically addressed to migrant people, so segregated from the rest of the citizens, creating barriers and hierarchies.

As stakeholders from reception centres explain, a key intervention to reverse this could be giving opportunities for them to integrate into the social life of the town and communities. Linkage between the boys in the centre and the life in town, people, associations help to reduce this loneliness and segregation. Educational and ludic spaces should be created, for the exchange and interaction between newly arrived and local communities.

b) Centre/organization level

- There is a high need to enhance communication between all institutions working with target populations and with all stakeholders.
- Introduce the culture of the migrant children to the teachers: there is a lack of cross-cultural educational material; there is a need for training on how to work in multilingual and multicultural classroom, thus, to promote the participation of the community into the centres as volunteers.
- Centres for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and high schools can do much more in terms of education: the training and learning offer (in terms of skills and competences) must be widened and needs to go beyond preparing minors solely to unskilled jobs. This same aspect is related to the expectations of children and minors regarding their future.
- Schools' and centres' leadership matter and is important: there is a need to involve families in the educative community in the whole organization of centres, as well as to promote communal spaces where end-users, professionals, and stakeholders can interact.
- Incorporating professionals of similar cultural and ethnic origin background as part of the centres' staff can be an advantage.
- Promote high expectations among the professionals to guarantee high standards in educational provisions of all children.

What is the situation in an asylum accommodation camp in Sweden

The main challenge that children face in the centre (asylum accommodation camp) is that the centre is an overcrowded and small living space with bad hygiene conditions particularly during the pandemic of COVID-19.

A 17-year-old child separated from his mother, her being an undocumented refugee in Sweden. The migration agency provided accommodation only for the child not for his mother. The child lives with an adult man in a room in the asylum accommodation camp 'Restad Gård' (name of the camp). He does not feel safe with the adult man and wants to be with his mother, but according to him, the Migration Agency does not listen to him. The child is from Afghanistan and living in Sweden for 5 years but does not have a residence permit. His asylum application has been rejected, but due to recent changes in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over the country, the Migration Agency has stopped deportation and has provided accommodation. Therefore, he has got a place in Restad Gård to live, however his mother did not. The youngster does not have the motivation needed to continue school since he does not know if he has the chance to stay in Sweden or not. In the beginning he says that he had the ambition to learn the language and study economy and business and become a professional in the future but now after years of uncertainty he lost his ambition and feel like he does not have a better future in this country. Due to not having a residence permit, things are very hard going, even at school. In the school system, there are some apps that share about the weekly schedule, free time activities and other documents that keep parents updated. However, to use the app, one needs a social security number (Swedish personnummer) that asylum seekers do not have and therefore, they cannot use those apps and other schools' material. Children also experienced isolation upon arrival to Sweden in an accommodation camp a few kilometres away from the city.

c) Stakeholders/surrounding community/policy makers' level

- Tailored capacity-building for teachers to be able to work in multilingual and multicultural classrooms
- Encourage families and communities' participation in key decision-making processes as a crucial element to develop policies and actions which are relevant for the constituencies.

- Promote actions that have already showed to be effective in promoting academic success,
- Lack of gender perspective in the design and implementation of services
- Addressing language barriers in access to administrative services
- Facilitating legal employment
- Strengthen public support units by incorporating more psychologists and professionals, who can accompany educators in the centres, but also children and minors in relation to MHPSS and include families, when possible.
- Municipality/politicians: understanding that integration and inclusiveness requires mutuality and reciprocity. Creating spaces for migrants and refugees to fully participate in decision making to embrace a more inclusive and mutual notion of integration.

What stakeholders interviewed in Palermo (Italy) explain about the needs at the community/policy-makers level?

The high rate of school drop-out and educational poverty affects children with foreign backgrounds, and locals too. Some students move outside Palermo and disappear. The only work of the school is not enough, there must be a broader support that can follow children from the primary school until the end of the high school, but also their families, to make them understand the importance of school.

There are no spaces where migrants can meet and share their lives together with locals, for this reason network and cooperation among sport and culture associations are essential. "*We should think to the well-being of the person from a horizontal point of view and not from a vertical/institutionalized level as it happens now*" [IT12_INT6] These spaces can also be an opportunity to develop a proximity relationship with locals, and to avoid of thinking about migrants as people in need of only food and house, but as people in need of everything, especially for children and their growth.

Children born in Italy from families of other origins are without Italian documents, and they cannot attend specific school activities, such as school trips abroad. There is the need to follow up with families about bureaucracy, as often minors do not have a GP (doctor). Moreover, simplified procedures would be needed, as well as having (institutional and school) documents translated in the most spoken languages in the city and explained through multi-languages tutorial. Another relevant aspect observed is the importance of non-formal education programs offered by NGOs and collaborator organizations.

KEY LEARNINGS AND TAKEAWAYS

Data collected points to (or 'highlights') six underlying aspects of key relevance across all the pilots' sites, and which need to be urgently addressed:

1. *High educational expectations for all children, youth and their families.* Since children and minors face difficult transitions between their home and educational settings in foreign countries, language acquisition of the host country is key without being a trade-off of educational opportunities. In this sense, inclusive and rich interactive learning environments are the ones which have showed to be most efficient in equipping children with both, effective language acquisition as well as educational opportunities.

2. *Protection against racism, discrimination, and race-related/Islamophobic bullying.* This implies establishing effective practices based in evidences of social impact in centres and schools that reverse situations of inequality and inclusion through the participation of the educational community and the creation of violence-free spaces.

3. *Need to include a comprehensive approach to MHPSS and prevention practices.* Include a comprehensive approach to MHPSS in all educational policies. The educational context is the most important setting outside the family for the development of mental health in children and minors. Therefore, the inclusion of the mental health perspective in educational policies will

conduct significant impact on the well-being and development of socioemotional skills that in turn translate into improved educational outcomes.

4. ***"In transit is our normal reality".*** Challenges posed by high temporality and high rotation of both users and of staff poses barriers in terms of planning, implementing, and assessing measured aid at supporting UMA social inclusion. But this must not prevent professionals and aid structures to do their work. Much more can be done if a tailored capacity building for teacher and professionals is ensured. Leadership at the centres' level, matter.

5. ***Inclusion of the gender perspective in the design and implementation of services.*** To this end, it is essential, on the one hand, to understand that gender is related to a sociocultural process regarding the roles expected of each person and, on the other hand, to understand the causes and consequences of gender inequality to overcome it. Including the gender perspective in the design and implementation of services and policies in the educational and mental health fields must be aligned with theories and practices that have been scientifically proven to contribute to overcoming this problem.

6. ***Promoting dialogic participation of the communities and professionals.*** Public sector agencies (especially those with which end-users often come into contact) must ensure that they create safe spaces in which they spend time with children and families to get to know them and their needs as well as to fully recognize their agency involving them in key decision making processes.

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