



# **Summary: Lessons learned and best practices report**

**Analysis and identification of best practices**

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Promoting educational success, promote wellbeing and a sense of belonging for children with a refugee or migrant background has been the ultimate goal of the REFUGE-ED project.

To this end, the project has identified, implemented, and evaluated evidence-based practices in education and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that have been shown to promote these goals for children enrolled in both formal, non-formal and informal education.

The project stands on social impact of prior EU research in the field of education and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) as well as the combined two fields. The core of its success is a dialogic process of co-creation involving all members of the education community, i.e., children and families, communities, civil society organisations and local service providers, school staff and teachers throughout the process.

The project has implemented these practices in 46 pilots in six countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, and Spain.

The following is a summary of important lessons learned from the project and how they can be used for future uptake of the SEAs and MHPSS approaches.

The full lessons learned report can be found here: [ADD URL]

## ONE-STOP SHOP FOR RESOURCES

The project has created the Brokering Knowledge Platform, which contains the co-created knowledge and opens up SEAs and MHPSS resources and tools to schools and other learning centres who want to strengthen their training or explore new practices, as well as to every teacher, educator or school looking for answers on how to properly integrate migrant and refugee children in diverse settings. The platform offers the possibility to interact with peers for the exchange of valuable material and experiences, continuing the process of co-creation of knowledge.

**Beyond evidence-based practices into those with evidence of social impact.** The practices available through the Brokering Knowledge Platform are carefully selected based on evidence of social impact. This sets this initiative apart from other existing methods in schools. Being this, the main added value of the REFUGE-ED project that differentiates it from other initiatives.

**Addressing educational and mental health and psychosocial wellbeing needs at once.** Through effective practices (SEAs and MHPSS) safe spaces are created in which children's psychosocial needs can be addressed. Many discussions and themes of wellbeing emerge from reading and reflection at the Dialogic Gatherings (one of the SEAs). SEAs have demonstrated their contribution not only in the instrumental dimension of improved learning and academic performance, but also in the development of safe spaces where children feel confident to share their stories, in the reduction of conflicts in the centre, by promoting pro-social behaviours. Thus, the inclusion of the MHPSS approaches is aligned with the main features of the SEAs in terms of involving the all the community members. In this way, the results are the product of addressing education hand in hand with children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.

## CO-CREATION PROCESS AND PLANNING

**Egalitarian dialogue builds trust and interest among all participants.** Each step in the process is a link in a chain. They are interconnected and a result of the previous process. Understanding the needs and having access to the scientific evidence via the Brokering Knowledge Platform is key in

this process. The egalitarian dialogue involves the inclusion of the community in the decision-making process which cements a relationship of trust, commitment and interest between all stakeholders. Without egalitarian dialogue, the trust and interest, the expected impact cannot be achieved.

**Anyone can contribute to co-creation.** Co-creation process implicates the involvement of all stakeholders along the project. It is a step forward in the democratization of scientific research. This means that everyone can contribute to the collective construction of knowledge. The communicative methodology helps to break down hierarchical interpretation gaps.

**Contextualising without hindering the core elements of SEAs and MHPSS.** Each context is different, so the identification of needs through a dialogic process of co-creation is the starting point for determining possible adaptations needed. This must be done without changing the key elements of the SEAs and the MHPSS approaches. In both cases, while a set of aspects can be changed and adapted to the contexts, other crucial aspects might not lead to the expected good results.

**Meaningful participation of the community in decision-making.** Involvement of the wider community and stakeholders leads to more positive and effective outcomes. The mobilisation of administrators and teaching staff through the dialogic co-creation process has been shown to be a motivation to also participate as volunteers in the project's activities. It is useful to provide educators with a comprehensive guide and a schematic picture of the activities at the beginning of the project, for them to have a more concrete idea on when and where they should put more effort.

**Co-creative selection of practices.** The Brokering Knowledge Platform contains effective practices (SEAs and MHPSS approaches). Discussions between the stakeholders lead to an agreement on which practices can best achieve the agreed objectives. The dotmocracy method is a useful way of involving the whole school community in selecting which of the priorities identified in the needs analysis should be addressed first.

**Setting up Communities of Practice and Learning (Co&PL).** Setting up a group of members of the educational community involved in the implementation of the practices is key at each stage of the project. Co&PL should be set up in each educational setting.

**Timing is fundamental.** It's important to consider the timing of implementation both with the school year, and the availability of all stakeholders. Teachers and educators must have sufficient time to participate in activities and meetings and workshops must be planned at times that are suitable for all stakeholders. This is a challenge that requires careful planning but is critical to success.

**Crossing the language barrier.** Language is an important barrier to overcome to promote community participation. Experience has shown that having people from the community who also speak the host language can help to improve communication. In some cases, the people of the community (mothers, fathers, members of nearby organisations etc.) can serve as a language bridge. Another recommendation is to suggest exploring translation options further with communities to better understand their translation needs and conduct an analysis of the available resources to see in which ways these needs can be better fulfilled. This will increase stakeholder engagement and help build trust and rapport between stakeholders and the research team.

## TRAINING

**Training adjusted to site circumstances.** Needs for additional training vary from context to context, and identification of training needs is part of the dialogic co-creation process. The Brokering

Knowledge Platform contains several open source training resources and the online Co&PL can help identify further options for training, linking with subject matter experts etc.

**Frequent and systematic follow-up.** Formal and informal communication and coordination within communities throughout the whole implementation period facilitate the creation of a path of action for adapting to context and changes. Teachers and educators learn new effective practices for the inclusion of migrant children and get in touch with other peers to feel more part of a learning community.

**Experiential training.** Experiential training allows teachers and educators to observe how effective practices should be implemented and observe the improvement of the school environment and how children's attitudes towards learning enhanced. For instance, during the REFUGE-ED project online training sessions were arranged to receive training of experienced educators in implementing SEAs. Visiting schools that have a long experience in implementing SEAs for the professionals and unaccompanied minors provides an opportunity to see how they look like in practice. The CoPL on the Brokering Knowledge Platform can be used to facilitate contact between different learning environments for exchange of experiences.

**The need to provide training on MHPSS.** Many educators and teachers express the need for training in mental health and psychosocial wellbeing aspects and the improvement of coexistence, especially when dealing with children of migrant backgrounds and socially diverse centres. Resources on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is available in the Brokering Knowledge Platform.

**Training open to the whole community.** An essential component of Successful Educational Actions is the involvement of the community in the teaching-learning process as well as in decision-making. Training is not only promoted and delivered to school staff and students but is also open to the community. This has proven to have a positive impact on community empowerment and capacity building, as well as a better relationship between families and the school.

**Continuous training.** Apart from initial training, it is essential to promote continuous training with teachers and educators. At this point, one of the Successful Educational Actions focuses precisely on engaging teachers and educators in comprehensive professional development based on scientific evidence under the principles of dialogical learning. Thus, the Dialogic training for teachers consist of collective reading and discussing meetings where participants build collective knowledge to transform their practice in education. This SEA has demonstrated its contribution to a reflective collaborative process. Moreover, the systematic and frequent implementation of this action has proven to have a positive effect on the sustainability of the other SEAs.

## PROMOTING COMMUNITY AND SHARED LEARNING

**Community of Practice and Learning on the Brokering Knowledge Platform:** It is highly recommended to participate in the forums available on the Brokering Knowledge Platform. In this way, the exchange and collective construction of knowledge is promoted at the same time as support networks are created, which might guarantee the sustainability of the actions once the project ends among those who have received the training and have implemented the actions.

**Other Communities of Practice and Learning (CoP&L).** A number of bottom-up networks and resources have been created to provide support and guidance to new schools, encouraging them to implement the practices. This has undoubtedly allowed the implementation of the practices to take

place in a more fluid process, where the community is empowered and connected to each other. Some of these are mentioned below:

- **SEAs:** Learning Communities in Latin America, Association for evidence-based education in Asturias, Euskadi, Valencia, Madrid, Cantabria to mentioned a few. In addition, the permanent support of the CREA research group. Today, these networks and others have ensured the sustainability of the implementation of SEAs in countless centres worldwide. More than 15,000 centres implement one or more SEAs worldwide.
- **MHPSS:** The Resource Library of the PS Centre and the resources section of the MHPSS Collaborative bring together a wide range of materials and resources for those centres or individuals interested in implementing MHPSS practices. Besides, there is also a platform The Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Network, for connecting people, organisations, and even other networks, through which materials can be shared.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**Implementation tailored to the needs and realities of each context.** Adaptations can and should be made throughout both the co-creation process and the implementation as situations and contexts shifts. For instance, in centres with a high turnover of children, educators tend to prioritise literacy and language learning over educational development in other disciplines. High turnovers make it difficult to implement a practice to address long-term educational needs. Working with articles or shorter classic stories rather than longer novels in reception centres and refugee camps is a good practice that engages children even though they may only participate for a shorter period.

**Language and communication challenges.** Language barriers add complexity making it difficult for children to fully collaborate with each other. Practices such as Dialogic Gatherings fosters language learning as well as the development of an inclusive environment where children help each other. The REFUGE-ED project has shown how host pupils help and encourage their peers who have difficulties with the language during the Interactive Groups and Dialogue Gatherings (SEAs), thus contributing to a good learning environment.

**Turning difficulties into possibilities. Challenges in non-formal and informal settings.** Despite the high turnover of children, non-formal and informal settings (centres for unaccompanied minors and refugee camps) may find it difficult to recruit volunteers. Unlike schools, where most volunteers are parents and family of children, it can be much harder for various reasons to involve parents. In this case, the participation of members of associations surrounding the centres, as well as administrative staff of the centres, should be promoted. Community participation, extended to everyone surrounding the centre, is useful and valuable. In many centres where SEAs are implemented, the volunteers are university students in need of internships, retired people, exchange students, etc.

**Ethics.** To protect the dignity, rights and welfare of participants, all the activities must carried out in compliance with ethical principles and applicable international, EU and national law. Special attention must been paid regarding the participation of children and youth in the project. The Brokering Knowledge Platform contains a section about the safeguarding of children, but it's essential for all educational centres to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and policies in this regard.

## EVALUATION

**High quality evaluation process.** REFUGE-ED capitalised on the social impacts of prior EU research in the field of MHPSS and education, using the Supportive Process for the Inclusion of Children's Experience (SPICE) under the framework of the communicative methodology of research, as part of the dialogic co-creation process. It included diverse and complementary data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative, which gave a more comprehensive understandings of the project's outcomes. The Brokering Knowledge Platform contains tools for evaluating actions.