

INTO Submission to Joint Committee on  
Education, Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

**Education and Supports  
Provision for Displaced  
Ukrainian Students**

**May 2022**





## Introduction

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the largest teachers' organisation in Ireland representing the trade union and professional interests of over 50,000 members in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The INTO welcomes this invitation to outline issues that Irish primary schools and special schools face as they welcome Ukrainian children to their schools.

Hundreds of thousands of children and young people are fleeing the war in Ukraine into the European Union. Latest figures indicate that nearly 30,000 refugees have arrived in Ireland, approximately 6,000 of which are children or young people. These children need to have access to education, ensuring a fundamental human right, and providing a sense of normality, having suffered the trauma of war and displacement. In this context, Ireland and other European countries face the challenges of including these children quickly, taking care of their specific educational and care needs, providing sufficient help to learn a new language and helping them to become comfortable in their new environment.

Beyond academic learning, education offers a protective environment that is even more relevant to crisis-affected populations, particularly children (UNESCO, 2022). Many Irish primary schools have already welcomed children from Ukraine and INTO commends the swift response and compassion demonstrated by school communities. This is an evolving situation and will require ongoing monitoring and review.

In that regard the weekly meetings between education stakeholders and Department of Education officials, which INTO sought in early March have been very beneficial. These meetings are scheduled to continue until 29 June, but they will most likely be necessary well beyond that date.

INTO welcomes this opportunity to outline some supports that schools will require over the weeks and months ahead as children from Ukraine continue to arrive to various parts of the country.

### 1. Curriculum provision

Some countries such as France, Germany and Finland have established preparatory classes or 'bridging' classes to provide children with the necessary skills (including language skills) to transition to primary school and promote children's balanced development and integration into society. An alternative approach is to facilitate early immersion within mainstream classes and curricula, with additional specific support to accelerate social and academic learning. There is a growing trend in a number of jurisdictions to provide in-class support to migrant students to develop the language of schooling parallel to subject-specific knowledge employing innovative, inclusive, and multilingual pedagogies.

The provision of additional support similar to that afforded to schools as part of the Covid Learning and Support Scheme (CLASS) would be useful for Irish primary schools to provide



targeted support for pupils who have been impacted by war and trauma. Under the CLASS programme this academic year (2021-2022) teachers are providing additional teaching support for pupils who require targeted intervention to address their needs. The granting of additional hours to schools as a response to the current humanitarian crisis would be helpful in supporting co-curricular activities that could reduce the negative impact on children's wellbeing and foster pupils' sense of safety, calm, efficacy and connectedness (Hobfoll, 2007). Schools are encouraged to consider methodologies best suited to promoting meaningful inclusion such as team-teaching and small-group teaching. The allocation of additional hours would be of immense benefit in facilitating such approaches and allow children to engage within the mainstream class with the targeted support required, thus ensuring that they are not segregated from peers for valuable aspects of classroom learning as would be the case if they were withdrawn.

Children arriving from Ukraine will have individual needs which will require unique, targeted interventions. This approach is being implemented in Finland where individualised programmes are being prepared for pupils according to their learning goals. Special Education Teachers will play a fundamental role in supporting newly arrived children and collaboration with mainstream class teachers and EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers will be crucial. Allocation of additional Special Education Teaching (SET) hours would help facilitate this planning in schools which find themselves accommodating significant numbers of Ukrainian pupils. Schools whose populations have increased by more than 10% should be granted extra SET support from September. Where children with complex special educational needs present to schools the Department of Education must respond quickly with the provision of places in special classes and/or special schools as appropriate to meet the additional needs of these pupils.

Most countries, including Ireland have access to educational materials and pedagogical innovations which were developed during the pandemic and these can be enriched with the specific materials of Ukrainian language and other home languages. Adding to these existing suites of resources will be of great assistance to teachers. The Department of Education has made progress in this regard and content has been curated on the *Scoilnet* website which is accessible to all schools. Other examples of good practice in this regard include the Erasmus+ co-funded project "*EDINA - Education of International Newly Arrived migrant pupils*" (developed by policymakers, schools, and researchers from Finland, Belgium and The Netherlands) and '*Micreate*'. It is important that the working group involved in the Department of Education's initiative continue to review and refresh materials to ensure resources within the toolkit are up-to-date, appropriate to the Irish context and evidence based.

Play is 'the work of the child' and provides children with opportunities to express their feelings and deal with their emotions, as reinforced in the 'Aistear' Framework. Providing opportunities for pupils to engage in creative activities will help to enhance their learning. Teachers are skilled in integrating drama, music and art into various curricular areas. An emphasis on Arts education can enrich pupils' learning experience and support their



socioemotional and cognitive development. Increased funding must be allocated to schools to provide concrete materials and learning resources to create suitable, well-equipped learning environments to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Allocating additional funding may also help to provide opportunities for children to engage in partnerships with the local community to deepen their cultural awareness and promote socialisation.

## 2. Language provision

Language is the primary means of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication and is key to the development of the child as a person (NCCA, 2016). Access to knowledge within the curriculum necessitates that children understand and can use increasingly complex language at each class level. Language plays a critical role in allowing children to interpret experiences, explore ideas and emotions and gain an understanding of the world around them and therefore language constitutes the first barrier to the integration and socialisation of Ukrainian children in Irish primary schools.

Children arriving to schools in Ireland from Ukraine may have limited English skills and it is imperative that appropriate, timely supports are available to help learners with English as an Additional Language. In the short-term, the INTO welcomes the provision of additional EAL teachers to schools where the need is identified in response to the arrival of Ukrainian children. The provision of language support for scoileanna gaeltachta and gaelscoileanna is also welcomed. It is important to emphasise that these children will need sustained support over time and therefore the current fast-tracked application process for additional EAL hours must continue beyond the end of this school year. There has been insufficient professional development for teachers regarding the teaching of children with English as an additional language and this must be addressed by the Department of Education as a matter of priority.

On a whole-school level, creating a learning environment that supports inclusion is crucial. When children experience their language being acknowledged it encourages a sense of belonging and can also have a positive impact on their readiness to learn. INTO is committed to inclusion and embracing diversity within schools and there are many examples of schools encouraging the use of native languages/mother tongues in line with the aim of the Primary Language Curriculum to “*nurture their appreciation of their home language, their understanding of language diversity.*” (PLC, 2019, p.27)

Access to home language instruction (including teaching materials), encouragement to speak existing languages on a day-to-day basis and the creation of a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds is crucial. These elements foster children’s sense of belonging and bonding, personal identity and bridge the gap between home and the school. INTO has been to the fore in providing such support for teachers through



spring and summer courses on Diversity which include content on language teaching and learning. Linguistically responsive teachers are aware of the nuances of language knowledge and use. They understand that a child who is learning a new language needs encouragement and involvement, rather than exclusion and othering. They also understand that by using the languages of their pupils they are benefiting the learning experience of everyone involved, while affirming the importance of each child's linguistic and cultural identity. Being a linguistically responsive teacher does not mean changing the curriculum, but welcoming discussions about language across all subjects, including opportunities to do homework in a language chosen by the child, encouraging all children to use all their languages when learning about a subject (for example writing down terminology about a geography topic in many languages). Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers designed centrally by the Department of Education is a key factor to enable teachers address the needs of EAL pupils in their care.

It is also important that communication with pupils' families is facilitated in a language that they can understand. For many children with EAL, partnerships between the primary school and their homes are critical for planning for and supporting their language learning. INTO emphasises the importance of ensuring that translators are available to schools who require such services to avoid the unacceptable practice of asking pupils or other children in the school with the language to provide translation. Parents of children must feel valued and empowered. When teachers and schools show interest in the families' languages and cultures, their identity is validated, and they feel a renewed sense of welcome and interest in who they are. Often this openness leads to parents feeling encouraged by the school to embrace their linguistic and cultural identity and also augurs well for cooperation and discussion between school staff and families. In the current context where parents may be reluctant to share information about recent experiences and engage in conversation on sensitive topics, the establishing of trust is critical. Parents may then reach a stage where they are comfortable sharing personal information about their child that will enable teachers and school leaders to plan the most appropriate support for the pupil to meet their unique needs.

Communication with parents/guardians may be a role for Home School Community Liaison Teacher. In their interactions with parents/guardians, the HSCL teacher must be informed and mindful of the needs of EAL learners and their families. Where schools do not have a HSCL teacher, there is merit in assigning responsibility for liaising with families to a member of staff with whom they can establish a trusting relationship. Schools have shared their experience of assigning a liaison role to one EAL teacher who would be a point of contact for parents/families. Where this is deemed an appropriate response in a particular context, these teachers should receive targeted training in this area (including managing challenging and sensitive conversations as mentioned above). Consideration should also be given to the appointment of co-ordinating teachers who would liaise between families and schools in areas



that are outside of the home-school community liaison scheme, akin to the model of rural co-ordinators that existed prior to the decade of austerity.

### **3. Psychological support**

Refugee children often face psychological challenges linked to recent arrival in the country, interruption to schooling, separation from family and friends and traumatic experiences in their native countries. These challenges may result in psychological and educational problems, with different degrees of severity and should be addressed with professional responses and continued psychological support to strengthen resilience and social inclusion and address mental health issues of those in need.

In the case of children arriving from Ukraine, the traumatic conditions that they endured in fleeing from war could have a lasting negative impact on their development. These children must be provided with the therapeutic services they require in a timely manner, preferably on an in-school arrangement. Such integration of psychological support as part of the educational practice in school will help mitigate any learning delay while caring for social and emotional wellbeing. The interdepartmental approach to specialist services adopted in the formation of Regional Education and Language Teams (REALTs) across the country is a positive development. It is important that these teams are sufficiently staffed to ensure that queries from school leaders and Ukrainian families are addressed with minimal delay and to assist with the provision of appropriate school placement as early as possible.

Social and emotional support should be embedded in a broader and cross-sectorial scheme to take account of all children's specific needs. Support from National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in this regard is welcomed by INTO, although, the long-term issue of a shortage of educational psychologists in the country remains a huge cause for concern. To raise awareness of refugees' specific needs, all school staff should be equipped with the appropriate competencies and skills through the provision of high-quality CPD, however, teachers must not be expected to take on the duties of other professionals.

Where the need is identified by a school and confirmed by a therapist, schools welcoming children who are enduring the effects of extreme trauma should have access to play, music and art therapy on site provided by professional practitioners. Supports such as this could prove to be cost saving as there would be less demand on other services provided through NCSE, TUSLA and the HSE.

Teachers' own mental health and well-being needs to be supported through access to counselling and other professional support services to help staff deal with the challenging context in which they teach. Teaching children with serious social and emotional difficulties, in addition



to learning difficulties, requires significant emotional and physical energy and resilience from teachers.

#### **4. Other supports**

In addition to the key requirements outlined above regarding curriculum provision, language provision and psychological support, the INTO outline additional supports that are vital to enable schools meet the needs of Ukrainian children in their community.

##### **(i) Additional staff**

Schools cannot face the challenges of integrating refugees alone. To ensure that schools can meet the needs of all children, it is essential that sufficient staff are available. The INTO has consistently advocated for smaller class sizes to align with OECD average.

Since March the Department of Education has been handling schools' applications for extra mainstream teachers on a case by case basis. The INTO demands that for the duration of this latest crisis when a school which has enrolled Ukrainian children reaches the appointment figure for an additional mainstream class teacher, the extra teaching post should be approved immediately.

As outlined earlier in this document, a multi-agency approach is needed in supporting Ukrainian children at this time of crisis. It is imperative that support teams and agencies have adequate staff to respond to critical needs in our schools. NEPS are already under-resourced and if additional staff are not available, the children in need of targeted supports and interventions will suffer greatly.

Including staff with Ukrainian language competences will help to support integration of refugee children.

The success of the supply panel scheme will help to ensure that teachers are available to alleviate any pressures regarding substitution. This scheme should be made available to every primary and special school and must be supplemented in areas where further needs arise

##### **(ii) Continuous Professional Development**

To meet the diverse needs that refugee learners may have, teachers need to adjust teaching and learning to the specific needs of the newly arrived migrants and refugees. Important aspects are the educational staff skills and expertise to address psycho-social needs of refugee children – trauma in particular - and to teach in multi-lingual, multi-cultural contexts. Access to specialist advisors through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and CPD programmes are also required.



In the short term, given the pressures of schools, guidance for teachers should focus on the most immediate needs including:

- Raising staff understanding of past and present experiences of refugee children
- Applying whole-school approaches for the induction of refugee children into the school community
- Providing additional support for children's social and emotional learning and wellbeing
- Implementing effective strategies to ensure the safety of newly arrived children in the school environment and when using the internet
- Forming a supportive partnership with parents/guardians.

### **(iii) Collaboration**

As noted earlier in this document, a whole-school approach must be adopted to ensure continuity and consistency for pupils and staff. This encompasses a process of reflection, planning and a review of policies and practices including an evaluation of interventions that are put in place to meet the needs of pupils who are identified as requiring additional support. A whole-school approach should address the full continuum of needs.

In the school setting, time and space for colleagues to engage in planning and review of pupils' learning and development is important and the allocation of time and supports including webinars and meeting time to schools would be helpful in facilitating this important discussion and inform preparation for teaching and learning.

### **(iv) Communities of practice**

Enabling staff exchanges, peer learning, and peer support among teachers, trainers, and other educational staff and professionals, through networking, seminars and multi-professional learning communities that foster collaborative learning, collaboration projects, and communities of practice will be invaluable in providing support for teachers as they meet the needs of pupils in their care as schools navigate this evolving situation. As previously outlined, a multi-disciplinary approach is required to ensure Ukrainian children have all necessary supports.

### **(v) School Meals Programme**

The provision of free school meals is a feature of the French response to welcoming Ukrainian children. INTO have consistently called for 100% of funding for school meals to be provided to schools identified with the highest level of need. Additional funding to support breakfast clubs and



afterschool clubs should also be made available where a need is identified. In the current context, nutritious child-friendly school meals should be available to children arriving from Ukraine aligning with school polices on healthy eating.

#### **(vi) Summer Programme**

The Department of Education encourages schools to provide the summer programme for primary (and post-primary) children with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. Last year the programme was open to all schools as a Covid-19 pandemic response measure to support pupils to re-engage with education, to build their confidence and increase their motivation, promote wellbeing, and help ensure that they can progress to their planned educational placement in September. INTO is pleased that flexibility will be afforded to schools to offer this programme to children who have recently arrived from Ukraine. Exemplars and practical guidance for schools developed by the Special Education Section of the Department of Education on how support may be provided to Ukrainian children would be welcome.

#### **(vii) Extra-curricular activities**

Enhancing access to non-formal learning opportunities is important when planning for integration of refugee children and this includes organisation of extracurricular activities. Schools should be provided with supports and funding to enable such activities take place within the school setting and attention should be paid that such experiences include interactions with peers and, where possible, members of the local community.

## **Conclusion**

Ensuring that Irish primary schools are equipped to provide high-quality education and support to newly arrived children from Ukraine is a priority for INTO members. However, in order to ensure that these vulnerable children receive the care, support and education they require, a number of practical actions are needed.

At the outset, as the first Ukrainian refugees arrived in Ireland, the INTO sought regular meetings with the Department of Education to monitor this situation and identify supports that schools would need to enrol Ukrainian pupils. INTO is pleased that weekly meetings to engage constructively with the Department on key issues for schools are taking place. INTO reiterate the need to maintain this regular contact to respond to the changing situation within our communities.



The desire of teachers and school leaders to open their arms to Ukrainian refugees and ensure that they have access to the basic human right of education must be met with a firm commitment from the Department of Education to increase funding and resources for primary and special education and provide the necessary supports as outlined in this submission - Integration is an investment.

## References

- <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mapping-host-countries-education-responses-influx-ukrainian-students>
- [https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/downloads/files/news/Policy\\_guidance\\_Ukraine\\_schools.pdf](https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/downloads/files/news/Policy_guidance_Ukraine_schools.pdf)
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## **INTO Motion on Ukraine (Congress 2022)**

### **Congress:**

- a. declares that the pursuit of peace and democracy is a fundamental value of the trade union movement and an essential condition to secure safety, social justice and workers' and human rights;
- b. condemns the Russian attack on the sovereign nation of Ukraine, and supports calls for the immediate cessation of military operations and for meaningful dialogue to bring about an end to the war;
- c. expresses its solidarity with all people, workers, and trade unions of Ukraine;
- d. welcomes the humanitarian donations made by the INTO to the Irish Red Cross, UNICEF and teacher unions in the Ukraine;
- e. calls on all INTO members to support the ICTU/ IBEC initiative to donate one hour's wages to provide humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian population, and demands that the Department of Education matches these donations;
- f. notes the warm welcome received by Ukrainian families who have presented their children at schools in Ireland;
- g. acknowledges the commitments made by the Irish government to provide cross-departmental supports for those arriving from Ukraine; and
- h. demands that the Department of Education adopts a co-ordinated approach to delivering a multi-faceted package of supports to schools to enable them to support Ukrainian pupils, to include:
  1. additional EAL teachers;
  2. a fast-tracked approval process for Ukrainian teachers seeking registration with the Teaching Council;
  3. access to translation services;
  4. additional resources for NEPS to provide dedicated support for these pupils;
  5. appropriate counselling services for Ukrainian families;
  6. access to HSCL support for schools to support Ukrainian families;
  7. free school transport to enable children to attend a school in which they are enrolled;
  8. funding to enable schools to provide textbooks and materials to meet the needs of Ukrainian pupils; and
  9. appropriate CPD for teachers to enable them to properly support the inclusion of Ukrainian children.

### **Item 17: Motion 80**

Congress notes that the current allocation of permanent EAL posts does not reflect the changing demographic of our schools and demands that:

- a. this allocation be urgently increased; and
- b. the criteria for the allocation of permanent and temporary posts and the operation of the appeals process be uniform and transparent.