

# Elements of success: Finding good practices of integration for teachers with refugee backgrounds

In this paper we present some key results of our EU project EMERGenCeS Erasmus+ which aims to find best practices in helping teachers with refugee backgrounds integrate into European Union countries. We collected data about refugee-educational initiatives and media-reported success stories from seven EU countries, looking for factors in the data that help refugees make use of their previous knowledge and find meaningful careers in their host countries. The aim of this project is to contribute new perspectives to discussions about learning in refugee integration contexts.

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#### Introduction

Since 2015, more refugees have been arriving in Europe than at any time since the Second World War. After peaking at over one million in 2015, the annual number of asylum applications to European Union member states remains consistently over 400,000. Around one third of these applicants have been minors. (Eurostat 2021a). This sets a great challenge for the societies and educational systems of European Union host countries. According to UNESCO (2016), education systems should provide a "safe, supportive and secure learning environment with inclusion and equity" for all learners (p. 9). This goal, however, has not yet been fully realized. The Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2020), points out that educational inclusion is lacking in many schools globally and that up to one third of host country teachers reported not using any special approach when teaching students with culturally diverse backgrounds (UNESCO 2020, p.10). The lack of teachers using specialized educational approaches for culturally diverse educational encounters hinders the inclusion and equal learning opportunity of refugee and migrant students and is a key factor leading to the high drop-out rate, and lower educational success rate, of students with refugee backgrounds compared to their host-country peers (OECD 2018, p. 180).

The European Union also currently suffers from a teaching shortage due to its ageing population of educational professionals. Only 7 % of its working teachers are under 30 years old, while around 36 % are 50 or older. An extensive 2014 survey (Katsarova 2020) revealed that over a third of European Union teachers work in schools with a shortage of qualified staff, and nearly half of school directors report a shortage of special-needs teachers. Moreover, the teaching profession remains culturally rather homogenous, even while European Union societies are becoming increasingly diverse. Teachers with refugee backgrounds, if

included more fully in European Union education systems, may help to facilitate the integration of pupils with similar backgrounds by providing role models and fighting against stereotypes (Fennech 2017). However, the proportion of these teachers in schools in the European Union is currently lower than that of refugee learners: Only 2,5 % of non-EU citizens are working as teachers, whereas 5,6 % of EU citizens were employed as teachers (Eurostat 2021). According to UNCHR 2019, 4 % of the children attending school in EU were born outside the EU.

# The EMERgenCeS project

The European Union recognizes the need for including teachers with migrant backgrounds in its education systems as a strategy to develop more effective ways of creating inclusive and sustainable education for all learners. EMERgenCeS: Merging Refugee-Educators Competencies and Skills (KA204-060226) is a European Union-funded Erasmus+ project that is developing guidelines for good practices of integration for teachers with refugee backgrounds: specifically for those who had their educational training in their country of origin. The project brings together researchers and professionals from six European Union countries: Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Romania, and Slovenia.

In our research, we approached the notions of good practice and refugee integration through the lens of culturally and linguistically responsive education (Gay 2002; Lucas & Villegas 2011; Linan-Thompson et al. 2018), which sees language, culture and identity as deeply interconnected and learning as a social and sociocultural process. Additionally, we drew on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to understand how integration takes place within and across different levels of actions and communities. To develop guidelines for good practices, we first needed to find out what types of good practices were currently being used in countries around the European Union. As a sample we used the six countries involved in the EMERgenCeS project, plus Germany as one of our researchers was familiar with the language and was able to research that country's practices. This paper discusses the practices that we found, and the process by which we found them.

# Collecting good practices of refugee teacher integration

To find and collect current good practices from the sample countries, we investigated the practices used in various governmental and non-governmental initiatives that offer assistance and guidance for refugee integration (see Table 1). Initiatives were considered appropriate for collection if they explicitly aimed to increase the opportunities for refugee and migrant teachers to more efficiently integrate into host communities and helped them to start to work in host countries' education systems. In addition to the initiatives, we conducted searches through each country's local media for stories related to refugee teacher integration. Stories were considered "success stories" - and so appropriate for collections and analysis - if they talked about the overcoming of obstacles towards positive integration into a host society education system. From these initiatives and success stories we were able to identify challenges faced by refugee teachers in the integration process as well as practices currently used to overcome them. As prior research (e.g. Latomaa et al. 2013, Dustmann & Fabbri 2003) already clearly identifies host-country language acquisition as a crucial factor in refugee integration, we decided to look beyond language learning to investigate other key factors that impact integration.

# Results

Our research located a total of 34 initiatives and 16 success stories from the seven sample countries, as detailed below in Table 1. The initiatives we found consisted of government-funded agencies and programs, as well as initiatives produced and run by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), universities and other

independent organizations operating within the sample countries. While many are strategically supported by governments, most initiatives are project-based. The projects are important for piloting and implementing new practices, yet we think it is important to extend the knowledge and practices gained in them to develop more long-term, stable practices in national level policies.

Table 1. Initiatives and success stories by country.

Country	Initiatives	Success stories
Belgium	1. Build Bridges, not Walls! Help me to help myself!	1. Hüdanur
	2. Employment agencies help refugee teachers get back on their feet	2. Harun Civan
		3. Teacher Gulizar
Finland	1. The Finnish refugee advice center	1. Samran Khezri
	2. Legal and advisory services	
	3. SIMHE	2. Zahra Al Take
	4. SIMHE Jyväskylä	
	5. "KUULUMISIA"	3. Nasima Razmyar
	6. WE SEE YOU	
	7. ENNEN OLIN PAKOLAINEN – Once I was a refugee	
France	1. PAUSE	1. Souzan, Rabab and
	2. Wintegreat	Ali
	3. CoLAB	
Germany	1. Resettlement-Procedure	1. Olga Gotjur
	2. Refugee Teacher Program - University of Potsdam	2. Samer Tannous
	3. Project NesT	3. Forough
	4. Programme "Coordination, Qualification and Promotion of Voluntary Support for Refugees"	Khastkhodaie
	5. Make it in Germany	
Italy	1. Intercultural mediators in Italy	1. Testimony of Leyla
	2. China project	Dauki
	3. UNIBO for refugees	2. Khaled
	4. Welcome Refugee Program	Abdelrhaman
	5. Soft skills enhancement and employability	
Romania	1. Timisoara Refugee Art Festival	1. Octavian Ursu
	2. Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)	2. Ayfer Karaoğlu
	3. Save the Children Romania	

Slovenia	1. Center for Slovene as a Second and Foreign language	1. Aida Kamiša <b>l</b> ić	
	2. Slovene Learning Online	Latifić	
	3. Slovene for children and teenagers	2. Vera Xhafa Haliti	
	4. Project VIME		
	5. Immigration to Slovenia (Ministry of Interior Slovenia)		
	6. Free Slovenian language courses		
	7. Implementation of distance (on-line) education in emergency		
	8. The National Employment Agency		
	9. SIMS Programme - "The Challenges of Intercultural Coexistence project"		

### Discussion

From an analysis of the collected initiatives and success stories, three features were identified as significant in each. We are introducing the most important features in both topics and discussing the common and different features and how to develop the initiatives to meet the needs of refugees even better. We are also setting each feature in Bronfenbrenner's ecological frame in either MICRO, MESO, or MACRO level depending on the location of the action: If the action is happening mostly within one individual, it is MICRO level action, whereas interpersonal action (e.g. peer groups or professional networks) are classified as MESO level actions. Finally, institutional level actions are at the MACRO level. This classification makes it easier to recognize the things that are already working well in the inclusion process and the perspectives that might still be missing.

In the **Initiatives** the most important features were:

- 1) Access to adequate information about the host county's requirements for being a teacher. Since there are differences in the requirements for teacher qualifications also within the EU countries, this information was crucial for the newcomers to know if their prior teacher diplomas were valid in the new society or if they need to gain some additional qualifications. The initiatives in which this factor is found are typically offered through on-line support and other forms of communication based on official bureaucracy and non-personal interactions. Importantly, we found that these initiatives usually offer only temporary support for newcomers. They are more a momentary services and are not linked to any longer-term support programs. As they are currently practiced, these types of initiatives do not involve newcomers into all processes of integration but only see them as objects of policies. In the Bronfenbrennerian perspective this is a MACRO level action that happens at an institutional level.
- 2) Recognition of prior diplomas. Without the official recognition of prior studies and qualifications, teachers with refugee backgrounds cannot fully utilize their professional expertise and experience. In almost all success stories this factor was cited as the single most important stepping stone for teachers with refugee backgrounds in their pursuit of professional success in host countries. This is also a MACRO level action and requires changes in an institutional level.
- 3) Development of interpersonal relations with members of host societies, as second language acquisition is not only a cognitive but also a sociocultural process (Lantolf et al. 2014), yet this feature was found mostly in the initiatives not related to education. In these initiatives such as the Romanian Timisoara Refugee Art Festival and CoLAB, the refugees are seen as equal subjects promoting their ideas. This kind of approach should be implemented more in other fields of life too. In the educational field initiatives, the relationship between different demographic groups was not always equal or reciprocal. This is a MESO level action in the Bronfenbrennerian view.

In the success stories, too, we found that there were three key factors to the success of integration reported by teachers with refugee backgrounds:

- 1) The first factor was the official recognition of diplomas and qualifications mentioned above. This was seen by many as important not only in building a career in the host society, but also in fostering a feeling of being acknowledged and accepted as a member of society, leading to increased motivation to learn the local language. This again is a MACRO level action.
- 2) The second factor centered on the unofficial relational networks that refugee teachers developed between neighbourhoods, peer groups, work places, and circles of friends. The importance of these networks is also highlighted in several initiatives, such as the Belgian Build Bridges, not Walls! Help me to help myself!, the German Refugee Teacher Program, the French Wintegreat or the Finnish Kuulumisia; and in the voluntary work or internship at schools or other institutions mentioned in several success stories. This is a MESO level action, although the original input starts at the MACRO level: Institutions or organizations are making it possible for refugees to start to build professional and personal networks while participating in these initiatives.
- 3) The third factor was the development of a holistic understanding of the host country's systems, society and culture. In more than half of the success stories, refugee teachers mentioned the importance of knowing about their host country on multiple levels; its educational systems, its local culture, its manners of teacher-student interaction, and its explicit and implicit values. This knowledge was seen as a pivotal part of their professional expertise. This factor can be set into the MACRO and MESO levels: There is an institutional part in learning these things, yet especially implicit practices and values can be learned only in MESO level action. The best way to gain all necessary knowledge is to participate in the work in institutions (MACRO) as well as with people (MESO).

When comparing these factors, one significant factor of refugee teacher integration identified in the success stories, yet largely absent from the range of initiatives, was interpersonal relations with members of the host society. Many of the initiatives involve newcomers entering an impersonal, rigid system: most of the services are on-line and based on "first read the web pages and fill in this electronical form" type of communication; in the newcomer's point of view, there is no person to help them but just an official. Thus, this does not offer tools or means for integration or inclusion. Purely financial and official help can not build relationships or mutual trust. Also, language learning is usually organized by a different partner/institution/office than other courses or activities for integration (Intke-Hernandez 2020, 117).

In this article we did not pay attention to MICRO level actions for two reasons. First, we find it quite obvious that migrants need to learn new skills when they enter new society. Second, it is easy to say that the newcomers should integrate, which means that they are the ones who do all the work in MICRO level, yet we want to point out that in that case we end up to one-way integration, not mutual integration (see also Haswell et al.).

We suggest that placing more emphasis on developing interpersonal relations with members of host societies in refugee integration practices will lead to more successful and beneficial integration experiences for refugee teachers. One way to do this might be to offer refugee teachers the services of intercultural mediators, who would provide long-term guidance and motivation in not only navigating the integration systems but also becoming acquainted with the host society and culture. Mediators could also provide crucial assistance with the host-country language and literacy learning as well as help establish professional connections between refugee teachers and local schools and teachers.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the important role refugee teachers can play in developing inclusive educational environments for the many refugee children arriving in European Union countries. Through our analysis of initiatives and success stories related to refugee teacher integration, we identified key factors that make integration successful, and offered suggestions on how to improve the integration experience. Our research suggests that current project-based refugee integration initiatives should be made more stable and long-term. Given the widespread destabilizing effects of war, famine, and ecological crises, forced migration is a phenomenon that will surely continue. It is up to host societies, like those in the European Union, to make their integration practices as effective and compassionate as they can be to welcome these guests, and help them play their part in developing a culturally respectful and responsive society fit for all. In order to support socially sustainable inclusion, the policies and practices in refugee education should start to see also the Bronfenbrennerian MESO-level, interpersonal relations and belonging to groups in new host societies.

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## References

#### a) Initiative web pages

Initiatives in Belgium

- 1. Build Bridges, not Walls! Help me to help myself! [no web page available]
- 2. Employment agencies help refugee teachers get back on their feet:
  - https://www.vdab.be/ (https://www.vdab.be/)
  - https://www.leforem.be/ (https://www.leforem.be/)
  - https://actiris.be (https://actiris.be)

#### Initiatives in Finland

- 1. The Finnish refugee advice center https://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/asiantuntijajarjesto/ (https://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/asiantuntijajarjesto/)
- 2. Legal and advisory services https://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/ (https://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/)
- 3. SIMHE https://www.oph.fi/en/simhe-services-higher-education-institutions (https://www.oph.fi/en/simhe-services-higher-education-institutions)
- 4. SIMHE Jyväskylä https://www.jyu.fi/en/apply/get-to-know-us/guidance-for-migrants (https://www.jyu.fi/en/apply/get-to-know-us/guidance-for-migrants)
- 5. "KUULUMISIA" https://sites.tuni.fi/kuulumisia/in-english/ (https://sites.tuni.fi/kuulumisia/in-english/)
- 6. WE SEE YOU https://weseeyoufinland.wordpress.com/ (https://weseeyoufinland.wordpress.com/)
- 7. ENNEN OLIN PAKOLAINEN Once I was a refugee https://www.facebook.com/ennenolinpakolainen/ (https://www.facebook.com/ennenolinpakolainen/)

Initiatives in France

- PAUSE https://www.campusfrance.org/en/pause-program-urgent-aid-scientists-exile (https://www.campusfrance.org/en/pause-program-urgent-aid-scientists-exile)
- 2. Wintegreat http://wintegreat.org/ (http://wintegreat.org/)
- 3. CoLAB https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/colab-a-laboratory-for-newforms-of-collaboration (https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/collab-alaboratory-for-new-forms-of-collaboration)

#### Initiatives in Germany

- 1. Resettlement-Procedure https://www.unhcr.org/524c31666.pdf (https://www.unhcr.org/524c31666.pdf); https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement.html (https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement.html)
- 2. Refugee Teacher Program University of Potsdam https://www.unipotsdam.de/en/international/incoming/refugees (https://www.unipotsdam.de/en/international/incoming/refugees)
- 3. Project NesT https://www.neustartimteam.de/ (https://www.neustartimteam.de/)
- 4. Programme "Coordination, Qualification and Promotion of Voluntary Support for Refugees" https://fluechtlingshelfer.info/start (https://fluechtlingshelfer.info/start)
- 5. Make it in Germany https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/ (https://www.make-it-ingermany.com/en/)

#### Initiatives in Italy

- 1. Intercultural mediators in Italy LA MEDIAZIONE CULTURALE (comune.bologna.it) (http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/la\_mediazione\_culturale.pdf)
- 2. China project
- 3. UNIBO for refugees https://www.unibo.it/it/servizi-e-opportunita/borse-di-studio-eagevolazioni/esoneri-e-incentivi/unibo-for-refugees (https://www.unibo.it/it/servizi-eopportunita/borse-di-studio-e-agevolazioni/esoneri-e-incentivi/unibo-for-refugees)
- 4. Welcome Refugee Program https://www.unior.it/didattica/14192/2/welcome-refugees-program.html (https://www.unior.it/didattica/14192/2/welcome-refugees-program.html)
- 5. Soft skills enhancement and employability [no web page available]

#### Initiatives in Romania

- 1. Timisoara Refugee Art Festival https://www.clarinetproject.eu/nominee/timisoara-refugee-artfestival-traf/ (https://www.clarinetproject.eu/nominee/timisoara-refugee-art-festival-traf/)
- 2. Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) https://www.mipex.eu/romania (https://www.mipex.eu/romania); https://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads (https://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/romania\_abridged\_migrant\_integration\_policy\_i ndex\_mipexiii\_2011\_ro.pdf)
- 3. Save the Children Romania https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ (https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/)

#### Initiatives in Slovenia

- 1. Center for Slovene as a Second and Foreign language https://centerslo.si/en/ (https://centerslo.si/en/)
- 2. Slovene Learning Online https://www.slonline.si/ (https://www.slonline.si/)
- 3. Slovene for children and teenagers https://centerslo.si/en/for-children (https://centerslo.si/en/forchildren)
- 4. Project VIME https://centerslo.si/en/for-teachers/for-volunteers/project-vime (https://centerslo.si/en/for-teachers/for-volunteers/project-vime)
- 5. Immigration to Slovenia (Ministry of Interior Slovenia) www.infotujci.si (http://www.infotujci.si)
- 6. Free Slovenian language courses https://infotujci.si/en/integration-into-slovenian-society/freeslovenian-language-courses/ (https://infotujci.si/en/integration-into-slovenian-society/freeslovenian-language-courses/)

- 7. Implementation of distance (on-line) education in emergency http://medkulturnost.si/slikovnislovar/#/ (http://medkulturnost.si/slikovni-slovar/#/)
- 8. The National Employment Agency http://english.ess.gov.si/jobseekers/assistance\_in\_job\_seeking (http://english.ess.gov.si/jobseekers/assistance\_in\_job\_seeking)
- 9. SIMS Programme "The Challenges of Intercultural Coexistence project" http://www.medkulturnost.si/ (http://www.medkulturnost.si/)

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