



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE RECEPTION AND INCLUSION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

These ten guiding principles based on the results of a co-created methodology (involving children and other stakeholders) to define 30 key indicators to monitor the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in Europe, without distinction of legal status or origin.



Above all, children's right to access compulsory education must be fulfilled.



Schools need to be a welcoming place.

Children's well-being must be a guiding principle.



Positive attitudes towards refugee and migrant children need to be fostered.



It is important that children acquire relevant competences in the host language.



The segregation or concentration of refugee and migrant children in specific schools must be avoided.

Social connections are a fundamental source of well-being.



Mental health and counselling services at schools can make a large difference.



Learning and language support is particularly relevant for ensuring equal opportunities to refugee and migrant children



Co-creation and bottom-up approaches need to become common.

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Above all, children's right to access compulsory education must be fulfilled

Their participation in compulsory education involves endless benefits for their well-being and social connectedness, and it minimises the disruption in their educational achievements. All administrative and practical barriers must be removed, and access expedited. Similarly important, children's other fundamental rights must be fulfilled, including access to health care and the right to international protection. Political leadership and decisive action is needed to attain these objectives.



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Children's well-being must be a guiding principle

The physical and mental wellbeing of children must be the paramount concern of the responsible adults, including schools and authorities. This well-being conditions all other aspects for the successful inclusion of children and social cohesion. Children's happiness and sense of belonging at school are key indicators of this well-being.



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It is important that children acquire relevant competences in the host language

So that they will be able to communicate and attain a sense of belonging. However, it is also important that they maintain their cultural identity and mother language competences, and that these are valued and appreciated.



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Social connections are a fundamental source of well-being

Finding support in teachers is important for all children, and particularly for younger ones. Spending time and having opportunities to interact with other children, making friends and finding their support among them is also important, more so for older children. And they all need to be able to trust institutions (from the police to the education or healthcare systems).



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Learning and language support is particularly relevant for ensuring equal opportunities to refugee and migrant children

Specific policies, programs and resources should be devoted to supporting the specific needs of these (and other) children. In the case of refugee and migrant children, different mother tongues, educational systems, and disruptions in their school enrolment frequently produce specific needs to be addressed. Preparatory classes (while ensuring they spend time with other children as well), learning and language support for as long as they are needed, and supplementary services and activities, are all important in ensuring that these children attain their full potential in terms of academic skills and educational achievement.



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Schools need to be a welcoming place

Schools are the key context where the inclusion of refugee and migrant children is most at stake. For this reason, it is important to incorporate and promote an intercultural approach to school organisation: making this a fundamental part of a school's identity; incorporating intercultural competences in the teaching dynamics; working with the families by facilitating parental involvement; incorporating social mediators.



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Positive attitudes towards refugee and migrant children need to be fostered

Negative attitudes towards migrants and refugees and xenophobia are particularly damaging for these children's well-being and for general social cohesion. Fortunately, in the case of the recent Ukraine flows, there is a wide sympathy and acceptance across the board regarding these refugees and children. However, we need to remain alert and to work towards a broader understanding and welcoming of all refugees and migrant children, ensuring also that these attitudes will last. To ensure this, clear political leadership is essential (i.e. countering xenophobic discourses), in particular to incorporate and promote an intercultural approach to education (e.g., including intercultural competences in the syllabus).



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**The segregation or concentration of refugee and migrant children in specific schools
must be avoided**

This is needed to ensure that all children have equal opportunities, and that the diversity of our societies, with its richness and its challenges, is experienced and shared across the board.



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Mental health and counselling services at schools can make a large difference

This is the case for all children without distinction. In the case of refugee and migrant children, the presence of trauma and particular challenges, such as separated families, is also more frequent, which makes the presence of these services at school particularly important, since they might not be accessed otherwise. Particularly vulnerable groups of children and young people (e.g., traumatised children, minor girls with children) need special attention and adequately trained staff embedded in the schools.



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Co-creation and bottom-up approaches need to become common

Research, as well as normative frameworks, firmly support the need, the importance and the feasibility of children to participate in the discussion about their needs and how these should be addressed.

Schools and policy-makers should (and would benefit from) adopting this type of approach and engaging all children in discussing how to address the reception and inclusion of refugee and migrant children.

