

The Rights of Refugee Children in Education

An international review of best practice

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Context

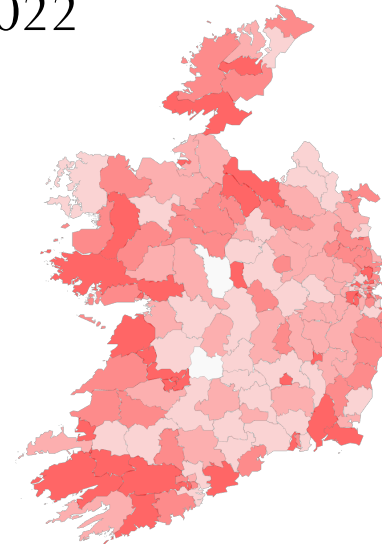
Latest figures confirm 55,000 arrivals, with 35% aged 0-19 years (CSO Oct 2022)

High levels of education, lower levels of English language proficiency

More primary children – especially in Dublin, Cork, Donegal, Kerry, Clare

Secondary schooling: Dublin, Cork, Kerry

Location of arrivals from Ukraine CSO 2022



Forced Migration: some facts

A refugee is defined as someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their own country of nationality, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted

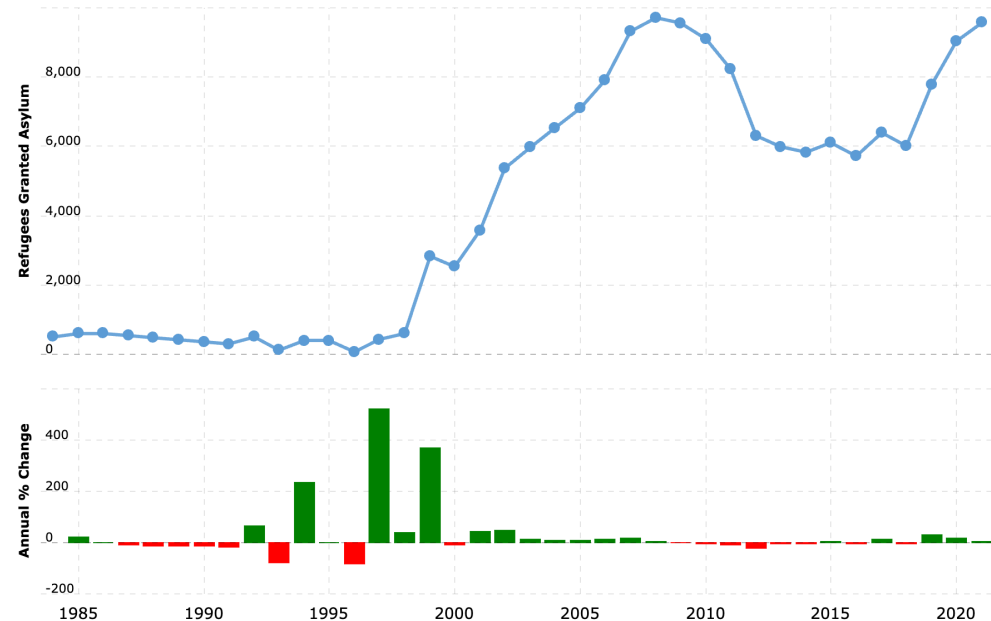
1% of world population currently forcibly displaced (est. 100 million people, 50% of whom are children)

Avg length of displacement is 10 years

Up to 8 million Ukrainians displaced since Feb 2022

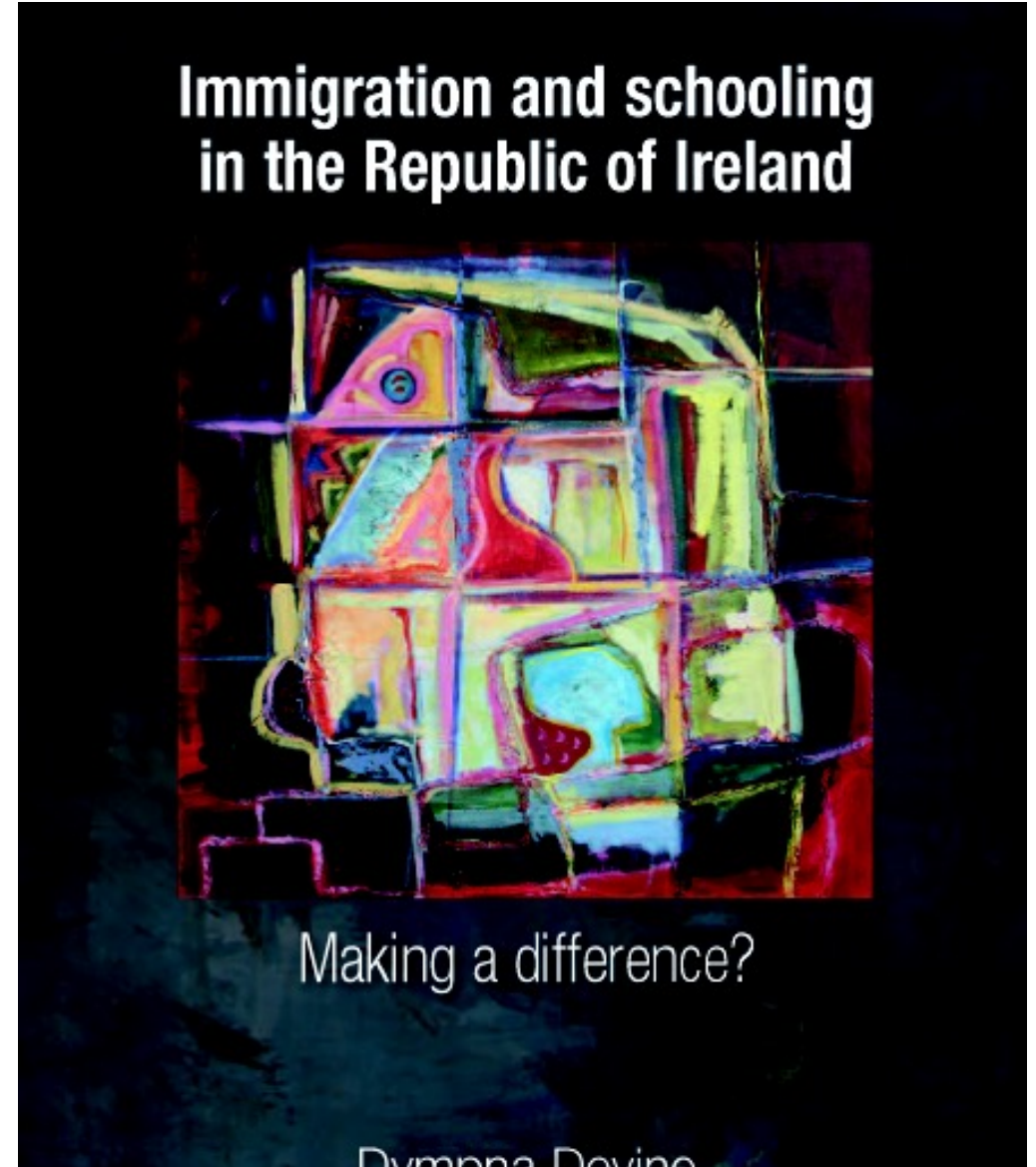
Refugee children in Ireland

Refugees to Ireland 1984-2022



Framing Education responses

- Schools at the forefront of social change
- Wider context of immigration and demographic change
- Particularities of experiences of refugee children
- Education, life chances and quality of life



The centrality of children's rights

- *States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that **a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee** in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures **shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.** (Article 22 UNCRC)*
- **Article 28 and 29** define children's rights to go to school, and children's rights to an education that enables them to flourish
- Other articles relate to children's rights to respect, freedom from discrimination and cultural recognition (Articles 2 and 6)
- **Article 12:** children's rights to voice and participation

The Education of Refugee Children

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graph TD; A["The Education of Refugee Children"] --> B["Rights to Education"]; A --> C["Rights within Education"]; B --> D["Access to schools"]; C --> E["Quality of Learning"]; C --> F["Freedom from Discrimination"]; C --> G["Voice"];
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Rights to Education

Access to schools

Rights within Education

Quality of Learning

Freedom from Discrimination

Voice

Refugee Children's Rights to Education

- Access: the right to go to school – but which one/where/how?
- **Models of provision:**
 - Full immersion into mainstream school from day 1
 - Attendance at separate language immersion school and transfer to mainstream
 - Mainstream provision with separate language support [withdrawal]
 - Mainstream with classroom assistant
 - Hybrid approaches
 - Key issues: segregation, transition practices, supports

Refugee Children's Rights *within* Education

- Quality of learning environment
 - *Trauma informed*
 - *Child centred*
 - *Language support*
- Freedom from Discrimination
 - *Safe Spaces*
 - *Cultural recognition*
 - *Funds of Knowledge*
 - *Information*
 - *Consultation*

* Voice

Quality of Learning Environment Trauma informed

- Trauma mediates capacities to cope with change
- ‘PTSD’ does not fully capture the experiences of forced migration
- Length of pre-migration phase
- Loss of primary carer
- Resettlement stressors
- Adaptation to schooling
- Resilience but not a panacea
- Schools as Safe Spaces
- Secure learning environments
- Predictable, non-threatening
- Calm, inviting, low stress
- Individuated
- Small group learning
- Family communication

Quality of Learning

Tensions between 'bordering' and 'belonging'

You can't talk about yourself or your culture, you have to hide...It's like living another life'
(17 year old 2nd generation Vietnamese Irish)

'Girls in my class don't know I'm a Traveller ...I'm ashamed. I don't want to tell them' (10 year old Irish Traveller)

I don't know why they call people coloured. White people when they get sick, they go pink and blue. When they die they go pale and purple...they are the ones who turn all different colours' (11 year old Syrian refugee)

- **Recognition**

- **Visibility**

- **Power**

Quality of Learning

Culturally responsive pedagogies

- Pedagogies position teachers as much as the children they teach
- Stepping out of the comfort zone

- Moving beyond individualized instruction
- Incorporating diversity as normal for the whole class
- Developing intercultural competencies of teachers
- Teachers as advocates

Culturally responsive pedagogies

- Child Centred and Rights Respecting
- Rich literacy environments that recognizes the multi-lingual skills of refugee children
- Group learning
- Participation in extra-curricular activities

- Debates about rubric of 'inclusive' education....deficit, special needs, 'fixing of failure'

What the research says about additional language learning

‘to reject a child’s home language is to reject the child’ (Cummins 2001)

It takes a child 3-5 years to gain oral proficiency and 4-7 years to again academic proficiency

Skills in the mother tongue transfer to the learning of other languages

SES, Trauma, prior experience of schooling

Strengths based funds of knowledge approach: translanguaging

Culturally appropriate assessment of needs

Freedom from Discrimination

- Children are active negotiators of culture and identity
- Strategic and pragmatic
- Bridge between family and local community
- Competency in negotiating dual spaces of home and school
- Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within peer groups
- Learning as social practice



Learning as social practice

- Child 1: There's a girl I sit beside and her name is Ava
- Child 2: And she's coloured
- Child 1: And she tells me to shut up a lot of the time
- Child 2: She's racist, Ava's a racist
- Child 1: If I say: 'I need a loan of your pen'; she says: 'no'
- Dympna: I heard you say there that Ava was a racist...what do you mean by that?
- Child 2: She doesn't like white people
- Child 3: She does get along with white people but sometimes she doesn't like to be their friend
- Child 2: *She thinks she's all smart and great because she is from a different country. She knows her Irish the most.* She thinks she's all popular (Majority ethnic group, Riverside primary)

Whole School Approaches



Risk and reputation



Managing vs Leading for Diversity?



Schools have their own 'logics' of practice

- Schools as learning communities
- Home/school interconnections: bridging practices
- Leaving the door open?
- Professional support to develop intercultural competence

Best practices

Pedagogies that are child centred, trauma informed and provide appropriate language support

Culturally responsive classrooms/schools which validate the funds of knowledge that refugee children bring, and provide safe spaces within which they can learn

Empower refugee children through consultation and information

High quality professional development and supports for teachers and principals

Current challenges/ opportunities

- (Re)settlement
- Communication across schools
- School refusal – Enforcement?
- Teacher recruitment
- Psychological supports
- Differentiation across refugee groups
- ‘Them’ and ‘us’
- School cultures: small rural schools
- Systemic supports for teachers and principals at local level

Realising a rights respecting education for refugee children...

1

Quality of Learning
Environment

2

Freedom from
Discrimination

3

Voice

Questions....

- Thank you!
- Please contact dympna.devine@ucd.ie