

# Impact of Covid-19 on refugee learners in Wales

## Research

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- Audience** This project was undertaken as part of the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry in Wales. The findings are aimed at policymakers and LEAs, who can support schools and practitioners in their ongoing work with refugee background learners and their families in Wales.
- Overview** Experiences of schools and practitioners in Wales who have been supporting refugee learners before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Action required** The findings suggest that a coherent strategy and budget allocation are required to support schools and practitioners in their work with refugee learners. This will facilitate adequate support for language learning, and the provision of alternative curricula and qualifications for refugee learners where necessary. Detailed screening of background information of refugee learners will help in the early identification of additional needs. There also needs to be improved communication between schools and refugee families, utilising professional translation services and bilingual teaching assistants as required. Training for staff in working with refugee learners is a priority in addition to training in developing multicultural awareness across whole school populations.
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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

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# 1. Executive Summary

This report details how a sample of schools and teachers in Wales have worked to support refugee learners and their families during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic recovery period. Interviews were conducted with a small sample of headteachers, class teachers, English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialists, and bilingual teaching assistants, working in primary and secondary schools, as well as Ethnic Minority Achievement Services, in Gwynedd, Ynys Mon, Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport. Despite the limitation of the sample size, the resulting interviews provided a wealth of data relating to the everyday experiences of practitioners in their work with refugee learners across Wales.

Analysis of this interview data provides insights into the strategies that were used to support refugee learners during the pandemic as well as some of the difficulties experienced by refugee families. It also suggests recommendations for aspects of education provision and services that need to be improved to promote inclusion and equity in education for vulnerable learners in the post-pandemic recovery period. Key findings and recommendations are detailed below.

The principal findings are as follows:

- Small class, intensive support was provided in schools throughout the pandemic for groups of vulnerable learners, including refugee learners. Although this provision was not fully utilised during the first lockdown, many refugee learners did come into school regularly and were able to benefit from intensive support to maintain learning, develop language skills, and catch up with education missed prior to their arrival in Wales.
- Many refugee families were unfamiliar with the use of digital technologies and online educational materials, so were poorly equipped to support their children to access lessons and resources at home during lockdown. This was often compounded by lack of adequate infrastructure in homes such as a physical space for learners to work in, access to IT hardware, and good internet provision.
- Lack of English at home meant that language learning for some refugee learners was effectively stalled during lockdown and learners were unable to obtain adequate assistance to complete tasks and assignments set online.
- Gaps in education resulting from enforced migration and periods of living in refugee camps were exacerbated during lockdown as further teaching and learning opportunities were lost. Some refugee learners are in an especially difficult position if they have arrived in Wales at secondary age, needing to quickly learn English and adapt to the GCSE curriculum if they are going to progress to Higher or Further Education.
- Schools had difficulties communicating important information to refugee families during the pandemic, including basic government rules about staying safe. Lack of translation services or interpreters means that friends, students, or bilingual teaching assistants may be employed to pass key messages to parents.
- Social isolation was pronounced for those refugee families who had only recently arrived in Wales and did not have the support of a network of local friends during the pandemic. For many refugee families, school is their principal link to the local community, and school closure made it harder to integrate or establish connections.
- Refugee learners often need additional time to develop language skills and gain the confidence to pursue specialist academic or vocational subjects. There are many factors which influence this, but research shows that it takes some refugee learners far longer than others to develop language skills. The pandemic may have prolonged this timeframe for some learners.

- Refugee families often have limited support to access key information about the education system in the UK, including the range of future qualifications and career options for older learners, as well as educational facilities available for younger learners. Refugee families need support to make informed choices.

Recommendations made by schools and teachers were as follows:

- Better screening and identification of additional needs should be carried out when refugee families first arrive in Wales by teachers and support workers, with the help of bilingual assistants, to obtain background information about family literacy and individual basic skills levels. This will enable schools and teachers to make the necessary adaptations for meeting refugee learners' educational needs.
- Increased bilingual teaching support to enable refugee learners to settle into the new school environment, make friends, and access the curriculum.
- Tailored, alternative curricula and qualifications, which allow refugee learners to achieve success whilst continuing to develop basic skills. This includes ESOL qualifications at an appropriate level to enable learners to continue onto post-16 vocational and academic pathways at college.
- Increased English language learning provision and adequate time put aside for refugee learners to develop sufficient language skills before they are expected to join subject lessons.
- Co-ordination of EAL provision should be a separate role from the co-ordination of provision for Additional Learning Needs.
- Monitoring of educational outcomes for refugee learners, to gauge how well aspirations and needs of this group are being met.
- Improved communication with refugee learners and their families to support learners to adapt to the UK educational system and make informed choices about future career options. This can be facilitated by schools, teachers and bilingual assistants working together, but should be seen as a key part of refugee learners' integration.
- More professional translation services to ensure that information from a range of sources including national government and individual schools and colleges is available in a variety of home languages and in formats that are easily accessible. Friends and family members cannot be solely responsible for conveying important information.
- Closer links with local resettlement officers and other community organisations that offer specialised support and opportunities to resettled families in Wales.
- Increased emotional and pastoral support in schools, including for speakers of other languages. Training for staff about the unique and complex challenges that refugee learners might face and ways of identifying signs of trauma, to help staff to develop skills in dealing with these situations.
- Training and increased cultural awareness to enable staff and other learners to become more familiar with global and diversity issues.

## 2. Introduction and Background

### Covid lockdowns in Wales

From 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 schools in Wales were closed to all learners apart from vulnerable children or children of key workers. This lockdown extended until the end of June when all year groups were encouraged to return, although attendance was not compulsory and was mostly part-time. All schools reopened at full capacity at the start of the new academic year in September 2020, with measures in place to ensure social distancing. Due to increasing numbers of infections throughout the UK, some schools in Wales had short “firebreaks” during the Autumn half term and closed early before Christmas 2020. This second period of lockdown due to Covid-19 extended into the new year and schooling went online again for much of the Spring term. Primary age classes were encouraged to return at the end of February and early March, but many secondary learners did not return until April 2021.

The impact of Covid-19 school closures on children’s social, emotional, physical, and educational development is only beginning to be fully appreciated (Werner & Woessmann, 2021), but it is already clear that many of these impacts were experienced more deeply by those who were already in a vulnerable situation, such as from a refugee or migrant background. Refugee families and learners faced common difficulties arising from the pandemic, such as unfamiliarity with technology and use of online learning platforms in place of face-to-face lessons. Some parents had difficulty supporting home schooling, and there was a lack of access to specialist services during the pandemic. Refugee families experienced additional challenges such as language barriers, lack of social networks, and inadequate housing conditions (Primdahl et al., 2021)..

To avoid widening existing educational disparities, further investigation into the impact of school closures on refugee learners needs to be supplemented with recommendations for addressing the specific needs of this group of learners. Schools play a central role in providing quality learning experiences for refugee-background students and in many cases need to provide a specially tailored programme of support to help these students to develop essential capabilities and skills (Tikly, 2016). Language is one of the capabilities that schools need to develop to enable refugee-background students to understand the curriculum, communicate with others, engage in interactive learning, and gain qualifications, particularly at secondary school. Many refugee learners are completely new to English and Welsh, and schools must therefore provide high levels of English or Welsh as an Additional Language (EAL or WAL) teaching support, as well as extra academic skills development for these learners (RoadstoRefuge, 2020).

In addition to their linguistic needs, many refugee learners may not have had access to regular education for months or years during their migratory journey so that there might be significant gaps in literacy development and knowledge of basic Maths. School attendance in refugee camps and countries of first asylum is sporadic at best and often minimal (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Madziva & Thondhlana, 2017)). Families may also have been unable to provide educational support at home due to their own literacy and skills levels, which means that schools may need to assist refugee learners to catch up when they arrive in the UK. Depending on literacy levels and educational backgrounds of refugee families, it takes time for learners to adapt to life and education in the UK.

Schools have an essential role in developing language skills and helping refugee learners to catch up with missed education; they also help learners and their families through the

process of transition and help to develop a sense of community and belonging (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015). The stability and routine of school can offer refugee learners respite from domestic upheavals and a safe space for them to settle and make friends. Schools provide support and a physical space for care (Primdahl et al., 2021), and care in terms of establishing relationships is particularly important to help integration into their new communities. Relationships with teachers at school may be some of the first community connections formed in a new country.

Caring school environments require infrastructures such as small classes, a unique curriculum that focuses on students' interests, skills and needs, and the time and space for students to become familiar with the school and the other people in it (Noddings, 1992). Emphasis on developing caring relationships is especially important for refugee learners (Baak, 2016). Many refugee families have come in through government schemes such as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and have been selected precisely because of their additional health or educational vulnerabilities. Refugee families and learners may also have a range of psycho-social needs relating to their experiences of loss and displacement.

There is a particular need to examine how these groups of learners fared in education during and after the pandemic, and to consider what further support might be provided to overcome challenges faced and improve their educational opportunities in Wales.

Over the course of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, there were about 3,000 asylum seekers (in receipt of support under section 95) across Wales. They were heavily concentrated in large cities, with about 1,600 Cardiff, about 900 in Swansea and about 500 in Newport.<sup>1</sup> These figures are not complete, but they do provide a useful picture of the distribution of asylum seekers across Wales.

The aims and objectives of this research study were:

- To collate and analyse the experiences of a small sample of practitioners working with refugee children and young people in schools in Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To gain a better understanding of the training, resources, and external agencies needed in schools in Wales to support the well-being of refugee children and young people during and after the pandemic.
- To develop classroom/ whole school strategies to support the teaching and learning of refugee children and young people within schools in Wales.
- To share this evidence with the Welsh Government, school leaders, teachers, and support staff with the aim of building on policy and improving practice in schools.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#local-authority-data>

### 3. Literature Review

Some areas of Wales have been supporting refugees and asylum seekers for many years, but this activity has dramatically increased in response to the UK's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), launched in 2014 and then expanded in 2015 to include 20,000 refugees fleeing from the conflict in Syria (refugeecouncil.org.uk). All areas of Wales have resettled some refugees under this scheme, and others have been brought in under community sponsorship schemes. Although complete figures for the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees who are resettled in Wales are not yet available, it is known that by the end of March 2020, a total of 1,437 refugees had been resettled in Wales under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and the UK Resettlement scheme (Wellbeing of Wales, 2022).

In August 2021, more than 15,000 refugees from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan were urgently deported and given sanctuary in different parts of the UK and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement scheme pledged to take up to 20,000, in coming years. 250 of these have also been resettled in Wales. More recently, the Welsh Government pledged to becoming a 'super sponsor' and committed to accommodating up to 1,000 refugees from the war in Ukraine. Many more than this (4,192) have also been accommodated in Wales via the Homes for Ukraine scheme (Senedd Research, 22 July, 2022). These recent large-scale immigrations are in addition to the refugees that are also coming into Wales from many different countries due to a range of ongoing situations such as political and social unrest.

As these successive waves of refugees are welcomed into Wales, they need to be provided with good quality accommodation, living allowances, healthcare, education, and emotional support. Welsh Assembly Government policy documents such as the Nation of Sanctuary Plan (WAG, January 2019) have outlined a holistic approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Wales which is essential to ensure that these vulnerable groups are able to develop social belonging, have opportunities to access quality education, and partake of economic prospects. This plan includes clear goals for all refugees and asylum seekers to gain essential skills including ESOL and digital literacy, as well as opportunities and funding to access further and higher education. It also aims to provide refugees and asylum seekers with the information and advice that they need for successful integration in their new environments.

To achieve these aims, there has been a focus on inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in national education systems, and schools and colleges have become the obvious context for promoting the resettlement and integration of resettled learners and their families. This is a pragmatic solution as schools and colleges are spaces where refugees can establish new relationships, develop new skills, and begin their adaptation and integration into society (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). Learning to feel safe and accepted may indeed be a key function of schooling for many refugee learners, both young and old, as schools and teachers provide a structured environment and routine, and the caring co-presence of teachers who can monitor individual well-being and identify additional needs (Primdahl et al., 2021). These are key factors in helping refugees to feel settled, but schools and teachers cannot be held solely responsible for meeting the complex and multiple needs of refugee learners, which also require input, policies and resources from local councils, governments, and health services.

A stay of 5-10 years in a refugee camp is not uncommon for many refugees, which can have a devastating effect on educational development (Oh and Van der Stouwe, 2008). Refugee learners and their families experience displacement, mistreatment, and discrimination during

their migration and stay in camps, in addition to months and months of missed schooling. These experiences coupled with insecurity over the right to remain in the UK may result in an understandable lack of confidence, low self-esteem, mental and emotional distress (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Schools and colleges certainly have an important role to play in supporting and protecting learners who come from such challenging backgrounds and who arrive with these complex and often unmet emotional and mental health support needs. A holistic approach is needed which provides support for a range of learning, social and emotional needs (Arnot, Pinson, and Candappa, 2009). These additional needs may be identified by teachers and support workers, but they may often lack the resources or training to deal appropriately with them (Mock-Munoz de Luna et al., 2020).

Lack of training or preparation for working with refugee learners means that schools and teachers are often uncertain what types of support refugee learners most need, and what is the best course of action to take (Lundberg,2020). Not all refugees are easily identifiable as such, and it may be difficult sometimes for schools and teachers to distinguish refugees who come from war-torn countries from other non-English speaking learners (non-refugees) who have also recently arrived from other parts of the world. This can mean that the complex needs of refugees are neither properly understood or addressed: needs such as interrupted education and experience of trauma, family poverty and social isolation. As a result, refugee learners are often conflated with other categories of learners such as EAL/ESOL students, or those with learning difficulties (Sidhu and Taylor, 2007).

Schools and colleges can provide opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to gain the skills, competencies, and certifications that they need to integrate successfully and take part fully in society. With these hopes in mind, many refugee learners and their families have high aspirations for education when they come to the UK (Stevenson and Willott, 2007; Morrice et al., 2020). Family stability and the opportunity to attend school regularly may have been denied some families for several years, so that when they finally arrive in the UK, they are not going to waste a valuable opportunity to make plans and a new start. However, despite this motivation, the transition to the UK education system is not always straightforward, particularly for older learners who must enter secondary school without attending primary in this country. It takes some learners many months (even years) to develop sufficient language skills to be able to function effectively in their new environment, and these learners will often require high levels of additional support to fully comprehend the curriculum or take qualifications (RoadstoRefuge, 2020). The assumption that refugees who have been living in camps or other temporary conditions for months can catch up with their non-refugee peers in just a few months, with little or no support, has been repeatedly demonstrated to be false (Lundberg,2020; Hutchinson and Reader, 2020).

This is a critical aspect of resettling refugee learners, and inclusion without appropriate levels of support in place, or proper appreciation of the difficulties that many learners have faced, can mean that proper integration is hard for these families and learners to achieve. A sense of belonging and access to future economic prospects may remain elusive (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). Alternative educational pathways and qualifications may be a better option for many learners, but these pathways are not always available. Secondary education in the UK is primarily focused on preparing for GCSE exams from 14 years onwards, and it is not always made clear to refugee learners what other options are available for those who do not get into sixth form or university (Morrice et al., 2020). For many, ESOL or ESOL + courses at college become the only choice. Refugee families are often unable to help their children with learning English and Welsh at home and may even have limited literacy skills in their own languages. This means that many refugee learners struggle to obtain recognised qualifications at the appropriate age, and a recent report into the educational outcomes of refugee and asylum-

seeking children in England has shown that many refugee learners fall significantly behind their non-migrant peers in terms of attainments at GCSE (Hutchinson and Reader, 2020).

Refugee learners and their families often need additional emotional and pastoral support, including advice and guidance about educational programmes and future possibilities, but they lack the network of family and friends in the UK who can provide this. Schools and practitioners can provide some of this information and support, but without a specific targeted policy for refugee learners combined with adequate budget resources, it is difficult for a few individuals to cope with the increasing numbers and demands of their refugee learners (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Insufficient numbers of ESOL trained staff and limited professional development opportunities for other staff means that some of the needs of refugee learners and their families cannot be met. These difficulties may be partially offset by the presence of a teacher or support worker in schools who can speak the same language as refugee learners and can act as a bridge between school, home, other teachers, and students (Lundberg, 2020). Bilingual teaching assistants can voice the needs of refugees and help with their social integration. Training teachers to work in multicultural settings, to foster cultural awareness and intercultural communication, are additional ways in which staff can be better supported to work with refugee-background learners.

Having a strong commitment to social justice, the celebration of diversity and an inclusive approach, have been identified as some of the characteristics of good practice in refugee education (Pinson, Arnot, and Candappa, 2010; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Arnot and Pinson (2005) also highlighted the importance of parental involvement and improved communication links between schools and community agencies, who can support the role of the school in the community and assist refugee learners to adjust to life in the UK. This might include resettlement teams, refugee organisations, colleges, and local employers. Tikly's (2016) model for providing good quality education for refugees and other vulnerable groups includes an enabling home and community environment, enabling school environment, enabling policies and processes in the wider context, and the additional crucial element of linguistic capability, which is the mechanism whereby refugees and migrants can gain access to services and economic prospects. Language proficiency must be developed by refugee learners and their parents if their voices are to be heard, and they are to be properly integrated.

Many of these approaches and strategies are already in place in schools that have had extensive experience of working with refugee learners and their families, and these can be implemented more widely. Nevertheless, without specific policies and budget resources in place for these learners, the ideals of social justice cannot be easily translated into practice.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from participating institutions in December 2021.

### **4.2 Procedures**

Interviews took place in various locations across Wales and were carried out by several members of the research team, who each took responsibility for interviewing in their area. Most interviews were conducted online due to Covid restrictions, but it was also possible to carry out a small number of in-person interviews. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Purposeful sampling methods were used as the aim was to ensure the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. This means that the research team made direct contact with schools and institutions who were known to have refugee learners in their population and asked for potential participants from among those who were responsible for teaching and supporting these learners. The purpose was to gather data from practitioners and sites with experience.

The research team included academic staff from two universities teaching on a variety of programmes, who are committed to raising awareness about diversity and racial equality issues, both within their professional settings and in their local communities. The principal researcher is a university lecturer in Education and has also had many years of experience working as a special needs teacher. She is actively involved in several charities and support networks providing help to resettled families under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme and Community Sponsorship schemes.

In these roles the research team had considerable prior knowledge of schools and organisations which are supporting refugee families and learners. In some cases, a snowballing approach was followed as initial participants who agreed to take part in the study were able to suggest further potential contacts.

Information about the study was sent to all participating schools and interviews were arranged after consent had been obtained.

### **4.3 Participants**

This study represents the perspectives of practitioners from eight different institutions across Wales, including six schools (two secondaries and four primaries), one FE college and one Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. Practitioners included headteachers, class teachers, EAL specialists, and bilingual teaching assistants. There was one participant who agreed to take part from most institutions, but two or three from some others. Schools and services from the different regional consortia were represented, including some from GWE, ERW, CSC, and EAS. To some extent, participants' responses reflected their unique locations and contexts: some are working in urban settings with large numbers of refugee learners in their school population, while others in more rural settings have so far welcomed only a small number of refugee background learners.

The total sample was twelve participants from eight institutions. The sample is represented in the table below:

Table 1: Sample of participants

Headteacher	Class teacher	EAL specialist	Bilingual TA	Ethnic Minority Achievement Service
3	4	2	1	2

Most interviews took place online and were recorded and transcribed with participants' permission. Interviews were carried out in English between January – March 2022 by the research team based in the North and South.

Despite the limited number of interviews carried out, the quality of the data enabled the research team to gain valuable insights into many of the challenges, successes, and resource issues affecting practitioners' work with refugee learners both during and after the pandemic.

## **5. Presentation and analysis of data**

Data was transcribed and analysed thematically following Braun & Clarke's (2006) protocol. Transcripts were read repeatedly to identify key messages and themes, and themes were checked across all transcripts. Extracts and sub-headings were used to outline the principal features of accounts and to present a coherent narrative. This account was shared with other members of the research team to develop further analysis and draw conclusions.

The analysis is grounded on what participants have reported and verbatim quotes from participants have been incorporated throughout the analysis to provide an authentic account of the experience of schools and teachers working with refugee learners in Wales, both during the pandemic and beyond. Participants identities and those of participating institutions have been anonymised throughout.

Data is presented in narrative format in response to the research questions. These questions are presented in Appendix A and are related to the experiences of teachers and schools working with refugee learners in Wales, strategies developed to support such learners during and after the pandemic, as well as the support mechanisms and resources which are urgently required to maintain and improve effective working practices with these learners.

## **6. Main Findings**

Themes have been extracted from interview data and organised into four main sections which correspond to the initial research questions. The first section looks in detail at the experiences of practitioners working with refugee learners in Wales during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The next section explores the resources, support and training required to support the well-being of refugee learners in schools. The following section considers classroom and whole school strategies that might be used to support these learners and the final section draws conclusions and makes recommendations for policy makers and organisations to help schools to improve practice.

### **6.1 Experiences of practitioners working with refugee learners in schools in Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic**

This section summarizes the experiences of a small sample of teachers, headteachers, support workers, and language specialists working with refugee background learners in schools in Wales during and after the pandemic. Although the sample size is limited, the depth of participants' experience and understanding of many of the issues affecting refugee learners has enabled the research team to gain insights and draw conclusions which are thoroughly grounded in the data provided.

#### **6.1.1 Abruptness of school closure**

Some teachers and headteachers were upset about schools being so abruptly forced to close during the first pandemic period as they would have preferred greater autonomy to set up their own arrangements for learners. The speed with which restrictions were introduced and lack of time for teachers to appraise the evidence around shutting schools and potential effects on learners made several teachers uneasy. Hubs were set up in some areas which involved learners travelling to different schools and being taught by unfamiliar teachers. Although this disruption was felt to some extent by all learners, it was especially unwelcome to vulnerable groups such as refugee learners, who were used to having specialised support provided by specific members of staff with whom they had developed trusting relationships. The increased flexibility during the second lockdown period was appreciated.

#### **6.1.2 Home environment**

Home schooling is largely dependent on the learning opportunities and resources provided in the home environment, but this poses an increased risk for learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Poverty, food insecurity, inadequate housing, lack of heating and basic resources, are difficulties shared by some refugee learners in addition to other minority and disadvantaged groups. Although not all refugee households are experiencing economic disadvantage, issues such as overcrowding, poor health and unemployment do affect many.

Schemes such as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) specifically resettle refugee families who have additional health or educational needs, so that many of these learners may be from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds.

'Our children, when they arrive, because of the set criteria from the UN, in order for them to achieve refugee status, it means that they generally do come with a lot of needs, whether they're physical or educational'.

Fears were expressed from participants that school closures might exacerbate existing social and educational inequalities. Concerns about food poverty, inadequate housing,

overcrowding, domestic violence, and lack of parental resources at home were discussed. Many refugee families are living in cramped conditions, with limited resources, so that learners might lack a quiet, warm space in which to work at home.

‘We have issues with children needing food banks. We have issues with all sorts of stuff and when you're not seeing them daily for months at a time, you don't know what they've had to put up with and what they're battling with at home. I just - for a lot of our children, school is the safe place. That's where they feel happy. That's where they feel confident and having not had that’.

Teachers and support workers are used to providing intensive support for vulnerable learners in schools on a daily/ weekly basis, so many of them were understandably concerned about losing this regular contact. School routines and contact with teachers and peers can offer security and stability for vulnerable learners, and without their daily physical co-presence in schools, it was difficult for staff to know how learners were coping.

Several of the schools in this study are in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and have had an influx of refugee learners in recent years, which also affects the demographic of the school. Increasing diversity is something that schools and teachers are becoming more familiar with.

‘But basically, we're the only school that's not oversubscribed, all the refugees since then have been coming to us, well, the majority anyway. In the last 10 years, the demographic has changed massively. And I would say that white people are sort of the minority now in the school. It's incredibly diverse now’.

Some refugee learners have missed years of schooling during their family's migratory journey and may have limited literacy and basic skills even in home languages which can make it especially difficult to learn English and other subjects. In some cases, refugee families have also missed out on formal education in their own countries.

‘Lots of the children we get have never had any education before, especially when they're coming from Sudan, from Iraq, their education has been very broken, so some students are struggling with the real fundamentals, with addition, subtraction’.

The importance of family support for refugee learners to make progress with language and academic skills is well understood by schools and teachers, so that upskilling parents and increasing their stake in their children's success is a key part of teaching strategy.

‘So, the problem with them is home. What makes them slow for improving in the language is not the schools at all. It doesn't matter primary or secondary. It is home. It's the parents. But when I ask them, can you read and write Arabic? Some of them, they, they're not...they, they're not very good at reading and writing Arabic...we're worried about that, which is why I always say that to the parents, you have to be sure your child is not missing his home language. You have to be sure that you're sitting with them, but I don't know if they don't bother’.

### **6.1.3 Small class, intensive support in school for vulnerable learners**

Practitioners in schools across Wales arranged for support to be put in place for many vulnerable groups of learners during the pandemic and pandemic recovery period. Refugee learners were included in these groups during both lockdown periods and were encouraged to attend lessons in school. This was not compulsory so that, although there was some

good attendance throughout, many parents felt safer having their children at home, especially during the first lockdown. Some schools maintained high levels of attendance among vulnerable groups of learners, many of whom came into school daily from the outset.

Teachers and support workers were able to continue to provide a nurturing environment in schools during the pandemic, making sure that children were being fed every day and were socially supported.

#### **6.1.4 Opportunities for catching up**

Where refugee learners were able to attend lessons on campus, they continued to receive intensive support with language development and to follow a flexible curriculum; they were placed in small classes and were provided with technology to access online teaching sessions. Small class provision enabled these learners to have maximum levels of support and work at their own pace. This additional period of intensive support was an opportunity for some learners to catch up with essential skills development and, in some respects, this was better than normal provision where learners would be in larger groups following the mainstream timetable. In some cases, teachers reported that the reduction in student numbers on campus and flexibility to offer a mix of lessons and wellbeing activities during lockdown, had been especially beneficial for some refugee learners.

‘I came in every day during Covid and so did the majority of them, which was really beneficial for them because they really caught up where lots of the mainstream kids weren’t engaging whatsoever, so these guys were in every single day’.

For some refugee learners and their families, the opportunity to be educated is one of the main motivations for coming to the UK to live, and they demonstrate excellent attendance and completion of homework. Several participants in this study spoke about refugee learners taking education more seriously than some other groups of students.

‘What I would say is that, on the whole, there is real, compared to the mainstream White British children, there's a real onus on education’.

Teachers described these learners as not taking anything for granted, having spent time living in refugee camps where there were often no resources other than a board and a pen.

‘Our pupils that are from war-torn countries, or the sort of refugee status.... the fact that they’ve got an education, they’ve got technology in the building, they’ve got different teachers who are skilled, the fact that we’ve got a nurture class with three members of staff’.

#### **6.1.5 Difficulties accessing online lessons and teaching resources**

Although many teachers and schools were unfamiliar with online teaching methods at the start of the pandemic, they were obliged to create online resources and activities urgently. Live recorded lessons were timetabled each week for learners to access online and learners were provided with worksheets and assignments to complete at home and return using school portals. This remained the dominant method of teaching and learning for much of the pandemic. Teachers also arranged individual online tutorials with learners to check on progress and comprehension. Schools identified learners who had limited access to technology at home and were able to provide all eligible families with laptops, iPads, and dongles, where needed. Technology was also provided by local councils and private businesses.

A variety of apps and online platforms were trialled, such as Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom, Hub, Seesaw, Crash Academy, Giglets and other language learning programmes. Some of these were cheaply available at the start but became more expensive as the pandemic progressed, so that schools were unable to renew subscriptions.

Despite this provision, many learners including refugee learners had considerable difficulties going online and accessing resources, especially during the first lockdown period. This was partly due to unfamiliarity with technology, language barriers and lack of family support for online teaching methods. Many families lack literacy and digital skills and had limited understanding of the sorts of work their children were being asked to complete.

‘Because I would say most of the refugees, they have not worked online at all, especially in the first lockdown, because it was a new system anyway for the whole UK, in general. But I will say the people who were born here in UK, they’ve been dealing with the technology. Well, they’ve been dealing with a laptop. They’ve been dealing with e-mails. They’ve been dealing with that stuff. But people from the Middle East it’s not the same’.

Self-directed learning methods might be particularly difficult for vulnerable learners or those with language barriers. Inadequate understanding of tasks set or the need to complete homework and obtain feedback, meant that for some learners their education was effectively stalled whilst at home.

Refugee learners often receive high levels of additional support from teachers and support workers at school, which is very hard to replicate at home. Lessons with a trained assistant sitting beside learners in class to explain key concepts or vocabulary are resource intensive and specialised. Most families of refugee learners were unable to provide this level of specialised support at home.

‘Because if they stayed at home, it was really terrible, because at home most pupils don’t study at home, they don’t like it, just playing games, they need somebody else to look after them, tell them do that, do that, otherwise they just miss their lessons’.

In cases where learners were unable or unwilling to engage with online resources, teachers and support workers made contact through phone calls, emails, or messaging apps. These methods enabled staff to stay in touch with many refugee families and learners, although were not sufficient to increase motivation or attendance in some cases. Home visits were sometimes arranged to drop off work packs and food vouchers.

One bilingual teaching assistant described spending four hours patiently guiding the parents of a refugee learner through the process of logging in via a WhatsApp video call, showing them step by step how to use capital letters and passwords.

‘But this is what I do like, we, we’re doing a WhatsApp phone call. And then I will just say to her, ‘Put the mic on and then show me the screen.’ And then I’ll keep saying to her, ‘Press that, press that, press that,’ something like that’.

There were examples of high levels of online engagement, but there were also multiple cases of non-engagement and learners failing to log in to lessons or complete homework tasks on a regular basis. Getting families of refugee learners to support their children’s education at home was not straightforward in many cases, despite the best efforts of staff.

‘Any child that didn't engage we sent the list to our senior management and our family engagement officer, and they were tasked with phoning home, but again, our family engagement officer and senior management team speak English, so and then we spoke to parents on the phone, so we still weren't 100% like you could phone up and go. Oh hi. How's X doing and they were like Oh yeah X is fine. Well - why hasn't he done any work online? Oh well. We've had problems with Internet, or we haven't got time because I'm out at work all day... or his older brother needs the computer because he's in high school and that was that’.

### **6.1.6 Improved online skills during second lockdown period**

The abrupt shift to online learning during the first lockdown meant that schools, teachers, and learners were obliged to develop digital skills at speed. This proved hard for many learners and teachers but did result in an overall improvement in the level of online literacy that could be assumed during the second lockdown. Several participants commented that although schools had been unable to maintain contact with some vulnerable learners during the first lockdown period, when schools reopened, extra efforts were made to ensure that all learners had the skills to log in and access lessons.

‘We tried to support different groups of children and the refugee children got a fair bit of that support because we were very aware that they hadn't in the summer term, so we were insisting that they were in and sorting that, so we were really quite hot on their attendance’.

During the second lockdown, participants reported that there was an increased expectation that learners would know how to go online and complete tasks, and teachers were less prepared to accept claims of not knowing how to access resources. Teachers made daily phone calls to those who failed to engage, and learners were reminded to complete tasks on paper, if necessary, to submit when school re-opened.

‘I think the second lockdown, the teacher in the schools, they start really concentrating for...if, if all the kids log in everyday to see their homework and to see the class work. And if not, they were like contacting me straightway. So, yeah. We start getting for all of them...be sure that all of them can be logging in. And if he can't hand in his job, the teacher said if he can't hand in his job, we have to be sure that he's done it, given in paperwork’.

### **6.1.7 Communication with refugee families**

Communicating with refugee parents and families in languages and ways that they can easily understand is a significant challenge which was made more explicit during the pandemic, as basic information regarding government Covid advice, or instructions about how to access online materials, had to be conveyed urgently and to all families.

‘Using the pandemic as a good example, if we want to communicate the new rules that the government have set out, we need to do that ideally in English, Welsh, the other 39 languages, and in a way that is suitable for parents with low literacy but also those parents with low literacy and English as an additional language’.

Schools tried to create stronger links with all families during the pandemic, including families of refugee learners, providing information about Covid regulations, use of technology,

benefits, and free school meals. These forms of support continued throughout the pandemic and have in some cases strengthened links with families.

‘During Covid because we had weekly check ins with them, so that helped to build a good relationship- we helped to sort out how to claim free school meals etc - so there was a lot of communication through that, but we do work quite closely with the families, we get to know them over the years’.

### **6.1.8 Lack of social contact for vulnerable families**

Concerns were expressed that the lack of opportunities for social activities and events during lockdowns had resulted in increased social isolation especially for refugee learners and their families. Refugee families, many of whom had only recently arrived, had less of a local, social network in place to depend on. It takes time to develop a sense of belonging to a new country and to feel settled in the community. Refugee background learners were unable to develop friendships and enjoy time with peers during lockdown.

‘So where maybe families who had been born and raised here, might go for walks together, but maybe some of them didn’t have the social contacts in their mobile phones or their WhatsApp group to say does anybody fancy going for a walk here today, where maybe here we would see families going together, socially distanced of course’.

Lack of social contact is particularly impactful for vulnerable groups who are already at risk of social exclusion and have diminished family support.

‘I think that balance in school and home is a necessity for most children and particularly those who have had some trauma, or the families had trauma, they need that consistency, and they need that knowing where they’re going to be. We’ve got children traumatised across the board now not just our refugee families. And it is trauma, you know, when you look at some of the resilience from our pupils now, it’s non-existent, you know, and, yeah, I don’t know’.

As the pandemic continued, there was increased recognition of the importance of pastoral care and the detrimental effects of social isolation for all learners, especially vulnerable groups. Some schools supplemented lessons in the morning with wellbeing activities such as cooking, gardening, and sports, after lunch. Additional opportunities were provided for learners to chat to each other online, in breakout rooms and forums. Learners were not expected to put cameras on, in cases where this was an obstacle to their participation.

Teachers observed noticeable relief when learners returned to the classroom, although they sometimes had to re-learn important social skills. Interviewees described many learners, including refugee learners, as much quieter when they returned to school after the pandemic. Acknowledging the loss of confidence and increased anxiety of some learners, teachers and support staff made time for learners to socialise and re-establish friendships when they came back to school.

‘When they're at home, they haven't had that chance to have fun and make those friendships and the wellbeing aspect that .... I mean they when they came back to school we were told as a school to make sure that they just have play time. Don't structure a PE lesson. Just let them have free play because that's what they need to catch up on. They need to catch up on with their mates and have a good time and have fun and just play. So, we did a lot of that which has helped’.

This emphasis on emotional support and giving young people the time to talk about their experiences and situations, has continued into the pandemic recovery period, where learners have been able to access counselling and specialist support services, where needed. Some refugee background learners were also affected by family bereavement during the pandemic, adding to their previous traumatic experiences.

### **6.1.9 Significant gaps in knowledge**

Participants spoke about significant gaps in basic skills when learners returned to school, and there were concerns about the potential long-term effects on learners' knowledge and levels of skill development. This may be of particular concern for those who already have language and literacy issues. When learners returned to school, teachers had to remind themselves to start from scratch.

'We reminded ourselves not to take anything for granted as well. So, when we've come in expecting children at this age, at this level, to be doing that, and we're thinking, no, we haven't done that for such a long time within school, why would they know that? And so, we're just having to remind ourselves, second nature to us, it's definitely not for them'.

There was also a noticeable deterioration in English language skills among refugee learners, as many of them had only been immersed in their home language during lockdown.

'And I think they're not exactly where they should be. But with our EAL children, I think it's even bigger because they've got the language gap as well as the learning gap. And they weren't hearing the English at home. They weren't accessing the English books and so on'.

For most refugee learners the pandemic interrupted emotional and pastoral support that was being provided at school, and this interruption in support was especially troublesome for practitioners working with secondary school age learners, who in some cases left school without proper strategies in place for future career plans. It is not clear what the impacts of this removal of support are at such a pivotal age.

'And then we had the COVID situation coming, yes. And then she is the...we stopped. Well, when obviously I didn't see her that much. And then when she came to 16 years old, she just left, I don't know. I feel sad by myself because I really worked very, very hard just to, to talk to her, just to get her...and then she was getting there'.

## **6.2. Training, resources, and external agencies required to support wellbeing of refugee learners in Wales**

Many of these suggestions and recommendations refer to the teaching of refugee learners in schools in Wales more generally, rather than just during the time of the pandemic, although the disruption caused by Covid-19 may have highlighted the additional challenges involved in working with and supporting vulnerable groups of learners. Refugee learners are a distinct group with complex and special needs, and as numbers of refugees are increasing in schools and colleges throughout Wales, there is an increasingly urgent need for specific training for schools and teachers to be able to respond with understanding and sensitivity to their situations. Many refugee families have high educational aspirations but have been

forced to leave their own countries under traumatic circumstances; learners need time to develop language skills and catch up missed schooling as well as adapt to the new culture. Schools and teachers are some of the first cultural contacts made so that these relationships and behaviours become especially significant.

### **6.2.1. Training to work with refugee learners**

One of the main challenges for schools and teachers is that refugees can arrive in the UK at any time of the academic year due to the vicissitudes of war and conflicts in their home countries and need to be accommodated as quickly as possible. Services such as education and housing are given very little warning. Refugees arrive in difficult circumstances and need to be re-housed and re-educated quickly, so that schools often find themselves in the position of responding to a sudden influx of refugees without much training, or consultation with other agencies. Some of this work was disrupted by the pandemic and is still ongoing in the post-pandemic period.

‘Around November, we had such an influx of refugees with no provision for them so that the school decided to create an alternate provision for them to give them enough English so they can access mainstream lessons’.

There is limited training available specifically for schools and staff, so that individuals are left to work out their response largely by themselves.

‘I attended a conference which was related to refugees, so again, that was sought out, it wasn't given to us necessarily because we have refugees. We've also sought out resources as well, so books and other things that would help refugees particularly’.

Schools may decide to employ bilingual teaching assistants or introduce a new curriculum to meet the needs of refugee learners, based on their professional knowledge and understanding of working with other groups of students with additional needs, as well as on specific information gathering and research. Many of these strategies work well and are examples of good practice which can be shared across schools in Wales, so that schools with more experience of teaching refugee learners help to train those with less experience.

### **6.2.2 Improving cultural awareness in schools**

Participants spoke about the need to engage meaningfully with refugee learners' native cultures to ease their transition and to enable other learners to learn more about global issues. Celebrating the diversity of the student population can be integrated into the curriculum with sensitivity, but teachers may need training to develop the skills and knowledge to deal with intercultural interactions in multicultural environments. One suggestion was that increased diversity training should be incorporated into teacher training and initial postings of newly qualified teachers.

‘And one of the things that we started to talk about this week was about raising awareness of some of the issues that our pupils face, with other pupils. Having that sort of training I suppose for the wider school population might well be also quite useful, that sort of social education. So, I think building that awareness is something that we would like to look at as a school. They need to understand our culture and we need to understand their culture. Diversity is more than having multilingual posters in the foyer’.

Some resources dealing with issues surrounding sanctuary, refugees and asylum seekers, are already available in the Hwb repository provided by the Welsh Government ([hwb.gov.wales](http://hwb.gov.wales)), but these can be supplemented with materials developed by schools and practitioners for their specific populations.

### **6.2.3 Increased EAL / ESOL provision**

Additional funding for English language teaching is needed in some schools to recruit more specialised EAL/ ESOL teachers and EAL Teaching Development Officers. It was felt that existing provision lacks the capacity to meet the needs of many refugee learners, who often arrive in Wales with very little or no English, as well as low levels of literacy in their home language. English language teaching or ESOL is seen as the gateway to integration and future progression. Most refugee learners are given intensive language support in schools when they first arrive, but funding is usually withdrawn after an initial two-year period although the evidence shows that many learners continue to need support for a long time after this (Schellekens, 2019).

Better continuity of funding arrangements would enable schools to provide enhanced support, including the development of specially tailored curricula and alternative qualifications. One suggestion was to use the system of Individual Development Plans for all refugee learners.

‘The IDP system that we have in this country are individual development plans. Now that system would be perfect for refugee status pupils, that they come in, and for argument’s sake they have absolutely no English whatsoever. So, the thing is, is that if we then decided as a local authority that that pupil will need access to 20 hours of one-to-one support, that funding then comes straight into the school and the school have an obligation to spend that money on buying in a person’.

There is some provision in Wales for newly arrived Welsh language learners to go to a study centre for two months and be fully immersed. There is not the same provision for learning English although some refugee learners might benefit from such.

One of the key findings of this study was the inconsistency of provision between schools in different areas. This ranged from schools having one EAL teacher for a large secondary school with up to 140 EAL background learners, to a team of five or six EAL specialists in other schools. Where EAL provision is limited, refugee learners can attend EAL sessions in small classes or receive one to one provision for up to five hours per week. This is supplemented with support from teaching assistants and class teachers, who try to make mainstream lessons as accessible as possible.

In schools with more EAL provision a tailored ESOL curriculum can be provided for all learners who are new to English, including refugee learners, for up to fifteen hours per week, with additional differentiated Maths and Science lessons. Learners can follow this bespoke curriculum until they are assessed as having adequate language and literacy skills to join the main timetable.

Having enough EAL/ESOL staff to provide language teaching at differentiated levels is essential and means that refugee learners can have intensive support when it is most needed. Not all learners make progress with language learning at the same rate, and some may be ready to re-join the main timetable sooner than others.

It is often not properly understood how long it can take for learners to acquire sufficient language skills to be able to re-join mainstream provision, and teachers and families might be misled into thinking that learners' spoken language skills mean that they are ready for academic qualifications.

'And because the English at home is zero for his parents... so, his English for his parents - they think, 'Oh my God, his English is amazing!'

Factors such as family background, age, motivation, and prior learning may all have an impact on outcomes. Many schools have large numbers of EAL/ESOL learners and the co-ordination of services for these learners takes time and preparation. Schools requested that co-ordination of EAL provision to be recognised as separate from ALN.

'I would like to see EAL coordinators have some sort of recognition for doing what they're doing. And release time to actually do it in because they're doing it in addition to teaching fulltime and you know having their own PPA'.

EAL/ESOL teachers and Teaching Development Officers can also offer training and support for other subject teachers in schools to look at lessons and materials through an EAL lens and to raise awareness of language acquisition in general. These specialists have an important role in raising the profile of language learning in schools and reminding all staff that language learning is a whole school responsibility.

'And part of my role is I go in my support mainstream teachers sort of upskill them. So, I give them tips on what we could be doing, how can we develop the curriculum'.

#### **6.2.4 Better screening and background information**

All participants in this study stressed the vital importance of schools and teachers having more detailed information about refugee learner backgrounds when they arrive. Refugee learners come from different educational systems, often having spent several years in migration, and missing large chunks of their education. Communication difficulties make it hard for schools to identify additional emotional or learning needs, and it might be years before refugee learners are able to articulate their needs themselves. Better screening and links with local resettlement services were called for.

'Because we have very little information about the situations that our refugee pupils come from, we don't know if they're turning up at school with PTSD. We have no idea of some of the traumas that they might have experienced, the things that they might have seen, and the scale as well. We can put support in place - but for somebody who's come to Wales who speaks no English, no Welsh, and has come from a war-torn country or whatever, and who might have been living in a refugee camp, whether that's in Northern France or in somewhere else - we don't know'.

Information about family backgrounds, literacy levels, medical or psychological needs, are communicated as much as possible via interpreters, including bilingual teaching assistants, siblings, or friends with better English skills, although this is often unreliable and unprofessional. Private details about learners and their families should be handled with sensitivity and respect. The voices and needs of refugee learners and their families may not be properly communicated in this manner.

'Lots of the time you're going through interpreters and sometimes people over the phone, they don't want to disclose absolutely everything, they don't want to air their

difficulties in public, lots of the time they're going through friends and maybe there are certain things they don't want to share'.

### **6.2.5 Identifying Additional Learning Needs**

Identifying additional needs at the earliest opportunity means that learners receive the appropriate amount and types of additional support. Additional Learning Needs are difficult to identify especially when learners are unable to use mainstream languages, so might easily be missed. This can mean that some refugee learners are not provided with the additional educational support which would enable them to make progress with learning and qualifications. It can also be difficult for families and learners to express their concerns. Under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) there is a legal requirement for parents and young people to be involved in all decisions regarding ALN, and it is important that their voices are heard. Currently there is often no way of refugee families' voices being properly heard, which can mean that refugee learners with additional learning needs are further discriminated.

'We need an opportunity for the voices of these families to be heard in school, whether that is parents or the pupils themselves and whilst we've got services in school, where parents and pupils can raise a variety of issues, if the language is a barrier, then automatically, I would suggest that that door is closed'.

At present EAL is not classed as an Additional Learning Need, although in many cases it is a major obstacle to refugee background students accessing the curriculum and gaining an appropriate education. It is often very hard for teachers or support workers to understand the cause of difficulties.

'She took at least, I would say, half, half year until she talked to me. I would sit by her. She will not talk to anybody. She doesn't want to speak. It was a big story behind that, behind the girl. But I say to her dad, I can't help her if I don't know what's going on, why she doesn't want to talk to me, why she doesn't want me with her'.

### **6.2.6 Increased emphasis on emotional and pastoral support in schools**

In addition to identification of learning needs, the emotional effects of trauma and displacement on learners and the time taken to address these issues, is often poorly understood by those working with refugees.

'You've just been locked out of your country not knowing where you're going and just landing, that might well have a very big influence on how long it takes a child to feel at home being assimilated. And I think these refugee children, once they do start communicating, it's only then you realise where the trauma is. And they still have that trauma, and then you think we are missing years waiting for them to be able to communicate and we don't have that access either in their language'.

Schools requested more training for staff in recognising signs of trauma and using trauma-informed approaches in classrooms. Many schools have an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) or someone who has completed trauma-informed training, but there are not enough of these specially trained professionals to deal with the many pastoral issues arising in larger schools. Student counsellors and mental health practitioners attend schools regularly, although these specialists are typically fluent only in English or Welsh. Buddy schemes are used in some schools so that refugee learners are paired with fellow students to learn about school systems. There is evidence that such buddy schemes can

have significant benefits for both parties, for vulnerable learners and those who are in the role of mentors, especially in terms of promoting well-being and facilitating positive educational experiences (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019).

The impact of war, upheaval and having to flee one's home country is not well understood, but some refugee learners were described as always being on the alert as if they needed to defend themselves in school. Participants speculated on some of the possible effects of living in refugee camps.

'But I don't know whether it's being used to being in the refugee camps or it's like their backs are up, they're always on alert. They will fight to protect themselves- we've had some incidents where they have, they have got into fights. But I do think sometimes there is a current amongst some of the mainstream kids'.

Wellbeing and mental health topics have a central place in the new curriculum in Wales (Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act, 2021) in which all learners are encouraged to better understand their own and others' emotional and mental health needs, in addition to ways of accessing support where needed. Making these conversations accessible through the languages of minority groups is clearly an important next step.

'All of our support is advertised throughout the school, and we have welfare walls, and these welfare walls have a similar structure and pattern across the school, so no matter what building you're in, you will walk past one of these walls that says, 'If you've an issue, go and see this lady. If you're being bullied, go and see this person'. But those boards are all around school but granted of course the language that they're written in is in English and Welsh'.

### **6.2.7 Better access to translation services**

Schools requested help with translation of key information into minority languages. In some areas with greater diversity local councils already provide centralised translation services where needed, but this service is not consistently available for all schools. School admission and policy documents, progress reports, and information about events, should be available in all home languages, and tailored for learners from all backgrounds. Apps are not always appropriate or easy to use and often not available in minority languages.

'There's no translation service for schools, so anything that we send out to parents is either in the medium of English or Welsh, so unfortunately our refugee pupils they will have communications from the school, its electronic, it comes through an app. but it will be in English or Welsh, there's no translation service for putting things into Arabic, and if you've ever tried to use things like Google Translate they're never appropriate and they never work'.

Schools may have 40- 50 languages represented in their student population as well as families with low literacy levels, so that producing information in easily accessible formats for all these groups is extremely challenging. Families of refugee learners are often unaware of many aspects of the UK education system, including types of subjects, exams, and career options for their children.

### **6.2.8 Access to Higher and Further Education**

Monitoring outcomes of refugee learners is crucial to know how needs are being met and to investigate barriers to further education. This group of learners has significant and additional needs compared to other ethnic minority or disadvantaged groups: missed schooling,

language barriers, and the difficulty of identifying potential additional learning needs, means that, despite family motivation and aspirations to go on to higher education, many refugee learners struggle with the testing regime of the UK education system and fail to gain the necessary GCSE and A-level qualifications that are required for admission to university (Gateley, 2015; Morrice; Tip; Brown; & Collyer, 2020).

GCSE qualifications in English and Maths are considered the benchmark which all learners should achieve, but even when refugees arrive in years 8 or 9 it is often too late for them to gain the necessary language skills to succeed with good grades at GCSEs, and to therefore make the transition to A-levels, and university. Even after several years' intensive language support many are still struggling with reading and writing in English.

'I still sometimes communicate with them, and they are still struggling with their writing and reading as well. They are really important, because in school you need to improve your writing and reading, not only speaking. Speaking is definitely really important but the most important in school is writing and reading, you need to learn formal language, specific words.'

To be able to study for A-levels, most learners need to obtain a minimum of five grade Cs at GCSE, and it can take years for some learners to get sufficient English and other basic skills to study at A-level. In some cases, parents and families continue to hope that their children can go to university even when their language skills are inadequate. Discussions between schools and families need to be realistic, taking account of language skills, but also providing inspiring and motivating options, other than university.

'His dad was hoping for him to go to the uni. I say to him there's nothing wrong with your child. He's a very, very clever boy. He is very smart boy. But the language barrier that I would say, if he come here early, he probably would be able to do it. But what we can do, until he come to the GCSE, his English will...probably will be okay to go to the college and learn for the...carry on with the hairdresser'.

In some cases, even if learners obtain A level qualifications, they are unable to access student finance if they have been in the country for less than 5 years. Many refugee learners continue with their education in local colleges, despite their earlier ambitions or those of their families, and improved links should be made between families, schools, and colleges, so that options are clearly communicated at an early stage.

Many of the findings in this small-scale study concur well with findings elsewhere. They relate to an improvement in training and resources for practitioners working with refugees generally, and not just for the pandemic or post-pandemic period. As in earlier studies (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Biasutti et al. 2020; Primdahl et al. 2021), participants in this study stressed the need for a more holistic approach to teaching and supporting refugee learners that takes account of their various social, learning, and emotional needs. They expressed concerns about the problems with assessing the needs of newly arrived refugee learners, partly due to language barriers and lack of background information. There is a need for improved access to translation services, and staff training in dealing with trauma and other effects of forced migration, as has been discussed elsewhere (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Biasutti et al, 2020). The additional time needed for refugee learners to develop adequate language and literacy skills to be able to participate in mainstream programmes needs to be recognised and supported by increased EAL/ESOL provision and more continuity of funding arrangements.

## **6.3 Classroom/ whole school strategies to support the teaching and learning of refugee children and young people within schools in Wales**

This section outlines some of the classroom and whole school strategies that are currently being employed by practitioners in their work with refugee learners in schools in Wales. Many of these strategies were in place before Covid -19 lockdowns took place and continued to be utilised both during and after the pandemic. They represent the expertise and commitment of headteachers, teachers, and support workers to support the learning and teaching of refugee learners in schools across Wales. Although the pandemic and school closures made it more difficult to implement some of these strategies, interviewees were nevertheless keen to share details of their adaptations, especially those that seemed to be successful, and felt that it would be worth sharing their experiences with other schools with less experience of working with refugees.

Strategies to support young refugee learners in primary schools include taking the time to listen and making sure they feel welcome and safe.

‘We are people with them. We are not authoritarian with them. They are welcome. The children welcome them. So it is that feeling that they are safe and that is the way everybody speaks to them. Everybody sorts it out. We do not rush anything, so we don't rush any problems they have. If they have an issue, it's dealt with until they are happy it's dealt with and that takes an awful lot of time, but everybody does that in school. You know, right from all support staff- all the way through, time is given so they feel welcome, they feel at home here’.

### **6.3.1 Additional EAL support**

Making sure there was adequate support from the outset so that refugee learners were able to pick up languages and settle into their new environment was also considered a key strategy, and in several cases, schools were fortunate to be able to employ Arabic and Pashto speaking support workers to assist with this transition. Support workers speaking other languages would also have been desirable but were not available.

‘They get the gist. And if they're given the tools, particularly the idea of having somebody next to you who can explain what's going on. The support worker and the school sat in the middle with the child and helped everything from the outside, so the families felt they had contacts, and they knew what was going on’.

In some schools in North Wales, the bilingual support workers were also learning Welsh in classrooms alongside the refugees and were able to liaise with families outside of school.

‘They were going to the same mosques so they're able to discuss things there in an informal way’.

Refugee learners are assessed for English language level and general ability when they arrive in secondary school, in their own language, if possible. Intensive language support is allocated to those with most need, and learners who are completely new to English may be withdrawn from non-core lessons for up to five sessions a week. This level of support is reduced after the initial period, but learners can continue to receive support for 2-3 years.

Some refugee learners may be allocated to classes where there are other speakers of the same language or put in lower academic sets initially where there is additional support available, to focus on basic language skills and concepts before moving into higher groups.

‘We have a half-sized specialist class that deals with pupils who’ve got very, very low literacy, no matter whether it’s low literacy because of an additional learning need or low literacy levels or low level of English’.

Although this is an understandable use of resources and small class support is valuable, these learners have distinct and separate needs which need to be recognised, and this practice can sometimes have the unfortunate consequence of making learners give up on their educational aspirations.

‘Whereas they were quite enthused about coming to the UK, to come into the British education system, and then to be put in a lower group, you almost see them switch off you know because they can see what’s going on’.

Assessing language difficulties and additional learning needs can be problematic, especially with those refugee learners who have missed years of schooling in refugee camps, and whose parents are unable to communicate fluently with schools. Many refugee background learners can develop sufficient language skills to communicate with peers and integrate with the school community but continue to struggle with academic subjects and technical vocabulary for a long time. Some learners are expected to attend lessons in Science, Maths, English, Cymraeg and other subjects almost from the start, despite having limited understanding of basic vocabulary. This is clearly a considerable burden, and one participant spoke about refugee learners being sat in the back of class for several years, not speaking any English and not understanding what was going on.

‘There are lots of children just sat on the back. I mean when I first got here, there were girls who’ve been here for about two years who spoke very, very little English, and just used to be in the back of a classroom. So, we realised that that needed to change’.

### **6.3.2 Tailored Curricula/ ESOL qualifications**

To overcome this problem, some schools have developed an alternative ESOL timetable for refugee learners and others who are new to English. This allows beginners and those with limited English to spend time focusing on developing their basic language skills before being expected to cope with subject specialist vocabulary and other more advanced academic skills required in the mainstream timetable.

‘A team of about five or six within the EAL department and we’ve got separate provision – and they get 10 ESOL lessons with (an ESOL teacher) a week, 20 a fortnight and then they have 5 lessons additional English on top of that. Basically, it’s 12 weeks of trying to get them, give them enough language and confidence to go into mainstream classes and be able to flourish basically’.

Learners are re-assessed each term to decide if they are ready to join mainstream classes and might then be offered a reduced timetable in addition to more ESOL classes.

‘So, for example, we had three pupils who at the start of this term, so first week of January, we felt their English was too good to be keeping them in our ESOL class, but also not good enough to be completely thrown in the deep end. So, they attend maths with everybody else, they then go to three sciences and then they have one GCSE option’.

GCSE qualifications in English and Maths are considered the benchmark which all learners should achieve, but even when refugees arrive in year 8 or 9 it is often too late for them to gain the necessary language skills to succeed with good grades at GCSEs, and to therefore make the transition to A-levels, and university. Even after several years' intensive language support many are still struggling with reading and writing in English.

'I still sometimes communicate with them, and they are still struggling with their writing and reading as well. They are really important, because in school you need to improve your writing and reading, not only speaking. Speaking is definitely really important but the most important in school is writing and reading, you need to learn formal language, specific words.'

The demands of GCSE curricula and exam requirements mean that however hard some learners work on their English skills, they will still fail to obtain good grades:

'He is working as hard as he can and really, he might get an E at the end – it's quite disheartening, but that E is an achievement – they're not going to hit a C yet because they haven't had the time – it's time that they need". Moreover, English Language exams are now only available in one tier, so "You're in the situation where some of the students don't even understand the questions.'

Refugee learners may need additional time to get to GCSE standard, and in many cases would benefit from having a lighter timetable, with fewer exams. Having a tailored curriculum is often not possible in schools due to staffing issues, which means that learners are entered for qualifications that they cannot really manage.

'Who's going to physically be with them and timetabling, and what do we offer them. They would not be able to be with me. They're doing a lot really, they're doing a minimum of eight, and then to get to sixth form they need a minimum of five Cs, but really getting into sixth form with five Cs is really not that good going, and probably some departments will not accept them'.

An additional challenge is when refugee learners arrive in schools midway through years 10, 11 or 12, when GCSE and A-level qualifications are already underway, and some coursework has already been completed.

'We're getting children admitted every week or so and they're just coming in too late to do the course. Some children they think that they can access this maybe, but it's too late to catch up with something like Mice and Men with all the American slang. It's impossible'.

In some cases, ESOL qualifications are offered where learners have arrived too late to follow GCSE English programmes.

'So, for the pupils who would be on a Band A so completely new, there's no way they can access GCSE lessons, they basically have sort of half their timetable develop into weekly ESOL, so it's an ESOL course. We're trying to get them all on ESOL qualifications as high as possible, so they start doing their exams for that in the next couple of months'.

The aim is to get learners up to Entry 3 or Level 1 ESOL before they leave schools so they can then attend local FE colleges and follow vocational programmes in addition to ESOL

(ESOL+). Additional OCR qualifications are also offered in some schools, in place of GCSEs.

'If they don't get a level one or Entry three, then they've got to do two more years of ESOL which for a lot of pupils, it's just mind numbing. If we can get them to that level then they can do ESOL plus hospitality, ESOL plus catering because they've got a little bit more broader range opportunity'.

Some schools also offer an ESOL curriculum alongside A-levels. Having a flexible strategy so that learners can combine ESOL with other options means that schools keep open the possibility of further and higher education.

### **6.3.3 Bilingual Teaching Assistants (BTAs)**

Bilingual teaching assistants (Arabic/ English or Pashto/ English) are employed as a matter of policy in some schools, more by chance in others, but these members of staff can act as a vital bridge between refugee families, schools, and external organizations. Bilingual teaching assistants work closely with refugee families over several years and their role is to help refugee learners to settle into their new environment, develop confidence, and learn to communicate with classmates and teachers. They often have knowledge and understanding of refugee families' cultural and educational backgrounds, and some have personal experience of being refugees themselves.

'It's a brand-new system but I mean a lot of our families have been, or some of them have been five, six years in camps and so on. So, the whole education system is completely new to parents and needs explaining. And it takes some settling into. I think an LSA, especially an Arabic speaker, it will be much easier to do that, because he knows, or she knows, their background, their mentalities, how they think'

Having the support of teachers/ teaching assistants from the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds is very useful, although this is clearly challenging to provide in practice given a limited supply. Generous financial allowances were made for some schools in the vanguard of governments responding to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, and there was an emphasis in some areas on getting things right from the outset. This meant that bilingual teaching assistants could be employed full time in some schools and could support individual learners for up to two years.

'We were the first school, so I think we were a little bit of an experiment. They wanted to get it right. It was huge, it was a massive story at the time with everything going on in Syria. And every local authority wanted to get it right'.

Several schools in this study spoke about the importance of having bilingual teaching assistants. These teaching assistants can convey important information to schools relating to the needs of individual learners and might be asked to attend Pupil Centred Planning (PCP) meetings with refugee families.

'But you know for PCP meetings, I think having a BTA who is familiar with the family, familiar with the children, it's less intimidating for the family. They're more encouraged to sort of voice what their opinions are. So, what we're trying to get out at school is if you are arranging a PCP meeting with an EAL parent, you know, bear in mind that they have a right to somebody there to interpret for them and to have all of that documentation translated as well. I mean they can't participate fully in the

process otherwise. So, and that's very much based in sort of a rights-based approach'.

#### **6.3.4 Use of home languages and promoting bi/tri-lingualism in Wales**

Bilingual teaching assistants can encourage learners to use their home languages in class to make sense of key concepts and vocabulary, which is an effective tool for learning other languages of schooling: trans-linguaging is an empowering approach and can reduce the stigma attached to being non-English/ Welsh speaking. It enables learners to participate in lessons and to share their own prior knowledge and experience.

'And first language as well, making it known that the importance of using their first language and to maintain their first language and to sort of raise status of it within the school so it's not stigmatised in any way and children, there are other Arabic children who are not refugees in school, so make them feel welcome to use their first language in work- split page in half and translate you know write some of it, do a first draft in Arabic even'.

Having books and materials in home languages and encouraging the uptake of first language GCSEs are other ways in which refugee learners are enabled.

Wales is a bilingual country, and many schools and teachers are familiar with bilingual teaching methodologies and the importance of promoting learners' home languages. In some Welsh medium primary schools in North Wales, refugee learners learn Welsh before English and can even become the best Welsh speakers in their class. These schools are encouraging young refugee learners to be trilingual, using Welsh and English in addition to their home language, as the situation requires.

'There was an instance this morning, one of the children that we have speaks every word to Welsh to me, speaks English to some of her friends. But mum phoned this morning and she spoke Arabic over the phone to mum because we needed a little bit of support to discuss something with mum. And the child who is the eldest refugee in the school spoke fluently and then said to me this, this, and this. Spoke back to mum in Arabic. And mum decided, bye and thank you and just cracked on. So, they speak three languages now without... so that's really nice'.

Refugee learners are often the main spokesperson for their families, so they have the additional role of helping their families to integrate and be successful in the new culture. Interviewees spoke about the different patterns of family life and expectations placed on some young refugee learners.

'The children have to shoulder the burden of new school, shoulder the burden of what their parents are going through. Culturally, children are far more involved in family life from the Syrian background than maybe local children are. I think they do much more. And the older children look after the younger children, and they have been given that responsibility and there's an expectation of that. So, I do think the children shoulder that'.

#### **6.3.5 Links with parents/ supporting and upskilling refugee families**

Several participants spoke about the importance of making stronger connections between schools and refugee families. Families of refugee learners often lack information and support networks outside of school, so have limited understanding of how the education system works in the UK, or possible career pathways for their children.

‘They need somebody just to communicate with them, to explain about their children, what they do at school or exams. Nobody knows what’s going on, they don’t know what GCSE means, they know their son or daughter is in year 11, next year will be in college, or wherever, no plan, it’s a big problem, and nobody can tell them all the time, GCSE is really important, your son needs to study, to do his homework, there’s nobody available to do that’.

Schools provide information and access to resources, such as books, uniforms, free school meals, trips, and extra-curricular activities. They also signpost to other community services and organisations, including language and skills classes. These are important functions in terms of upskilling parents of refugee learners and improving their opportunities.

Parents of refugee learners may need advice and training on using IT, claiming benefits, and accessing other sources of support. Giving advice about nutrition and the importance of healthy lifestyles might also be important following the pandemic.

‘I must say some of our EAL pupils and our refugee families are really on the lowest rung as well with that. Everything that comes in the packed lunch is in a packet so, you know, the nutrition is really poor - it’s gone downhill very fast’.

The educational background of refugee families also has a major impact on the language and literacy progress of learners in schools. Even when books are provided for learners to take home, some families are unable to support their children’s education.

‘The big difference I find is if they’re illiterate in their home language, it really has a knock-on effect in their ability to pick up the English. But these kids, they only get their English in the school. When they go home, no English. And I start to give them books for them to read, but they will not read. Why are you not reading? Because no one can read with them at home. Mum...mother and father cannot read at home. Nobody will practice with them. So, they will not move faster. They will not improve as the other, you know, the other British kids on the school. So, it will be very slow’.

### **6.3.6 Summary of strategies used to support refugee learners in Wales**

Many of these classroom and whole school strategies to support refugee learners in schools in Wales were developed before the pandemic period but took on additional significance during school closures. The important role of bilingual teaching assistants, and improving communication links between schools and refugee families, were highlighted as key elements of providing information and support for refugee learners and their families during lockdowns. Strategies such as providing additional ESOL/ EAL support in schools and tailored curricula were able to be continued throughout lockdown periods, although not all refugee learners came into school or attended lessons. There were also additional strategies that evolved during the pandemic such as well-being activities to address the social and emotional needs of learners, which continue to be useful in the post-pandemic recovery period and may be a lasting consequence of the pandemic. Raising awareness of the importance of emotional wellbeing and pastoral support may be a lasting consequence of Covid-19, and the development of digital skills is another legacy.

## 7. Recommendations

### 7.1 Recommendations made by schools and teachers

These recommendations have been made by schools and teachers working closely with refugee learners in schools across Wales and are based on their experience to date of what is working and what needs to be improved. The breadth of recommendations clearly shows that more needs to be done to improve services and outcomes for refugee learners as they are assimilated into mainstream educational provision.

- Better screening and identification of additional needs, where relevant, including background information about education missed and family literacy, to help schools and teachers to make appropriate adaptations for meeting learners' needs.
- Training for staff about the unique and complex challenges that refugee learners might face and ways of identifying signs of trauma, to help staff to develop skills in dealing with these situations.
- More awareness and up-skilling for staff and students in issues around sanctuary, refugees, and asylum seekers
- Increased emotional and pastoral support in schools, including for speakers of other languages.
- Improved access to translation services to ensure that important communication and information is available in various home languages, and in formats that are easily accessible. This will avoid the need for other family members or friends to be employed as interpreters.
- Increased English language learning provision for secondary age learners and time to grasp the basics before they are expected to join mainstream timetables. This will enable learners to concentrate on acquiring basic skills without being overwhelmed by the demands of multiple academic subjects.
- Co-ordination of ESOL/ EAL provision to be given specific time and recognition.
- Employment of bilingual teaching assistants to support refugee learners to settle into their new environment and make use of their own languages to develop new linguistic and academic skills.
- Tailored, alternative curricula and qualifications, which allow refugee learners to focus on the development of English language skills, Maths, and selected additional subjects.
- ESOL qualifications at school to an appropriate level to enable learners to study vocational options in addition to further English language at college.
- Close links with local colleges and other providers of work experience. Realistic goals which allow refugee learners to be successful.
- Improved communication with refugee learners and their families to support learners in their adaptation to the UK educational system and to make better informed choices about future career options.
- Continuous monitoring of educational outcomes for refugee learners to gauge how well needs are being met. This is a key element of measuring success of support mechanisms and provision and should be undertaken by senior school staff and ESOL/ EAL specialists who work closely with these learners and are often in the best position to provide progress reports.
- Training and increased cultural awareness to enable staff and other learners to become more familiar with global and diversity issues.
- Closer links between schools and resettlement officers and other community organisations that offer support and opportunities to resettled families.

## 7.2 Limitations

The above findings should be viewed in the light of several limitations. A relatively small number of interviews were carried out in schools across Wales, so that it is not possible to make detailed comparisons between regions, or between types of schools. As such, this account does not claim to be generalisable or representative of the larger experience of schools and services across Wales.

Practitioners from eight different institutions were interviewed about the impact of Covid on their refugee-background learners: some of these were from primary schools and some secondary, some in urban areas of Wales, some in rural parts. Several of these practitioners are working in regions with a high density of refugee background learners and have had substantially more experience of responding to the needs of these learners; others are in schools which have only recently started welcoming refugee learners. These different perspectives were reflected in the responses. All these practitioners were responsible for teaching and supporting some refugee-background learners during and after the pandemic. Their combined insights reveal some of the concerns and struggles that individual schools and teachers inevitably face when trying to provide an equitable and inclusive education for refugee learners, many of which were made worse during the pandemic. The voice of practitioners can provide authenticity in communicating concerns on the education frontline and in planning ahead for this group of learners. Their responses also demonstrate key strategies that were used to support refugee background learners before, during, and after Covid-19.

Although interviews were conducted by several members of the research team, it was not possible due to time pressures and difficulties with data sharing for all team members to be involved in the data analysis process, although the interpretation of data was checked by several members of the team and feedback provided. Findings and recommendations were also checked by external reviewers.

As this is primarily a pilot study, it has focused primarily on the experiences of staff working with refugee learners in schools during the pandemic and has not sought to capture the experience of refugee learners themselves or their families, which further research is needed to develop a fuller picture. It is hoped that this will be possible as the effects of the pandemic may continue to be felt by many of these learners.

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## Appendix A - Interview questions for teachers/educators

Were you (or your teachers) teaching refugee children before Covid-19? How many refugee students have you been teaching?
What information/ training did you receive, if any, to prepare you for teaching refugee children?
What support have you received from external agencies e.g. language specialists, refugee organisations, government training/ information? What further support do you think would be helpful? From other teachers? More experienced teachers?
<b>CLASSROOM STRATEGIES</b> Can you share any strategies/ resources/ techniques that you have used for supporting refugee learners in the classroom?  Additional prompts: To be used at researchers' discretion.  What strategies have you used to support refugee children/ young people? Strategies to create a welcoming environment? Strategies to support language learning in Welsh/ English, bilingually? Are refugee children offered extra English/ Welsh lessons? Is there language support in their mother tongue? How much extra help are you able to give during lessons? Have you had any training in using English as an Additional Language? What resources have you been given to help you to teach children English or Welsh? What strategies are used to help refugee children to catch up with missed education? How easy is it to identify refugee children's additional learning needs?
<b>INTEGRATION STRATEGIES</b> Can you share any strategies that are used to support integration of refugee children into the school/ wider community?  Additional prompts: to be used with researchers' discretion  What skills do you think refugee children lack that might affect their integration? To what extent do you think this affects their integration? What support do you provide to help with this? Strategies to communicate with/ involve families? What systems are in place for involving parents? Reporting on children's progress- how are progress reports delivered? What mechanisms are used for helping parents to support children's learning? How are parents made aware of homework? How are parents with different backgrounds made to feel welcome?
<b>DURING THE PANDEMIC</b> Were you able to continue with these strategies during the pandemic? Were the refugee children given the opportunity to attend lessons during Covid-19? What forms of support were offered during Covid-19?  In terms of technology? Lessons- worksheets- homework? Translation services/ additional support?

Were there systems which allowed these children to stay in contact with teachers/ specialist tutors – tutorials/ meetings?

How did these children receive feedback on their work?

What were the biggest challenges for you (and the school) in relation to teaching/ supporting refugee children during the pandemic?

How difficult was it for teachers to stay in touch with refugee children and young people?

Were the refugee families able to access online portals?

What sort of technology was required?

Were there language barriers? Did you make use of interpretation?

How did the school maintain online relationships with refugee children?

What about student-to-student contact?

#### DURING PANDEMIC RECOVERY PERIOD

Have you observed any changes when these children returned to school after Covid restrictions had ended?

In terms of language development?

In terms of confidence/ social skills/ developing friendships?

In terms of educational progress?

Have you seen any benefits of lockdown for refugee children in your class/school?

(This could be about learning or the wider benefits)

Have you seen any negative effects of lockdown for refugee children in your class/school? (This could be about learning or the wider risks)

What additional strategies/resources/ have you been able to provide for refugee children and young people since the lockdown ended?

#### MOVING FORWARD

What lessons has the school learned about supporting refugee children?

If lockdown happened again, what do you think should be done differently? Why?

What professional development, training or support do you think you may need to support your work with these groups of learners?

Who would be best able to provide this training or support?

Investigating the impact of the pandemic on refugee families and children in Wales

# **Appendix B - Participant Information Sheet**

## **Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a project investigating the impact of the pandemic on the educational experiences of refugee children and young people in schools in Wales. Schools/ teachers/ teaching assistants who have been involved in educating and supporting refugee children are in a key position to give important insights into the effects of the pandemic on these vulnerable groups of learners and make recommendations for ways of enhancing their educational prospects. It is hoped that this research can help policy-makers and other educators to make further improvements to the ways in which refugee children and their families are supported in their schooling.

Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand the rationale for this project and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and contact the researcher for any further information that is required.

## **What is the purpose of the study?**

The study seeks to:

To collate and analyse the experiences of a small sample of educators (school leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants) working with refugee children and young people in schools in Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic.

To gain a better understanding of the training, resources, and external agencies needed in schools in Wales to support the well-being of refugee children and young people during and after the pandemic.

To develop classroom/ whole school strategies to support the teaching and learning of refugee children and young people within schools in Wales.

To share this evidence with the Welsh Government, school leaders, teachers, and support staff with the aim of building on policy and improving practice in schools.

## **Why have I been contacted?**

The reason that you have been contacted is that you and your school have had experience of teaching and supporting refugee children and young people, both during the pandemic and the recovery period. The research team is interested in the strategies and support mechanisms that you have employed to support these groups of students. This might include training, resources, and collaboration with external agencies.

We are also keen to learn about ways in which further support can be provided to refugee children and young people in schools in Wales, so that recommendations can be made to policy makers and external agencies about future actions and improvements.

## **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you tell us that you do not wish to take part, you will not be contacted again. If you decide that you would like to take part, you should complete the consent form that is attached and return by email. This confirms that you have been given some background information about the project and are happy to be contacted again to arrange a confidential online interview with a member of the research team, at a time and in a place that is convenient for you. Teaching cover expenses will be covered.

## **What will happen if I decide to take part?**

The purpose of the interview is to hear about your experiences as a member of staff with responsibility for the teaching and learning of refugee children and young people during the pandemic and the recovery period. You will be asked about ways that you have adapted your pedagogy to accommodate these learners during the pandemic. Also, you will be asked about your experience of any support or training that has been provided and considerations for further support that you would find useful.

The interview will take a maximum of 90 minutes and may be recorded, with your consent, or alternatively, the researcher will take some written notes. There will be time at the start and the end of the interview to ask questions and discuss any further issues that you might like to raise.

## **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Your contact details will be stored on a confidential database and the information that you share will be treated in complete confidence. Your name or any other identifying details will not be used in any reports or publications. You do not need to have your camera on during the recording. Recordings will be transcribed as soon as possible, after which digital files will be deleted.

Transcripts will be stored in password protected files on a computer dedicated to this purpose. Codes will be assigned to each transcript in place of names and names will not be stored alongside codes. All identifying details in transcripts (e.g. names of schools, departments, other teachers, student names etc.) will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms or codes.

Notes made during interviews and in the data analysis phase will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet and in password protected files. Final documents will be checked by other members of the research team to ensure that individuals and schools cannot be identified in any way.

## **What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw, you will not be contacted again. Your data can be withdrawn from the study until the end of March when the data has been collated and written up into a final report. It will not be possible to withdraw your data after this time.

## **How will the results of this study be used?**

The findings from this study will be shared with the Welsh government, school leaders, teachers, and support staff with the aim of building on policy and improving practice in schools in relation to teaching refugee children and young people.

Finding out more about strategies, resources, and support mechanisms that schools currently employ, and what further resources are needed, will help to inform the continuing development of classroom/ whole school strategies to support the teaching and learning of refugee children and young people within schools in Wales.

These insights may be used to inform the provision of training events and seminars for educators who are in the front line of meeting the needs of refugee children and young people in Wales, as well as the development of support services and language resources that are available to these students.

## Who is organizing and funding the research?

The study is being organized by the research team at Bangor University and Cardiff Metropolitan University. For more information about any aspect of this project, please contact the research team using the details below.

Next steps: If you decide that you would like to take part, please complete the attached consent form, and return by email.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

### Contact information

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## Appendix C - Participant Consent Form

Please tick the YES or NO answers that apply to the following statements:

I have received an information sheet giving details of this study and have had the opportunity to discuss my participation and ask questions.	YES	NO
I have been given time to consider whether to participate in this study.	YES	NO
I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, although if this is after the end of March 2022, I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form, but this will not be identifiable to me as an individual.	YES	NO
I am confident that all collected data and personal information will be kept confidential and in a safe place. The results of the research will not contain any names or other identifying features.	YES	NO
I am willing to take part in a confidential online interview at a mutually convenient time and place.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview can be audio recorded and that I can request to have the recording stopped at any time.	YES	NO
I understand that I can choose whether to have the video camera turned on during the interview process.	YES	NO
I understand that I give as much or as little information as I feel happy to.	YES	NO
The collected data will not be used for any purposes other than those stated and will be destroyed after 3 years. Recordings of interviews will be destroyed after transcripts are made.	YES	NO
I give permission for research findings to be published in reports, conference proceedings, and research seminars.	YES	NO
I consent to participate in this study.	YES	NO

Signature of participant ..... Date.....