

#ETU4REF

Roundtable Dublin

14-15 January 2025

REPORT





“In and through education: Education Trade Unions support the inclusion of refugees and migrants”

(Project #ETU4REF, number 101101573)



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Published by the European Trade Union Committee for Education - Brussels, 2024
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Introduction

The second roundtable of the ETUCE project '[In and through education: Education Trade Unions support the inclusion of refugees and migrants](#)' (ETU4REF) took place in Dublin, Ireland, on 14-15 January 2025. It followed the first roundtable organised in Lisbon, Portugal, on 8-9 October 2024.

The project aims at further building the capacity of the education trade unions on providing specific support to their affiliates regarding the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the education system, as well as at contributing to making the teaching profession more attractive, including for refugees and migrants, and accommodating the needs of education personnel from various backgrounds with the view to represent the voice of all teachers and other education personnel in the European region.

The 1.5-day roundtable organised co-organised by ETUCE and the project partner INTO provided the opportunities to discuss the national findings of the project research on the specific professional needs of education personnel regarding the inclusion of migrant and refugee learners in the education system, as well as share the education trade unions' actions and practices on supporting and building the capacity and knowledge of their affiliates to address the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the education systems. Furthermore, a working group session was devoted to discussing the development of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to support the inclusion of migrants and refugees within education trade unions.

During the opening session, the **ETUCE President John MacGabhann**, emphasized the key role of education trade unions as first defenders and champions of inclusion and generosity. **Carmel Browne, INTO President**, welcomed participants to Ireland and highlighted the importance of recognizing the value that every person brings with various backgrounds. She also reminded that researchers consistently show that students perform better when their background is reflected in teachers.



Key Presentation and Discussions

Introduction to the EU policies on migration and ETUCE Project ETU4REF

Presented by: Ekaterina Efimenko, ETUCE Coordinator

This session provided an overview of EU policies supporting migrant inclusion, framing the project as a crucial step towards reducing disparities in educational access and integration. The speaker outlined in particular the impact of the European Action Plan on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background on the inclusion in education and the ETUCE policies and views related to inclusion of migrants and refugees in education, including in the context of trade union renewal.

Presentation of the preliminary results of the project research

Presented by: Dominique Danau, SAGO Research, project researcher

This presentation provided an overview of the preliminary results of the project research based on the literature analysis and outcomes of the project online survey that was conducted in the period June – August 2024. A total of 51 respondents from 46 ETUCE members located in 32 European countries participated in the online survey. The research aimed to identify the key challenges and needs of the teachers and other education personnel regarding the inclusion of refugees and migrants. It also explored the actions and practices of education trade unions in building their capacity and knowledge of their affiliates to address the inclusion of refugees and migrants in education systems. Special attention was given to the situation of Ukrainian refugees in education across different countries.

The key findings highlighted by the speaker included:

- According to 48% of ETUCE members surveyed, the inclusion of migrants/refugees in education has gained more prominence on their agenda over the past four years, while for 46%, it has remained a consistent priority. Looking ahead, 56% of respondents anticipate that this issue will become even more important in the coming years.
- Policies focused on the attrition, recruitment, and retention of teachers and other education staff from migrant/refugee backgrounds are lacking, according to 62% of respondents.
- Assessment systems to evaluate in particular the social, emotional, and mental health needs of newly arrived learners from migrant/refugee backgrounds are lacking, according to 34% of respondents, with an even greater gap reported for Ukrainian refugees (50%).

- Adequate initial teacher training and continuing professional development for teachers and other education personnel addressing the inclusion of migrant/refugee learners is in place according to respectively 62% and 65% of the respondents, though only implemented effectively according to respectively 20% and 24%.
- Adequate resources to implement inclusive and quality education for migrants/refugees do not exist for about 1/3rd of the respondents.

Regarding the role of education trade unions in addressing the inclusion of migrants and refugees in education, the speaker highlighted that:

- According to 66% of respondents, their union has a policy on this issue, with half having a dedicated policy and the other half embedding it within a broader framework. However, some respondents suggest that "policy" might be too strong a term, with "a position or demand" being a more accurate reflection of reality.
- These policies primarily focus on combating racism, discrimination, and far-right ideologies (79%), along with support measures for integrating migrants and refugees with teaching qualifications (64%).
- Overall, the findings indicate a comprehensive but rather uneven approach, with greater emphasis on addressing prejudice and integrating qualified professionals, while broader institutional and advocacy efforts are less part of these policies.
- Areas like fast-track accreditation for teachers with migrant or refugee backgrounds (18%), training on workers' rights (18%), and language and cultural programs to aid integration (21%) are the least addressed within education trade union policies.



Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Irish Trade Union Context

Speakers: Maeve Mc Cafferty, INTO (primary education); Diarmaid de Paor, ASTI (secondary education); Shane Curtin, TUI (second level, third level and further education); Miriam Hamilton, IFUT (higher education).

During this panel, representatives of education trade unions in Ireland presented an overview of their respective efforts to support the inclusion of migrants and refugees in education. These presentations highlighted a diverse range of initiatives, showcasing the unions' shared commitment to inclusive school and trade union environments.

INTO advocates for the inclusion and support of not only migrant and refugee students but also migrant teachers in Ireland, underlying the lack of concrete data on their presence in the labour market. Union's work involves broader advocacy efforts, including calls for diversification of the teaching profession. Such good practices as the work of the INTO Equality Committee, involvement in the Migrant Teacher Project, and collaboration with the Irish Network Against Racism to support migrant teachers in meeting language requirements and accessing professional opportunities, were highlighted.

TUI has unanimously passed several motions on anti-racism and migrant teacher barriers over the past three years. Union's collaboration with NGOs has influenced policies at the National Council of Assessment, leading to an upcoming intercultural policy for schools, given the obvious demographic change among students towards more diversity regarding the migrant background, even in rural areas. Recognizing that teachers play a key role in shaping societal attitudes, TUI also advocates on the local level, for example on issues of the school admissions.

The speaker from **ASTI** highlighted that migration to Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon that has brought rapid demographic changes. He praised the Migrant Teacher Project for collaborating with unions to emphasize the importance of union membership for migrant teachers. He also underlined an ongoing challenge of addressing the concerns of far-right parents while ensuring inclusive education.

The speaker from **IFUT** reported on the specificities of the higher education sector where foreign students and staff are prevalent but there is a lack of a dedicated equality structure in unions. She highlighted such challenges as precarious employment, visa restrictions, and the housing crisis as major challenges for migrant academics. While universities actively recruit international students as part of their financial strategy, there is a need to improve teacher training programs to attract more migrant students and ensure better representation in the sector.

Inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education sector in Ireland

Kate Liston, Senior Leader on Inclusive Education, Oide, provided an overview of the Primary Inclusive Education Team within Oide, which was established in September 2023. The team's focus is on supporting the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) government policy initiative. Key areas of support include English as an additional language, inclusion through team teaching, professional learning supports and events (e.g., "Fostering an Inclusive Culture in Schools"), and various school support initiatives.

The presentation emphasized the importance of fostering an inclusive school culture and equipping educators with the necessary skills to support migrant and refugee students effectively to address the following challenges:

- Rapid increase of migrant and refugee learners in some schools;
- Need for teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge of English as an additional language;
- Enhancing understanding of social inclusion in schools;
- Outdated system structures that hinder inclusivity;
- Focus on student and teacher wellbeing.

Grainne Cullen, Principal Officer on Social Inclusion, Department of Education, emphasized a whole-government and multi-stakeholder approach to ensuring equitable education access and fostering an inclusive culture for migrant and refugee children in Ireland. The speaker presented relevant policy frameworks (e.g. Migrant Integration Strategy; National Action Plan Against Racism; National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy; Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 etc.) and outlined the key initiatives and support structures in place on national level:

- Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 ensures non-discriminatory access to education.
- Schools must admit students if places are available and cannot discriminate based on race, religion, etc.
- REALT (Regional Education and Language Teams) - Coordinate support for new arrivals, secure school placements, and provide transport.
- Collaboration with agencies like the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), TUSLA, and NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service).
- Cineáltas (Action Plan on Bullying)
- Guidance counselors and Oide support for school leaders in creating inclusive environments.

The speaker also presented the examples of support mechanisms provided at the school level in Ireland:

- English as an Additional Language (EAL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support.
- Intercultural guidelines and anti-racism curriculum.
- Special Education Needs (SEN) allocation model for migrant students.
- Summer and extra-curricular programs to aid integration.

Gerry Cullen, National Lead Implementation Manager, City Connects, presented the international City Connects Program, an evidence-based programme that addresses out-of-school factors affecting students' success and operates in 10 schools in Ireland. The programme focuses on supporting migrant and refugee learners by providing systematic student support, connecting each child to the right plan at the right time, and using community-based and in-school resources to meet students' academic and social needs. It addresses in particular such challenges as housing instability, food insecurity, chronic health conditions, family challenges, and limited access to enrichment opportunities.

The speaker also provided examples of concrete actions realized through the City Connects programme during the academic year of 2023-2024:

- Talking Heads Group (NCI) - supporting language development.
- Prioritized after-school childcare access (NEIC/Sherpa Kids).
- Bespoke school programs (e.g., Gardiner Street Primary School).
- Translation & interpretation services to aid communication.
- Multi-Disciplinary Team (OT, SLT, NEPS & HSE Psychology) for specialized support.
- Family engagement & community linking for better integration.

Rory Mc Daid, Director of the Migrant Teacher Project at Marino Institute of Education, presented the programme which supports qualified migrant teachers to enter the Irish education system. Through a mixture of continuous professional development Bridging Programmes, advocacy, one-to-one support and research, the project works to challenge the barriers that migrant teachers face with regard to registration with the Irish Teaching Council (registration), securing entry into the teaching workforce (recruitment) and maintaining those positions (retention). The Migrant Teacher Project offers general supports, and has also offered tailored supports for specific cohorts of teachers, such as those who have fled the war in Ukraine. A Teacher Network (both physical and online) supports migrant teachers, with an active Facebook page where teachers share information and guidance with newcomers.

The speaker highlighted that less than 1% of teaching qualifications in Ireland were obtained outside the UK and Ireland, and that qualification recognition poses particular structural barriers, including bureaucratic processes and lengthy timelines.

Seyi Agbede, former student of the Migrant Teacher Project and currently teacher in Irish school, underlined the benefits of the programme, including getting an understanding of the Irish education system; observing teaching and learning at schools; help with registration process; and networking opportunities within INTO (the union collaborates closely with the Migrant Teacher Project).

The speaker also outlined the challenges he faced as an experienced teacher coming to Ireland:

- an overwhelming number of schools are under Catholic patronage so migrant teachers who are not Catholic have 4% chance of getting the job;
- Irish language requirement creates a major barrier for migrant teachers;
- systemic barriers and precarious conditions;
- limited visibility of the migrant teachers in the unions.

He also recommended policy reforms in particular regarding the Irish language requirement for teaching in the primary schools in Ireland as there needs to be a better access to Irish language courses, including location, price, etc.

Briana Fitzsimons, Former Teacher and currently Diversity, Equity & Inclusion consultant, spoke of the ongoing efforts in teacher education and professional development to enhance intercultural competence and anti-racism education in Ireland, embedding these principles into teacher training, ensuring a more inclusive education system. She mentioned in particular:

- Ongoing Work at Dublin City University:
 - Ethics in Education Module - Helps primary school teachers integrate ethical education into their teaching.
 - Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Module - Supports primary teachers in critically engaging with global topics.
 - START RITE Research - Aims to build capacity for teacher educators in anti-racism education.
 - Collaboration with Marino Institute of Education, Mary Immaculate College, and Maynooth University.
- DICE Project (Development and Intercultural Education Project):
 - National education initiative since 2003, involving four publicly funded Initial Teacher Education providers at the primary level;
 - Focuses on developing staff expertise in development and intercultural education as key components of teacher training;
 - Aligned with Irish Aid's Development Education/GCE Strategy; Irish Teaching Council's Céim Standards for ITE - Global Citizenship Education; and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Working Group Discussions

Participants divided into working groups to discuss the goals, structure and content of the project **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for education trade unions on inclusion of migrants and refugees in education**.

Participants' suggestions included the following:

- The MOOC should address the process of moving from the existing policy to its implementation and the place of education trade unions in this process.
- The MOOC should include such topics as culture and respect in the classrooms; democratic citizenship, navigating the far-right/anti-migration discourse for teachers.
- The MOOC should mention the anti-racism training provided by education trade unions;
- The MOOC should identify and address barriers to enter the profession for migrant teachers (coming from voices of such teachers).
- Capturing the voice of migrants and racialized minority background by education trade union;
- Looking towards providing language courses more extensively;
- Working with education stakeholders to have language assessment which is fitting different age groups and less bureaucratic;
- Assisting migrants and refugees through multiple transitions: for example, Ukrainian students who might come back to their home country;
- The MOOC should include ideas on how to show that we are a welcoming society;
- The MOOC should reflect the political dimension of the topic, e.g. nationalistic governments;
- The MOOC should address the 4 main areas of education trade unions' work:
 - Awareness raising not only among the refugees but also among teachers and trade unions, changing the mindset;
 - Advocacy - checklists and good practices;
 - Financing;
 - Capacity building on teachers: mentors, books provided.
- How to support teachers when they are in the middle of the difficult situation (e.g. asylum seeker student being deported): school is often one of the few places trusted by asylum seekers/migrants;
- Including a researcher/academic on the course;
- The MOOC should be as interactive as possible and include knowledge-checks throughout the course.

Country cases and trade unions good practices on inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education sector

Tanja Küsgens, VBE, Germany, presented the state support services for refugee and migrant students in place in Germany, including psychological and social support to help children cope with trauma and displacement, specialized staff (language teachers, social workers) assisting in integration, and financially supported projects (often carried out by student teachers) aiming to aid in particular Ukrainian students.

Regarding the role of education trade unions, she referred to the active social dialogue with 16 German federal state governments to address refugee inclusion, as well as teacher training programmes provided by VBE on:

- Trauma-informed education
- Language barriers in German
- Anti-discrimination practices

Furthermore, trade unions provide brochures and materials to help structure inclusive education policies, conduct bi-weekly surveys on language support and Ukrainian student enrolment, and focus on inclusion of teachers with migrant/refugee backgrounds in the workforce.

Dorota Obidniak, ZNP, Poland, presented the initiatives by ZNP on supporting migrant Ukrainian students and teachers in Poland:

- Resources for Schools and Teachers:
 - Guides for teachers & principals on integrating refugee students.
 - Advice on talking to students about the war in a sensitive manner.
 - Solidarity materials - downloadable posters in Ukrainian.
 - Aid actions in schools to foster inclusivity.
- Educational & Training Support:
 - Podcast on Ukrainian history ("Ukrainian ABC")
 - Includes teaching guides & student assignments.
 - Polish as a foreign language course - 1,200 teachers enrolled.
 - Training for intercultural assistants to aid refugee integration.
 - Online course for teachers to recognize trauma symptoms in students and respond appropriately.

- Networking & Community Support:
 - Dedicated Ukrainian liaison specialist (Valentina) to assist teachers & parents.
 - Information points for Ukrainian teachers & parents to navigate the system.
 - Facebook support group and database development for better coordination.

- Humanitarian Support & Direct Assistance:
 - Providing shelter for 120 refugees in ZNP buildings.
 - Holiday home provided for 50 students from Vinnitsa.
 - Educational & visa assistance for Ukrainian families.
 - Summer education programs for 200 Ukrainian students.

- Advocacy & Media Engagement:
 - Regular interventions to ensure fair exam access for Ukrainian students.
 - Dissemination of legislative changes related to refugee education rights.
 - Support for Ukrainian educators in accessing the Polish labor market.
 - Coverage of refugee education issues in ZNP's magazine, Teachers' Voice.



Visit to local schools, Dublin

On the second day, roundtable participants visited a number of local schools, including Paradise Place Educate Together National School, Central Model Senior School, and Coláiste Pobail Lorcáin. These visits proved to be both powerful and impactful, allowing participants to see firsthand how the policies and initiatives discussed on the first day were being implemented in practice.

Conclusion

Concluding the roundtable, **John Boyle, INTO General Secretary**, highlighted the remarkable progress made in including migrant pupils within the Irish education system while also acknowledging the pressing need to further diversify the teaching profession by actively including migrant and refugee teachers. He emphasized the importance of having relatable role models from diverse backgrounds in schools to reflect Ireland's multicultural society and inspire all students and stressed the role of education unions in supporting migrant and refugee teachers.



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