

The Integration of Refugees into the Education System in Rural Ireland

**An analysis of policy and practice in relation to the
lived experience of refugees in one county.**

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of two-year-old Alain Kurdi, who perished with his family crossing the Mediterranean Sea in search of freedom and safety. His story has inspired this research.

Ar dhéis lámh Dé go raibh a anam dilís.

Home By Warsan Shire

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark
You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well
Your neighbors running faster than you, breath bloody in their throats
The boy you went to school with who kissed you,
dizzy behind the old tin factory, is holding a gun bigger than his body
You only leave home when home won't let you stay.

No one leaves home unless home chases you fire under feet, hot blood in your belly
It's not something you ever thought of doing until the blade burnt threats into your neck
And even then you carried the anthem under your breath
Only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
Sobbing as each mouthful of paper made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

You have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
No one burns their palms under trains beneath carriages
No one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck feeding on newspaper
unless the miles travelled means something more than journey.

No one crawls under fences no one wants to be beaten, pitied
No one chooses refugee camps or strip searches where your body is left aching or
prison, because prison is safer than a city of fire, and one prison guard in the night is
better than a truckload of men who look like your father
No one could take it, no one could stomach it, no one skin would be tough enough
The go home blacks refugees, dirty immigrants, asylum seekers sucking our country dry
Niggers with their hands out, they smell strange, savage, messed up their country
And now they want to mess ours up
How do the words, the dirty looks roll off your backs
Maybe because the blow is softer than a limb torn off
Or the words are more tender than fourteen men between your legs
Or the insults are easier to swallow than rubble, than bone,
than your child body in pieces

I want to go home, but home is the mouth of a shark, home is the barrel of the gun
And no one would leave home unless home chased you to the shore
Unless home told you to quicken your legs, leave your clothes behind
Crawl through the desert, wade through the oceans
Drown, save, be hunger, beg, forget pride
Your survival is more important

No one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear saying
Leave, run away from me now, I don't know what I've become
But I know that anywhere is safer than here

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the experience of a range of individuals and groups involved in trying to integrate refugees into the education system in rural Ireland. It investigates the Government's moral position towards refugees and whether or not a gap exists between the current government policies and the reality of the lived experience of refugees and those working closely with them.

The proposals focusing on education detailed in the Migrant Integration Strategy (2107) are embedded in the framework of this research as it examines language, culture, integration, employment opportunities and diversity. The stark variations in the Syrian refugee community and the local communities in Co. Donegal are highlighted. The impact of Lockdown due to the Covid pandemic (which occurred during this research) on education is also addressed. Quantitative data from surveys of refugees and qualitative data from interviews were gathered and analysed to get an in-depth view of the refugees' journey from fleeing Syrian to settling in Co. Donegal. Interviews with headteachers, teachers, integration officer, interpreters, volunteers, befrienders, and others working directly with the refugees yielded rich data which engenders the voice of all stakeholders, ensuring the evidence was not divorced from the social context.

This thesis, whilst acknowledging the positive contribution of the Irish government, contests the notion that sufficient infrastructures are in place to fully integrate refugees into society and address the education gap that exists. Findings further demonstrate that recent proposals to eradicate Direct Provision are not on track, wasting funding and resources which could be deployed more productively.

Keywords: Refugees Ireland, Migration Integration Strategy 2017, Education Gap, Diversity

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Background

1.1: Introduction

Ireland has, in a relatively short space of time, become a nation which has changed from having a very modest migration of refugees to one which has opened its doors to offers asylum to the displaced seeking refuge. The Great Famine in 1845 brought about permanent change in the country's demographic, political, and cultural landscape when the population fell by 20-25% due to death and emigration. The graph below details the sharp decline in population where one million people died of starvation and two million people eventually emigrated. In times when international travel was rare, those who emigrated did so on a one-way ticket and never returned home. For years, people fled Ireland in search of a better life, to escape poverty and persecution. With the boom in Ireland's economy during the Celtic Tiger, the population swelled only to fall again with the subsequent recession. Ireland's population has again risen in the past 10 years from 4.5 million to 5.1 million in 2022. However, following the Famine, Ireland's population never recovered to its former peak. The Irish became synonymous with the term refugee.

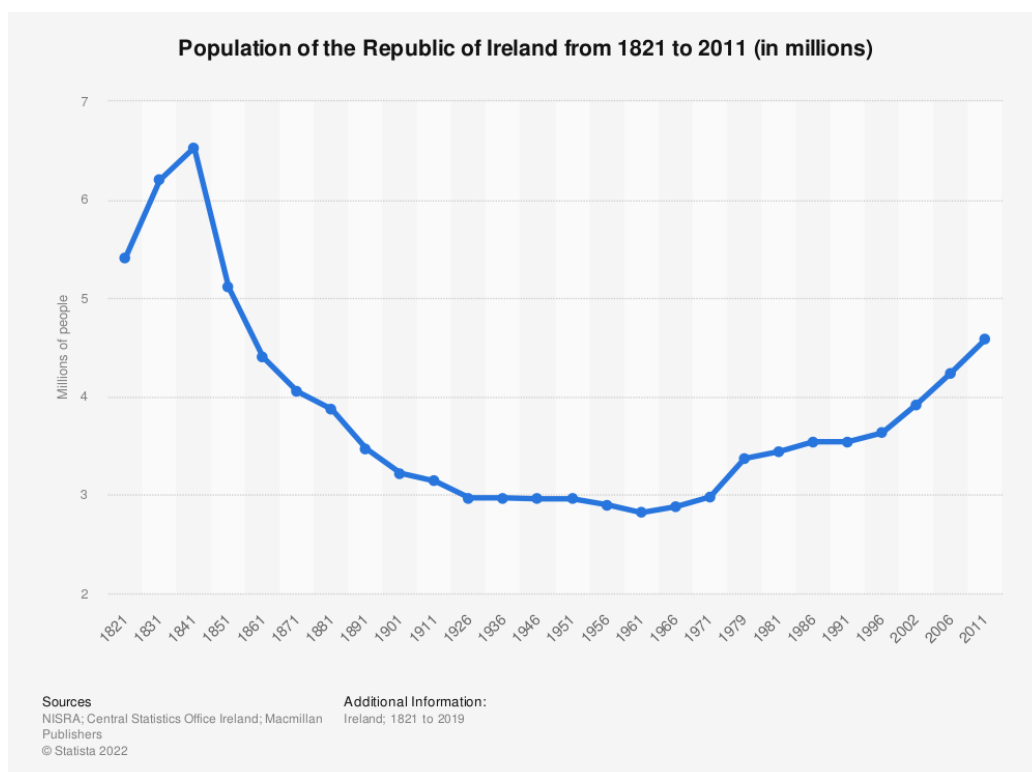


Figure 1: • Population of Ireland 1821-2011 | Statistica

Ireland accepted a small number of temporary Belgium refugees during World War 1 while the Red Cross took approximately 500 refugee children to the country during World War 2, who remained for three years. In September 1979, two hundred and twelve Vietnamese 'Boat People' arrived and were accommodated by The Red Cross in Dublin. They were given intensive language course training in English, and over time spread throughout the country, integrating well and predominantly earned a living by introducing the Vietnamese food business to Ireland. The 'Emerald Isle' became idealised as a romantic, welcoming nation, with its strong religious binds portraying a country of strong moral constitution where the family unit is sacrosanct. They were the first cohort of refugees to make Ireland their permanent home. Between 2000 and 2019 over 3,000 refugees from almost 30 nationalities were resettled to Ireland. Since then, Ireland's refugee intake has predominantly been from Syrian. On a global scale this is a relatively small number of refugees. Consequently, there are few precedents to assist the many individuals and groups who design and deliver services to facilitate the transition of refugees into the state Irish education system. This research explores the experience of integrating refugees into the education system in rural Ireland. It investigates the government's moral and compulsory imperatives towards refugees and whether a gap exists between the current government policies and the reality of the lived experience of refugees and those working closely with them. My thesis will critically examine three questions:

1. What legislative provisions are made by the Department of Education in Ireland for the education of refugees?
2. How much practice conforms to policy in relation to the proposals of The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) and other government policy?
3. What are the inter-agency challenges of refugees and those working with them?

The focus of my research is whether the government policy effectively delivers what it proposes in terms of education for refugees so that they can integrate successfully into Irish society. Crucial to this research is that it examines, not just the challenges and successes of the refugees, but also those of the Irish communities in pursuing integration, bringing their collective voices to the fore in an effort to inform future policy and practice.

By legitimising the voices of both sides, both the Syrian and Irish people are drawn together, and the reality of a changing rural Ireland emerges as it adapts to a more diverse landscape. While this research focuses predominantly on the education of young people, it will also examine the provision of education for adults in terms of EAL and qualification conversion as these impact on their children.

To gain an in-depth understanding of this complex issue, a survey was conducted with the refugee community in Donegal as well as informal conversations with government departments in Education, Justice and Social Welfare, so that a multi-dimensional perspective could be attained. The researcher spent considerable time as an unofficial volunteer / befriender in the company of the refugees in Donegal gaining further significant insight into both the challenges and accomplishments of their daily lives in their new environment in Donegal.

Whilst this research is based predominantly on the experience of the 49 Syrian refugee families based in Donegal, reference is made to the experience of the 59 asylum seeker families who have been housed in Donegal since 2019. These are the first asylum seekers to be resettled in Donegal following the abandonment of plans to house asylum seekers in Moville in 2018 following an arson attack.

Comparisons are drawn as to their status, their eligibility for employment, driving licences and government benefits. An overview of their experience is given to illustrate how local authorities, schools and interagency groups have coped with such an influx of immigrants in such a short space of time and what efforts and opportunities are given to them to assist with integration and settling into the community.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (2016) set the provision of Quality Education as its' fourth target. This resonates the Millenium Development Goals 2000, which proposed provision of universal Primary Education as its' second target. Despite this international declaratory policy emphasis however, refugee children remain some of the most educationally marginalised on earth. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022) report the number of people forced to flee their homes stands at the highest level since records began. By the end of 2021, the number of displaced stood at 89.3 million. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the figure has reached over milestone 100 million in 2022.

Ferris (2018) reports that according to the Brookings Institution research 'the average length of time a refugee has been displaced is between 10 and 26 years.' This data would suggest that a short-term educational fix is not sufficient. One of the most detrimental, yet ironically disregarded, consequences of displacement for refugees, is that displacement frequently means the end of stable education, thus preventing students from acquiring knowledge and skills for school, the workplace and life in a consistent, safe environment. A vital but what would appear to be an unexamined question in Ireland surrounding the education of refugees is whether they should study the curriculum of their country or origin or the curriculum of the country of asylum. This is a political decision, and either option has substantial implications for refugees and governments, which I will examine later. First however, I will consider the complications faced in the education of refugees and the challenges they face through their complex and harrowing experiences.

1.2: Overview of the Refugee Experience

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a valuable framework whereby the various contexts that influence the development and welfare of refugee children can be examined. He hypothesises that children are intrinsically enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate ecological system of the home to the larger school system, and then to the most expansive system which incorporates society and culture. Each ecological system interacts with and influences each other in each facet of a child's life. Bronfenbrenner emphasises the significance of both nature and nurture and illustrates his theory by placing the child in the centre of concentric circles bounded by a variety of different influences which impact upon the child. The five segments of the model are described as the:

Microsystem: friends and family who have direct influence on the child.

Mesosystem: teachers, health specialists – the broader surroundings and direct influences that impact a child's development.

Exosystem: colleagues and friends of family members – the broader circle of people who indirectly influence the child.

Macrosystem: a wider space including the values, customs and attitudes of the cultural group that the child is exposed to.

Chronosystem: the system which merges the hereditary makeup of a child with the environmental forces that surround them.

A case study in Chapter 5 'Findings' illustrates the connections and interdependence on human traits and environmental influences that can lead to widely varying experiences for refugees based on Bronfenbrenner's framework. This chapter focuses on the Macro, Mezzo and Micro systems which relate to the refugee experience. The 'big picture' of how the impact of war plays out is complex; it spans a narrative that weaves its way from a foreign country where a different language is spoken, which is culturally polarised to Ireland. The consequence of that war has a far-reaching effect; mass death and destruction in Syria, to the magnitude of homelessness and refugee camps in Europe, which follows on to a Muslim, Arabic speaking child sitting in an Irish classroom. Throughout that journey UN policy as well as national Irish policy are affected. (Mezzo System) Allies and enemies are formed with the warring countries. Migration trends increase, leading to more diverse and multi-cultural societies while left and right winged politics clash, all of which has a strong effect on the economy, education, housing and the existing culture.

It is self-evident that the history of refugee children prior to being resettled has significant ramifications for the continuation of their academic careers. The common experience of refugee children is to have had frequent disruption of, and limited access to, regular formal education. This experience of either gradual or abrupt ending of formal education has substantial consequences on their ability to progress with their future education. Maslow (1943) discusses a hierarchy of needs of humans, hypothesizing that the lower order of needs, such as food, warmth, rest, and stability need to be met before the higher order of needs such as self-fulfilment and self-esteem can reach their full potential. He suggests that a person's response to learning is led by whichever need has priority at that time. Despite the fact that he was writing eighty

years ago in America, Maslow expressed in a fairly simplistic way the hierarchy of human needs which is relevant to the refugees. The refugees' experience has substantial negative impacts on their ability to develop a sense of agency and competence to enable them to embrace higher level life skills, formal education, and livelihood opportunities.

According to Trading Economics (2022), the World Bank collection of development indicators report that there were 9571 refugees resident in Ireland in 2021. Whilst this research is broadly based on refugees in Ireland, it focuses specifically on the Syrian refugee experience in Co. Donegal as up until March 2022, Syrians were the only refugees resident in Donegal.

By the eve of the Syrian civil war, Polk (2013) claims that Syria made considerable progress under the rule of the Assad government, but Assad ran his regime on the same track as his father's. 'Run your own lives privately and enrich yourselves as you wish, but do not challenge my government.' Although the regime was corrupt, driven by nepotism and brutally authoritarian to opponents, it did deliver fairly high standards of living for the average citizen. Coutts (2011) argues that 'Syrians were not, at least initially, calling for the downfall of President Bashar al-Assad. Most had accepted a decades-long trade-off: stability, security, and a decent standard of living in return for not openly criticising the government.' In this context, it is necessary to remind ourselves that for many Syrians there is an abiding desire to avoid interaction with government officials as much as possible. Gersh (2017) hypothesises about the pervasive corruption entrenched in the Assad regime where 'widespread and accepted bribery of government officials created distrust of the Syrian government in the run-up to the conflict...For many Syrians, dealing with corrupt officials became an everyday part of life'. Avoiding government officials or acquiescing to their ultimatums embeds mistrust, which is exacerbated by the social contexts in which refugees find themselves in their new country. Hynes (2003) argues that 'refugees both mistrust and are mistrusted during the entire process of becoming a refugee, from the period of threat to post-resettlement.'

The lack of intervention from the West will not have gone unnoticed for the families whom the war turned from urban dwellers into refugees. With rebel groups lacking a unified ideology and all parties committing war crimes, the expected Western allies did not come to the rescue even when chemical weapons were used 2013. Tisdall (2018)

reported that 'the US, the world's only superpower, and key allies such as Britain, were not prepared to fight for a free, democratic Syria, no more than they would fight for democracy in support of other Arab Spring revolts.' When the West eventually intervened in 2015, it was in self-interest to defeat ISIS who were targeting Western citizens and spreading Islamist ideology on home turf. While the above critics claim that any intervention in a war by the West is only self-serving, others might argue that following the invasion of Iraq and the intervention with Afghanistan that the West were right not to interfere in another war in the Middle East. This claim is from the liberal Guardian newspaper which has a natural bias, therefore is not rigorous in the academic sense, but it is noteworthy for this particular research which relates to contemporary events.

Refugees tend to move several times and remain in exile prior to gaining asylum or permanent residence in a particular country. During this period, refugees are likely to be exposed to several languages without the opportunity to become truly proficient in any of them. Dr Ingrid Piller (2016) addresses the challenges of migrants learning a new language. She argues that despite common stereotyping that migrants are too lazy to learn the language, several variables are influential including age, prior education, socio-economic status, gender and race. Conflicting priorities can leave language learning on the back foot. The instructional content is unlikely to be in their native language, and the large class sizes and multi-lingual composition of classes in refugee camps makes acquiring fluency in any new language difficult. Piller further posits that 'it makes a huge difference whether you are learning in a supportive community or one that rejects you. The ultimate outcome of second language learning efforts is not purely an act of willpower or the result of the learner's personal choices.'

Refugees may move through several countries before being permanently placed leaving a lack of consistency for language learning. In all of these transitional environments, formal learning is made more difficult because of uncertainties about food security, personal and collective safety and effective hygiene. This does not begin to address cultural challenges, students with special needs, the politics of curricula or the psychological damage incurred by children and families who have survived war zones and extended periods of destitution. Their experiences of loss and grief are commonly amplified by discrimination and hostility in the host country where refugees are viewed

as terrorists and a threat to the community. It is therefore essential to recall that this patchwork of difficulties is what compromises the mental background for Syrian refugee children and their families beginning their educational journey in rural Ireland. They have entered a new world in which the mainstream culture, language, religion, landscape, and education system are vastly different than what they have experienced in the Middle East.

Psychological trauma incurred can impede a child's ability to assimilate into a new classroom setting; while some may show aggression, others may become socially withdrawn. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2019) addresses the high percentages of refugee children who suffer from post-traumatic stress claiming that schools often play a key role in restoring a sense of stability, however teachers are ill-equipped with inadequate training or resources to deal with such scenarios. The report cites Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM report, that 'teachers are not, and should never be regarded as mental health specialists, but they can be a crucial source of support for children suffering from trauma if they're given the right training.' The issue of war, displacement and asylum seekers is not likely to dissipate, therefore educational leaders need to consider appropriate training for teachers so that they are equipped to deal with the inevitable rising numbers of traumatised children in their classrooms.

1.3: Ireland - From Push to Pull

Whilst Ireland has gone through several transitions over the past few decades, it has traditionally been seen as a county of emigration and one that mourned its 'brain drain' as late as the 1980s. During the 'Celtic Tiger' phase (1993 – 2001), it became a country that welcomed large number of mainly young, single, professional work force immigrants thanks to a considerable increase in foreign investment. In 2008, however, as part of the Global Financial Crisis, Ireland suffered a severe recession and thousands of those immigrants were forced to leave the country as the economy collapsed and work dried up. (Macro System)

The next significant influx of immigrants came in the form of refugees from the Syrian War in 2011 and these comprised a new type of immigrants who are unlikely to leave due to any economic fluctuations. This influx of foreign-language permanent immigrant families altered the design and delivery of government policies in numerous ways, which had to be adapted to accommodate the new demographic. The Mezzo system here could be said to incorporate both the broader surroundings and the direct influences on the refugees themselves and the host country.

It is important to recall that the causes of becoming refugees are varied, and that even within communities of refugees from the same nation, there can be divisions which are as deeply felt and as seriously contended as those which have plagued Ireland for centuries. With a tumultuous history of famine and British colonisation, Ireland was synonymous as a place to flee from, with half its population decimated from hunger and emigration in the 19th century. Whilst they felt the push to leave, the allure of a better life was a strong pull. The push and pull can vary in strength depending on whether immigrants move for political or economic reasons. Over one million people died from starvation and imposed eviction, while two million other Irish fled to seek refuge in foreign lands. The Irish were refugees and entailed all the hardships that accompany it. In the mid-19th Century, NINA (No Irish Need Apply) advertisements with relation to employment, along with other anti-Irish sentiments including 'No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs' were a regular feature in the United Kingdom and further afield. For a time, Irish people were a condemned race.

Less than a century later, the demographic landscape of Ireland has changed dramatically. According to the Central Statistics Office (1979), out of a total population of 3,368,217, only 3.2% (108,934 people) were immigrants and 96.8% (3,259,283) people were Irish. This contrasts with the preliminary data published from the latest census taken in 2022 which reveals that out of a significantly increased population of 5,123,536, the number of immigrants has also increased to 190,333. Times are changing.

'The modern multicultural, multi-coloured world has finally hit Dublin and we can no longer see Ireland as a green pasture packed with white faces' (Cullen, 1997)

In relation to Irish immigrants into the UK, Mac Greil (1996, p136) posits that they *'tend to be economically useful but socially unwelcome. Irish migrants to Britain and elsewhere have felt the impact of this status for over a century and a half.'* In essence they do not

necessarily want the people; they just want the product. Whilst one might argue that this is not the case anymore, historically first-generation immigrants universally tend to do the low skills labouring jobs which support industry or major infrastructure projects. It will be interesting to see how this role will manifest in a world where increasingly those kinds of jobs simply won't exist due to automation and artificial intelligence. It is difficult to predict what role an immigrant may adopt in the future.

Ireland's murky history of famine, emigration, colonisation and being the underdog could lead to the assumption that we are a more tolerant welcoming nation, who would naturally empathise with the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. However, on closer inspection, while much noble effort has been made to accommodate refugees and adapt government policy to embrace and integrate them into the community, the findings of this research unearth that many cracks and shortfalls remain. The land of a thousand welcomes is subjective.

Biases, often fuelled by the media, have been formed against Syrian refugees as immigrants, who unlike their European counterparts, take but do not give anything in return. While lambasting refugees and asylum seekers as 'sponging off the state,' there lacks clarity and transparency in the public psyche that refugees until very recently were not allowed to take up employment in Ireland, and indeed asylum seekers still need to wait a period of nine months from when they arrive before being allowed to seek employment. This echoes the observations of Richwine (2016) who explores the paradox of 'Schrödinger's Immigrant' which alludes to the contradictory narratives in which immigrants are simultaneously competing with natives for jobs whilst also exploiting the welfare system. Richwine hypothesises that *'two competing narratives about immigration are both true. Immigrants do indeed have a strong attachment to the labour force....At the same time, however, immigrants consume a large amount of welfare spending.'*

Richwine's logic is justified as the American welfare system is designed to prop up low-income workers. Similarly, in Ireland, a generous welfare system exists whereby low-income employment and welfare co-exist. Immigrants with a strong work ethic are not immune to this as the stark reality is, they have fewer or lapsed skills, language barriers and a cultural deficit within the country they come to inhabit. Overall, they are forced to exist at a lower socio-economic level than before. Whatever employment they manage

to procure is generally less secure and less fulfilling This is due in part to the government's strict protocol on the transfer of qualifications of qualification and recognition of experience. One example of this is Primary teaching. In order to register as a primary teacher in Ireland one must have a strong command of the Irish language and secure a higher-level honour in their Leaving Certificate. This almost certainly eliminates Syrian refugees with such ambitions.

1.4: Refugees - The Donegal Context and the Issue of Brexit

Another examination of a Mezzo system suggests that Dublin and urban Ireland may have shown increased signs of multiculturalism and understanding of diversity, Donegal, on the rural north-west coast of Ireland, almost completely isolated by the Northern Irish border, has been slower to shed its homogenous skin. Whilst there remains a significant Polish and Indian community in the largest town of Letterkenny with a population of just under 20,000, there have never been any refugees living in Co. Donegal until 2017.

On 12th November 2018, an announcement was made through local and national media sources that The Caiseal Mara Hotel in Moville in Co. Donegal would become a Direct Provision Centre for 100 asylum seekers. The small, rural village of Moville has a permanent population of just 1400 people, so such an influx raised outgoing logistical challenges. There was also a political complication when despite there being no prior warning or discussion with local residents, the local advocacy group 'Inishowen Together' issued a statement extending '*the warmest of Inishowen welcomes to all those who are arriving – and to let them know that they will have many new friends here*'. (Maguire, 2018)

Inishowen Together is a local group which campaigns for positive change in the community across a range of feminist, social justice and ecological issues believed by the group to be of critical importance. The Micro System is fed into by the Mezzo System whereby local groups and individuals come together to form a bond and exchange

cultural experiences and discuss the geographical implications of living so close to the border and the limitations that ensue.

While residents were cautiously welcoming, questions were quickly raised on what extra provision for health, education, translation, and employment would be given to the village to ensure a smooth transition to the first group who were due to arrive before Christmas 2018. The geographic location of Merville on the Inishowen Peninsula, which borders Northern Ireland raised further serious political issues. One example of such issues is that international protection laws forbid asylum seekers from leaving the Republic of Ireland while their application is being considered. The lack of a physical border in this area however makes accidental entry to Northern Ireland (and hence the UK) not only possible but probable.

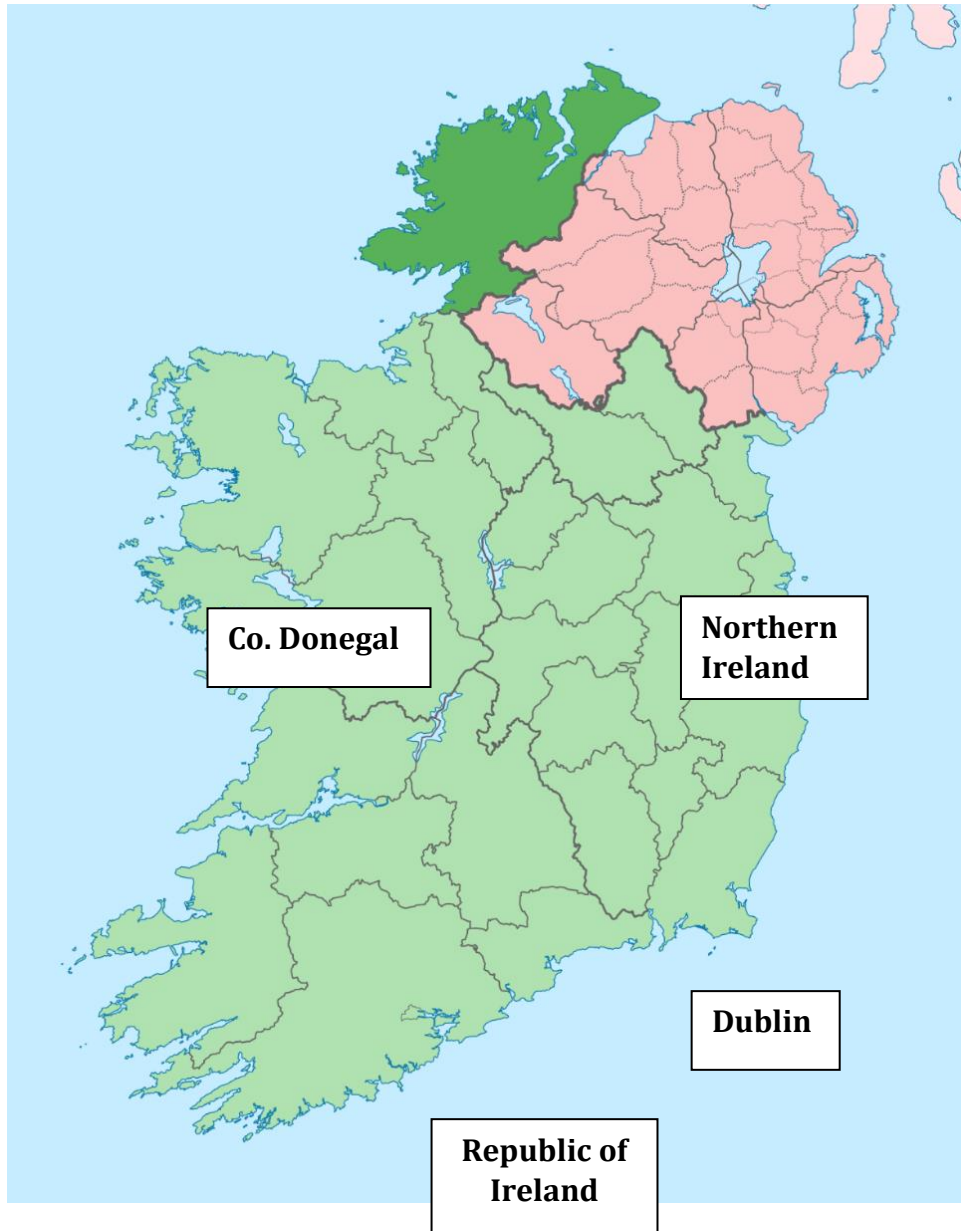


Figure 2: Map of Ireland showing Donegal in relation to Northern Ireland

The issue of the Irish border during BREXIT (the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union) negotiations complicated matters further with the prospect of normal cross-border relations being potentially compromised or eliminated. This is a very concrete problem because the interview process for asylum seekers and refugees take place in Dublin. The most direct route from Merville to Dublin however is a 270km drive of roughly four hours' duration which necessitates transit through Northern Ireland. To avoid doing do (and hence breaching their asylum conditions) the refugees are forced to drive around Northern Ireland via Sligo. This route increases their expected travel time to appointments to approximately 10 hours each way. Taking the Sligo route

would therefore require the refugees to hire a car (or otherwise have the use of a car), for two full days and to incur the expense of an overnight stay in Dublin or elsewhere. It also heightens the chances of the refugees missing their appointment slot due to traffic or other delays. Obviously, this also represents a major disruption to the employment of adults and to the education of any children involved.

On the 25th of November 2018, two weeks after the announcement of the imminent arrival of 100 asylum seekers to Moville, all local and national media outlets reported an arson attack on the Caiseal Mara Hotel causing extensive damage to the hotel and injuring the owner. Initially it was projected that the asylum seekers would arrive after repairs to the hotel had been completed. However, fourteen months later the hotel was sold for an undisclosed sum to a property developer and plans to settle the intended asylum seekers were scrapped. Whilst any act of arson should be condemned, it is perhaps a better outcome for the asylum seekers due to the poor reputation of Direct Provision centres. Furthermore, requiring the involuntary residence of Sunni, Shia, Alawite and Kurdish Muslims within a single building would be a situation akin to requiring Catholics and Protestants to co-habit during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. These warring factions of Muslims are part of the reason they have become refugees, so to assume that they could live in such close quarters would be an entirely foreseeable disaster which would increase disharmony and social unrest.

The settlement of refugees in a rural place like County Donegal has raised serious ongoing logistical resourcing issues for the delivery of appropriate and effective education. Chief amongst these issues is that local primary schools have never previously required the services of EAL teachers due to the historical lack of immigrants to the area.

Unfortunately, this has led to bureaucratic tensions between the government and rural schools who are desperately seeking such resources. The provision of social services in Co. Donegal is a significant issue. Although their staff and organisations will have invariably dealt with a wide range of social issues, their experience of, and resources for dealing with the very specific needs of refugees is limited, as there were no refugees living in the area prior to 2017. The table below taken in 2016 indicates the lack of ethnic diversity in Donegal prior to the arrival of the refugees.

Usual resident population by ethnic or cultural background	
Ethnic or Cultural Background	Persons
White Irish	139,728
White Irish Traveller	586
Other White	8,817
Black or Black Irish	684
Asian or Asian Irish	1,521
Other	1,362
Not stated	3,471
Total	156,169

Figure 3: Census 2016 Sapmap Area: County Donegal (*2022 Census Sapmap not yet published)

Consequently, this rural county with limited resources and a limited cadre of professionals with relevant experience is on the cusp of embracing a new phase of ethnic diversity. Undoubtedly this will place considerable and immediate stress on both individual schools and upon the education system. In the fullness of time, the rippling effects of such diversity will impact on the culture, language and everyday life of the entire county.

1.5: Ireland's Obligations to Refugees

Whilst Ireland holds no obligation to allow non-citizens to take up residence in this country, as a member of the European Union and the United Nations, it must respect

and adhere to its commitments with regards to refugees and asylum seekers. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention:

'Ireland has freely accepted obligations under national, international and European law to consider asylum and subsidiary protection claims from those who arrive in this State claiming to be in need of protection from the State of their birth or former habitual residence.' (Cosgrave & Thornton, 2015, p170)

The Refugee Act 1996 was enacted to ensure adequate measures existed for protection and welfare provision but Ireland's economic situation since then has often created a mismatch between levels of provision and levels of need. This is especially evident in the lack of sufficient housing stock and many refugees and asylum seekers are poorly housed for extended periods leading to frustration and despair at the 'hellish existence.' (Nasc: The McMahon Report, 2019, p160/1)

The combination of a lack of housing and increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers arriving, necessitated a sub-division of the Department of Justice, the RIA (Reception and Integration Agency) to be established to provide accommodation, food, and essential utilities. Then in 2000 Ireland introduced a policy of Direct Provision but this has been neither as successful nor as popular as intended, leading it to be widely condemned. As detailed in the McMahon Report, the processing time and living conditions fall far below par for a developed country like Ireland. The stigma of 'state spongers' increases and particularly during the Pandemic with little movement on housing or employment, the system becomes clogged up even further. Refugees who have secured permanent housing are also open to resentment as visible material prosperity fosters bitterness during a time when opportunities to prosper are limited.

In October 2020, the Department of Justice established an advisory group led by Dr Catherine Day, former Secretary General of the European Commission, and published a report detailing recommendations for the long-term approach to the provision of supports, including accommodation to persons in the international protection process. The report highlighted the many failings of the Direct Provision system, which were magnified during the COVID-19 Pandemic. From their findings, it was proposed that Direct Provision be abolished by mid-2024. Despite this, to date, there are still 7400 refugees housed between the 38 Direct Provision centres throughout Ireland, 1600 of

whom have been there longer than five years. In the third and most aggressive wave of the pandemic, Ireland was put into complete lockdown, including all schools, thus delaying progress, language, socialisation, and integration for many refugees. Those in Direct Provision who were due to be rehoused in Donegal are in stalemate, waiting to be transferred. In a system that is already under pressure, schools will be stretched to capacity when the next cohort of refugees arrive.

In 2015, with the surge of Syrian migrants entering Europe, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established. The Irish government pledged to accommodate 4000 refugees as part of the burden sharing deal with Europe. This quota has not yet been reached but according to the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (2020) the following progress has been made:

- Under the EU Relocation strand, 1,022 people were relocated to Ireland.
- Under UNHCR Resettlement, a commitment was made to resettle 1,985 people, of which 1,913 resettlements have now been completed.
- Under the IRPP Humanitarian Admission Programme 2018/19 (IHAP), a commitment was made to admit 740 family members of refugees.
- Under other mechanisms (Search and Rescue Missions, Unaccompanied Minors from Greece, Calais Special Project), a commitment was made to admit 253 people, of which 113 have arrived.

Pollak (2020) states that the IRPP have agreed that *'More than 200 Syrian refugees currently living in Beirut have been cleared to travel to Ireland once Covid-19 travel restrictions are lifted'*.

While Ireland continues to deliver on its promise to accept 4000 refugees, a closer look at what this means in terms of quality of life, specifically with regards to education is explored. The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) issued by the Department of Justice and Equality is a framework which details the government's commitment to supporting the assimilation of refugees into Irish society, covering all aspects of life. Section 4 (p27/28) contains twelve proposals concerning education. The first of these proposals' states that *'The Education (Admissions to Schools) 2016 will be in enacted'*.

This means that all refugee children are automatically allowed to attend school in Ireland and receive the same education as their Irish counterparts. Other proposals include the provision of EAL classes, developing positive attitudes towards diversity, more training for teachers and the 'free fees initiative' for third level education. At first glance each proposal appears like a positive step towards equality. On closer inspection though, each proposal carries significant logistical challenges in terms of delivery of the intended equity and inclusion.

Mac Ruairc (2016, p3) argues that *'inclusion as a construct is a highly contested area in education, both in terms of what is encompassed by the term inclusion itself and by the variety of attempts, in practice, in various contexts, to deliver an inclusive education system'*.

This resonates within the Irish context. In Ireland, inclusion initially became synonymous with SEN following the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) where it was proposed that 'those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools', and that 'regular schools with an inclusive ethos are the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming and inclusive communities and achieve education for all.' By allowing SEN students to access mainstream education, schools were progressing from integrating students who must adjust according to the mainstream education system to being inclusive whereby educational structures are established so all children can participate in classroom events. Mac Ruairc (2016) highlights the lack of a broader construct of inclusion outside SEN, and that the continued practice of diagnosing and labelling students feeds into the notion of 'them' and 'us'. Inclusion in terms of ethnic diversity is a relatively new and uncharted concept in Irish schools which has significant implications for the educational experience of refugees, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The UNCRC (2010, p28) states that one of its aims for education is *'The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.'* This proffers that

education should be culturally appropriate for all irrespective of ethnicity or background, something that is in its infancy in Ireland.

1.6: What are the challenges for refugees in Ireland?

Through the concept of a Micro System one can examine the detail of what happens to a refugee who manages to get to Ireland and how this affects those directly involved. In 2000 Direct Provision was established to facilitate the short-term needs of asylum seekers awaiting processing of their application. In the interim, the government offered them food, accommodation, and a minimal stipend to buy essentials. Although intended as a short-term solution for asylum seekers, this system has been highly problematic with it being possible for an infant refugee to reach adulthood and still not have completed the asylum process. Muldoon (2020, p8/9) claims that *'Twenty years on, the average length of stay in Direct Provision is just under two years (23 months) with some families remaining in this system for many years while their asylum application is processed'*.

Whilst difficult to establish which country has best practice, New Zealand sets a good precedent of housing refugees while giving sufficient education and cultural knowledge to the whole family after which they are released into the general population and put on the normal welfare system. If they refuse to settle, or commit crimes, they are deported. While the theory is ideal, the issue of where to deport a refugee to if their country is still at war proves contentious.

The longer the transition period for refugees between arriving in Ireland and getting settled in their 'permanent home,' the greater the challenges they will have to overcome. Without immediate and robust support systems in place in health, education, social welfare etc, the asylum seeker will fail to integrate sufficiently to support themselves and their family. A vicious circle of State dependency occurs which is almost impossible to reverse and break the cycle of poverty. The McMahon Report (NASC,

2019) highlights the challenges and frustrations of refugees' difficulties in accessing the labour market. They are allowed access to work where they have not received a first instance decision on their protection claim within nine months and the delay cannot be attributed to the applicant. As asylum seekers have no control over where they are placed, this further impacts their accessibility to work.

The report (p109) further states that *'in the course of the consultation process participants raised again and again their strong desire to work to support themselves and their children and recounted the profoundly negative effects of not being allowed to work on their sense of self-worth, their health and their future prospects and those of their children.'*

Gaps in education widen. EAL deficiencies for both parents and children remain, psychological trauma is left untended which spills on to the next generation. Cultural integration is harder to attain while media misconceptions fuel racism and mistrusts. The importance of investing in these areas from the outset is vital. Turning government proposals into actions would prove more cost effective. In the following chapters, I will critique each of the challenges mentioned above in relation to the refugees.

1.7: Research Design: From Acorn to Oak

The chapter on research methodology outlines the aims of the research in relation to the research questions that are focused on throughout the study. A synopsis of the constructivist paradigm undertaken is outlined. The research strategy, methodology framework and the methods undertaken are detailed while the process for data collection is discussed. The role of the researcher is outlined and finally, the procedures used to analyse both phases of the data collection are described. This research is intended to add to the limited literature available in the context of the education of refugees in Donegal. As this is an ethnographic study, this research employs predominantly qualitative research methods to ensure the data collated is not divorced from the social context. By observing, interviewing, and interacting with refugees and those working with them, this study attempts to understand their real environment and interpret the information

gathered to explore what the implications of the data could be. Quantitative methods are employed to collate and analyse surveys and published statistical data with relation to overall numbers of refugees, school attendance, their ethnicity, the patterns of their arrival and to measure the length of time it has taken for them to be processed through the system. This is carried out using questionnaires and public records from the Department of Education, the UNHCR in Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council, and local schools.

Obviously, the experience of refugees in Co. Donegal does not necessarily reflect the experience of refugees throughout Ireland, or arguably in other parts of the world. Therefore, this research seeks to find patterns and to draw parallels from common denominators within the global literature on refugee experience. The settlement of refugees in rural Donegal and the attempt to merge people from two diverse cultures raises questions of aptitude, educational gaps, and ability to communicate in English which need to be addressed. Similarly, educators and policy makers must identify the commonalities and disparities between the cultures of the education systems and attempt to bridge the gap in order to successfully integrate the refugees.

The critical literature review examines examples of research relating to the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and the provision of education for them in the context of increased global migration in recent years. Whilst conscious of the nuances of each term, the umbrella term 'refugees' is used for the purpose of research. Efforts by local communities in rural Ireland to cope with the integration of refugees is focused upon, and the proposals to stakeholders and policy makers from the experiences in schools and classrooms. This research aimed to explore methodologies used in relevant research that addresses philosophical questions concerning the nature, aims and challenges of education for refugees. Furthermore, a framework was proposed which could be adopted to explore the educational level and needs of the group of refugees who joined the Irish education system in Co. Donegal in the northwest of Ireland over the next few months. The study sought not just to identify the challenges of the refugees and interagency workers, but also to highlight the potential benefits that might be brought to the classroom. This was important, because such children and their families can bring to their Irish classmates and the wider community, vivid examples of

resilience in the face of difficulties, perseverance in acquiring fluency in other languages and an enhanced appreciation for the value of education.

This research examined what the Irish government said they would provide and what they actually do provide for refugees with specific focus on education. To examine whether the Irish government effectively delivers what it proposes in terms of education for refugees, the methodology specifically examined the gaps in education of the refugees between leaving their home country and settling in Donegal, the time frame in which schools were notified about the arrival of refugees, training and resources of staff teaching and liaising with the refugees, extra support services within schools and the community, training in anti-racism, diversity and psychological trauma and English language provision. Finally, the challenges of the Covid 19 Pandemic and its impact on this ethnographic research were outlined. The aim of the research was to explore the integration of refugees into the education system in rural Ireland. In doing so, it investigated whether a gap exists between the current policies set by the government and the reality of the lived experience of refugees and those who work most closely with them. The study examined what provisions are made by the Department of Education in Ireland for the education of refugees, what the interagency challenges of refugees and those working with them are and evaluated policy versus practice in relation to the proposals of The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) and other government policy. This thesis explored the extent to which the policies issued by the government delivers what it proposes effectively in terms of education of refugees.

1.8: My Position

I am an Irish teacher living in Co. Donegal, where we are currently dealing with the realities of integrating refugee children. In the past I have volunteered with Syrian refugees in Greece and Brussels, and I am passionate about the educational journey of refugees. My initial voluntary work was in 2016 with the refugees in Greece when they were arriving in their thousands daily to Athens. The following year I returned to volunteer in Athens where the situation was no longer one of crisis and emergency

relief. Instead, the situation had evolved to focus on the delivery of education and social care services and to improve the education life skills of a mass of people who were now safe, but in limbo and who lacked the opportunity to work and start a permanent life. In 2018, I had the opportunity to work with some of those who I met in Athens, who had been successful in finding asylum in Brussels.

My experiences thus far have given me direct and valuable insight into the background and experiences of Syrian refugees during their perilous journeys across Europe as they sought a new and safer life. Establishing an emotional attachment was advantageous for my research to break down barriers and build trust. Building trust as a volunteer who assists in providing basic needs such as delivering provisions, assisting with administration or practical needs of school children comes without too much difficulty. As a researcher, trust is more difficult to earn. As a researcher, I needed to hear their stories, their opinions, their horrific experiences; I was asking them to give me something I need, thus changing the dynamics of the relationship. Mistrust becomes inherent in many refugees and can often become a form of survival. If researchers are to be the 'gatekeepers' of their tragic and sensitive stories, refugees need to feel safe with them. The issue of why refugees mistrust is explored by Hynes (2003, p246) citing Zolberg who proposes that the formation of new states is a 'refugee-generating process' in that 'conflicts over the social order are a struggle between dominant and subordinate classes' and that this process of restructuring the social order of the nation-state results in either the risky option of 'exercise of 'voice' ...' or the less risky option of 'exit'. Perceived differences of ethnicity, gender, language, power, wealth, or religion cultivate mistrust during such reconstructions. The subordinate (refugee) may find it difficult to trust the dominant (researcher).

Whilst attachments have been built with many of my research participants, I have had to be mindful not to lose objectivity which is further discussed in the Ethics section. An emotional attachment may reveal a subconscious search for my own prejudices to be reinforced and miss that which argues against my prejudices while looking for reaffirmation of my own beliefs. By identifying the philosophical assumptions underpinning the methodologies used in the research of education of refugees, I intend to demonstrate the way in which truth is used in both policy and practice in Ireland with a specific focus on the refugees in Co. Donegal.

Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

Refugees in Ireland; Challenges, Structure and Power

Introduction

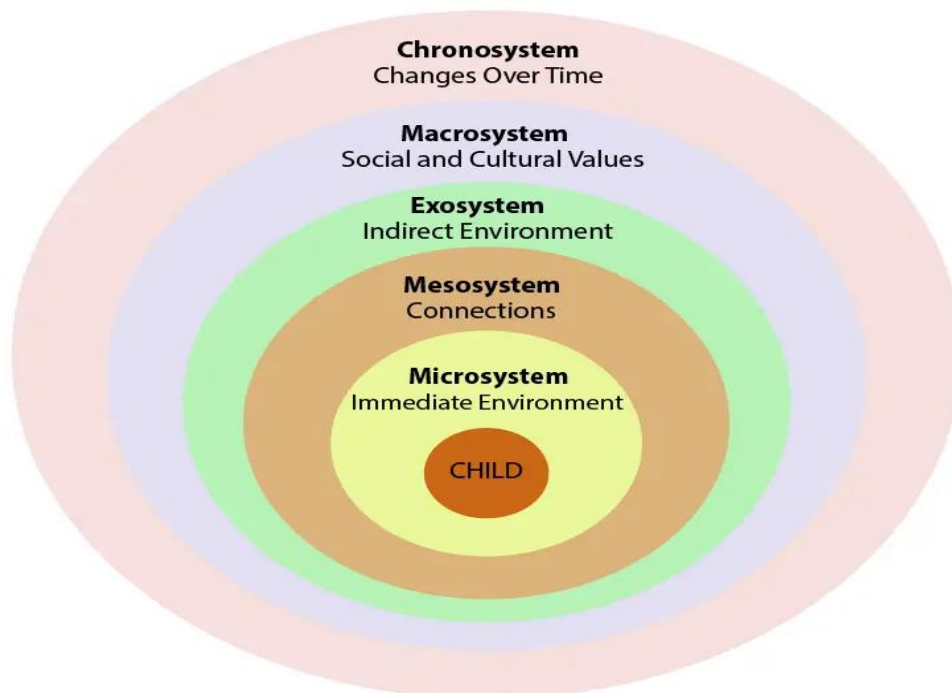
This chapter focuses on the literature pertaining to the challenges, structure, and power of the refugee experience in Ireland. Divided into two parts, Part 1 explores the experience of the refugees while Part 2 focuses on the Irish context.

As illustrated in Chapter 1, the influx of refugees to Ireland has led to the evolution of a once homogenous society to a relatively diverse multi-cultural one. The complex issue of refugees is elucidated in this chapter through exploration of the current relevant literature and theoretical concepts related to the developing research. This section will examine the literature pertaining to the challenges and attitudes of both the refugees and the host society within the Irish context. Part One of this chapter focuses specifically on the challenges of the refugees including gaps in education, EAL deficiencies, psychological trauma, integration, and cultural and linguistic diversity. The second part will focus the infrastructures set up by the host country for education, housing, social welfare, and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. It will explore the role of the media and the power it wields regarding perceptions, misconceptions and rhetoric towards refugees and the narrative and stereotypes that emerge as a consequence. It also examines the impact of neoliberalism and nationalism in the representation of asylum seekers and how they are often politicised in media narratives instead of being presented in the context of human rights.

Due to the complexity of the refugee experience, Bronfenbrenner's EST model is used to illustrate the influence of a child's environment on their development. This is reciprocated in the way in which the behaviour and personality of the child will simultaneously influence the way people in the environment will interact with that child. It questions whether a person born in a war zone, or forced to flee during their formative years, who has watched a parent die, or grown up in a refugee camp can relate to others in the same way as a child who has grown up in a safe, secure and stable environment. Arguably, one might query whether a female Muslim refugee seeking

refuge in Ireland be offered the same job opportunities as an Irish woman of similar qualification. In The Psychology Notes HQ (2021) the author highlights one of Bronfenbrenner’s most significant findings in his research on ecological systems; that it is possible for siblings who find themselves in the same ecological system to experience very different environments. If two siblings experience the same microsystem, it is possible for them develop in significantly different manners. Specific personality traits, such as temperament, which is influenced by unique genetic and biological factors, ultimately have a hand in how they are treated by others. The diagram below indicates the intricate layers of complexity embedded within a child’s environment which will be explored in further detail in the Findings chapters. Whilst this model is effective in categorising the various systems of a person’s environment, there is no category directly relating to war, trauma or migration. These can be loosely incorporated into the Macrosystem or Chronosystem, but don’t fit comfortably into them, as they are such significant and complex entities on their own.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory



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Figure 4: Bronfenbrenner’s EST Mode

2.1: PART 1: Challenges of the Refugees

2.1.1: Gaps in Education

By definition, a refugee must leave their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. It is a process that causes disruption to every aspect of normal life. Homes and material possessions are destroyed or left behind, health and safety are compromised while education loses priority and often becomes non-existent. The journey of a refugee is rarely a quick process, therefore gaps in the educational development of refugees are inevitable. The crucial academic and social building blocks that are established during a young person's tenure at primary and secondary school are eliminated, leaving a deficit that can leave a lingering and devastating effect.

In this section, reference is made to a longitudinal study *Growing up in Ireland*, in which two cohorts of children and young people in Ireland were observed over two phases beginning in 2006 and it explores how migrant children settle and develop in Ireland. Darmody et al. (2016, p1) cite the importance of education and the Leaving Certificate as currency to a better future.

'Taking academic outcomes and social interaction as indicators of their wellbeing. Academic outcomes are a crucial aspect of their wellbeing, since a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health and a longer life' ... Likewise, emphasis is put on long term social and academic success... 'especially in Ireland where the Leaving Certificate acts as a channel to post-school education and where the financial returns to tertiary education are substantial.'

Owing to the war having disrupted both society and schooling in Syria, it is highly likely that any refugee child arriving in Ireland will have endured a significant gap in their education. Prior to leaving Syria, many have had to abandon their schooling due to bombs destroying schools. The UNHCR (2016, p14) estimates that refugees miss three to four years of schooling because of forced displacement. Given that the time from when they fled Syria to getting settled in permanent accommodation can vary by several years, this means that for many children, their education has been sparse and inconsistent.

When they are finally settled, further obstacles pose a threat to their progress and development. (Day, 2020) The complexity of the educational gap is amplified by desire to succeed often being thwarted by the lack of time and resources to bridge the gap, leaving refugees unable to reach their desired potential. Whilst they may optimistically strive for upward mobility Darmody et al (2016, p3) posit the existence of *'the aspiration-achievement paradox, whereby many immigrants with high aspirations are not able to translate it into high achievement'*.

In MRCI's (2015) report 'All work and low pay: the experience of migrants working in Ireland' highlights how migrant workers constitute a significant proportion of low-paid workers in Ireland. The study found that migrant workers were found to be concentrated in service sectors where jobs are often undervalued, underpaid and in some cases exploitative. The reports also found that 70% of migrants were overqualified for the jobs they were employed in. Irrespective of how well qualified they are, the stark reality is that many migrants work in employment below their skill set and are over-represented in lower-paid jobs which in turn is reflected in their earning power. Dooley (2004) cites a study undertaken by Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative (SPIRASI) as a part of an EU-wide research programme which examines the challenges of refugees gaining employment equivalent to their skills set and experience. When refugee status is obtained, participants have the same employment rights as Irish citizens, yet very few worked at jobs where their full potential was recognised. *'The main reason cited by the interviewees for their failure to secure posts as doctors was the lack of recognition of their qualifications by the Medical Council. A similar refusal to recognise qualifications in other areas was also cited as a difficulty for other participants in the study.'*

Refugees and migrants may well bring new skills and expertise with them. The price of failing to recognise this wealth of experience and employing them in jobs that reflect their education levels puts an inevitable strain on the welfare system. Upskilling and retraining would cost the government significantly less than training people from scratch or preventing them from working and paying tax, thus generating revenue. Financial and linguistic barriers make immersion challenging, coupled with bureaucracy which dissuades and deters applicants.

Ní Mhurchú (2007, p24) highlights issues raised by the Integrating Ireland study 2005 about the '*lack of transparency and consistency*' within the Irish system with regards to qualification recognition and accreditation and how '*the current structure and set of rules are very complicated, with different agencies involved, jargon and processes that are not customer focused*'. Ní Mhurchú cites The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) who argue that there is some evidence that, in general, migrant workers work longer hours for less pay than their Irish counterparts. She hypothesises that migrants are left in a quagmire whereby they can't get the jobs they've trained for in their home country, therefore need to lower their career expectations, yet are deemed overqualified for more menial jobs, often rendering them unemployable. Ní Mhurchú questions whether Ireland wants to be a country of '*taxi-driving doctors and engineers waiting tables*' or whether they have the vision to provide the resources to harness the full potential of all who come here to actively seek work. More recently, in 2017, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, established from the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), of which Ireland is a member, adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation. It is expected that ratifying states implement measures outlined. Suggestions include a European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and a toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation. Pilot programmes have commenced, but to date, Ireland remains an observer of the evaluations. (OPSI, 2019)

The experience of Syrian refugees in Donegal reflects that of refugees globally, in that they have no choice about where they will live or what school their children will attend, and this creates tensions. In most developed countries, access to public education is significantly affected by the available number of school places within a particular catchment area and the global marketing pressure on education creates a situation where demand for places often outstrips supply.

In Ireland as in other countries this creates pressure for parents to deploy social capital to gain access to preferred schools especially in urban areas. Refugees lack such social capital, and this combined with their lack of choice over residential location and traps them in the lower end of a competitive socio-economic cycle for housing, schools, and employment opportunities. Duncan (2015) highlights the government's failure to tackle

the inequality of school access arguing that ‘the composition is not representing our local communities’ (p1) She further posits that ‘*school patronage, first-come-first-serve admission policies and unregulated parental choice*’ makes it all but impossible for refugees to access school places in more balanced educational settings. The high concentration of immigrants in a number of select schools contravenes the notion of equity and equality.

While there are officially no segregated schools, the reality tells a different story. It is argued by Darmody et al. (2016) that school policies tend to favour local settled families, while immigrants and refugees tend to be educated in larger, more urban schools with a greater concentration of lower socio-economic and disadvantaged students, and greater levels of unemployment. As a rural environment, Donegal finds this problem of competition for preferred options compounded by a simple lack of educational resources, housing, and transport infrastructure, and this presents its own set of challenges. The socio-economic profile of a school is a significant reflection of student achievement and their ability to accrue culture capital. McCallig (2017) reported that three secondary schools in Donegal are ranked amongst the top Irish secondary schools based on the number of students who went on to enrol in university. There are less than 0.01% migrants / refugees in those schools compared to the richly diverse Errigal College, comprising of 22 different nationalities which concentrates on lower academic training courses including 5 FETAC courses (www.errigal.ie). In 2021, the same three schools continue the trend with Loreto Milford having 2/ 798 migrants, Abbey Vocational School, Donegal Town hosting 8/ 930 migrants and St. Columba’s Comprehensive School having 0/ 384 migrants.

Being an immigrant can bring a new dimension of inequality. As many immigrants, particularly refugees, bring the baggage of disadvantages experienced to their new lives through no fault of their own, their education is inconsistent, and their life opportunities are reduced. Darmody et al. (2016) refers to the aspiration- achievement paradox, whereby many immigrants with high aspirations are not able to translate it into high achievement due to the lack of available resources and the social environment in which they find themselves.

As the only county in Ireland without rail connections, Donegal is overly reliant upon infrequent buses and expensive taxis. For the refugees with limited language skills or

money, this makes travelling to school, health, or asylum processing appointments more arduous. Whilst the county is renowned for its welcoming, generous spirit, its remoteness also means that the inhabitants are significantly less diverse than other parts of Ireland. One of the things which smooths the transition from immigrant to citizen in any society is the ability to deploy social or cultural capital, Hanifan (1916) through gaining access to additional resources, social contacts, or economic opportunities through informal religious or ethnic networks. In rural Donegal this presents challenges to the refugees due to their almost total dependence on State benefits. This is exacerbated by government restrictions on working, lack of suitable employment, profession of a religion which the locals regard with some degree of suspicion, the lack of language education and the effect of the pandemic. This last two issues pose the greatest limitations to the refugees' potential integration, because without a common language and the opportunity to go out into the community and use it, it is difficult to develop understanding and tolerance. The Irish Refugee Council (2020, p40) collated conversations with refugees during Lockdown and highlight the stark frustration, loneliness and sense of claustrophobia felt. *"My experience is so saddening. [There are] 22 Covid cases here. We cry out to be moved for safety in vain. I am still living in an infected room for my roommate tested positive of Covid. The local residents are scared of us. We are in total lock down and not safe. I am always in a state of fear."*

The report further reveals the challenges of home-schooling, where children are missing socialising with friends, having a sense of normality, an opportunity to practice English compared with trying to study in a cramped room, with poor connectivity and the inability to go outside for fear of catching the virus. (Section 6) The chance to gain social capital through academic or social means during this time is severely curtailed. It does, however, raise the question as to what the role of schools are in promoting social mobility and whether a reliance on just getting refugees through the curriculum is what our taxpayer's money is going towards.

Being a rural area, Donegal is much more ethnically homogenous and socially conservative than more urban areas. There are no mosques in the county, but Friday prayers and Eid prayers take place in the Letterkenny Community Centre, a facility which is used by clubs, families and individuals from all parts of the community for a

wide range of activities. The refugees lack of language, religious customs and minimal money reduces their ability to engage with local cultural and recreational activities where they might make informal social contacts with locals. Consequently, the visibility of differences such as skin colour, language, and forms of dress such as burkas and hijabs and desire for halal foods can increase rather than reduce distance between the refugees and their host communities. Historically, each wave of immigrants to a new place are able to work and mix freely with the locals and this rapidly leads to networks of social capital which then cumulatively assists each new immigrant. Because of the conditions imposed by their arrival and legal position the Syrians are excluded from this process and indeed Darmody et al. (2016, p7) hypothesise that *'the disadvantage occurs, at least in part, due to the devaluation of the human, cultural capital of the new arrivals. In fact, belonging to certain national groups could be seen to constitute a new form of inequality in Ireland'*.

2.1.2: EAL Deficiencies

The most pressing educational need of refugees is the acquisition of English. Little (2000, p1) hypothesises that the language rights of refugees are twofold; the right to preserve their native language as an integral part of their identity and secondly the right of access to every reasonable effort by the government / Department of Education to assist in developing their language proficiency.

'They have language problems in the sense that their lack of English seriously limits their access to the processes and institutions of Irish society. But they also have language problems in the sense that they are separated from the linguistic community to which they owe their sense of ethnicity and personal identity.'

Over twenty years on, linguistic diversity is not valued to the extent it should be. O'Connor (2021) argues that *'the absence of discussions on linguistic diversity and discrimination is all the more striking given the dramatic changes in the linguistic*

landscape of Ireland over the last 20 years.' Although the data on the 2022 Census relating to foreign languages has not yet been published, Census 2016 revealed that 612,018 residents spoke a language other than Irish or English at home, an increase of 19.1% since 2011. Of these, 363,715 were non-Irish nationals. (CSO, 2017) Despite the evidence of an increasing multi-linguistic Ireland, O'Connor further states that *'in Irish Equality legislation, there is no explicit reference to different linguistic backgrounds, language disadvantages, or linguistic barriers preventing access to services or opportunities.'*

This raises the issues of what both the host country and refugees are expecting. One school of thought might argue that Ireland, like many other host countries has a right to expect functional competence in English in order to work, study and integrate into society. In the same vein, one could claim that in general, Arabic is of little use to Irish people, therefore it shouldn't require significant resources and funding. However, for Syrian refugees, the culmination of losing their home, families and livelihood may be enough to render them dysfunctional. By keeping their language, they are keeping part of their culture and identity, if only to use amongst themselves to feel a sense of connection to their homeland. Paradoxically, the need to feel 'at home' in their new home is what may delay their integration. For those who speak Arabic at all times within the home, they are less likely to progress than those who fully assimilate themselves with English.

2.1.3: Attitudes to Learning English

Conflicts of interest arise as refugees need to decipher whether they should pledge more allegiance to their native tongue or to English. Whilst there may be a strong desire to maintain their native tongue and use it as a first language within the household to ensure it is passed on to the next generation, this inhibits the progress of English acquisition, which in turn reflects upon integration and employment opportunities. Proficiency in English comes with a price tag; the severing, at least in part, from their

ethnic and cultural roots to which their native tongue is so strongly connected. This conflict is a perpetual challenge for immigrants; the struggle between how much of the new life they are willing to embrace at the expense of giving up part of their old life and identity. How does one get their children and grandchildren to speak a language, love a country and take pride in a culture they have never known? As Law (2010, p86) suggests '*An immigrant leaves his homeland to find greener grass. A refugee leaves his homeland because the grass is burning under his feet.*'

This concludes that refugees are forced to leave their home, as opposed to making a free decision which will impact upon their attitude towards embracing a new culture and learning a new language. For many refugees who intend returning home to their native land when it is safe, they may feel a desperate need to hold on to what they know and feel it futile to learn the language of their host country. Indeed, usually an emigrant has a specific destination in mind whereas a refugee simply moves to a safer place and hopes for the best. It also raises the question of whether it is possible to remain bi-cultural in a host country which is fundamentally different in every way.

This transition proves easier for children who tend to have less inhibitions and less responsibility compared to adults. Learning a new language can prove particularly difficult for adults, some of whom lack proficient literacy skills in their own language. Little (2000) attributes this to an inferiority complex that can develop with refugees with the realisation that their language deficiency restricts access to society for them, thus making language learning cumbersome and seen as a burden that must be overcome. (p4)

With more exposure to naturalistic language learning, which '*entails a process of organic growth in which approximation (getting linguistic forms nearly right) and error play a central role*' (Little, 2000 p2), school children have more opportunity to develop their language skills both unconsciously and informally. Gaps may arise within households where the adults never gain full proficiency while the school children have better potential to become fluent, thus forcing a merger of cultures. This is dependent on many variables including age, gender, language proficiency in the mother tongue and domestic responsibilities. Fluency tends to favour the young, who have fewer responsibilities and the more routine structure of school where they are consistently exposed to the language on a daily basis.

2.1.4: Adults Refugees learning English

Whilst this thesis focuses predominantly on the education of school age refugees, the acquisition of English for adults is relevant to assess their ability to support their children with their schoolwork, access the employment market, be positive role models for their children and for the integration into society of the whole family unit.

For many adults, they may have run out of time to attain fluency in English. In Ireland, during the first year of orientation when a refugee arrives, they are entitled to receive English tuition. Their attendance at these classes has no bearing on whether or not they get their government benefits, so although strongly advised, they are not obliged to attend these classes. After the arduous journey of fleeing Syria and going through the asylum-seeking process, many people are not in the frame of mind to start learning. Many have a mental block or resent that they have had to leave their country and start using another language to be understood. For some, who were not proficient in their mother tongue, it is a very daunting task trying to learn a new language. It further impacts parents' ability to assist their children with schoolwork. *"My daughter starts crying because she can't understand, and she can't do her work . . . Back in our countries we could help them because we were the same language, but here we can't," a parent said.* (Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2019) Such examples of stress add to the weight of needing to learn English.

Without the time and suitable informal environments in which to learn organically, it may be unrealistic to expect adult refugees with no prior knowledge of the language to become proficient. Whilst formal teaching is beneficial, fluency is difficult to acquire without the natural platform afforded to children who learn in an uninhibited way. The teaching must be learner centred to retain motivation, however unless the learner has cause to use the language consistently in a natural context, as with any language, or indeed any skill, if you don't use it, you will lose it. Depending on the aforementioned variables, this could be the case for many refugees, particularly women.

Learning English may be seen as a threat to the refugee's identity, fuelling negative attitudes towards the language. This can lead to a dependence on children to translate and speak on their behalf, placing an extra burden on the child. Invariably, the younger

a person is immersed in a language, the higher chance they have of becoming fluent. Candappa & Egharevba (2002) argue that this can lead to a complicated relationship between parent and child, particularly as women's comparatively lower literacy levels position them unevenly to their children, who often act as gatekeepers to adult affairs and administration.

This reliance on children to assist with discourse for routine appointments and administration leads to regular absence from school as they assume the adult role of assisting with running household affairs. Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2019, 21) in their study of refugee children in Ireland report that many young refugees carry considerable family responsibility by needing to translate and interpret for their parents or indeed forsake school altogether to gain employment due to family poverty.

Klenk (2017) posits that policymakers tend to conceptualise empowerment as a tangible outcome of education, measured by employment, formal qualification, or status. This is daunting for adult refugees and gives rise to feelings of intimidation and inadequacy. For Arabic women in particular, there may be cultural and religious barriers to language learning. They may feel bound by their traditional role as child carer to skip classes or indeed feel uncomfortable in the company of a male teacher and this may inhibit progress. Also, Arabic and English are vastly different languages in terms of alphabet, sentence structure and even the direction of reading is opposite. Language assumes shared cultural knowledge to create meaning and what may be used as teaching material for a European language may vary drastically with the resources used to teach Chinese, Russian or Arabic.

With this in mind, the broader issue that needs to be addressed is not whether learning English is a means to an end for refugees, an isolated achievement designed to advance their employment opportunities, but rather, that it empowers them to have a voice so that they may contribute to society from a broader cultural, social and political perspective. The ability to speak any language is the primary enabler to establish social bonds. This is vital for the integration of refugees whose family and friendship bonds have been fragmented. Gendered power relations are also at play as Arabic women adopt and are encouraged by their husbands and fathers to adopt the freedoms offered to women in Ireland which are not available in their own country. Learning the language is integral to the empowerment of refugee women and their ability to forge

friendships, feel confident to support their children's education, feel a sense of agency, purpose and belonging. More than that is a bonus but the will to learn is paramount.

It is maintained by Little (2000, p11) that if refugees are receptive to the notion of learning a new language, remain positive to the idea of adopting a new cultural identity, at least in part, and embrace the new opportunities afforded to them, that language proficiency will come without too much difficulty. By contrast, Little argues that if refugees maintain despondent about their situation, rejecting language learning and the need to adopt a new cultural identity, they will struggle to grasp even the most basic functional language, which will invariably further impede their integration to their new society. Attitude to learning can be the ultimate enabler or conversely, disabler.

2.1.5: EAL in Schools

Muldoon (2020, 31/33) cites the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality ...that in line with the 2018 regulations, language support is imperative...*'All schools with a sufficient number of non-English asylum-seeking pupils should have a designated EAL teacher as required. Where any one school does not have a sufficient number of pupils to warrant a full time EAL teacher, The Department of Education and Skills should put in place provision whereby this resource can be shared among schools as appropriate.'*

However, this is evidently not the case in several rural schools in Donegal which accommodate such small numbers of refugees, that they miss the quota required to warrant EAL support. Teachers are expected to use their allocated resource hours for special needs. No extra time is given to refugees for EAL.

While the Safe Haven report (2019, p21) advocates that schools adopt a welcoming and inclusive environment, it also stresses the importance of targeted approaches, policies and programmes which are geared towards the specific needs of refugees, as distinct from other immigrants. In contrast, Healy (1999) observes that the government offers no extra financial assistance when refugees are placed in schools, there are no guidelines for teachers or principles as to how to deal with refugee students and due to data protection, little or no background is given about any individuals. Special needs resources are consumed by refugee children at the expense of other SEN children. Many

refugee children don't have special needs but have a language deficit. There is a gap in their learning, not their aptitude, and with severely limited resources, such aptitudes are not fostered sufficiently. Many teachers are required to adopt a trial-and-error approach not just to teaching English, but in addressing the child holistically, their academic, psychological and cultural needs. Instead of leading from the top, the task of educating refugees is coming from the ground up.

As with native Irish children, refugee students present with all different levels of academic ability and their potential to achieve is driven by the support and standards set at home. Fostering a love of reading and nurturing a child's learning is fundamental to their success. For refugee parents, with little or no knowledge of the language, this poses a challenge, exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic, where school support systems were significantly reduced and the opportunity to use language in natural social settings was diminished. The two primary support systems for learning were gone. The Safe Haven Report (2019, P47) details the challenges faced by refugee parents trying to cope with home-schooling during Quarantine. *"Now our children do not go to school, and this is a problem for us, they do not receive education and cannot study remotely because we do not have the opportunity to do so. It is impossible to organize training in one room where there are 4 people in a locked room."*

The difficulties experienced by the population as a whole were amplified for refugees, setting them further back with their education due to a further gap in the opportunity to practice English and their general living conditions.

It is argued by Devine (2005) that a 'deficit model' of support for English language learning prevails within the Irish education system which places little value on linguistic diversity or further development of native languages of immigrants. Whilst Irish is a mandatory subject in all primary and secondary schools in Ireland, depending on the age they arrive in school, many refugees will get an exemption from this subject. The assumption is that you are 'non-English speaking' until you are English speaking, at which point, you will be expected to access and work through the curriculum. The concept of bilingualism doesn't appear to hold much currency when accessing the Irish system. The vision and resources remain largely untapped. Although Irish is compulsory and this experience of bilingualism begins at an early age, other foreign

languages aren't taught until secondary school. Bruen (2018) posits that 'the lack of foreign language capacity in Ireland brings many personal, social and economic drawbacks.' She argues that the delayed introduction to foreign languages in secondary schools means that 'students don't benefit from the brain's natural capacity to acquire language with greater ease at a younger age.' Additionally, younger children don't benefit from the 'development of greater cognitive flexibility, creativity, open-mindedness, intercultural awareness, communication skills and an ability to view issues from multiple perspectives' that accompanies foreign language learning. Primary students have less inhibitions than their older peers and would learn languages more readily if the opportunity were available.

2.1.6: The Value of Learning English

Irrespective of how motivated and dedicated a student is, poor proficiency in English will negatively impact on their academic accomplishments. The way in which such proficiency is measured and subsequently valued is significant. This varies between the different generations of refugee learners. Notwithstanding reasonable cognitive ability, it is widely acknowledged that the younger the student, the more likely and efficiently they will acquire language proficiency. Consequently, it stands to reason that primary school students will have a better chance of gaining proficiency ahead of their secondary school and adult counterparts. It is therefore important to consider what the value of English proficiency is for each age group. For primary and secondary school students, it is perhaps a stepping-stone to the next stage of the Irish education system; for adults, maybe a stepping-stone to gaining meaningful employment.

There is however more to language proficiency than just a means to an end. Sampson (1922, p3) in a prescient essay, hypothesises that education should be seen as '*a spirit and not a substance*', and that what the teacher has to consider '*is not the minds he can measure, but the souls he can save*'. (p2) Almost one hundred years later, this sage advice is more binding than ever. With the inevitable trauma and resilience that refugees have to endure prior to their arrival in Ireland, perhaps valuing education just for the experience of bettering oneself and gaining an appreciation of the world would prove

more advantageous as a *'preparation for life, not merely for a livelihood'* as advocated by Sampson (2000, p4). He further argues that every occupation has its own specific requirements and skills, which cannot be attained at school and therefore schooling should not be undertaken with the sole purpose of employment in mind, but as a vessel to develop the mind and soul. Whilst this may appear idealistic in a system guided by testing and accountability, a hybrid approach would ensure a more balanced entrance to the education system for refugees, whose priority should be to assimilate and learn the language without the pressures of assessment. Sampson's report is a brilliant assertion of why we should spend taxpayer's money to make poor children literate.

Sampson believed that English should not be viewed as just another subject, but rather the means through which all else should be learned. If the language of communication is strong, students will fare better in all other subjects; if English is weak or the teaching of it is bogged down by the intricacies and nuances of the language structure, other subjects will be impeded. The author promotes the widespread belief that the quality of language learning lies in imitation. This has posed significant challenges for refugees during the lockdowns of the pandemic both in terms of socialisation and language acquisition. These issues will be addressed in more detail later.

A further issue is that Irish is a compulsory subject in both the primary and secondary school curricula. A student may request an exemption if they have lived abroad or do not speak English as their first language. Students with significant learning difficulties or special needs may also request exemption. For refugee children in lower primary, it is expected that they too will learn the language. Few, if any refugees are placed in a *gaelscoil* (Irish speaking school).

2.1.7: Psychological Trauma

In the introduction to *'Madness and Civilization,'* Foucault (1988) addresses the issue of mental health, claiming that during the period from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, mentally ill people were treated much in the same way as criminals;

that is to say, confined for their own and society's good. However, the ways that we recognise, understand, and treat mental illness has made great advances over the past three centuries especially since the Convention on the International Protection of Adults 2000. Nonetheless, disturbing parallels can still be drawn between the attitudes of the 17th century and modern society towards the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers.

Foucault (1988) surmises that the opening of the general hospital marked the start of confinement of 'madmen'. Being idle fell into this category, which was the way in which the ruling classes kept it out of the public eye. 'The Great Confinement' reflected the moral standards of the ruling classes and marked their ability to impose their values upon the lower classes. It was a form of control. 'Madmen' were often treated like animals, beaten, and forced to live in sub-human conditions. By confining them, the authorities were able to maintain the illusion that society was running smoothly with no problems. Bethlehem Hospital in London, a famous psychiatric hospital, with a long history than inspired horror films and books, displayed the madmen so the public could come to spectate for a fee.

Interestingly, this practice of charging admission to 'view the inmates' was a Georgian innovation aimed at generating revenue for their keep. In earlier times Christian charity was sufficient for that purpose. It's hard to imagine humans being treated with such disdain and inhumanity, yet in the 21st century, echoes of similar levels of abuse are subjected on refugees.

From some perspectives the Brexit referendum in 2016, driven by the populist anti-immigration wing was a direct smear campaign towards immigrants. This political earthquake was closely followed by the inauguration of Donald Trump who made no secret about his disdain for immigrants. Slogans including '*Take Back Control of Our Borders*,' '*Build The Wall and Crime Will Fall*', incited and gave permission to those of already racist tendencies to voice and discriminate against ethnic minorities, particularly immigrants. Fear was instilled into those who were sitting on the fence as these leaders expertly used their voters as pawns to get the result they wanted with images of screaming, starving children incarcerated in cages, separated from parents at the Mexican border and Nigel Farage's thinly veiled racist poster with lines of refugees espousing that Britain was at 'Breaking Point' from the strain of the influx of

immigrants. Simply put, the ruling classes did whatever it took to confine the less fortunate and convince the lower classes that they were in danger, leading to a significant increase in racism and xenophobia, with little being done to assuage their racist assumptions. Following the repetitive divisive rhetoric by leading politicians in the lead up and in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum, an increase in race and religious hate crime of 15-25% in England and Wales was reported. (Clifton-Sprigg, 2021) The author argues that the increase in race and religious hate crime occurred predominantly in the first three months after the referendum and was most conspicuous in pro-Brexit areas. This may or may not be attributed to the referendum or the outcome itself as opposed to having been triggered by it. Similarly, racial undercurrents were at the fore since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, who incited rather than diminished issues of race and inequality. Dimock & Gramlich (2021) published a survey following Trump's presidency stating that the president's rhetoric caused 'deep partisan divisions...with 56% of adults claiming that Trump had made race relations worse since taking office, while 65% suggesting that it had become more common for people in the U.S. to express racist or racially insensitive views since his election.' The former president's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is a well-documented example of his divisive and polarising form. Packer (2020) describes the 'extreme vetting' of asylum seekers under the Trump administration, who are subject to unattainable levels of administration and bureaucratic red tape making it almost impossible for them to get through the selection process. Packer cites Trump who speaking at a rally in Bemidji, Minnesota in September 2020 claimed that *'Sleepy Joe will turn Minnesota into a refugee camp. Think of it. 700 percent increase. So, you're not happy now? ... Biden will overwhelm your children's schools, overcrowd their classrooms, and inundate your hospitals. That's what'll happen. Biden has even pledged to terminate our travel ban to jihadist regions. They've already been doing that to you, haven't they? Opening the floodgates to radical Islamic terrorists.'*

Such regular rhetoric fuelled the fire of his many followers building an ever-increasing distain for refugees.

There is no part of a refugee's journey that can be considered plain sailing. By definition, an asylum seeker or refugee is seeking a place of refuge, they are displaced, they have no home, they are fleeing in true fear of death or persecution. Resilience is a key factor

in their survival, but for even the most robust hearts and minds, there will be few refugees who are left unscathed and without some form of psychological trauma. At each stage of their journey from when they leave their native home until they finally find their refuge in a permanent home, there are different forms of psychological trauma at play. PTSD, physical injury, racism, loss of home, unemployment, lack of purpose, language deficiencies, separation and loss of family members and friends, uncertainty for the future, discrimination, living in limbo, loss of identity, disease and health issues, bureaucracy, direct provision, sexual harassment, violence, human trafficking, xenophobia and perilous journeys.

A refugee's journey can last for years, for some an entire lifetime, leaving irreparable mental scars, long after their journey is over. Regrettably when refugees find their 'permanent home,' the causes of psychological trauma often continue in the form of racism, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, and lack of belonging. This trauma transcends the age brackets impacting adults and children alike and manifesting in different ways. The effects of this psychological trauma cause ripples throughout society, to schools, places of employment, health services, housing etc. Therefore, the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not wholly applicable as the stress has not past, but ongoing. The Faculty of Public Health Medicine (2016:3) argues that unless the issues of employment, education and housing for refugees are solved, irrespective of what psychological or psychiatric help they get, the mental health of refugees will continue to decline unabated as those issues are a direct cause to their continued anxiety and suffering.

In 2014, after coming under increased fire for the unacceptable way in which refugees and asylum seekers were being handled, the Government established 'Working Group on the Protection Process and Direct Provision'. This working group joined forces with NASC, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre and were commissioned with the task of drawing up recommendations for the protection process of refugees and Direct Provision resulting in the publication of the McMahon Report (2015). Despite recommending that policies and procedures be implemented without delay, the working group were frustrated when Minister Fitzgerald, (former Minister for justice

and Equality) dismissed the report as mere ‘food for thought.’ (Nasc, 2019) Further inadequacies were brought to light by NASC with the publication of a ‘Working Paper’ in 2017. In it, they conveyed discrepancies by the Government in relation to their recommendations for refugees. *‘In contrast to the Government’s representation that 98% of the recommendations had been implemented either fully or partially, we found that only 20 (51%) recommendations could be verified as partially or wholly implemented.’* (Nasc, 2019) The system failed.

While The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) failed to acknowledge the issue of mental health in any of its 76 proposals and no specific recommendations were made, the recently published White Paper on Refugees (2021) recommended that targeted mental health promotion and prevention actions should recognise the distinct needs of International Protection applicants, and that the HSE should deliver their services in a culturally competent way. The White Paper acknowledges the mental health needs of refugees are distinct from general society due to the inevitable trauma suffered.

The Position Report from the College of Psychiatric Ireland (2017, p2) cites that *‘Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have been identified as suffering up to ten times the rate of post traumatic disorder (PTSD) compared to the indigenous population.’* It is seven years since the first Syrian refugees arrived in Ireland in 2014, so a lot of time has been lost in addressing the mental health of refugees. Whilst the proposals from the White Paper 2021 are welcome, they are still just proposals and will take time to put in place. Meanwhile as more and more refugees arrive in Ireland, the problem escalates.

Day (2020, p77) highlighted that the *‘heavy human toll and increased burden on the State in terms of lost tax revenue, economic activity and Direct Provision’* for adults who can’t earn money to support themselves and their families and lose their skills due to enforced inactivity and lack of recognition for their previous qualifications. This is a prime example of how mental health issues fester and exacerbate.

While the National Standards for Direct Provisions Centres (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019) replicate to a large extent the provisions of the EU Recast Directive, it is

not immediately obvious that all of the provisions relating to children contained in the latter will be fully met. It is particularly significant that the National Standards make no reference to the provision of rehabilitation supports for children who have been previously abused and traumatised. (Article 23 of Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, supra note 35.) The system has again failed to deal with the mental health of refugees.

The Safe Haven report (2019, p33) addresses the resources available for mental health for refugees. Full physical tests are carried out on all refugees on arrival, but mental health assessments are only conducted on adults. They are questioned about their children's mental wellbeing and how the trauma of their journey from Syria to Ireland manifests in their children. This includes bedwetting, nightmares, lethargy, and irregular sleep patterns, while teachers reported episodes of emotional outbursts, inability to make friends, boredom, and self-isolation. With health centres and GPs stretched to capacity, the resources to assess and provide treatment for mental health issues is scarce. Coupled with this is a stigma of shame and embarrassment for many refugees who pride themselves on their resilience and don't like to show weakness. Further issues arise with the lack of interpreters and an unwillingness to share their anxiety with a third party. In a report published by Crosscare Information and Advocacy Services (CIAS, 2018, p6) research indicates *'a gap in the awareness of, and access to, interpreter services by customers with language support needs. There is strong evidence that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also unaware of the availability of interpreters in Intreo offices, and, where they are aware, they are generally unable to advocate for access to interpreters for their clients with any success.'*

The report further claims that because the interpreter industry is unregulated in Ireland, issues of quality, privacy, confidentiality, and professionalism of contracted interpreters is not guaranteed.

The work of Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2019) argues for the upskilling mainstream staff and providing intercultural awareness training to all staff dealing with refugees to get a truer, more organic insight to the lived experience of refugees. Ireland's Health Service

Executive (HSE) had previously held responsibility for child protection and welfare, before TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency was created in 2014. TUSLA is responsible for child protection and welfare services, family support, educational welfare, and a range of other services, including those relating to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. With the change of services between the HSE and TUSLA, vital information and deep understanding of the person was lost. When a child was registered with the HSE, a team including a registered psychologist was made available to them. Harmony ensued. When services transferred over to TUSLA (Tús Lá) the psychologist remained with the HSE as their services weren't required within the remit of TUSLA, leaving a gaping hole of important information about refugees left behind. The College of Psychiatricians of Ireland (2017, p4) observe the unaddressed pre-existing mental health issues of refugees enduring and fleeing war that need to be catered for along with the psychological trauma accrued on their journey to refuge which endures. Staff and patients are culturally polarised within the health system, without medical records or history to begin the difficult narrative. The report further hypothesises that immigrants access mental health services at a lower rate than the indigenous population, despite this population's greater need of mental health care.

In 2020, the Irish Refugee Council published a comprehensive report detailing the experiences of refugees in Direct Provision. The responses elicited by the residents portray the grim reality of increasing and returning mental health problems. Their responses include:

'I have never experienced so much depression in my life!'

'It's depressing; I feel traumatized, I feel not safe in this place.'

'My already appalling experience has worsened. I currently have mental issues.'

'Traumatising. I am afraid I will die and never see my other children again. The thought of the possibility of dying and never to see them kills me each day.' (p39-40)

This evidence implies that despite many governmental departments and NGOs being fully cognisant of the psychological trauma, both pre-existing and ongoing suffering by

the vast majority of refugees, neither reasonable resources, let alone priority has been afforded to this issue. Exhibiting credibility can be a complicated task for refugees and asylum seekers. Given that they are unlikely to be able to gather concrete evidence to support their claims, it can be a challenge for them to tell their full story, for fear of retribution. On the other hand, it is difficult for those in authority to decipher if things are really that bad, if refugees are genuine or if they are trying to play the system. Finding the balance of truth is difficult without seeing and addressing the context in which refugees live.

2.1.8: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

The work of Muldoon (2020, p55/57) identified that every group of children that was engaged with reported the use of racist remarks and was commonly cited as a source of exclusion in school. Children had experienced being called racist names such as 'Black monkey' and 'a chocolate.' A number of participants talked about the use of the 'N' word by their peers in school.

Such overt racism, whilst shocking, is nothing new in Ireland. Christie (2002, p10) cites McVeigh who argues that while new forms of racism have emerged since the arrival of refugees in Ireland, racism still existed prior to that even in the absence of black or ethnic minorities. Therefore 'to suggest otherwise would be to blame these communities for racism.' Ireland needs to examine its attitudes closely and reflect on their treatment of minority groups.

It is argued by Devine (2005, p59) that schools in Ireland are hesitant about addressing the issue of racism, instead dealing with it 'within an anti-bullying, rather than an anti-racism framework'. Physically putting students of mixed backgrounds together in the same space is not sufficient to eliminating prejudice and fostering good relations; crucial to the success of integration of refugees and other minorities is a whole-school approach whereby policy and practice reflect anti-racism and intercultural training with strategies in place to proactively inform and address issues relating to refugees, race and discrimination.

As with physical and mental support systems, cultural and linguistic competence is important in supporting the welfare of refugee children and families. Spending time to foster relationships helps to build trust and respect. When official refugee status is granted to refugees, this should translate into actual participation and integration to wider society.

In the Safe Haven report (2019, p20), O'Hagan hypothesises that '*self-awareness is acknowledged to be the key component of culturally competent or culturally conscious practice*', thus suggesting that it is not just refugees who need support but society as a whole. In particular, those working with refugees need to be given opportunities to develop their self-awareness and question their own attitudes and biases towards this minority. Only through self-reflection can society be cohesive. It is posited by Valtonen (2004, p75) that cultural integration needs to be a two-way process, its success lying in each group acquiring new cultural attributes from the other and absorbing these characteristics into their own belief systems and practices. It is not enough to just provide services such as health, education, social welfare to refugees; recognition of their cultural and linguistic diversity should be acknowledged and embraced. An absence of this leads to racism and xenophobia such as is the focus of Arendt's (1963) book's namesake, where she describes the banality of evil and the notion that the perpetrators of evil acts are not necessarily evil themselves but are party to evil acts by simply obeying orders. The inability of people to see others as human allows perpetrators of evil to compartmentalise their crimes as part of their duty towards a higher power and not challenging the status quo.

Culture is strongly intertwined with a person's sense of self. As a primary tenet of identity, culture is embedded independent of accomplishment or success. The work of Valtonen (2004, p77) argues that '*the cultural transition phase of refugees settling is a critical time, during which youth could go astray if they were not able to draw upon the meanings and moral signposts of their own culture*'.

Refugees need to feel comfortable to express themselves culturally, to practice their religion, wear clothes, eat food and follow a code of morals, beliefs and customs that befits their way of life and sense of belonging. If refugees cannot find a channel to

express their cultural norms, or at least some of them, or worse, they are afraid to show their culture for fear of persecution, intimidation, or negative stereotyping, they will forever feel on the fringes of society.

Currently, the main issues pertaining to racism towards refugees in Ireland and keeping them embedded as 'other' in the social conscience include the Pandemic, unemployment, the housing crisis and education. The consequent adversity of these problems stimulates prejudice. As an ethnic minority, refugees are prime candidates to be on the receiving end of such bias. As the economy slumps and society struggles to house their residents and vaccinate their people, people look at where priorities should lie. Self-interest sets in while introspective narratives develop. *'The government should look after its own' ... 'Why should refugees get housing when we are homeless?' ... 'Why should Syrians get our Covid vaccinations' ahead of our pensioners, teachers etc,' thus developing a sense of 'we need to look after our own'.*

The restructuring of the labour market and national socio-economic transformation brought about by the global pandemic has had a direct impact on employment opportunities for refugees. Businesses continue to struggle to stay afloat after a year of Lockdown, while unemployment levels soar. On a different level, refugees with professional qualifications rarely obtain employment which reflects their skill set and earning power. Stringent bureaucracy means qualifications and experience are non-transferrable, thus limiting effective participation in the work force. Other immigrants are allowed to come to Ireland, use their skills and qualifications to work and earn a good living, but not refugees.

This could be considered a form of covert institutional racism, a way to keep the oppressed down. If refugees are legally allowed to gain a work permit, gaining employment within their trained profession should not be insurmountable. Take for example primary teaching; Irrespective of equivalent qualifications in Syria, it is a prerequisite that all primary school teachers can teach Irish. The minimum requirement for this is an honour (Grade C or above) in a higher-level Leaving Certificate exam. It also involves spending several weeks living in a Gaeltacht (all Irish speaking region) during teacher training. Those who have qualified outside the Republic of Ireland are required to complete several modules of Irish, attend the Gaeltacht and sit exams, all of which are

exorbitantly overpriced. The refugee experience is not conducive to meeting these requirements. Apart from the trojan task of learning an entirely new language, they are priced out of the primary teacher market. In 1937, English became the second official language (along with Irish) in Ireland. The long-standing national debate continues about the value of the Irish language and what it means to be Irish. It is part of the heritage of the country, part of its identity, yet English is the most widely spoken language. If this is the case and immigrants come to Ireland with a good command of English, it is worthwhile considering whether they should be penalised for not having an adequate command of the Irish language even if it is of little value to them.

In the 1990s with the rise of multi-racial population in Ireland, the government ran a national campaign called 'Know Racism' in the belief that people knowing about racism would prevent racism from happening. Kitching (2010, p51) argues that a statement by DES (2000, p214) forgets or filters out pre-existing and ongoing racism in Ireland. The DES declare that *'Recognising the importance of this issue for the future direction of Irish society, aiming to maximise the gains of multi-culturalism and pre-empting the rise of racism in Ireland, inter-culturalism will be the third underpinning principle of government policy on Adult Education.'*

The work by Kitching (2010) criticises the insensitivity and lack of perception at the DES presenting racism as a potentially new entity in Ireland, thus disavowing the long-term exclusion and inequality of the Irish Travelling Community. Racism is not just confined to refugees. Despite its friendly façade, and reputation for welcoming strangers, Ireland has a shameful history of racism within its own ranks. It is claimed by Rorke (2019) that travellers are treated worse than refugees in Ireland, leading to alarming rates of suicide which are six times higher than the rest of society. Similar to the refugees, their mental health issues remain largely ignored and are exacerbated by an incessant sense of discrimination and injustice felt by lack of validation of their ethnicity and the feeling of being 'other'. Citing the new UN report, Rorke (2019) highlights the correlation between global mental health and inequality and how 'many risk factors are also linked to the corrosive impact of seeing life as something unfair.'

Like many refugees, numerous Travellers live in sub-human, overcrowded squalor and despite being formally recognised as an ethnic minority in 2017, local authorities have failed to mandate appropriate accommodation and services for them even though government funding was available. The appetite to help Travellers simply wasn't there. As stereotypes about Travellers being criminals and untrustworthy prevail, comparisons to refugees being demonised can be observed.

There are very few schools in Ireland that are not positioned and pitched to accommodate and enhance the experience of the 'White Irish.' Kitching (2010, p216) cites Takaki's claim that in the 19th century in America, the Irish fleeing the potato famine in Ireland were considered as 'black niggers' who were perceived as being '*closer to blacks than whites on the chain of being*'. This attitude was embedded in the Irish psyche for centuries, that they were lesser beings than Anglo-Saxons.

In the 20th century the Irish were stereotyped as 'the blacks of Europe'. It's hard to imagine after decades of psychological stereotyping that Ireland could itself marginalise its own kin, never mind an immigrant ethnic minority, a label with which reflected their own identity.

Ireland has shaken off the shackles and become 'less black.' As a society, it recognises its upward mobility particularly during the lucrative years of the Celtic Tiger. The inferiority complex as famine victims and victims of a bloody civil war have diminished. The socioeconomic landscape has changed and so too have attitudes. This is reflected strongly in the predominantly theocentric education in Ireland where secular schools are rare, and the Church still has a firm grip on the culture of Irish schools.

Consequently, schools who manipulate their school policies to favour local white Catholics could consciously or subconsciously be implicit to a degree in institutional racism. Whilst it may not be individual racism, the inequity of the immigrant's experience demonstrates the lack of connection between wider social exclusion policy and the national education policy of interculturalism.

The work by Kitching (2010, p215) acknowledges Gillborn's theory that one can '*draw some parallels with whiteness studies and critical race literature in its understanding of*

whiteness as an ambiguous, normalised social position protected in education policy'.

Irish Travellers have been marginalised and stereotyped for years irrespective of their whiteness; there's no reason to believe that refugees will fare much better unless there is a radical overhaul, not just in policy but in practice. Once a nation deemed unworthy to be considered 'white,' with the dawn of a more multi-cultural Ireland, white privilege is now alive and well. For too long the responsibility has been on the immigrant to integrate; to learn the language, follow the customs and walk the walk, if they had any chance of gaining upward mobility. Offering to give adults English classes, whilst beneficial, is not enough to integrate them. Their attendance at these classes bears no reflection on their state benefits. There is a disconnect between how to deal with racism effectively, for most practice and policies it is new territory. Children and teenagers need more than just English class; they need stimulation and a purpose for their learning. The onus on our schools and communities now is to become, not just non-racist, but actively anti-racist.

Whilst anti-racist CPD (Continuous Professional Development) is starting to appear in schools, it is not obligatory. A long-overdue, more inclusive curriculum is required in Irish schools. Teachers are not equipped or trained to change the status quo in schools. Moloney (2020) reports that campaigners are calling for Black, migrant and Traveller history to be included in the Irish curriculum and for anti-racism training for teachers to be compulsory. Schools are where students learn how to view people. Barnes (no date given) argues that with the increasingly diverse demographic in primary schools, they should be supported in welcoming cultural diversity as they are the ideal platform to address *'complex concepts like human trafficking, migration, asylum seekers and refugees...'* Barnes claims that *'Research shows that attitudes to race are often fixed by the age of 12 or 13. While some change their perception of other cultures, the vast majority of secondary-aged pupils will probably have already formed their attitudes for life.'*

Schools should be considered a safe place, particularly during the critical formative years of children, to explore and address topics outside of their comfort zone which can empower them to welcome and feel welcome. Teachers are therefore responsible for establishing a non-Eurocentric view of these minority groups so that they are embedded as 'us' rather than 'them' in the collective psyche. This concept of inclusion is

a challenge given that the profile of most primary and secondary school teachers in Ireland is middle class white people.

Whilst there is much discussion about inclusion and equity, the reality of bringing it to fruition is much more complex. Mac Ruairc (2016) attempts to deconstruct the discourse by examining the term 'inclusion' itself. He argues that *'the term implies a 'bringing in' and therefore carries within it a presupposition of a centre/ an ideal centre or a place worthy of being brought into..... where particular patterns of prestige and privilege are identifiable.'*

This raises questions of who is already 'in' and who has claim to the 'centre' and who is 'out/ other' and attempting to come in. For meaningful inclusion to occur, discourse needs to change track and the status quo challenged, to eliminate exclusionary constructs embedded in power and privilege. Mac Ruairc (2016) argues that whilst there have been numerous initiatives and programmes established to address inclusion, the root cause of exclusion remains unchallenged. He proposes that *'what is required is a deconstruction of the centre from which the different forms of exclusion and exclusionary practices are derived.'*

A class teacher might query how this idealistic view is possible in a classroom of 30-plus pupils. How would they avoid grouping and labelling when refugees come into their class mid-year with no English and the only possible resource available to them being SEN resource hours? Transformational leaders are needed to address this at the core to enable transformational teaching so that true equity and inclusion are possible, not just token gestures and lip service.

The policy document *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*) is a comprehensive national policy designed for children and young people aged from birth to 24 in Ireland. The objective of the framework is to liaise with a broad range of government departments to secure 'better outcomes and brighter futures' for young people. Outcome 5 of this framework idealises that 'children have a sense of their own identity, free from discrimination' and to 'have positive networks of friends, family and community'. Yet this is totally dismissed in the placement of refugees trying to forge a new identity who are lumped together in Direct Provision centres without consideration for their history or culture. Little or no

consideration is given to the fact that they have fled a bitter civil war in which Kurds, Shi'ite and Sunni communities are sworn enemies.

It is naive to assume that just because they are in a neutral country, by mixing these factions together that social cohesion will ensue. This notion is particularly simplistic when they continue to be repressed and subject to living in poor conditions. Lynn Smith & Lupton, (2008, p101) argue that mixing communities on the assumption that the working / poorer classes will benefit from the desirable modelled behaviours of the middle classes can be detrimental as there are no 'wealth-generating opportunities that can get residents out of poverty'.

Providing services and support is not sufficient without the opportunity to gain upward mobility. By ignoring the complexity of who refugees were before they came to Ireland, there is a risk that mainstream interculturalism will result in a reproduction of the Irish ethnicity, rather than accommodating and merging with new ethnicities. One might query 'And so what? If refugees and asylum seekers want to come and live amongst us, surely, it's them who should change...?' If this attitude is adopted, and society remains unequal, it can never be truly free.

Freire's (1968, Ch1) advocates for education and liberation of the oppressed to be revolutionised. Freire hypothesises that the oppressed are dehumanised by their oppressors and that this needed to be addressed using effective educational strategies. He believed that the oppressed had to actively partake in their own liberation stating, *'The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for [the oppressed's] critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.'*

He argues that those who are oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor, and adopted his guidelines, and consequentially are fearful of freedom. Furthermore, the oppressors are also dehumanized by the society in which they exist. Through small gestures of generosity, they attempt to diminish the unwitting oppression they inflict. However, such meagre acts of generosity perpetuate ongoing oppression. If the various facets of culture and identity of refugees isn't acknowledged

and addressed by Irish citizens and if refugees don't fight to be allowed to merge with Irish culture and identity, an imbalance of oppressor and oppressed will remain.

2.1.9: Summary

The challenges of the refugees in Part One are multi-layered. If the education gap is not bridged before a student reaches Leaving Cert age, their chances of upward mobility are reduced. This is dependent on the refugees' ability to become proficient in English, not just as a means to achieving academic success, but also to give agency and empowerment to form social bonds and contribute within their new community. The acquisition of English varies widely between individual depending on their previous education, their personal mindset, and their age. While younger refugees acquire fluency more readily, adults can struggle with inconsistent EAL classes, a lack of informal environments in which to practice, feelings of intimidation and a struggle to relinquish part of their already diminished culture by using another language.

Embracing a new culture can prove challenging when you left your home under duress, unlike other immigrants who choose to leave their country to readily embrace new adventures, employment, and opportunities. Facing cultural changes of food, language, dress, customs, and climate coupled with the prospect of unemployment and inability to transfer skills and experience is daunting. Embedded in all of this change and evolution is the issue of psychological trauma which permeates the lives of all refugees; trauma which started with bombs dropping on houses and schools in Syria, lives lost, families broken and scattered. Trauma of the journey to Turkey hiding from police and army while sneaking across borders, trauma of putting your children in a crowded inflatable boat crossing the Mediterranean, trauma of watching the boat in front of you or behind you capsize while souls perish, trauma of living in cramped refugee camps and direct provision, trauma of living in limbo, trauma of setting up a new life in a new country and facing racism. Trauma for refugees is ongoing and difficult to eradicate as they face fresh challenges of integration and possible resistance from the host society. Part Two will examine this from the Irish perspective.

2.2: PART 2: Challenges of the Host Society

2.2.1: Education of Refugees during Lockdown

As the world emerges from the shackles of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and life regains a semblance of normality, whilst the circumstances were unprecedented and most would now rather confine it to the recesses of the mind, it is important to note the significance of the pandemic as this research took place during this extraordinary period in time and the repercussions are still keenly felt by the refugees.

Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in his report Direct Division (2020, p3) depicts the overwhelming theme of powerlessness of refugees in direct provision during quarantine. In his report he 'highlighted in new ways the problems of Direct Provision and further entrenched the lack of agency of people living in the system.' Throughout his report, Muldoon espouses the feelings and voice of refugees locked in Direct Provision concluding that if there is a saving grace, it has accentuated the urgency the pandemic has illustrated in that Direct Provision should cease to be, except when absolutely necessary. In his research over 38 Direct Provision centres and 22 Emergency Accommodation Centres, Muldoon reports that *'55% of respondents felt unsafe during the pandemic, 50% of respondents were unable to socially distance themselves from other residents during the pandemic, 42% of respondents stated that they shared room with a non-family member and 46% of respondents shared a bathroom with a non-family member'*.

These statistics are stark and not conducive to sound mental and physical wellbeing or productive home schooling. During the period of 4 months from March to July 2020 and then from January to March 2021, when Lockdown restrictions in Ireland were at their strictest, all nursery, primary and secondary schools, as well as third level colleges and universities were closed, without exception, throughout the country. All teaching and learning were conducted remotely online. Furthermore, a 5km travel restriction was imposed nationwide. Although the long-term effects of this gap are still too recent to measure meaningfully, it likely will have had catastrophic consequences on refugees in terms of social development, integration to the school and wider community and importantly, education. The housing process of many refugees in Direct Provision was

delayed due to restrictions. Muldoon (2020, p3) states that 'People living in Direct Provision, because they live in an at risk congregated setting through no fault of their own, also remain subject to significantly tighter controls around movement and quarantine than other members of society'.

He further hypothesises (p4) that there were two polarised policy decisions in relation to lockdown standards '*One for the general public, where social distancing is encouraged and another for people in residential settings such as Direct Provision, where sharing of intimate space is implicitly accepted*'.

If we, as a society (including teachers, principals and policy makers), bring refugee students living under these circumstances and all that it entails, into the context of the classroom, it would make little sense to hold them to the same expectations as the rest of the community. This doesn't mean expectations should be lowered, but they should be changed to accommodate the context in which they live. One can only work with a child within the context of their family, while everyone in the family reacts within the context of their environment. The overriding fact of the matter is that refugees are treated differently. In a blatantly two-tier system, the difficulties they faced were more substantial.

As previously mentioned, the educational experience of refugees arriving in Ireland posed many challenges, however during the pandemic the challenges for refugees were exacerbated compared to others as it was fraught with being unsettled again. Apart from acquiring another educational gap, missing socialising with friends and having the opportunity to practice English in a natural setting, their health was at stake. Refugees were at much higher risk of contracting Covid-19 due to overcrowded accommodation, lack of resources including sanitiser, PPE etc., the necessity to work outside of the home and the inability to maintain social distance.

Respondents to the survey carried out by Muldoon (2020) gave the following insights including:

'The truth of the matter is we are at risk of dying more than anyone else' (p12)

'Social distancing is impractical especially in the kitchen, laundry & dining place.' (p14)

'391 respondents shared a room with one or more non-family members.' (p14)

'Overcrowded room. 12 people in a room and no ventilation. Roommates were coughing badly and possible infections. In fact, I caught (an) infection from those coughing.' (p19)

'Not all residents comply with quarantine and basic safety rules.' (p25)

'GP prescribed just Panadol for a resident that has been coughing for over 10 days and suffering from breathing problems.' (p35)

Needless to say, the above testimonies reflect a group of people with susceptibility to stress, anxiety and depression. Coupled with their inevitable pre-existing mental health issues Muldoon (2020, p37) argues that *'studies have found that those seeking asylum were five times more likely to be diagnosed with psychiatric illness than Irish citizens.'* The pandemic exacerbated their insecurities, their feelings of helplessness and dependency.

Additionally, it ignited further stigma of them being outsiders who are dangerous to the public due to their living conditions during Covid-19. This doesn't bode well for educational progress. It leads one to question the value of education to refugees; with so much interruption and disruption, the opportunity to improve their prospects may seem insurmountable. School could simply be a means of escape from the monotony of their existence, an opportunity to be with peers away from the unending problems of the adult world that have filtrated into theirs. Some experiences may be so traumatic that no level of resilience can overcome. For some refugee children, going to school may be just a safe space to be. This was taken away during Lockdown. With this in mind, educationalists need to be sensitive to what is expected from these students going forward. There's no quick fix just because school has resumed. Policy and practice need to be adjusted and realigned to cater for the specific needs of refugees so that their learning is meaningful. Nowhere in the Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) refers to the issue of mental health of refugees, so what was already lacking is magnified during Lockdown. While the pandemic impacted all aspects of everyone's life, it served to highlight anomalies, inequalities and injustices within the system for refugees that thrust them further into the 'other.'

2.2.2: Housing

Refugees arriving in Ireland initially go to EROCs (Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres), the function of which is to orientate each candidate while permanent housing is found for them. The projected time is 6 months, the average time is 36 months. This can be attributed to the housing crisis in Ireland. Burke-Kennedy (2019) claims that the current problems with housing in Ireland have been described as more of an 'accommodation crisis' as opposed to a housing crisis. He reveals that there were in excess of 2500 houses built in 2019, but that homelessness, nursing home beds and lack of affordable housing leads to the dearth of suitable accommodation. Furthermore, because of Lockdown, the completion of up to 7000 houses was delayed leaving a backlog in the system, again impacting the resettlement of refugees. Whilst the government could never have anticipated a worldwide pandemic, the accommodation crisis could have been addressed more strategically.

Given the regular outcries condemning Direct Provision and the appalling conditions in which people were living, the government issued a White Paper on Ending Direct Provision (2021) promising to end Direct Provision by 2024 and replace the system with not-for-profit accommodation. Millions of euros have already been squandered on Direct Provision over the past 20 years. Scandalous corruption has been unearthed which outlines how private companies have collectively made a profit of more than €1 billion in public funds by turning their property into detention centres for refugees. Stewart (2019) highlights the inhumane conditions, not fit for purpose citing serious breaches of human rights. These include a transgender lady being forced to live in an all-male wing, dying tragically and being buried in an unmarked grave without any next of kin being notified, strict mealtimes with culturally inappropriate spoiled food, cramped sleeping conditions, children banned from playing and rat and cockroach infestations. Many of the refugees who were victims of torture in their own country, have now been incarcerated for up to a decade. With the recent scandal of the Mother and Baby homes and the memory of the Magdalene Laundries lingering in the Irish psyche, the plight of the refugees is proving to be another scar on Ireland's history. It was reported by Stewart (2019) that the fear of their asylum application being rejected prevents refugees from complaining or seeking basic human rights, echoing a chilling totalitarian, undemocratic system.

The hypocrisy of the money available to help refugees that is lining the pockets of the owners of the Direct Provision Centres is scandalous. They continue to go unchecked and unaccountable as they syphon millions of Euro profits in offshore accounts, money that could be well directed towards funding for schools and resources for teachers who require additional training. The White paper (2021) is a welcome proposal which aims to not only eradicate Direct Provision but also to monitor wellbeing, meet needs to support independence and develop community interconnectedness. These elements are essential to this research which explicitly examines the legislative provisions made by the government in relation to refugees and the correlation between policy and practice. On paper, this is a huge step forward, but the pertinent issue of the housing crisis in Ireland may prove challenging to the delivery of these proposals.

The Peter McVerry Trust is a national housing and homeless charity committed to reducing homelessness. The Peter McVerry Trust (2022) states that ‘the number of people accessing State-funded emergency accommodation as of April 2022 is 10,049 according to figures published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This figure does not include people sleeping rough, people couch surfing, homeless people in hospitals and prisons, those in Direct provision centres, and homeless households in Domestic Violence Refugees.’

With an influx in homelessness in Ireland, the response of the government is critical. Finding the balance between accommodating the refugees and looking after the homeless Irish has the potential to create tensions where issues of priority, racism, xenophobia and integration are at stake. With the ingredients for a perfect storm, the marriage of policy and practice has never been more pertinent.

2.2.3: Media Misconceptions

Since the Good Friday Agreement (1998) Co. Donegal is connected by an open border to Northern Ireland with both Irish and British newspaper publications widely available daily. This section will examine how critical theory helps us to understand how the mainstream media, the British and Irish media in particular, influences social conscience as they discursively construct a stereotype of what a refugee, asylum seeker

and migrant epitomises. The rampant xenophobia of the British tabloids permeates the Northern Irish border and affects local attitudes. As thousands of people seek refuge and asylum in the British Isles, the public are treading in unfamiliar waters. There is so much media and informational noise that for the general public it can be difficult to know what to think about complex issues and this dynamic of different people. It is common practice for individuals to seek information from the vast, ubiquitous mediascape we live with, when they experience the unfamiliar. Subconsciously, globalisation has left people feeling rootless and so they seek solace on a more human scale and unfortunately, tribal identities.

Critical engagement on the cultural consequences of mass media has never been more opportune as the public wrestles with its conscience over stark images of refugee children washed up on beaches and glaring rhetorical headlines which threaten to shake the fabric of all that seems familiar and secure in our society. Critical theory of the mass media examines the reflective assessments and critiques of society and culture, highlighting the complexity of human behaviour. It questions how the shift that takes place in people's minds to feeling sympathy and compassion for their fellow human beings can be altered to one of confusion and suspicion and looks at the discrepancies between what people think and what people do and how this affects how refugees are welcomed into our society and allowed to progress.

By using critical theory to scrutinize the language, imagery and rhetoric that are used by the print media in relation to the refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, this section reflects on the power and influence of the media and political stakeholders on society as a whole in relation to these displaced peoples.

The current rhetoric in relation to refugees stems from the theories of traditional Marxists who view the mass media as a means of production owned and dominated by the elite few, including those in government. With mass media being paramount in upholding the framework of capitalism, carefully constructed values and ideals became embedded in their text.

Widespread propaganda being applied via the media to mobilise support during WW1 led many political, social and cultural leaders to identify the connection between the new forms of communication and its ability to shake the status quo. The bourgeoisie

sought to control it and use it in their favour, leaving the average person defenceless against its corruptive influence. Marxists believe that in capitalist societies, the mass media propagates the philosophies and interpretations of life of the ruling class, whilst ignoring alternative ideas and undermining social order. This echoes the sentiments of Marx's argument by Curran et al. (1982, p22) that:

'The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.'

For years, Marxists explored the reasoning behind why the powerless consent to being dominated by those in positions of power.

Gramsci et al. (1971) outlines the central tenets of the notion of hegemony. He believed that the ruling classes use hegemonic ideas to gain domination over the subjugated classes, not through force or coercion, but from getting the consent from the masses of ordinary people using common sense. Common sense is 'just the way things are,' something which doesn't challenge the status quo. By manipulating language, culture, morality and common sense, individuals are guided through their local immediate existence oblivious to the overarching institutional socio-economic exploitation enabled by cultural hegemony. In recent years, as with the example of Brexit, where the immigration of refugees to the UK was used as a vicious threat to society, hegemony has become a foundational part of mass media. Being a commercial entity, media need to operate in a certain way to exist and do business.

This creates a favourable bias towards the state and political system that licences the media system. Gramsci et al. (1971) argues that there is constant negotiation between the ruling class and the subjugated class about what is accepted in society. Such negotiation is not to enhance equity or social justice, but to contain or deflect individuals or demands made against what the ruling class desire. One doesn't exist without the other, however the objective is to always maintain the ideas of the ruling class. Hegemony of the ruling class risks being destabilised in times of crisis, such as Brexit. The ruling classes recomposed their narrative by using the plight of refugees as a weapon against staying in the European Union. In reality, the impact of refugees would

have been negligible whether Brexit happened or not, but the ruling classes with the help of the media used this to get the result they wanted.

The world is unequal, humanity lacks equity; there has and always will be a profound distinction between the rich and poor, between the exploiters and exploited. Neo-Marxists believe that the economic system creates a wealthy class of owners and a poorer class of workers. Humans by nature place a lot of weight on their social status by constantly comparing themselves to those around them. For Syrian refugees, many of whom lived a very comfortable existence prior to the war, the loss of everything they own must be particularly traumatic. Payne (2017) explores how inequality affects how we think and act. He argues that feeling poor has less to do with your material circumstances than with how they compare to those of others. If you feel poor, this will likely have an adverse effect on many aspects of your life. Even those who aren't objectively poor suffer negative consequences when they feel poor relative to others. Our capitalist society is designed to pit us against each other, to be competitive. A common example of this with refugees in Ireland might be the notion of 'Why should they (refugees) get a house when I struggle to pay my mortgage? (even though I live in a huge house),' 'Why do they get so much free stuff when my taxes are so high? (even though I live very comfortably).' This is led by the media. In 2022, underneath the veil of democratically elected governments, authoritarian powers and puppet masters still control much more than meets the eye.

Pluralists might argue that with the wide breadth of publications swinging from far left to far right, the public have access to wide and varied views with the initiative to challenge and question what they are being informed about. McAneny (2015) claims that

'In Liberal Pluralism the media can sometimes be considered an agent for democracy since it can allow a range of different ideologies to be heard by lots of people.'

She affirms that the media / audience relationship is voluntary as the public can choose what he/ she reads and watches and oppose it with free will. As the purpose of the media is to maximise profits by attracting the biggest audiences, if this declines, they change tact to attract and retain the audience, thus the audience and media have equal

control. However, the antics by technology firm Cambridge Analytica in the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US Presidential election who used data to micro-target voters with a campaign of misinformation, demonstrated just how easy it is to tailor web content to confirm existing prejudices. This directly affected the fate of thousands of refugees.

In a classic example of fascism, it was an entirely deliberate and conscious choice by Robert Mercer and Dominic Cummings to use the capability offered by Cambridge Analytica's technology to interfere in the democratic process to achieve an outcome favourable to their economic and political interests. Furthermore, with Rupert Murdoch's company News Corp controlling a vast percentage of the global media, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd had a valid reason to label it a "cancer on democracy".

In contrast to McAneny (2015), Zuboff (2019) maintains that without our realisation, all aspects of the human experience are turned into data and sold. The purveyors of surveillance capitalism such as Google, Facebook and Amazon like to keep the extent of what they do under wraps. Few people realise to what degree their personal information is being used and how aggressively they are being monitored every time the internet is used. However, with few laws covering surveillance in the digital sphere, it's difficult to prosecute those who breach data protocols.

George Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty Four' illustrates impressive foresight in defining a dystopian world where totalitarianism has created vast inequities, and what the world could look like if we relinquish too much control to those in power. Despite the fact that this is fiction, it strikes a chord. It's hard to reconcile that both our conscious and subconscious feelings and opinions in relation to refugees are so strongly controlled and influenced. Why would anyone ever think that a refugee was dangerous, a scourge on society, someone who steals jobs etc.? Using the media to portray the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie, the media managers, and journalists below them, in need of their livelihood, do not challenge their owners, while the ideology is drip-fed into the public psyche of the proletariat.

Chandler (2014) asserts that Marxist theorists draw our attention to the issue of political and economic interests in the mass media and highlight social inequalities in

media representations. They tend to emphasize the role of the mass media in the reproduction of the status quo, while their focus on the nature of ideology helps us to deconstruct taken-for-granted values. Ideological analysis helps us to expose *whose* reality we are being offered in a media text but in reality, does the average citizen sit and analyse such ideology on a regular basis?

Horkheimer (1982, p244) described a theory as critical insofar as it seeks "*to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them*". By exposing this distortion of the media, the initial steps to liberating the public into questioning what they previously take for granted as the truth, are taken. (Most men want not freedom but merely kinder masters – Sallust 40BC) This leads to the question of how this affects 49 refugee families living in Co. Donegal and if British news publications can really influence small rural communities in the northwest of Ireland. With the highly sensitive issue of Brexit and the fierce debate and ramifications that rage on a daily basis, the physical location of Donegal in relation to Northern Ireland leaves it in the eye of the storm. Biases infiltrate the psyche causing wide gaps between differences of opinion. One might argue that people should just free themselves from the power of the media by avoiding it, not taking sides, and not engaging in the debate; however, this is a simplistic view. The mass media is so powerful that it is impossible to challenge because it is under private ownership, therefore subject to market forces, which is driven by money and power of the select few. The superpowers on both sides of the Atlantic have a continuous tug-of-war regarding the rhetoric of the displaced. With his "Make America Great Again" rhetoric, critics of Donald Trump have accused him of fuelling nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment across the US. In November 2017, the President was strongly criticised for retweeting inflammatory videos from the Twitter account of a British far-right, ultra-nationalist figure, which contained anti-Muslim content. Yet while his divisive comments may be rebuked by many, there is still a lack of media input which sheds refugees and asylum seekers in a positive light. Similar rhetoric to 'Make America Great Again' seems to be a global trend in recent years. This could be related to the US plutocrat Robert Mercer, former principal investor in the now-defunct Cambridge Analytica and artificial intelligence researcher. Mercer played a key role in the Brexit campaign by donating data analytics services to Nigel Farage thus playing fire with democracy.

In June 2017, when European leaders agreed a voluntary system for sharing the refugee burden across the continent, the UK opted out. With such resistance from the top, an easy transition of refugees and asylum seekers seems highly unlikely. This sends a strong message out as to the position of the UK, including Northern Ireland, regarding refugees. By creating a false, or at the very least a highly exaggerated negative narrative about the impact of refugees on society, the government creates fear and asserts control. Bordering Northern Ireland, it is impossible for those in the Republic of Ireland to avoid the rhetoric that drives this narrative completely.

In contemporary society, it is virtually impossible not to regard or be influenced by the media. The affiliation of the press and the refugees is hallmarked by sensationalism and commercialisation. While the perceived onus of the press is to report factual information, objectivity and accuracy is often overshadowed by reporting for entertainment. Van Dijk (1987, p217) claims that in terms of language, nearly a third of all headlines feature negative words of different classes: words that denote conflict and disagreement (hate, fight, crisis), control (stop, curb, ban, censor) or words that carry violence (murder, kill, riot, shoot, burn, massacre) and words that are associated with legal issues (illegal, prison, jail, police, arrest). Most of the concepts are used with association of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers or in general, migrants. Words coined by the press with negative and aggressive connotations are easily indoctrinated into the public psyche making policy and practice of integration and inclusion difficult to apply.

At the Journalism School in Cardiff University, Berry et al. (2016) undertook a study to examine how the current refugee crisis was being reported in the European press. Particular attention was given to the use of terminology by the media, specifically to the use of 'refugee,' 'migrant' and 'illegal immigrant.' Statistics revealed that 'Germany (91%) and Sweden (75.3%) overwhelmingly used the terms "refugee" or "asylum seeker", in Spain the most widely (67.1%) used term was "immigrant" and in Britain (54.2%) and Italy (35.8%) the word was "migrant".'

Through the research, themes were observed and noted ranging from national security to humanitarian suffering and much more in between. Less weight was given to humanitarian themes while government representatives dominated in favour of the voice of the refugees and immigrants themselves. The typically left-wing papers such as

The Guardian and Daily Mirror were seen to highlight the human aspect of the plight of the refugees but dictating the press with uncompromising anti-refugee and migrant articles were the staunch, polarizing right wing papers such as The Sun and The Daily Mail. The findings prompted Dr Mike Berry from Cardiff University to proclaim that 'British media coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis is the most polarised and aggressive in Europe.' (Appendix 1 illustrates the percentage of articles from the investigation into which themes feature more prominently in the British Media.)

This complies with the notion that the bourgeoisie deliberately construct an ideology to preserve the present state of affairs in which they remain in dominance. According to Bourdieu (1979, p469) *'all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, and that between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped to produce.'*

By making repeated false, out of context and sensational claims, mass media and totalitarianism appear to shun any tangible probability of social transformation. This holds true with reference to refugees on the British Isles as many remain as 'the others.' The Frankfurt School theorists focused significantly on mass media and popular culture as systems that encoded dominant ideas and practices that supported capitalism. In defining critical theory, the thinkers from the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory (Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse) hypothesise that 'apparently open Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies in which economic inequity, racism and class discrimination are empirical realities.' Evidence of this will be critiqued in more detail in the following chapters.

Lueck et al. (2015) discuss how both the left and right mainstream parties in Australia have used neoliberalism and nationalism to regulate economically desirable migrant groups and exclude those who are seen as economically undesirable. Through the negative narrative perpetrated by the media being drip fed into the public psyche, which is consistent with nationalist discourses, they succeed in stripping refugees of their humanity so that they can legitimise strict border protection policies and deter those who they deem have nothing to offer.

Lueck et al. (2015, p3) cite Fox in describing how *'Nationalism operates at both a macro level in relation to the normal mode of the organisation of countries and at the micro level through the everyday practices of 'ordinary people'.... it is based upon not only standardized notions of 'belonging', but also expulsion and exclusion.'*

By enforcing tough legislation on border control, a definitive model of social construction is formed. Those inside the border belong, those outside are the 'Other'. When the media adopts the negative rhetoric of the government towards refugees, they are asserting control of what it means to be a refugee and how they are viewed by the public and enforcing nationalism. Such rhetoric has the effect of dehumanising refugees and taking away their voice and agency leaving them unrepresented or worse, misrepresented.

Lueck et al. (2015) hypothesises that critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on how social and political problems are represented in text and talk and how power relations and social inequalities are reproduced and legitimised through language and discourse. This powerful tool enables the systematic selection of what is right and wrong, who belongs and who doesn't, according to the socially constructed narrative of those in power. Nationalism has strengthened with the rise of refugees seeking asylum. Neo-liberalism is also evident in nations' desire to protect their own wealth, property and economy.

Poynting et al. (2020) argue that the construction of the term 'refugee crisis' was Eurocentric and that in reality the real crisis was nationalism and racism of host countries with a 'resurgence of a discourse of ethno-nationalist European identity sharpened by the global financial crisis and neoliberal austerity.'

2.2.4: Looking Towards the Future

Significant numbers of refugees living in Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon. Whilst government policy is still in its infancy, progress is evident, however there remains much work to do. Having dissected the literature pertaining to government policy, the influence of the media, the refugee experience, and the existing structures in place in Ireland, one issue that stands out as being of paramount importance is the development of inclusive education. The education gap brings incalculable loss for refugees and society as a whole, making social cohesion difficult. The task of bridging the education gap should not be the burden of refugees alone but also that of the Irish community. Infrastructures, strategic planning, funding, and a skilled work force need to be in place so that Ireland can play its part by being actively receptive to their community becoming more diverse and multicultural as it merges with a modern interdependent world. Empathy for refugees must not stop at newspaper headlines showing washed up babies on a beach, and fear and mistrust should not be exacerbated by sensational clickbait.

With the powerful technological advances in television, social media and streaming, wars and atrocities are played out in real time on our screens daily. Society is saturated with news of suffering and hardship. It is becoming increasingly difficult to decipher what is real and what is not while our emotions ebb and flow with each passing headline. Taking personal responsibility for one's narrative is key in recognising the importance of addressing inequality and discrimination. Inclusion negates exclusion and much more. By educating our local communities, inclusion will reduce discrimination, xenophobic attitudes and foster a sense of belonging for refugees.

Inclusive education should aim to reject social exclusion attributed to race, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Ainscow & Sandill (2010, p402) cite Fisher who argues that 'education is basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. From this perspective, extending the social justice dialogue, inclusion refers to diversity as a concept, rather than reducing it to categories of differences.'

Teacher education is a fundamental step in fostering social justice education. Teachers and indigenous students must be proactive in fighting for social justice and amending policies and practices incongruous to it so that the worth of every student is validated.

Dominants and subordinates cannot co-exist in social justice education. Teachers must strive not just for equality but equity in both curricular and extra-curricular achievements. Mthethwa-Sommers (2014, p22) stresses the importance of holistic teaching in an era where the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and RTTT (Race to The Top) focuses solely on academic achievement and testing. By embracing a *'colour-blind, gender-blind, language-blind, socio-economic-blind attitudes...and ignoring students' situated identities, social justice education cannot be achieved.'*

School should be a place where all students can strive for upward mobility. Playing devil's advocate, one might ask how much an all-white Christian Irish school should be expected to change to accommodate one or two refugees. The bigger issue is not just about accommodating the refugees but educating the entire school community about the wider world, bringing their white privilege to the surface, and acknowledging its power, a power that many may never have been aware existed prior to the arrival of the refugees. The messy complicated and wonderful business of diversity needs to be addressed, not just because of the refugees, but as an education for the next generation and the world they will live in which will inevitably continue to diversify. However, it would appear that still in 2021, NCLB and RTTT rely on a construction of education as the ability to impart standard sized portions of propositional knowledge to age-segregated students at an arbitrarily determined rate and to assess their assimilation of such knowledge via regular standardised tests. Neither they, nor Irish /UK education has time for, or interest in, teaching the critical thinking and social empathy that Arendt and Dewey argued are vital to the survival and the success of democracy and so society finds itself twenty years later with the ideologies of Trump and Boris Johnson being implemented.

Darmody et al. (2016, p8) hypothesise that *'educational achievement is a key indicator of labour market success. Yet not all children have the same chance of success. School-based and home-based efforts to support migrant children's overall academic progress are critical to supporting their later outcomes.'*

There are many challenges for refugee students in Ireland to overcome prior to reaching third level education; Settling into primary or secondary school, bridging the education gap acquired during their transition from Syria to Ireland, integrating with the local community, trying to make friends, attempting state exams and ultimately

sitting the Leaving Certificate, the main access point to third level education. What happens afterwards depends on many variables that contribute to the outcome; what age they arrive in Ireland, their socio-economic background in Syria, their educational background, the educational ambitions of parents for their children and personal drive.

The prospects of post-secondary education can be stark for refugees, depending on how long they have lived in Ireland. The opportunity to move out of their lower socio-economic status when the path to tertiary education is very often financially out of their reach is daunting.

The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017, p25) proposal 28 states that *'The extension of the Free Fees initiative for Third Level Education to the children of migrants will be explored.'*

In August 2020, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science announced that the rules of third level applications would be relaxed. Applicants for international protection (other than those at the deportation order stage), who had been in the system for a combined period of 3 years as of 31 August 2020, would be eligible to apply for support in further and higher education.

Whilst this is a welcome development, it reflects only a small margin of refugees eligible to apply, appearing as no more than a token gesture in a box-ticking exercise. It still leaves the insurmountable problem of high fee levels for those in international protection who have been in Ireland for less than three years who are faced with paying non-EU level fees. Without money or fee reduction, refugees cannot attend third level institutions. Without education, refugees cannot advance their career and job prospects.

This represents a significant difference that puts going on to third level beyond the reach of many. An Advisory Group set up by the government and chaired by Dr Catherine Day was established to give a complete overhaul to how refugees and asylum seekers are processed in Ireland. It looked closely at the current policies and procedures and made a series of recommendations which culminated in the form of the 'Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process,' published in September 2020. In it, there are recommendations that the same fee levels as for Irish citizens apply to protection applicants meeting the criteria for admission to third level courses.

The provision of meaningful inclusive education is paramount for the progress of refugees, but this is only possible if staff are sufficiently trained and equipped with adequate resources. *'Stakeholders emphasised the importance of preparing education professionals in advance of the arrival of refugee children and the need for ongoing support after arrival.'* (Safe Haven p48/26)

On a positive note, in December 2016, Dublin City University was established as the first The University of Sanctuary in Ireland, followed by University of Limerick (2017), University College Cork (Feb 2018), University College Dublin (2018), National University of Galway (Sept 2019) and Trinity College Dublin (Feb 2021). The University of Sanctuary continues to foster a culture of welcome and inclusion while offering scholarships for third level students.

As with anything, preparation is key. Lack of disclosure about the arrival of refugee children in schools, lack of disclosure about their background, lack of knowledge and education about cultural identity, lack of resources, lack of awareness of overt and covert racism leads to delays in getting refugee students off to the best start when they begin school in the host country. Preparation is necessary to welcome and nurture refugees in school, but also the host schools, teachers and pupils need preparation about how to accept these new people and to acclimatise themselves with having their homogenous communities diluted.

The question remains as to how much should a host society be expected to change their ways to accommodate the influx of refugees. For rural communities who have never been exposed to diversity, they may question how much give and take should there be. Education is needed on both sides; for the Syrians to enable them to become fully functioning citizens and for the local population to learn how to understand live and work with refugees equitably without privilege. It is not enough to welcome refugees into our white Christian schools, educate them, be kind and friendly without adopting any awareness for their culture and the story of their journey to Ireland.

There is a scarcity of dialogue and literature that relates to the willingness and eagerness of refugees to contribute to their adopted communities by utilising their skills and talents, and this often results in a skewed stereotype. This raises questions of whether the government, local authorities and the media do enough to provide

pathways to skills recognition, resources for education or sufficiently address public perceptions about immigrants being a drain on their host society. This thesis argues that the Irish public lack awareness of the complexities of the application process and the nuances between refugees and asylum seekers which leaves them with little choice except dependence upon State benefits. It also explores the part the refugees play in their progress through the education system and integration into Irish society. More transparency on the real lived experience of negotiating the asylum process is needed if Ireland is to embrace a more multicultural pluralistic stance. This will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1: Introduction

This is an ethnographic study, the purpose of which is to gain a broad and deep understanding of the experience of recent Syrian refugees in Donegal. The rationale for using predominantly qualitative research methods was to ensure the data collated is not divorced from the social and cultural context, which can sometimes occur when gathering numerical data in quantitative research. It endeavors to unearth the opinions, feelings, and thoughts of the participants in a way that they could freely disclose and elaborate on their experiences.

Whilst most of the research was conducted using qualitative methods, it was complemented with quantitative methods to enhance the data and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the human condition and experience of refugees. The methods and methodology adopted in this study have unpacked the extent to which the policies issued by the government delivers what it proposes effectively in terms of refugees.

3.2: Rationale

In line with the constructivist-interpretative epistemological perspective of this research, it explores how reality is constructed through interactions between the researcher and the refugees and those working with them. To explore the problem in depth, the researcher engaged with those working 'on the ground' with refugees and their families and in doing so, hoped to stimulate the voice of both parties to inform policy and help deconstruct unqualified and often unchallenged identities of refugees being promoted as a burden to society. Such rhetoric, as was evident during the far-right campaign in the run up to the Brexit referendum, fuels widespread negative connotations regarding

refugees. Ingrained in this, ethical issues were considered; participation voluntary with anonymity and confidentiality assured.

Guided by the belief that reality can be constructed and is contextual, qualitative research derived from in-depth interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders in the refugee experience, would give depth and breadth to the research. Jacob (1988, p16) claims that 'Qualitative research has been characterized as emphasizing the importance of conducting research in a natural setting, as assuming the importance of the participants' perspectives, and as assuming that it is important for researchers subjectively and empathetically to know the perspectives of the participants. Adopting an interpretivist approach, enabling the researcher to elicit data via qualitative methods, permits them to interpret the intricate social world of the refugees by integrating into their environment. This thesis uses an ethnographic approach which paves the way for a deeper understanding and knowledge of human behaviour.

Quantitative methods were also employed to collate and analyse surveys and published statistical data with relation to numbers of refugees, their ethnicity, the patterns of their arrival and to measure the length of time it has taken for them to be processed through the system. Whilst the validity of truth is a widely contested issue, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were necessary in this study to ensure a balanced outcome; one that can both contest and further inform current policy. This research has attempted to build on existing studies whilst adopting a phenomenological stance which includes my experience in the development of perceptions and understanding of the subject. The research therefore reflects positionality of the researcher in so much as it seeks to explore the relevance of existing research in the context of which is familiar, thus symbiotically marrying research and practice in which both entities inform each other.

3.3: Methodology

Stemming from the previous chapter's discussion about the literature pertaining to refugees in the Irish context, this section outlines the ethnographic nature of this research with a specific focus on Co. Donegal in rural Ireland. The ontological and epistemological

perspectives of the research are explored and how this relates to theories of truth and methodology. Care was taken during data analysis to ensure the data was rich and varied in order to provide a full picture of participants' experience and transitions that occurred within the cultural context. During the data collection process, consideration was given to the role of the researcher as both researcher and volunteer within the refugee community and the effect this might have on the interpretation of themes arising from the study. The section concludes with an evaluation of the ethical challenges presented by the research.

3.3.1: Ethnography

Being an ethnographic study dealing with the complex issue of human beings thrust into physical, cultural, and educational instability, this research is not an exact science. It cannot be measured and analysed to produce a 'one size fits all' strategy of best practice. The objective is to compare government policy with the lived experience and where discrepancies occur to urge policymakers to seek to consolidate them; to bridge the gap. In recent years ethnography has evolved to encompass various meanings, something which has given rise to conflict of opinion for academics.

Bronislaw Malinowski, widely considered the founder of ethnography, developed the basic methodology of ethnographic fieldwork, namely participant-observation. The traditional notion of ethnography would include a descriptive study of a specific area of human society, or the process of making such a study. Such ethnography is predominantly based on fieldwork and requires the researcher to be completely immersed in the culture and everyday life of those being researched typically for several months or years.

Contemporary ethnography has moved away from the notion of total immersion. It is not as synonymous with research in far distant places with researchers living amongst unknown tribes; the field has widened and moved closer to home. This is due to several factors including time and money constraints for researchers and the mass movement of peoples which has made otherwise homogenous western societies more diverse, thus given more scope for ethnographic research to be carried out without having to move too far. Traditional ethnography is based on positivism, whereas post-positivist ethnography is developed on the understanding that the multiple truths, voices and perspectives of all participants must be considered. Whilst this particular study focuses strongly on the

refugees' story, the voices and experiences of the local Irish people receiving them are given agency.

Travel to Syria or any other distant country to conduct ethnographic research was unnecessary. Rich data was elicited both in person and digitally without having to make more than a two-hour journey. Regular visits, but not total immersion, was sufficient to gain access and acquire relevant knowledge. Observing a new cohort of people immerse themselves in the researcher's own culture was the point. This rejects the traditional notion that long term participant observation is necessary, whilst acknowledging its value at a given time. Furthermore, with the advance in technology, interviews can be recorded without the restrictions of stopping to take notes, images and videos can be rewatched over and over to ensure the data is not lost or misinterpreted.

Hammersley (2018, p2), highlights some of the current obstacles faced by ethnographers which has led to its broadening definition. This includes 'the growing demand for social research to be accountable...as regards 'demonstrable impact,' 'engagement,' 'knowledge transfer' etc.' Funding bodies can find ethnographic methods not cost-effective while renewed stress in government circles on quantitative methods is dominant. Hammersley argues that current academic trends leave researchers under time pressure to complete within their research within a fixed time frame. Expectations to publish papers, teach, attend seminars, do training courses etc. are not conducive to intensive, long-term fieldwork consistent with traditional ethnography. The Covid-19 Pandemic and its subsequent quarantine and stringent restrictions issued by governments worldwide has altered the way research has been carried out. In this particular research, spending long periods of time observing participants was off-limits while many interviews that were intended to take place face to face had to be conducted via zoom and telephone. It was not possible to conduct the focus-group interviews intended to bring groups of interagency staff who work with refugees together to gather their collective thoughts, but progress was made elsewhere. Whilst the pandemic led to certain constraints in physically meeting participants for some interviews, this remains a true and valid ethnographic study. Through volunteering, the researcher formed acquaintances and friendships with most of the Syrian community in Donegal. Invitations to birthday parties, engagement parties, children's play dates and Eid celebrations gave valuable insight into their rich cultural heritage, much of which they have been able to preserve in Ireland. Informal

meetings to hand over school resources, baby equipment and children's clothing led to casual lunches, dinners and conversations. Gensuk (1999) hypothesises that ethnography relies greatly on up-close, personal experience. Participation, rather than just observation, is one of the keys to this process.

This participation reinforced the foundations of knowledge gathered by the researcher during her two volunteer missions in Greece while the Syrian refugees were in transit through Europe, prior to commencing this study. Whilst this experience is undocumented for academic purposes it lends itself significantly to this ethnographic research. The researcher lived among the refugees, albeit in different circumstances and with different privileges, talked to them at length, assisted them in getting settled and getting processed through the system. Furthermore, the researcher observed at first hand the challenges of trauma, anxiety, language barriers, education gaps and xenophobia along with the resilience and strength of the refugees.

While the interactions and exchanges between the researcher and refugees cemented much of the data elicited from the interviews, the researcher had to exercise self-reflection to ensure pre-conceived impressions did not prejudice the research. Through contemplation and acknowledgement of the fact that as a non-Muslim, non-Syrian person of white privilege, who had observed, but not actually experienced the effect of war and displacement, clarity, transparency and greater impartiality of the bigger picture from the micro to the macro emerged .

The issue of the pandemic is an example of how ontological and epistemological perspectives are played out. By addressing how teaching and learning are dependent on context, one can acknowledge that the refugee students undoubtedly would have had a very different educational experience had the pandemic not occurred. Similarly, they may have been housed sooner in a different place had there not been a housing crisis in Ireland.

3.3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

What can be believed to be true about these research questions? Can the issues of policy regarding how refugee children in rural Ireland are catered for in the education system be investigated objectively or is the reason behind these issues one which can be explored by looking at the personal beliefs which have influenced policy? Is current policy influenced by the personal beliefs, culture and attitude of society or is it informed by best practice? Which is the best way forward according to all the evidence there is available to those who developed the policy?

In relation to education, The Migrant Integration Strategy, makes promising proposals to be carried out between 2017 and 2020. Published by the Department of Justice and Equality in February 2017, The Migrant Integration Strategy outlines the Government's intentions to facilitate the integration of migrants from the period of 2017 to 2020. This policy document envisages that migrants will be enabled to become an integral part of Irish society, playing important civic and cultural roles which will be aided and facilitated by all government departments. Furthermore, it assures positive action initiatives will be implemented to address and manage the challenges faced by immigrants, particularly with regards to equal rights and human rights. In terms of education for refugees, the policy offers twelve proposals (p26/27) which aim to address equity in education for refugees, the provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), teacher training on managing diversity and racism, language support and the fostering and development of positive attitudes.

However, the only definite actionable promise is Article 26 stating that 'The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will be enacted.'(p25) This means that any child with refugee status in Ireland is entitled to attend school with no prerequisites of language or qualification. Whilst this seems positive, the majority of the articles proposed appear to lack substance. Using language such as 'pro-active efforts, will be explored/ monitored/ reviewed/ encouraged' doesn't hold any tangible measurable objectives that the government can be held accountable for. For example, 'Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrant teachers' (Article 27). No mention is made of the necessity to be fluent in the Irish language to become a primary school teacher entailing substantial time and cost. Articles 29, 32, 33, 35 and 37 all refer to English language provision, attainment, and monitoring. However, in context, while a student may progress well with the prescribed

ESOL course, they may require significant further support to contend with all other subjects through English. The truth as consensus according to the teachers of refugee children is that ESOL provision whilst 'under review' (Article 32) and 'monitored' (Article 29), is not guaranteed. Each individual school must apply for ESOL provision. It is only granted if 10% of a class require it. Small rural schools are unlikely to meet this quota, and when granted, is only guaranteed for one year, after which it needs to be reapplied for. Paradoxically, the government's plan to avoid marginalising refugees by allowing them direct access to schools without any pre-requisites is counterproductive by the deficiency in ESOL support when they get there. There are significant proposals to 'examine, analyse and investigate,' but few steps which propose enforcing tangible action. This is inequality in the provision of education at a crucial time in a child's life.

The constructivist view suggests that knowledge and thus reality are relative to the observer or participant as reality is socially constructed where human behaviour, learning and education cannot be understood without challenging the effect of human interaction.

The belief that learning and teaching is subjective and dependent on context, leads me to question whether current government policy is fallible. Whilst it does consider issues relating directly to refugees, it does not appear to openly address the complexities sufficiently, thus leading to injustice in education. Such complexities include guaranteed language provision, pastoral care, and resources to equip teachers and staff to provide an equitable education.

As a researcher, my epistemological beliefs, that is, my personal views on how I conceptualise knowledge and the criteria I believe I need to acquire knowledge, is central to my research. My epistemological perspective is that teaching, and learning takes place in a social space and are mutually dependent on the cultural experience of teaching and learning of each participant within that space; specific to the learner and the environment and influenced by society as a whole. My research will delve deep to show the human perspective of education for refugees and evaluate whether or not government policy is infallible, serving always to protect the best interest of the refugee community.

The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) appears to be lacking the depth, breadth, and urgency necessary to offer an equal, balanced and meaningful education for refugees currently in Irish primary schools. The needs of refugees are multifaceted; policymakers and teachers cannot simply assume that applying EAL / TESOL (English as an Additional Language / Teaching English as a Second Language) will be enough to competently assimilate refugees into the classroom and wider community. The likelihood is that they will not have formal documentation relating to education. There may also be an element of fabrication in their testimonies regarding their age and background due to fear of retribution or deportation.

Given the high probability that refugees will carry significant emotional baggage with them and have PTS (post-traumatic disorder), administrators and educators need to invest more resources into their charges during this monumental geographical, socio-economical, linguistic, and cultural shift. This is my rationale for choosing to explore my research questions from a qualitative perspective, to ensure a well-balanced approach.

3.3.3: Theories of Truth and Methodology

Theories of truth and methodology are essential to my research as it is an ethnographic study of a social science. The refugee experience is complex. As alluded to in the previous paragraph, it is difficult to separate the process of learning from the process of teaching or the environment in which it takes place. Context is of the essence, and this leads to complexity. Complexity Theory is a set of concepts that attempts to explain complex phenomenon that can't be explained by traditional theories, thus relevant to the education of refugees. Burnes (2005, p75) posits that 'Complexity Theory emphasizes interactions and the accompanying feedback loops that constantly change systems.

While it proposes that systems are unpredictable, they are also constrained by order-generating rules.' With regards refugees, the simple solution of offering them an equal

education to Irish children is not necessarily the most appropriate as it lacks equity and needs deeper consideration. Complex social structures in education are unpredictable due to the agentic action and beliefs of policy makers, teachers, and learners, but effective policy and practice is still possible using Vygotsky's constructivist theories which rejects the possibility that learning could be separated from its social context.

I have adopted an interpretivist theory in my research to enable me to elicit data via predominantly qualitative methods, thus permitting me to interpret the intricate social world of the refugees by integrating into their environment. The ontological view that reality is socially constructed appropriately adheres to the complex issue of refugees and explores the cultural conditions which have influenced their environment as the history of refugee children prior to being resettled has significant ramifications for the continuation of their academic careers.

Using a holistic approach paves the way for a deeper understanding and knowledge of human behaviour. Fundamental to this research paradigm is acknowledgment that the truth is open to varied perspectives with the researcher acting as both insider and outsider. By acknowledging the natural bias and subjectivity that occurs, a truth underpinning the view of the researcher emerges. Recurring themes and patterns can be identified when compared with other data from similar research to create valid truths from which policy can be established.

In presenting a theory of truth which defines the way educational research is influenced by ontology, Bridges (2003) suggests that we adopt different meanings for truth depending on different situations. This method suggests that notions of truth are adaptable and that our approach in defining the truth of a belief or phenomena is to some extent determined by existing assumptions and beliefs.

3.3.4: Theory And Reality

Truth claims are central to all research. Bridges (2003, p71) defines truth 'as a procedural principal', or 'set of principals embedded in different and to some extent competing

epistemological theories. Bridges' notion of truth claims offers an approach that researchers can use in research analysis since identification of truth claims can assist in clarifying issues relating to method and purpose in research objectives and design. By linking theories of truth to epistemological and ontological beliefs and theories, Bridges highlights the way in which truth claims can be considered central to all research.

However, a distinction should be made between the notion of truth and truth claims which leads to the issue of equity and equality. Espinoza (2008) explores the difficulties of being able to have 'equity' and 'equality' in a society where efficiency in resource management is prioritised over social justice. Whilst all refugees are given equal rights in education in Ireland, they are not starting from the same place. Their specific learning needs may not be addressed; therefore, the education they receive may not be equitable.

Using the example that all refugees are provided with adequate shelter. Is this truth valid if the reality is that the accommodation is a tent? Is this truth more valid if they are accommodated in Direct Provision? Is the truth only valid if refugees are accommodated in an individual house / flat? Similarly, is the truth valid that all refugees are given the exact same education as Irish children, even if they don't have any command of the native language in a curriculum delivered in English?

The history of refugee children prior to being resettled has significant ramifications for the continuation of their academic careers. Frequent disruption and limited access to regular schooling coupled with language barriers and discrimination has substantial consequences on their ability to progress with their future education. They may be of equal intelligence and ability as their Irish counterparts, but the disadvantage of the language barrier, cultural difference and emotional instability leaves them on the back foot. This leads one to question if one truth can be truer than another or indeed falsier than another. Truth therefore cannot be deciphered dichotomously but as a continuous process which is central to research. There are many lenses through which truth can be observed.

3.3.5: Relationship Between Positionality and Research:

Being a practitioner researcher, I acknowledge that the position of myself as researcher is fundamental. The positionality and concept of identity of the researcher is integral to concerns of validity in practitioner research since the validity of the various identities of a researcher are influenced by the perceptions and understandings of the individual.

Throne (2012, p1) cites England stating that *'since bias is a naturally occurring human characteristic, positionality is often used... as an exploration of the investigator's reflection on one's own placement within the many contexts, layers, power structures, identities and subjectivities of the viewpoint'*. Throne hypothesises that this theory serves to *'inform a research study rather than to invalidate it as biased or contaminated by personal perspectives and social or political viewpoints'*.

By examining my position in terms of my academic research from an ethnographic stance, I can collate observations and interviews and data to produce comprehensive accounts of the people, cultures, customs, habits, and social phenomena which I encounter in my work. I have examined my feelings, reactions and motives to key situations, and how these influence how I rationalise and manage my educational journey. Through reflexivity, I have attempted to create critical distance from what I am researching, in an effort to counter any biases or partisanship, and ontological or epistemological assumptions that I may have been predisposed to as part of the fabric of my personal history and narrative.

Fundamental to this research paradigm is acknowledgment that the truth is open to varied perspectives with the researcher acting as both insider and outsider. By acknowledging the natural bias and subjectivity that occurs, a truth underpinning the view of the researcher emerges. Recurring themes and patterns can be identified when compared with other data from similar research to create valid truths from which policy can be established.

My positionality, and status as an 'insider' or 'outsider' is central to issues of validity in this study as both the internal and external validity are influenced by the understandings and perceptions of the researcher. Whilst volunteering in Athens, I was definitely an 'insider', although I did not gather formal evidence for my research at this time. Drake and Heath (2011, p1) define insider research as depending on the researcher 'having some experience or insight the worlds in which the research is being undertaken'. Although I

am still involved on a casual basis with local refugees in Donegal, five years have passed since I experienced them at their most vulnerable arriving in Greece, I have created physical and emotional distance from those scenarios and can analyse it through a different lens as someone who has seen refugees at the half way point of their journey to safety to the point where they now have a safe, permanent home but need to integrate into Irish society . As cited by Drake and Heath (2011, p19) ' *The validity of this form of research is necessarily influenced by the extent to which practitioner researchers or 'insiders' are able to achieve sufficient critical distance from the subject of their study.*'

Gibson et al. (2017, p2) cite Klenke who posits that '*self and identity are reflexive concepts*' ... that '*self-identity is multidimensional*'. On reflection, I am multi-dimensional. I wear many hats, I occupy many spaces, some are separate entities, others overlapping. I am a married mother of three children ranging in age from five to eighteen years. I am a teacher; having taught for almost twenty years in Ireland, the UK, the Middle East, in state schools, private schools, international schools and boarding schools, I have wide and varied teaching experience. I am a volunteer; since 2015, I have been heavily involved with the Syrian refugees. I completed two volunteer missions in Athens, the first during the emergency stage when the refugees initially landed in Europe off the boats from their war zone, the second during which time I assisted in setting up services and educational resources. Laterally, I regularly travel to Europe to meet and assist refugees who have managed to gain asylum there. I am a student studying for my Doctorate in Education. These are the spaces I occupy; these are my identities.

As a volunteer who has worked directly with many refugees of the Syrian conflict, I have accrued certain beliefs about the environment in which a significant number of refugees have lived over the past few years. I have personally watched refugees come off boats to escape war and conflict and followed the stories of approximately twenty of them as they navigate their way through Europe in search of a better life. Yet as a wife, mother and teacher living in rural Ireland, I have never encountered a single refugee living in my environment in Co. Donegal until very recently. Because of my positionality and the beliefs that I have accrued as a volunteer, it jars with my conscience and emotion to see refugees who I willingly volunteered to save and assist in a far distant country, become part of my community, a community we must now share; a predominantly white,

Christian, rural, agricultural community that runs the risk of being diluted by another culture. I am compelled to question my personal truth about the reasons behind my desire to work with refugees. When I volunteer in a far distant country, I can return home with a new mind-set, new knowledge, empathy, and perspective about how the world works for refugees, however my world at home remains the same. The parameters change when refugees come to my world. I have to reassess whether I truly want to be as involved. Their presence impacts upon me, my family, and my environment. When significant change occurs in a community, it stands to reason that any addition will be integrated, included, and welcomed more readily if they have something to offer; if they are viewed as an asset as opposed to a liability. In the case of refugees this becomes a multifaceted complex topic with issues of inequality, emancipation, and injustice at the core.

Gibson et al. (2017, p2) cite Bhabha's 'Third Space Theory'; an in-between place between home and work, where one can draw knowledge from both experiences. Given my roles as parent, teacher, and volunteer, I recognise this 'Third Space' as a place where both my personal life and professional life merge and overlap. Each role is inextricably linked. The strategies required to be productive and successful in each role, and the emotions embedded in each space resonates within the other spaces.

Establishing an emotional attachment with the refugees, whilst biased in some senses, is advantageous for my research; barriers are broken down, trust is built. Knowledge of the real lived experience is acquired that can be interpreted to be true in the most authentic form in which it was told. On the other hand, emotional attachment could be viewed as a hindrance to my research, one that could cause me to lack objectivity and the ability to see the 'bigger picture.' It may reveal a subconscious search for my own prejudices to be reinforced, and miss that which argues against my prejudices, whilst looking for reaffirmation of my own beliefs.

Ultimately numerous claims made in this research process reflect truths which are rooted in personal ontological and epistemological beliefs. Positionality of the researcher is important as it is reflected in the methodology, which in turn influences the claims made and the subsequent presentation of the truths. As someone who has collaborated closely with refugees, I am conscious that my experience influences my truth. On balance, with an awareness of my prejudices in mind, I chose the path to volunteer and feel it has empowered my research. By identifying the philosophical assumptions underpinning the methodologies used in the research of education of refugees, I have attempted to demonstrate the way in which truth is used in both policy and practice. Through reflexivity, I have been able to create critical distance from what I am researching, in an effort to counter any biases or partisanship, and ontological or epistemological assumptions that I may be predisposed to as part of the fabric of my personal history and narrative.

3.4: Methods

This section outlines the methods undertaken to elicit data and information pertaining to the research questions in the Chapters one and two. It details how the participants were recruited and the breadth of candidates interviewed to ensure a balanced view on both the refugees experience and that of those working with them. Each interviewee brought new and valued perspective to the table. Their combined knowledge and experience addressed the questions relating to the challenges of the refugees. Their views on how they have been able to integrate into the community, their opinions on the provision of EAL for themselves and their children, the effects of the pandemic and how they were supported throughout. Bridging the gap in education, transitioning from primary to secondary and on to further education was addressed to gain insight into where the refugees feel their future lies and whether they're content with that.

The input of the interagency staff and volunteers was invaluable in highlighting the infrastructures that were established by both the government and local communities. Their insight to the day to day working with refugees and all the complexities that

accompany them transcended any romantic notions of 'saving them,' or indeed 'rejecting them.'

Formal and informal conversations with government officials, school staff and the Educational Welfare Officer emphasised both the great efforts and shortcomings of the government.

Thematic qualitative analysis was carried out to identify key themes and subthemes. The research sought to integrate data from the various interviewees along with qualitative data to support this. The methods and procedures are detailed in Table 4 below to enable transparency.

Mind Map	Using initial themes of 1.Structural, 2. Cultural, 3. Refugee Story and 4. Irish Story, mind maps were used to draft what the researcher wanted to find out about the refugee experience for both the Syrian and Irish communities. Basic headings and sub-headings were outlined
Participants	A list of potential participants was drawn up based on how broad the spectrum of potential data could be. Contact details of potential participants were gathered
Ethics	A summary of ethical challenges was prepared, and the University Ethics form was completed, submitted and approved
Questionnaire	A quantitative questionnaire was created with questions specifically focusing on the refugees' journey from Syria to Ireland & the education gap
Translation & Permission	The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and checked by two separate parties. Permission slips detailing the nature of the research were drawn up. Syrian families were contacted and asked to participate.
Quantitative Data	Data from the surveys was analysed on a scale of 1-10 and illustrated in bar charts/ pie charts followed by a written summary of the meaning
Interview Questions	Specific interview questions were drawn up for different groups: 1. Refugees 2. School staff, 3. Volunteers/ befrienders 4. Government staff, 5. Cultural/ integration workers.
Interviews	Interview participants were contacted. Those who agreed to take part completed permission slips. Times / places for interviews were agreed. Interviews ranged from 1- 3.5 hours. Approximately were conducted by Zoom due to Covid restrictions. Remaining interviews took place in family homes, offices, hotel foyers and schools. All interviews were voice recorded. No video recording took place.
Data Analysis	Data gathered from the interviews was transcribed. Common themes and patterns were highlighted, labelled and put into themes and sub-themes. These were cross-referenced with information given from the different groups of participants. Extra categories were added where an abundance of unexpected evidence emerged. Other categories were deleted due to insufficient evidence.
Information	Data was recorded in Findings chapters

Table 4: Methods and procedures used to gather and analyse data

3.4.1: Participant Recruitment and Profiles

Being a longstanding member of the local community with several years of experience working with refugees, the initial contacts were reached through existing Syrian contacts in my circle. Over time this circle grew and evolved through links with community intercultural activities, immigrant welcome groups and children in local schools which I am involved with. Syrian refugees are now a part of my community. I recognise the potential for bias but feel these relationships are advantageous to this research as a good opportunity to gather participants. With this study being part of a professional doctorate, as opposed to a PhD, the research is not just about academia but practice in communities and the fundamental identity within that environment.

Potential candidates for interview were approached based on their personal experience as a refugee. Others with experience working with, volunteering or befriending refugees were contacted to request participation. Communication was initiated with people with experience in teaching and managing in schools, administration, intercultural platforms, volunteering and befriending circles and government officials.

The aims and objectives of the research were explained to potential interviewees, and they were invited to participate. Some refugees declined due to their perceived incompetence at speaking English, some through a degree of fear about revealing something they shouldn't about their personal journey, others simply didn't want to partake. Most of the Irish participants who were approached agreed to take part; those who didn't cited time constraints for declining to contribute.

Due to data protection, there is no formal record of which schools have refugees. The nature of Donegal being a rural area means schools, clubs and villages tend to be closely knit linking people together in a culture where 'everyone knows everyone.' Therefore, informal conversations between colleagues, teachers and headteachers led to information about which schools had refugee children on their roll. Headteachers, teachers, SNAs, ESOL teachers and translators were either phoned or emailed and invited to participate in an interview either face to face or via Zoom, Skype or phone. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, many interviews were conducted virtually. Phone calls and emails were sent to several government departments which eventually led me to the

correct departments in Education, Foreign Affairs, Social Protection and Justice & Equality.

Fifteen one-on-one semi structured interviews were carried out with a wide variety of candidates who are refugees, staff or volunteers that are associated and familiar with the refugee experience. All candidates are based in Co. Donegal except one, who is a Direct Provision staff member in Co. Meath. Follow up visits and calls occurred with many of the participants. Profiles of the following participants with a brief background are available in Appendix 8.

1. Eman - Intercultural Worker
2. Lucy - Educational Welfare Officer in Donegal
3. Holly - Special Needs Co-Ordinator
4. Sarah - Befriender
5. Syrian Refugee Family (Farooq/ dad, Amal/ mum, Nour, Hamid, Fatima / 3 children)
6. Hannah - Headteacher of a one-teacher primary school in rural Donegal
7. Mary - EAL Co-ordinator – Primary School
8. Aisling - Headteacher of an Educate Together Primary School
9. Chris - Headteacher of Secondary School
10. Ben - Headteacher of a three-teacher primary school
11. Farah - Interpreter
12. Aoibheann - Direct Provision Staff Member (EROCC)
13. Sinead – Befriender /Volunteer
14. Hamid - Male Secondary School Refugee
15. Nadia - Female Secondary School Refugee

3.4.2: Correspondence with Interagency Staff

Communication was initiated via email, phone calls and written correspondence with representatives from the Department of Education & Skills, Department of Justice, Department of Foreign Affairs, Social Protection, SOLAS and Training Boards. This communication was undertaken to establish the legal entitlements of refugees when they arrive in Ireland in terms of education, health, social welfare benefits, housing, and legal status. These conversations led to a broader understanding of the nuances of the rules and regulations for asylum seekers and refugees and what was available from local authorities.

3.4.3: Questionnaires

In January 2021, a carefully designed ten question questionnaire was drawn up to establish how long it had taken the refugees, from leaving their homes in Syria until they got settled in their permanent home in Donegal. The survey targeted the gaps in education, examined what education, if any, that refugees received on their journey in the camps, travelling through Europe and in Direct Provision when they arrived in Ireland. Furthermore, it asked refugees to rate the Irish education system, in particular their experience during Lockdown. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather tangible data relating to education gaps of the refugees and the quality of the education they had received en route to Ireland and when settled in Ireland. The questionnaires were distributed in person, via email and by phone over a period of 3 months from February 2021.

3.4.4: Volunteering

I have spent significant time over the past 8 years volunteering with refugees abroad and within the local community in Donegal. I have witnessed the challenges of refugees at source when they arrived in Athens and through volunteering locally in Donegal by spending time visiting, zooming, phoning refugee families to offer assistance with aspects of education, administration and befriending. I established a library in the newly refurbished Direct Provision Centre in Letterkenny and was able to familiarise myself with the building, facilities, staff and residents, what resources are available to them and provide over 1000 children's books to enhance their literacy skills and develop confidence in using the language. Whilst my data is not garnered from these specific sources, being embedded in the local community has helped to inform my research from an educational perspective about the real lived experiences of refugees. As a researcher, being immersed, but not part of the refugee community, has been a valuable contribution to data triangulation where along with the other research methods mentioned, helps to develop a comprehensive understanding of the refugee experience. The convergence of information from various sources helps to validate the data.

3.4.5: Methods - The Challenges

The challenges of gathering all of the above data were magnified due to the Pandemic restrictions. Seven of the interview candidates were interviewed in person, one by Skype and the rest were interviewed by phone. Some were interviewed during Lockdown, others when restrictions had lifted. Many of the government offices were not working normal hours so it often took many calls and emails to finally get speaking to the relevant person. Even then, due to Covid 19, normal rules, routines and entitlements had altered or changed in many areas. With Ireland having some of the strictest Lockdown measures in Europe, I was unable to visit the families as a volunteer/ befriender for several months during quarantine. Another challenge that came to the fore during the interviews was the realisation that the nuances of the factions of

Muslims are widely unknown amongst Irish people. Due to the dearth of Muslims living in Ireland, the cultural differences, and political and religious ideologies of the three main sects of Sunni, Shia and Kurds tend to be unknown. This lack of awareness has led to friction in some cases.

However, valuable data was gathered due to the diversity of interviewees.

Headteachers, class teachers, EAL and Special Needs staff and all those working on the ground with the refugees were able to give explicit information on the lived experience of the refugees in terms of the education system. Volunteers and translators gave important information on issues that were perhaps overlooked or not understood by others, due to language differences. A mix of male and female candidates gave important perspective especially where gender-based issues were highlighted. Although not living in Donegal, the Direct Provision worker gave valuable insight to what can realistically be achieved with regards schoolwork, in the EROC centres before the refugees are finally settled. Befrienders were able to really get to know the refugees on an informal basis, thus giving an important insight into what life was really like on a day-to-day basis for them. The refugees themselves gave powerful statements about the highs and lows of their experience, altogether creating a rich tapestry of data.

In the original proposal, it was planned to conduct expressive art sessions with refugee children to elicit thoughts and feelings about their journey and experiences and elicit data from their creations. This was cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Furthermore, plans to have focus group meetings with a selection of school staff and refugees were withdrawn for the same reasons.

3.4.6: Ethical Considerations:

In this section, the process of recruiting research participants is outlined and the relevant ethical considerations for interviewing and working closely with refugee families and workers are highlighted. Prior to gathering any evidence, ethical approval was sought and approved of by Canterbury Christchurch University. (Appendix 7)

Following approval, participants were informed verbally and in writing about what the expectations of the research / gathering of evidence entailed. All participants were then asked to sign a permission form stating that they were happy for me to use their information from interviews and questionnaires as part of my research. Questionnaires were translated into Arabic and double checked for correct meaning by an independent Arabic speaker.

With there being a relatively small pool of 49 refugee families in Co. Donegal, I gave all the families in this cohort the opportunity to partake in this study. There is a mix of Sunni, Shia and Kurdish refugees so it was hoped that a sample from each category would be ideal to give a broad perspective of experience. Written permission was sought prior to any interviews with refugee children and parents. Written permission will also be sought prior to interviews with headteachers, teachers, EAL workers, Social Welfare officers and Refugee Integration Support Workers. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of refugees and their schools where necessary.

All efforts were made to ensure interviewees fully understand the nature of the interview and were complicit with the intended aims and objectives of the research. The purpose of the research was made explicit as was how data from the study would be used as an instrument for change and to support the education of refugees. The study was also intended to provide interagency staff with an opportunity to reflect upon, examine and discuss their own practice.

Following a direct attempt at contact with individual students and parents of refugees, I was respectful of their right to refuse, and recognised that non-responders have indirectly indicated their wish to stay out of the study. For all participants, efforts were taken to minimise the impact of the research on normal working routines and workloads. Incentives were not used to encourage participation in interviews or informal discussions.

One-to-one interviews with staff and refugees (and their families) took place in an appropriate setting for the respondent, either in their place of work / study or a location of their choosing which was private enough to facilitate an audio-recording. Participants under 18 years old had a parent / guardian with them where appropriate. Considerable

effort was made to ensure that interviews were conducted in areas free from distractions, and at times and locations that were most suitable for the interviewee.

Staff were asked to respond to questions relating to their perception of the role of integration of refugees into the education system, how this guides them in adapting the curriculum, foster good relations and how they have engaged with student refugees at various intervals as they progress through the education system. Each interview lasted between 30 – 90 minutes.

3.4.7: Conclusion

The education of refugees is both a personal and universal subject. By examining my personal experiences of refugees with theories and policy that apply to them, I have been able to forge a clear relationship between what I believe to be true, how I can explore what I believe to be true, and apply relevant methods to prove, disprove and add to existing theories.

It is futile to believe that a child or adult can progress sufficiently if the issue of language and culture is not appropriately addressed. With this in mind, guidelines need to be adopted to prepare teachers and policy makers for this adaptation. Not only do the refugees need integration, but those also hosting them need to be trained and equipped with adequate resources to enable a successful fusion of cultures. Theories of emancipation, inequality, and injustice support this along with qualitative methods employed to conduct the research. Quantitative methods were employed in a lesser, yet no less important, capacity to collate and analyse published statistical data with relation to numbers of refugees, their ethnicity, the patterns of their arrival and to measure the length of time it has taken for them to be processed through the system. Whilst the validity of truth is a widely contested issue, I believe that both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were necessary in this particular study to ensure a balanced outcome; one that can both contest and further inform current policy.

Ultimately numerous claims made in the research process reflect truths which are rooted in ontology and epistemology. My positionality as researcher is important as it is reflected in the relationship between my ontological and epistemological beliefs and subsequently the methodology, I believe to have been most pragmatic in conducting my research. This in turn has influenced the claims made and the subsequent presentation of the truths. The inference therefore is that truth is only the truth of the researcher within a given context. It is functional in that it serves a purpose but is ultimately an elusive tenet.

Chapter 4: Findings – Structural Challenges

4.1: Introduction

This aim of this chapter is to collate the key findings pertaining to the integration of refugees into the Irish Education system with a specific focus on those who have settled in Co. Donegal. Using semi-structured interviews with refugees, school staff and interagency personnel who work closely with the refugees, several themes and sub-themes emerge which highlights the true lived experience of the refugees in Donegal.

As referenced in Chapter 1, the volunteer role of the researcher enabled regular and extensive meetings on an informal basis with many members of the Syrian community. In this ethnographic setting, a certain degree comprehension and awareness of the trials and achievements of the refugees' lives in Donegal were captured. This coupled with a survey and informal conversations with government departments produced intricate and varied data.

The data collated from the participants is placed in context with the literature and government proposals in relation to refugees in recent years. The basis of this research is to find out whether the Irish government is doing enough to support the refugees and those working with them with a specific focus on education guided by the government proposals in the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017. The original questions, detailed in Chapter 1 were:

- 1.What legislative provisions are made by the Department of Education in Ireland for the education of refugees?
- 2.How much practice conforms to policy in relation to the proposals of The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) and other government policy?
- 3.What are the inter-agency challenges of refugees and those working with them?

Thematic analysis evolved from the following sub-questions which arose during the research process which relate directly to the initial research questions detailed above.

1. Are the refugees in Donegal getting a satisfactory education?
2. Are there resources available to bridge the gaps in education that has been lost during their journey from their homeland to Ireland?
3. Are there sufficient EAL resources made available to refugees?
4. Is the government preparing teachers and staff adequately to deal with incoming refugees?
5. Is the government doing enough to educate and prepare local communities for diversity in their schools and towns?
6. Are issues of Cultural Awareness, Diversity and Psychological Trauma being adequately addressed?

Drawing from both the qualitative and quantitative data collected, emerging themes are collated which feature from the questionnaires and interviews of participants, which characterise specific perceptions, experiences and facts that is relevant to the research questions. The findings are categorised into structural and cultural issues with both the positives and negatives being summarised in each sub-topic. The structural themes explored include the Refugee Resettlement Programme, host schools, accommodation, the education gap, EAL, the role of SEN and SET, formal examinations, and Lockdown. In Chapter 5, the cultural themes explored focus on religion, trust of authority figures, acculturation and integration, psychological trauma, women, and money. The voices of the participants merge to give rich data on the lived experiences of refugees in Donegal. Before the data analysis and the findings from the interviews and the surveys is explored, it's important to contextualise this by explaining what is it that Ireland has agreed to provide and if the minimum requirements are being upheld. The findings indicate what is being done, not just by the government, but the important contribution of those working at grassroots level also.

4.2: Ireland Opens its Doors to Refugees

The Irish Refugee Council was established in 1992 to ensure that the asylum policy and practice in Ireland was in compliance with international law and that measures were taken to ensure human rights were upheld. In 2015 Ireland agreed to accept 4,000 mainly Syrian refugees in response to the European migration crisis as part of the burden sharing of the EU. Put in context, in excess of 5.6 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees, while a further 6.2 million people are displaced within Syria. This accumulates in Ireland offering to take approximately 0.07% of the 5.6 million Syrian refugees.

The Irish government agreed to accept up to 4,000 refugees as part of two different programmes. One was part of a UN refugee resettlement project that focus on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the second an EU relocation operation based on asylum seekers in Italy and Greece. By the end of 2018 just around 2,000 of the 4,000 refugees that were agreed upon had arrived in Ireland. In an effort to continue to reach the agreement of accepting 4,000 refugees, Ireland introduced the Irish Humanitarian Admissions Programme to facilitate 520 family members of Irish citizens, refugees or subsidiary protection holders who come from countries associated with the UNHCR, to reunite with family in Ireland. To date Ireland still falls short of fulfilling its commitment to accommodate 4000 refugees. This is partially due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland.

Refugees present themselves in various ways. Some arrive in the country and claim asylum while they await refugee status. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) allows refugees in a host country outside the EU, who are assessed as meeting the requirements for refugee status by the UNHCR, to be resettled directly to Ireland. Programme refugees have their claims evaluated in refugee camps abroad and if approved are subsequently brought to Ireland under specific resettlement programmes. All 49 refugee families currently settled in Donegal were programme refugees chosen by representatives of the Department of Justice and taken from camps in Lebanon.

4.3 What are refugees and asylum seekers entitled to in Ireland?

The following four sub-themes refer to government policy in Ireland, all of which have evolved and changed in recent years.

(i) Status

Once refugee status has been granted, a refugee can enjoy many of the same rights as Irish citizens. They are permitted to reside in Ireland for at least three years, which is renewable under section 54 of the International Protection Act if their application has not been processed. Although it is an arduous process, certain criteria allow refugees to apply for family reunification in Ireland with immediate family member who live in different countries. After three years of residency in Ireland from the date of their asylum application, refugees can apply for Irish citizenship. Furthermore, a refugee may apply for a Travel Document which allows them to travel in and out of Ireland without a re-entry visa, providing the country they are visiting accepts them. (youth.ie) Subsidiary protection can be granted to an asylum seeker who does not succeed in being recognised as a refugee through the asylum process but is recognised as needing international protection. Those who don't receive subsidiary protection can be deported. All participants in this research have been granted refugee status.

(ii) Employment

Prior to 2018, refugees were not allowed to work in Ireland. Following a landmark verdict on 9th February 2018, the Supreme Court declared Ireland's ban on employment to be unconstitutional and measures were put in place to lift the barriers on gaining employment for refugees and facilitate their right to earn their own money. (doras.ie) In 2018, legislation was passed which enabled asylum seekers to assume employment six months after arriving in Ireland if their application had not yet been processed. In February 2022, it was announced that asylum seekers who have been within the international protection programme for at least two years can now apply for 'Stamp 4', which is an immigration permission giving unrestricted access to the labour market and offering a pathway to Irish citizenship. This progress allows both refugees and asylum seekers to earn money, pay tax and contribute to society offering a more meaningful and dignified life. Whilst the refugees in this research are entitled to seek

employment, very few have secured work. This will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

(iii) Eligibility for driving licence

Gaining access to a driving licence has been a bone of contention for refugees and asylum seekers for many years. It has proved particularly difficult for those placed in rural areas, with poor public transport facilities to gain employment, attend educational courses and be independent. This compounds the issue of those trapped in the benefits cycle who wish to study and work. For many years, the embargo on issuing driving licences to refugees added an additional burden to their already challenging existence. Since the first cohort of Syrian refugees arrived in 2017, they are now eligible to apply for a driving licence. In December 2021, the government, along with the Department of Transport and the Road Safety Authority committed to allow asylum seekers to apply for driving licences also, thus giving greater opportunity to work and study more efficiently, independently and with increased dignity. Policy merges with practice amongst the sample of participants as most of the refugee families own and drive a car.

(iv) Government Benefits

As per government policy, refugees have similar access to benefits as Irish residents and therefore depending on their individual circumstances are entitled to the following:

- Accommodation
- Job Seeker's Benefit (not means tested) €208 per week
- Job Seekers Allowance (means tested) €208 per week
- Basic Supplementary Welfare Up to €206 per week
- Kit Out Allowance (Discretionary fund for furniture, white goods etc)
- Right to work
- Back to School Allowance Age 4-11: €160 per child / Age 12-22: €285 per child
- PUP (Pandemic Unemployment Payment) - if employed pre-Pandemic
- Habitual Residence Condition
- Disability Allowance (if appropriate) €208 per week

Asylum seekers residing in Donegal who are waiting for their application for refugee status are entitled to the following: (It should be noted that this does not reflect all accommodation of asylum seekers throughout Ireland)

- Daily Expense Allowance (€38.80 per adult & €29.80 per child)
- Fully furnished own-door accommodation
- Utility bills (including heat, electricity and maintenance)
- Card with a daily meal allowance
- Medical Card
- Back to school allowance (€150 per primary pupil & €275 per secondary pupil)
- Sanitary products
- Condoms / Contraception
- Nappies
- Discretionary payments for travel to official appointments
- PUP (Pandemic Unemployment Payment) - if employed pre-Pandemic
- School Stationery

All refugees and asylum seekers in Donegal have availed of many of the government benefits listed above. There are nuances depending on the specific domestic situation of individual families. The issue of benefits is reviewed later in this chapter in relation to availability of employment, the recognition of qualifications and the incentive to work.

4.4: Findings – Phase One: Surveys

4.4.1: Results of Surveys – Graphs

A survey detailing ten questions relating to the refugee experience was offered to all 49 families in Donegal. 55% of the families responded to the survey with some choosing to opt out and the remainder being non-respondent. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather quantitative data relating to their journey from Syria to Donegal. The data highlights factors which would influence how they would settle and integrate in Ireland specifically in relation to schooling and education. All figures are shown in percentages of the total number who completed the survey.

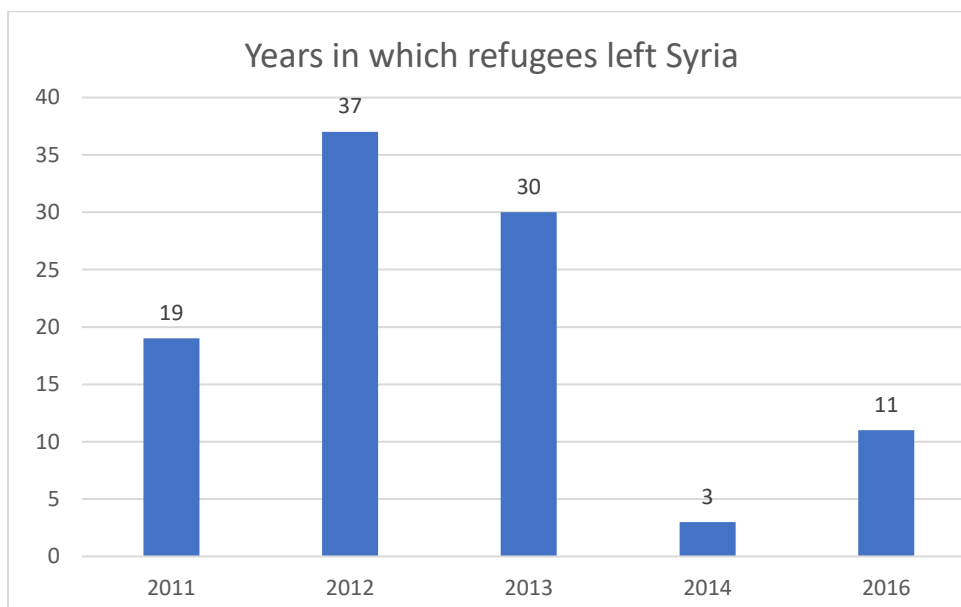


Table 1: The war in Syria began in March 2011. Whilst almost 1/5 of the participants fled the country in that same year, the majority left over the following 2 years with the largest number of 37% leaving in 2012, followed by 30% in 2013.

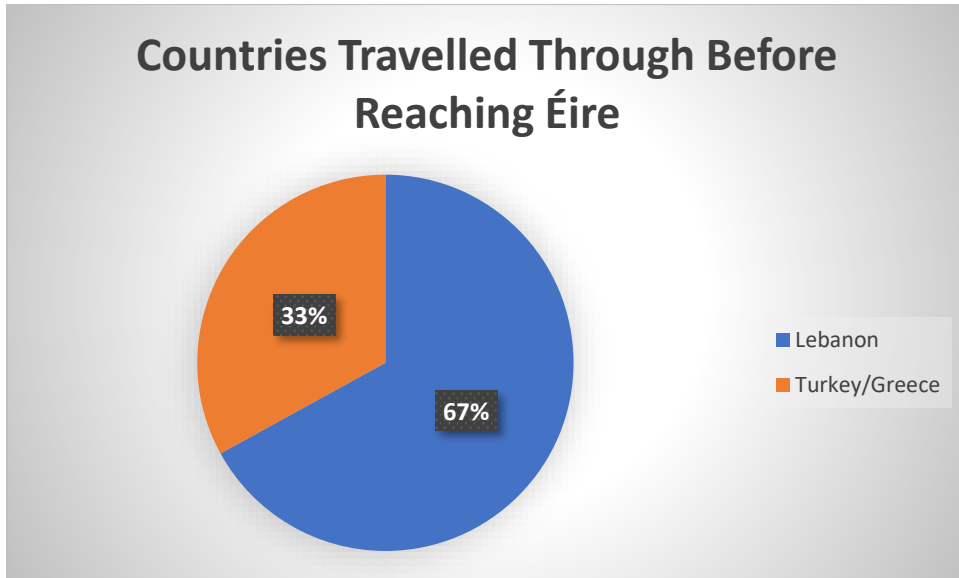


Table 2: Whilst most of the refugees had to travel through Turkey to get to their next destination 67% of them fled to safety in Lebanon, while 33% made the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean using human smugglers.

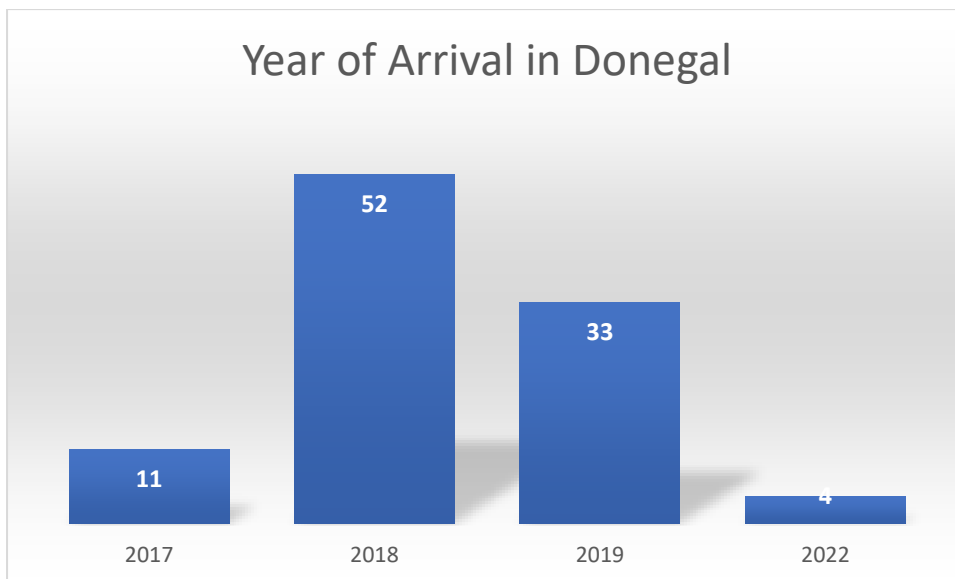


Table 3: With 52% of refugees arriving in Donegal in 2018, in relation to Figure 1, this graph indicates that on average the journey of the refugees from leaving their home in Syria to getting resettled in Donegal took 6 years. With 33% arriving in 2019, this also corresponds to the average of 6 years travelling from when they left Syria in relation to Figure 1.

Time spent in EROCs/Direct Provision in Ireland

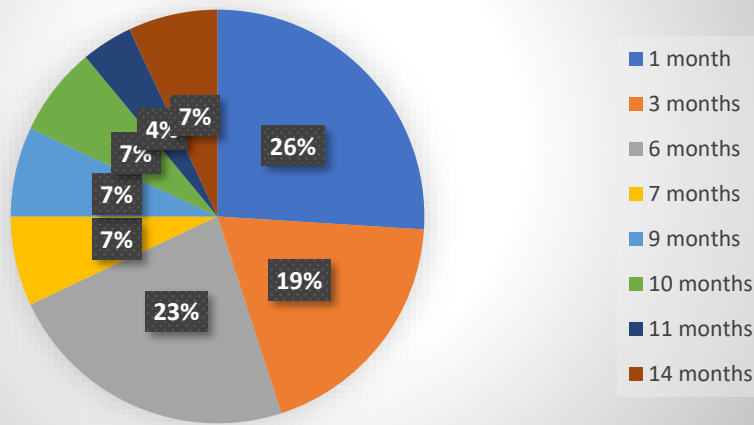


Table 4: Whilst many refugees are left in Direct Provision for years, the cohort which are resident in Donegal moved through the system relatively quickly. Over 25% spent only a month in DP, 68% were placed within 6 months and 93% had their own home within a year of arriving in Ireland. This is likely due to the fact that these particular refugees were handpicked from Turkey and Lebanon and were all families. This impacts on the gap in education which is discussed in Part 2 of the Findings.

Number of Family Members

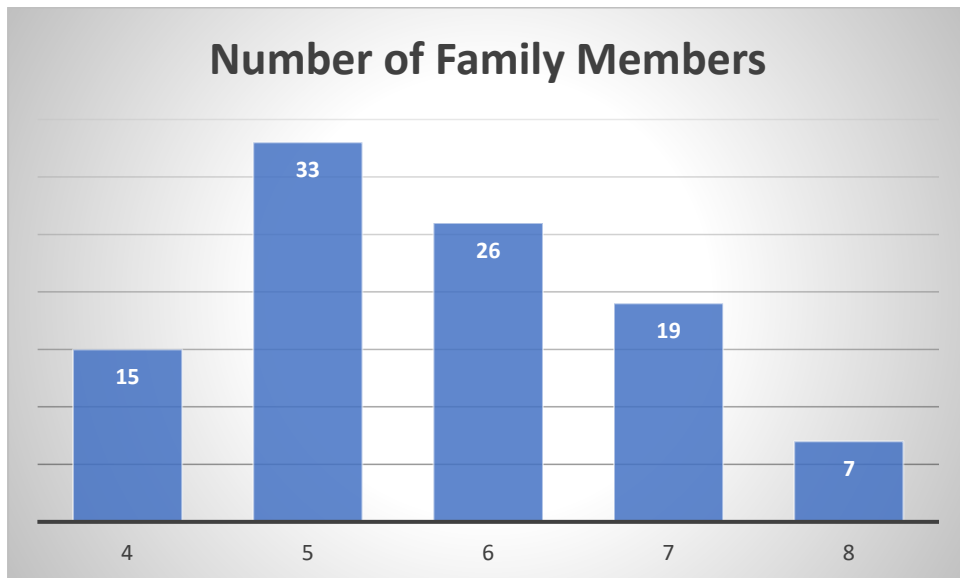


Table 5: This graph shows the family makeup (including parents) of the cohort in Donegal. According to ArcGIS (2022), nationally, the average household size in Ireland is 2.6 people per household. The trend of refugees shows a higher percentage of family members with 33% have 3 children while 52% have four or more children. This has

significant impact on the social welfare system, particularly the Child Benefit payments which amount to €140 per child per month. The 7% who have six children are eligible for €840 per month along with their other benefits. Receiving generous social welfare benefits affects the incentive of refugees to seek employment.

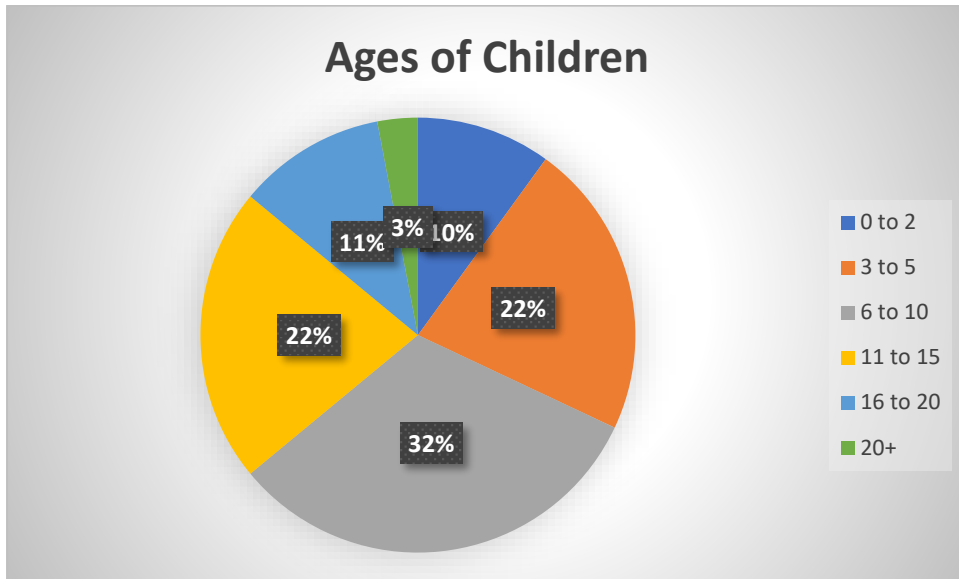


Table 6: Free pre-school is available for the 22% of 3–5-year-olds in the group. The largest group of 32% are primary school aged children which impacts school places in the towns where they reside, while the next biggest group at 22% are those attending secondary school. The 11% within the 16-20 years age bracket are the group under the most pressure as they arrived at a time when they had to sit state exams imminently, or navigate their way into third-level education, the workforce of social welfare.

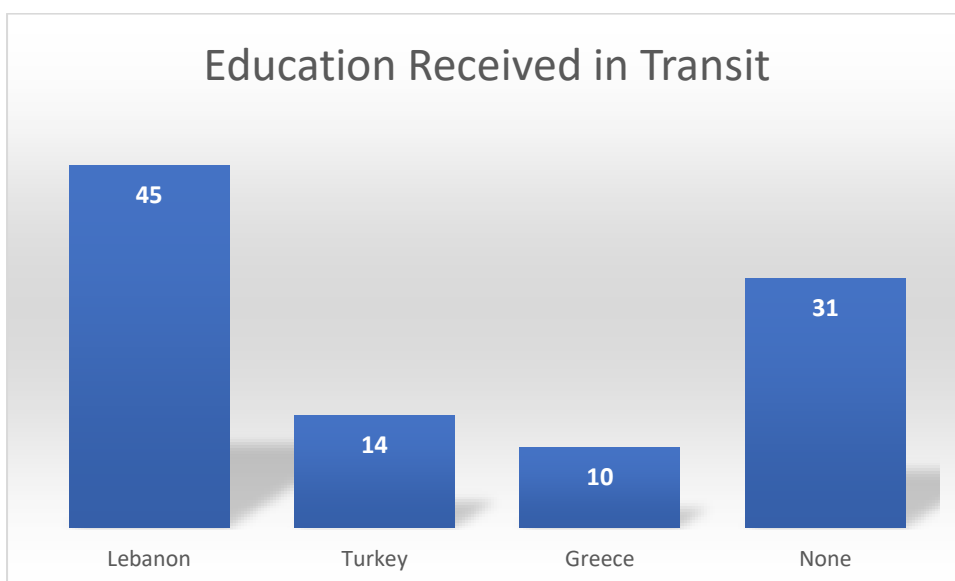


Table 7: 45% of those interviewed received education in Lebanon while 24% had schooling in Turkey and Greece. The education in these countries was often non-structured in makeshift classes which tended to be overcrowded. Almost one third of those interviewed received no education on their journey from Syria to Ireland. This gap in education has major repercussions for the schools and staff where they eventually settle and more pertinently for the students themselves, who not only have missed school but have to navigate their new school in a different language and culture.

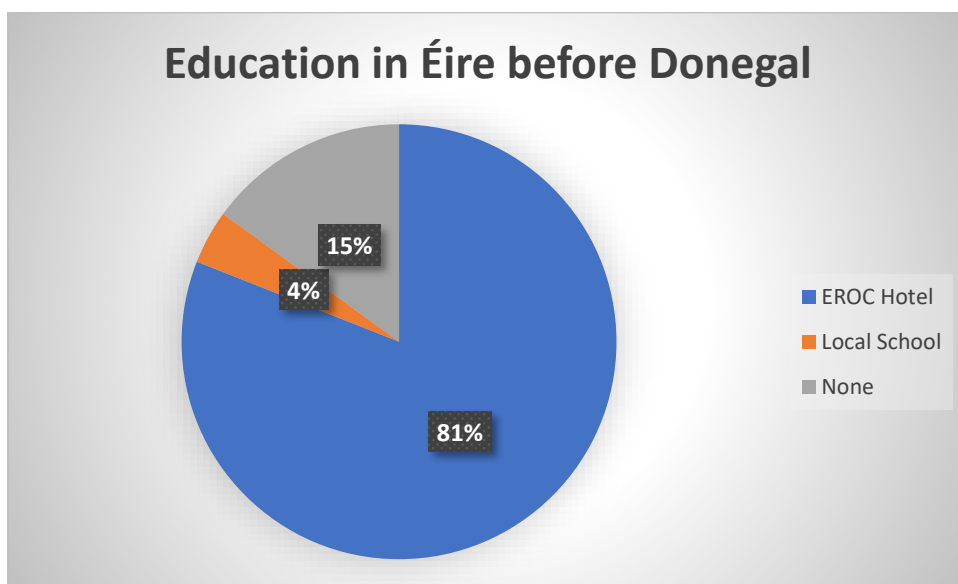


Table 8: The majority of children received education in the EROCs when they first arrived in Ireland. This focused mainly on learning English as opposed to the formal curriculum. With limited places in local schools and the likelihood of the refugees moving on to their permanent residences with 6 months, only 4% had the benefit of going to school, while 15% didn't go to school. This figure includes 10% of children who are aged 0-2 years.

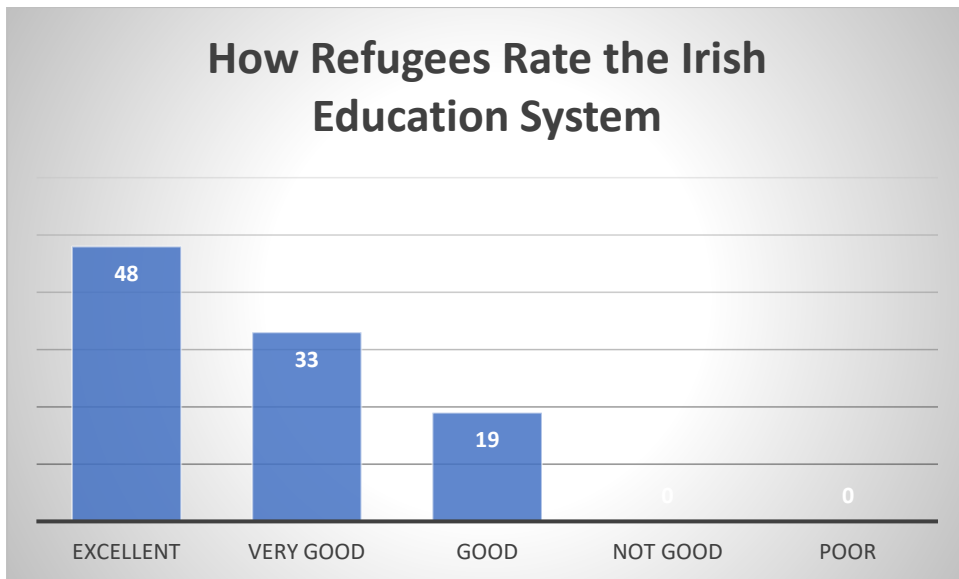


Table 9: 100% of those who completed the survey gave positive feedback on how they rate the education system in Ireland.

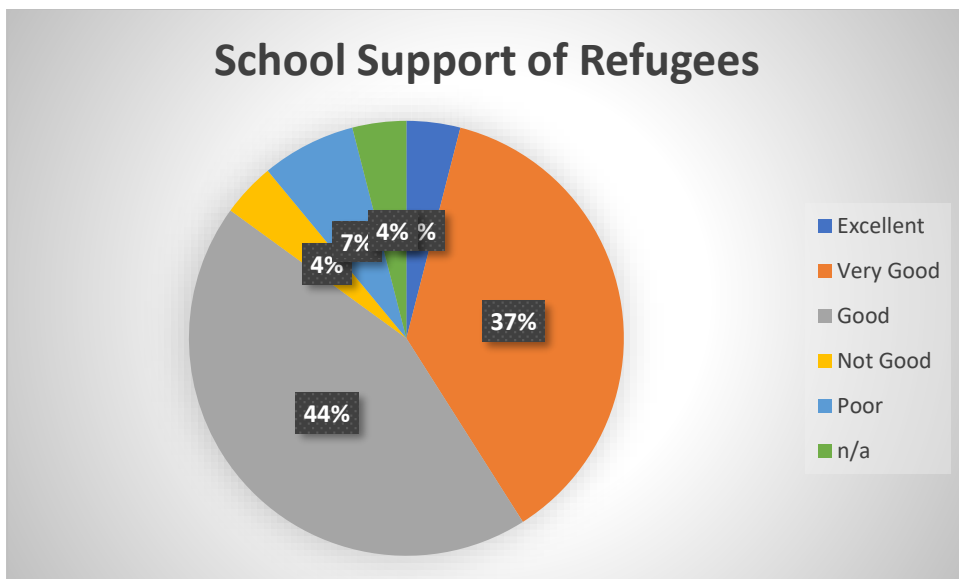


Table 10: Overall there was a positive response to how the refugees felt they were supported in school with 85% claiming that the support was good, very good or excellent. Those who felt the support was Not Good (4%) or Poor (7%) specifically referenced Lockdown as a time where they felt more could have been done. From the perspective of the refugees, it is clear that policy and practice are in union.

To summarise, the data gathered from the graphs illustrate that the majority of the refugees now living in Donegal left Syria between 2012 – 2013. They endured on average a six-year journey before finally settling in Ireland. They spent time in refugee camps and other accommodation in Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece, where they had minimal formal education. On arrival in Ireland, they were all placed in EROCs for approximately six months where they received some education which focused mainly on developing their English language skills, after which they were placed in permanent homes in Donegal. The combination of data from the graphs highlights how long the children were out of formal education on the different parts of their journey. Of the 49 families, the majority are primary school aged children. The Findings in Part 2 will analyse the ease at which primary aged children settle into school compared to the secondary aged students. There has been a very positive response about the support received from the education system in Ireland, although it should be noted that some families were disillusioned with the schools' response during Covid, feeling that more could have been done to support their children. The graphs offer valuable data as to the age, language proficiency, educational gap, and academic level that the cohort of Syrian children resettling in Donegal arrived with.

4.5: Findings – Phase Two: Interviews

The following section draws on the key themes which emerged from interviews conducted with participants and are used to answer the research questions posed. The themes are categorised into (A) Structural Challenges & Progress and (B) Cultural Challenges & Progress. This chapter will focus on the structural challenges while Chapter 5 will concentrate on the cultural challenges. As detailed in Chapter 3 (3.3.6), the interviews took place both in person and virtually, and lasted between 0.5 – 1.5 hours. Sample questions can be viewed in Appendices 4, 5 and 6. Transcriptions of the interviews are also available in the Appendices. The line number corresponding to quotes from the transcriptions is highlighted in red brackets in the body of the text.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

4.5.1: What role did the Refugee Resettlement Programme (RRP) play?

In 2015, as part of Ireland's response to the migration crisis, the Government established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). Through this programme, the Government committed to accept up to 4,000 people into Ireland. A network of Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) were established for the initial reception of those arriving under the relocation programme. All 49 families in Donegal spent time in EROCs before being permanently resettled in Donegal. Their initial accommodation ranged from hotels, hostels, caravans and Mosney Centre where efforts to acclimatise and integrate them began immediately. An EROC employee describes the preliminary orientation format for incoming refugees.

“Translators would come in and explain the system, the County Council, Brexit, History of Ireland, Leo Varadkar (Taoiseach) being gay, social norms...unmarried mothers being acceptable etc. (114) A Community Room was established with an open-ended remit in operation for 9 months before Covid hit. (20) The format was informal education, socialisation and filling in the gaps’ (40) (Aoibheann, EROC)

Direct provision centres were established by the RIA throughout the country, predominantly in the south. From quality of accommodation, food, integration and educational provision, life in the EROCs varied widely. This too could be said of the refugees as one EROC worker attested to.

‘They come with varying socio-economic backgrounds...they’re refugees but they don’t have much else in common, except that they are very resilient. (71) They come in with widely varying levels of English. Many children have never been to school before coming to Ireland. They have no concept of how to hold a pencil at 8/9 years old.’ (66) (Aoibheann, EROC)

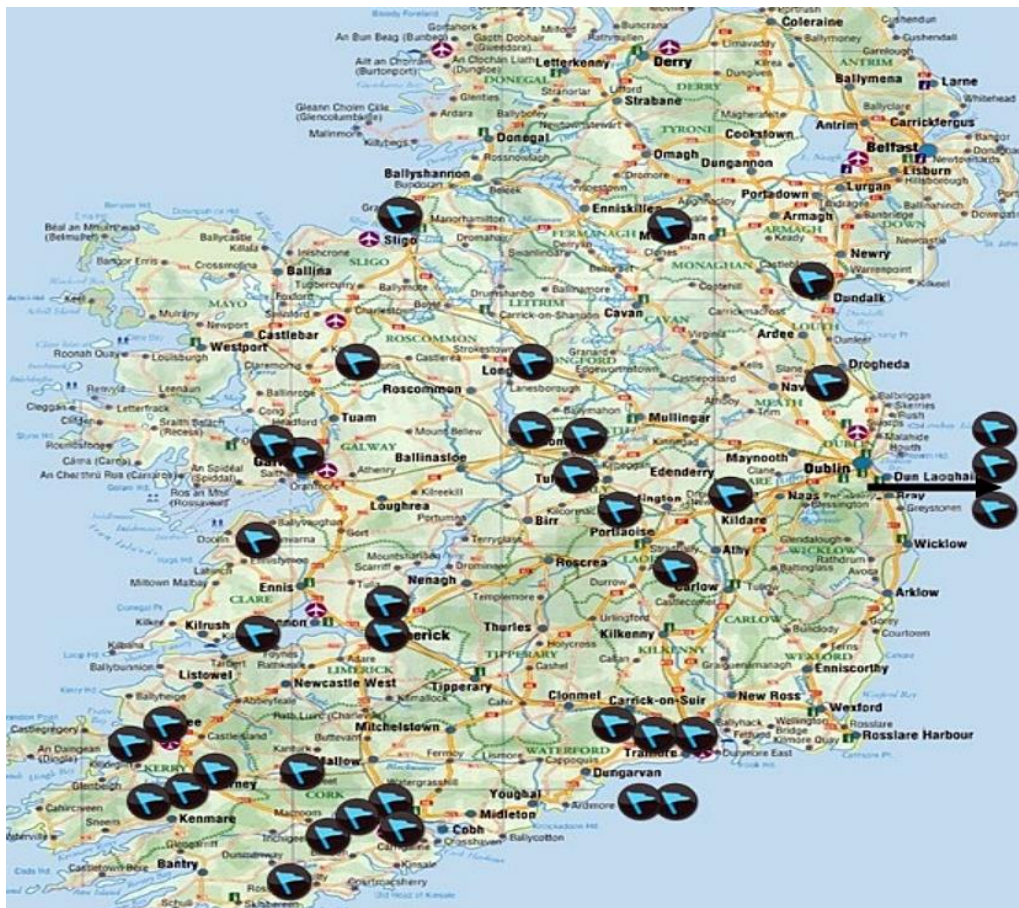


Figure 5: Map of Direct Provision Centres in Ireland 2018

Time spent in EROCs ranged from 2 weeks to 14 months, although it is not uncommon for refugees to spend years in EROCs before being resettled. Many economic and

cultural issues played a part in this. The longer they stay in Direct Provision, the bigger the impact this had on their education, language development and integration. An EROC worker highlighted the difficulties surrounding getting placed. *'Refugees could be in for a few weeks, others stay for 2-3 years (557) due to complications with mobility, disability, sizes of families and housing shortages.(559) Also, there might be a complex family needs, so they need to be near a hospital.'* (266) (Aoibheann, EROC)

As part of the RRP, Resettlement Officers and Intercultural Support Workers were employed to be at the disposal of the refugees for all their immediate needs for one year. The primary role of the Resettlement Officer and Intercultural Support Worker is to close the gap between the Syrian community that was going to be established within the Irish community, liaise with the interagency groups, and help to settle the refugees. This was the first time this had been implemented in Donegal. The remit was exhaustive, ever-changing, and constantly demanding as everyone tried to establish their role. With the volume of people coming into the country and the imminent need for them to be placed and organised, a lack of training became evident within the human resources.

'The people who were working on this (programme) originally, they were given a lot of training. (188) I didn't have much time to train but I was highly supervised by my supervisor who I would say in a community work guru. She was micromanaging me at first until I started getting the gist. (191) If I were lucky, we would have had one or two weeks' notice of families coming. (330) There was never one family coming, The minimum number of families coming was five. (333) It was a very busy time.'(341)
(Eman, Intercultural Worker)

The RRP mirrored the Canadian model of refugee resettlement, which lasts three years. It endeavoured to provide fully furnished accommodation, translation, and guidance to set everything up- GP, schools, bank accounts, PPS number, social welfare etc. Although it wasn't mandatory, the resettlement officer and intercultural worker were available 24/ 7 for one year. *'When we first arrived here, we arrived to the council and there was a lot of people there and they were the ones who organised everything. There was a woman*

who looked after us for a year. (122) She went to the school with us and told them that we had just come new and we needed more help... everyone was so friendly.’(126)

On arrival at school in Donegal, the resettlement worker helped organise everything, took the children to school, explained to staff what they needed, organised books etc.’ (Amal, Refugee)

Whilst this was an important bridge for the Syrian refugees, at times the staff found this challenging. Some felt that the refugees relied too much on the assistance been offered to them and were reluctant to do simple tasks of their own accord.

‘They definitely have taken advantage. (72) Regardless of what I was doing, if I was sick or not. Even on my birthday I got a call from a guy because there was a beehive outside his house. The guy was yelling at me to go and get the County Council to remove some bees from outside his front door because he was worried that his children might get bitten.’ (75)

‘It created a lot of dependency problems for us. People who have made it all the way here, you have to understand, they are resilient, but at the same time, they’re not too slow. Some of them might pretend that they can’t do anything, but that’s only to get you to do the work for them.’ (81)
(Eman Intercultural Worker)

One of the objectives of this research was to determine the challenges of the refugees and those hosting them. Teething problems became evident on both sides in the infancy of the RRP. Frustrations arose with the lack of certain resources. Resources that were available became limited due to the lack of translators who were able to assist refugees through the process of using them. There is an abject dearth of Arabic translators throughout the county which led to dissatisfaction and inefficiency.

‘There was a lot of frustration at the lack of resources. For example, if they are going to the doctor, that all has to be booked in advance and you have to make sure that you can get a translator on the phone at the right time so that you can speak to your doctor... that’s ridiculous. (391) Even

if translators were available 9-5pm Monday to Friday - you shouldn't have to book ahead, because what if they're stuck if there is an emergency. It's a national phonenumber that they have to book in advance. I don't think it's a localised thing at all.(398) The doctor has to organise it then. They have to ring the doctor, then the doctor has to try and get a translator on the phone and then try and do your appointment.' (402)
(Sarah, Befriender)

This highlights the lack of planning and foresight in putting sufficient structures in place for public services prior to the arrival of the refugees. The lack of Arabic speaking translators led to unnecessary bureaucracy which was overwhelming to deal with in such a short space of time. All adult participants conceded that one year for the Refugee Resettlement Programme was not sufficient to settle the refugees and adequately equip them with the tools they needed to fully integrate into society and to thrive. Whilst the Irish social welfare system in Ireland is generous, there seemed to lack equilibrium between giving them enough and giving them too much.

'I would say one year refugee programme is not sufficient ...A year is not enough to learn a language...and understand the culture to move freely around....I would say probably around three years.' (337)

'Most families that I spoke to who were in different camps in different countries, said that the Irish government was the best so far to deal with because they got proper homes, they got proper wages to go out and feed the kids....' (330) (Farah, Translator)

Whilst the benefits of safety and security gave peace of mind to the refugees, it is evident as per the testimony of the intercultural worker Eman (previous page) that the refugees were fully aware of how generous the government benefits in Ireland are and as reported by Hamid (refugee), they didn't have to work very hard to get them.

'Life here is too easy because they give you money for living and you can start with any job, and you can open any work . The difference between Ireland and Syria is freedom. Here there is no killing. The life is very, very nice compared to Syria... we have to bring my sisters here.' (216)

Apart from the RRP being extended from one to three years, one Intercultural Worker believes that a longer-term vision should be embedded within the programme, one that will be mutually beneficial for both the refugees and the host society. Eman made the following statements:

'What they (government) got right is that they started the RRP. They allowed the refugees to come here because to be honest, their life has changed drastically since the second they landed here. Their life has become so much better even if they don't know it yet, they will find out, they will know.' (208)

'They should make it be mandatory to involve them in more programmes that will lead in the end to integration and these programmes will bring them together not just as refugees, but also look at them as people who are settled here and try to integrate them based on their hobbies, their skills, education, age, their abilities or disabilities and just get them mandatorily involved ...because I'm afraid they're just going to stay at home and mingle amongst each other, rely on their children to translate for them and just not progress'. (222).

'They are all very capable of working. You have to understand that before they came to Ireland, they spent years in places like Greece and Turkey where they weren't given any social welfare money. They had to provide for their families, they had to work 12 hours a day, but when they came here, they sat down and rested and they became comfortable not working.' (231)

This ideal would ensure that the social welfare system was not overburdened indefinitely as people would be able to support themselves. Furthermore, by entering the workforce, integration and language skills would follow more organically.

SUMMARY

The Irish government provided a well organised programme of support to assist with the settling in phase for the refugees. It is widely agreed that one year of the RRP was insufficient time to allow the refugees to develop the skills and acquire the tools needed to fully integrate in society.

4.5.2: The Nuances of Housing and Living Conditions for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The issue of housing is an important one as it has an impact on education depending on how long a refugee spends in an EROC or Direct Provision. Where in the country they are placed, in rural or urban areas, in houses, flats or other accommodation affects the decision of what schools the children will attend. Government policy ensures housing will be provided but the refugees have no say as to what that specific accommodation entails and can have both positive and negative ramifications. This resonates with Maslow's (1943) theory referred to in Chapter 2, that having a safe place to live as opposed to constantly moving from pillar to post directly affects how one might prioritise their learning experience.

There are two options for accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers in Donegal. Those with refugee status were placed in houses in seven areas throughout the county. With populations ranging from 1400 (Moville) to 17,500 (Letterkenny), the areas vary from rural village to large town. The 49 families all have own-door accommodation and live predominantly in estates. As mentioned previously, plans to house 100 refugees in the Caiseal Mara Hotel in Moville were thwarted after an arson attack in November 2018 where some locals torched the hotel, the general feeling being that in a village of 1400 people, 100 refugees were too many. Resources and infrastructure weren't available. The handful of refugees that are currently based there live independently in decent accommodation. A prominent issue is the lack of public transport leaving refugees isolated from other Syrian families particularly for the first year or so before they can purchase a car. Lucy (EWO) described how challenging the logistics were: *'They were all landed into various places. A lot of the families were split up. The families*

were just taken out and slotted into rural Donegal...there you go and that was it; that was very challenging.' (120)

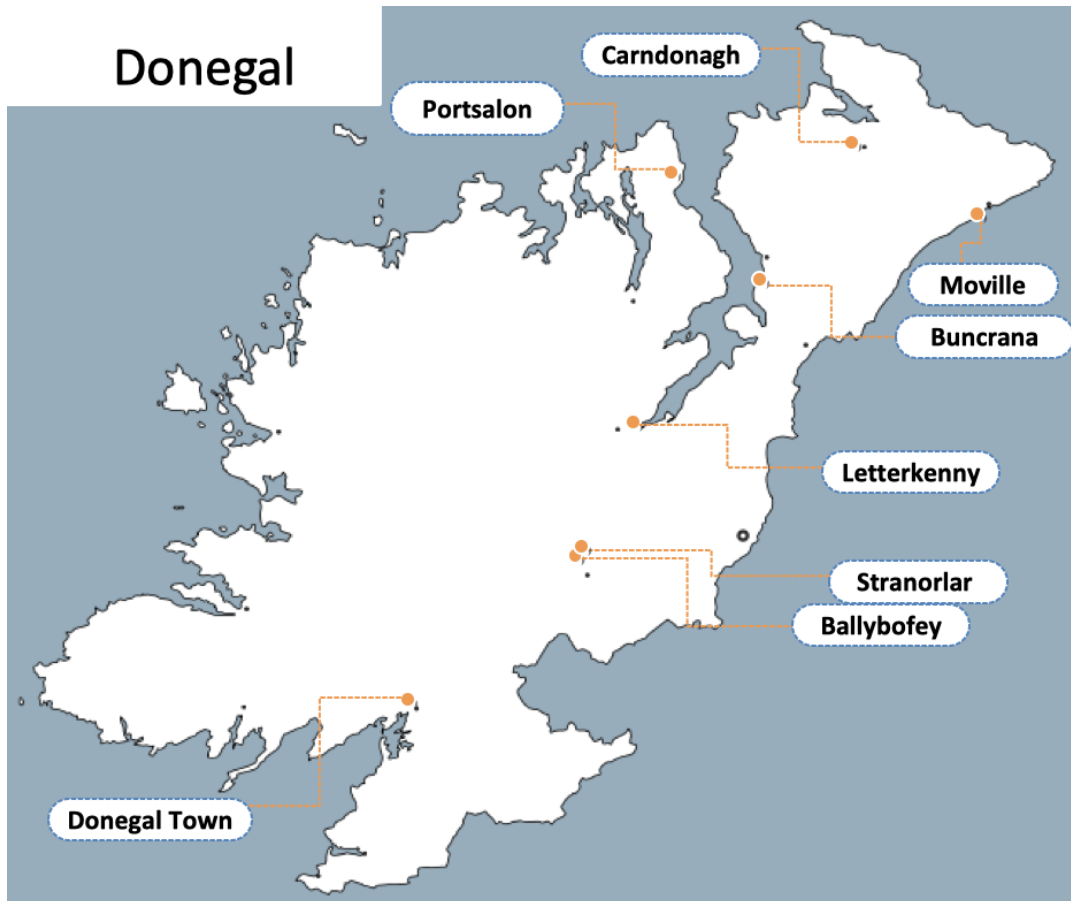


Figure 6: Areas in Donegal where Refugees are living

Mehta (2021) claimed that accommodation for asylum seekers in Ireland as '*inhuman, degrading and illegal by human rights groups*' reporting people living in cramped conditions, sharing rooms with strangers, prison-like rules and sexual assault'. Despite bad press and large discrepancies in relation to accommodation of Protection seekers, particularly those living in Direct Provision, it should be noted that the 59 families living in Donegal currently reside in a newly refurbished, high standard block of flats in Letterkenny. The centre is managed by Bridgestock Care. Supports and service provision for residents is provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Department of Health and HSE, the Department of Education and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

In July 2019, the first 16 asylum seekers in Donegal were placed in a guesthouse in Portsalon, a rural seaside village over 30km away. Isolated, with almost non-existent access to public transport, integration and employment prospects were bleak. In March 2021, they were finally rehoused in a new Bridgestock facility in Letterkenny. Bridgestock, a privately owned and state-funded company, is one of the largest companies involved in the 'direct provision' sector.

Fashioned as an upgraded version of Direct Provision, Independent Own Door Living Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers opened in March 2021. The European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 proposed the development of a new model of accommodation which focused on more independent living. The new centre in Letterkenny is an ideal working example of this model. Each apartment has its own entrance, bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen and living room. Notably residents can cook their own meals and do not have to rely on the restrictive option of scheduled meals in dining halls. Laundry facilities are contained in each apartment giving much needed independence. Communal facilities include a shop, library, games room, car park and playground. Each family is given a weekly points card depending on the number and age of family members. This can be used in the on-site shop to purchase food and other necessities.

These steps foster independence and a sense of autonomy for protection applicants. When they get refugee status, they must leave the accommodation and link in with the local county council and housing charities to secure alternative accommodation the same way an Irish citizen would. According to the general manager of the centre in Letterkenny, *'the asylum seekers are integrating very well into the community with approximately half of the families in local employment.'* Integration is integral as Bridgestock, and those running the centre are under contractual obligation to be proactive in aiding integration. A Friends of the Centre committee has been established who have diligently networked to recruit as many local organisations as possible to come into the centre to give workshops, offer advice and establish how they might help them, but also to find out what they can offer. The asylum seekers who are of school age attend local schools in Letterkenny.

Less than a week before the Bridgestock building opened its' doors to welcome up to 60 families, Roderic O'Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and

Youth issued a White Paper in which he anticipated that all Direct Provision Centres would close by the end of 2024. The Direct Provision system is overseen by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), a body of the Department of Justice and Equality. The majority of the centres around the country are privately owned and operated, and the standards of accommodation and living conditions vary widely. The White Paper committed to a remodelled approach on housing asylum seekers and refugees with equality and dignity at the core. Acknowledging the shortcomings of the system which *'has proven expensive, inefficient, and ill-equipped to respond to shifting trends in international migration'* the government endeavours to create a not-for-profit approach based on equality, dignity, and a strong focus on integration at the core. Whilst this appeared to be a promising step forward, the decision to house the new asylum seekers was met with resistance from some local councillors who claim that although Letterkenny is a welcoming town, they were concerned about the prospect of *'350 people living in 60 2/3-bedroom flats ... without due consideration for schools, healthcare and welfare of everyone involved and affected by this plan.'* (Donegal Daily, 2020) Whilst this is a newspaper report, which can be biased, as is evidenced by the data in this chapter, this prediction proved its relevance in relation to the concerns about insufficient resources.

Two important issues led to the publication of the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision in 2021: more dignified living conditions and a more cost-effective approach to housing those in Direct Provision. Whilst there has been a definitive move to improve living conditions for asylum seekers, there has been much criticism about the profits made by private companies who provide direct provision. Deegan (2021) reports that

'Last year Bridgestock Care Ltd received €11.09m (including VAT) in State fees accommodating asylum seekers in five properties with a combined capacity for 1023. It recorded operating profits of €2.39 million before interest charges.... The increase in profits at firms in the sector follows spending on Direct Provision soaring by 41% from €129.4 million in 2019 to €183 million in 2020.'

The article continues to highlight the lack of transparency in the profits made as those who run Direct Provision centres establish them as unlimited companies therefore are

not obliged to publish their accounts. *'A number of the major operators in the sector have unlimited status and they are not required to file annual accounts at the Companies Office.'*

In the midst of a nationwide housing crisis, schools struggling to get enough staff and resources to help with the refugees, and hospitals and other public sectors in the same position, this does not bode well.

SUMMARY

Overall, the provision of housing for refugees and asylum seekers in Donegal is excellent. Public transport can be an issue for those in more rural areas. Too much government expenditure is still being spent on Direct Provision.

4.5.3: Host Schools in Donegal from Various Perspectives

Education is a central aspect of the structural challenges facing the various communities. This section explores how refugees are placed in schools, the resources available for staff and pupils, the training and guidance given to staff and what the reality of integrating the refugees into the school system in Donegal was for both refugees, staff, and local pupils. Whilst policies were in place, the following data reveals that for some issues, it was insufficient, and the policy that was already established did not always consolidate with practice.

4.5.3 (i): School Placements and Overcrowding

The role of the Educational Welfare Officer includes overseeing school attendance and finding alternative schools for children who have been expelled. With the arrival of the refugees in Donegal, an interagency group was established by the Department of Justice & Donegal County Council to take on a remit to support the refugees. Along with her regular duties, the EWO now had to negotiate school places, meet with the refugee families, go through the enrolment form with the families with an interpreter, or one of

the resettlement workers, go through all of the needs of the child in relation to education, then secure the school places and arrange meetings in the school to introduce the families and the children to the schools as well. The remit had broadened significantly without any guidelines on how to approach this. Lucy (EWO) recalls the chaotic situation in Donegal.

'No guidelines! To be brutally honest, it was very ad hoc. We weren't really made aware of this at all. I'm based in North Donegal and know there's a lack of school places in Letterkenny anyway. Suddenly, there's all these families being placed because there may be housing, but there weren't enough school places. There was a huge lack of communication and absolutely no training. No, absolutely zero.' (43)

It was all quite cloak and dagger, and nobody was letting people know. When I probed into it a bit more, it was that they (the authorities) didn't want negative publicity. They didn't want racism and they didn't want communities to react negatively. I suppose hindsight is a great thing but what I said to Donegal County Council and the Dept. of Justice at the time was that we want these young people and families to integrate into the community. You haven't told the community they're coming, so already you've got people's back up. Schools were quite annoyed; families may have arrived on a Monday, and I was trying to secure school places for the kids for Wednesday.' (64)

This highlights a lack of foresight or consideration by the authorities when placing the refugees, leading to highly stressful situations for the EWO and school staff who felt ill prepared and under extreme pressure. As per the Migrant Integration Strategy (2017), 'The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will be enacted', if schools had places available and they were approached to take refugees, they were obliged to take them. In Letterkenny with the large influx of students, it was not always possible to place siblings in the same school due to large numbers, hence they became separated. For many schools, it was their first-time having children of a different ethnic minority.

'The schools here are very crowded. There is a waiting list even for the locals and not everyone is accepted whenever they apply due to

overcrowding issues. (263) To be honest there was an issue with placing the families in certain areas (out of the towns which were overcrowded). Certain rural areas in Donegal are even known not to be super accepting of outsiders who are Irish. I'm just stating that if someone is from Syria and they're disadvantaged already, and marginalised and you bring them into a community that needs a lot of development itself, that maybe is not the best idea.' (286)

Schools across the county accepted between 1 and 12 Syrians into their classrooms in both primary and secondary. In all interviews with the refugee families, despite the challenges they faced, it was agreed that every school was incredibly welcoming.

'It was amazing; I had really beautiful friends and beautiful teachers who always supported me. If I wasn't there and they hadn't supported me, I don't think I'd be here now. I had a really good experience in school'
(162) (Nadia, Refugee)

'We are very happy with the school..., teachers, subjects and extra teacher support received.' (93) (Amal, Parent)

'This is something that I am a firm believer in. I think Ireland is the second best country in the world for children to grow up safe and happy. Every school I dealt with were absolutely brilliant and the staff were very pleasant to deal with.' (272) (Eman, Intercultural worker)

However, the issue of pre-school didn't seem to feature on the radar of any dialogue. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme provides early childhood care and education for pre-school age children in Ireland without cost. Children can start ECCE from 2 years and 8 months of age and continue until they transfer to primary school, but many of the refugees weren't aware that this existed or could be availed of free of charge as noted by Sarah (Befriender)

'She just got a text saying they're only allowed in 3 days a week. I thought 'that's not true, you should get five days', but she just accepts it. There definitely a lack of communication in the pre-school area. This is the easiest age to integrate therefore would make the transition much easier if the two-year free pre-school facility is availed of.' (203)

Pre-school lacked priority as the Educational Welfare Officer commented on the considerable challenge of placing refugee children in suitable primary and secondary schools in Donegal at short notice. The schools in Letterkenny where the majority of refugees are resident *'are bursting at the seams and often unable to accommodate siblings in the same school due to class sizes'*. This made for difficult dialogue between parents and headteachers who had to pick and choose which family members they could and could not accommodate.

John Boyle, (2020) General Secretary of the INTO issued a scathing attack on the government over this issue claiming that *'Ireland is home to supersized classes, the largest in the EU. Almost one in five of our primary schoolchildren are in supersized classes of 30 or more having 20% of pupils in classes of 30 or more is a national embarrassment.'*

Aisling (headteacher) reported that *'we have between 30 and 33 in every class.'* (201) This highlights the reality that no matter how hard school staff worked and how many extra hours they committed to, there are extremely significant resource implications, making it difficult to give the academic and emotional support necessary to the refugees. Staff began to buckle under the pressure of the chaos and felt they had nowhere to turn to support especially for essential EAL support.

'I think the whole system in relation to education is very low priority ...for the Department of Education, it's like 'oh the schools will sort it out themselves or the Educational Welfare Officer will.' (725)

'Basically, as far as I'm concerned, they've provided no support to us whatsoever – absolutely none. The only small thing they did was grant language assistance for 12.5 hours a week.' (730)

'We need a full time EAL teacher because the difficulty we currently have is teacher only works 2.5 days a week,... so Thursday and Friday they don't have anything.' (735) (Ben, Headteacher)

Scholl staff felt that there was no conjoined thinking, or medium to long term plan about what would happen the refugees. Apart from the academic needs, there was no guidelines about integration, particularly in rural areas that had no experience of this.

'I think there has to be a sit-down proper plan about how this happens. The situation that we have in Stranorlar where we were asked to take 12 children was not acceptable, but I accepted them because of the situation they were in, and it wasn't their fault. It was the fault of the Irish government and the Department of Justice for creating the situation. They are literally plonked in Stranorlar and hoped that they survived. I think there has to be a long-term plan ...for how they're integrated into society, what provisions are made....and that basically people are there to support them.' (762) (Ben, Headteacher)

4.5.3 (ii): Staff Training

A recurring theme that emerged during the interviews was the issue of staff training. Many staff expressed concern over their perceived inability to do their best for the refugee students due to lack of preparation and lack of experience with this unique type of migrant. The reality is that while some of the town schools have quite diverse student bodies where intercultural training and diversity is a natural part of the fabric of the school, many of the small village schools may not have a single student of colour or who is non-Christian. All schools have an inclusion policy but it's easy to include everyone when everybody is the same colour, ethnicity and speaks the same language. There is no policy for mandatory training in diversity, anti-racism, or cultural awareness. Teachers can sign up for CPD courses and webinars, which in more recent times are becoming more geared towards the abovementioned themes, but it is not compulsory.

'Predominantly, it's figuring it out yourself. I think as a school we are quite proactive which was a great benefit and support to families when they arrived (112)but in terms of what was offered to us, there was absolutely nothing; you were really just left on your own to figure it out.' (119) (Aisling, Headteacher)

Headteachers and teachers found the enrolment of refugees to the school to be both rewarding and challenging. With virtually no record of previous education, no assessments and the language deficit, coupled with the absence from school and trauma of war, there were so many aspects to deal with that went beyond a teacher's normal remit.

All teaching staff and other interagency staff reiterated their sense of feeling overwhelmed at what was placed before them at such short notice. While they welcomed the refugees and knew it would be a learning experience for everyone, feelings of isolation, inadequacy, having nowhere to turn and being out of their depth were common amongst the participants.

'Initially when we first met them on the very first day...literally about 40 people arrived on a bus to our little, small school and I honestly felt a bit intimidated. I don't know why I felt like that but the whole family came. Literally the whole clan arrived on a bus outside our school(177) We had a resettlement worker there who did all the translating for us...we wouldn't have survived without somebody doing that.' (180)

I think it has challenged the teachers in how to include children like that in the mainstream classroom. (819) Sometimes I think the teachers feel a bit frustrated and they think they could do much better with them and give them more one-to-one but being realistic, it doesn't always happen.' (823) (Ben, Headteacher)

The lack of consultation for staff, particularly headteachers proved to be a contentious issue. Frustrations were vented about the assumption of the government that just because they had accepted these people into the country, all other systems and protocols would just fall into place without any warning, guidance, or conversation with the relevant parties.

'I got absolutely no notice. I saw on the local radio website...that children were among the group of asylum seekers that were being placed locally. I started making phone calls calling TUSLA and the HSE to see if anybody had any information, which they had not. (13) The NEPS psychologist, a young girl, did come to the school and more or less said, because I have

been working for 32 years, 'You would know more about this than me.'

(29)

'What I found was that there was no go-to person if I had a problem. I felt that I was very much on my own. (132) (Hannah, Headteacher)

The lack of forward planning from the administrators in the RIA in Dublin caused intense pressure for those on the receiving end. The lack of knowledge about the locality to which the refugees were being sent was remarkable. The availability of housing superseded all other factors for suitable accommodation as highlighted by Hannah (Headteacher).

'This particular family arrived in Ireland on St. Patricks Day, stayed in a hotel, then was put on a bus to Donegal from Dublin and ended up in Portsalon. (45) She was in the school for a few weeks when somebody from Bus Eireann came out to organise transport for her school, even though she lives directly across the way from the school. The authorities didn't seem to have any comprehension about the locality, the school or where they were sending them. They were just sent there, and it would all work itself out.' They didn't seem to think that they should take it upon themselves to contact me or the Board of Management or the Chairperson.' (143) (Hannah, Headteacher)

This was in sharp contrast to the hugely diverse schools in the main town of Letterkenny. They had more immediate resources and the staff had more experience due to the demographic of their school. 'In our school population we have 33 different mother tongues and even more nationalities, so EAL is well established.' (23) (Mary, EAL)

These testimonies indicate that overall, it was the luck of the draw where refugees were placed. No planning was done with their specific needs in mind. The priority of the authorities in Dublin was to get them placed in a house, then enrol them in whatever nearby school could accept them. Lack of notice of arrival, background information and staff training added stress and anxiety to staff. Lack of planning meant siblings could not be guaranteed the same school. Whilst refugees were made feel welcome, a period of chaos and turmoil ensued for staff.

4.5.3 (iii) Staff Support and Guidance

One of the biggest issues voiced by teachers and school staff was the lack of support and follow up. It was collectively agreed that as soon as the refugees were placed in schools, staff were left to get on with it without help, guidance or resources. Left to their own devices to navigate the language, culture and integration, they turned to the Educational Welfare Officer for advice, who in turn, was left equally in the dark, overwhelmed with the workload and operating outside her remit. Concern grew not just for the refugee children but also for the local children whose education was becoming diluted by the sheer numbers in classrooms as is explained by Lucy (EWO) in the following statements:

'Once the children are enrolled and settled again, those children are treated like any Irish citizen. We don't have a remit to be following up unless there's an issue. In practice that didn't happen. Schools were constantly ringing me.....schools were so so frustrated saying 'You've placed these children here, now what are you going to offer us?' ...but we're not the DoE so we can't offer you anything. It was the phone calls and the conversations around that which was very time consuming' (87)

'For myself, it was the lack of communication and lack of time. It's not that we were suddenly taken out of our current role ... you were trying to deliver the best service for these families while also being mindful of the 40 or 50 other families that you had to deal with.... People were working extremely hard; clocking off time and starting time didn't even come into it... it was just difficult to manage. (103)

The biggest difficulty for me was the lack of school commissive ... that negotiation with schools and then schools going above and beyond and placing children in classes of 34 and 35 just to get bums on seats - that was nightmarish. (108)

The population of Letterkenny has increased but schools haven't caught up or the Department don't seem to recognise that. Priority was to get them housed.' (113)

The Education Bill (2016) proposed in the Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) was indeed enacted by the government, but the EWO and school staff were left overburdened, feeling incompetent and ill-equipped for the task of following through on this law.

4.5.3 (iv) Resources

There is no policy relating to resources specifically relating to refugees. They were entitled to everything an Irish child was entitled to; no more, no less, irrespective of their refugee status and all that that entails. One staff member echoed the sentiments of her colleagues in claiming that it was qualified and experienced human resources that was lacking in schools as opposed to physical resources. With classrooms bursting at the seams and teachers buckling under the pressure of having so many pupils, they expressed the urgent need for more staff. The needs of the refugees were so great, their language skills so limited and their culture so different that they needed more concentrated periods of time with the teacher, which was just not possible as attested to by Aisling (Headteacher)

'We never have enough resources, of course we don't. We need more people, that's what these children need. We can buy all the fancy books and programs and laptops in the world. That's what became clear during this whole Covid experience. I could have given them state of the art iPads; it doesn't matter. They need a teacher, an adult there beside them, helping them – that's the most important resource.' (394)

No extra resources in terms of staff, money, counselling, or school equipment were made available to schools when the refugees arrived. In a classic example of equality but not equity, they were given the same as the local children, nothing more, nothing less; no concessions were made for them. Management had to manage and adjust their budgets and SEN/SET allowances to accommodate the new arrivals. If there was a large influx of refugees who needed EAL, more hours would be given, not because they were

refugees, but because they needed EAL. Aisling (headteacher) mentioned that with reference to her school budget there is nothing specific given to accommodate the refugees but *'Whatever we do is for all families.'* (466)

In the fullness of time, when staff and students got used to their new routine, despite the continued chaos, the benefits of having the refugees became evident. The speed at which the younger children commanded the language was a source of pride and accomplishment for everyone. The inhibitions of the younger children were in contrast to the secondary school pupils who found integration and language acquisition more challenging. They had also missed a more significant amount of schooling and remained conscious of the fact.

'99% of the schools are fabulous. They just absorbed and welcomed these wee people and provided everything they possibly could. A lot of the schools didn't have English language support or teachers, so they were fighting constantly with the Department to get additional EAL teachers. While waiting, they did what they could, and they pulled resources... They were fabulous even without the support which should have been allocated by the Department of Education.' (153) (Lucy, EWO)

Headteachers commented on the efforts made by some primary schools to aid integration not just of the children but the families and noted how enthusiastic the children were to learn.

'Highly motivated... once you get over the initial barrier and children start to relax and feel a little bit more comfortable, then they just want to learn, they just want to be there. Their attendance has been brilliant, and the families have engaged so well.' (206)

'We have a lot of hands-on activities; we do Family Fridays and invite the families in to get involved.' (212) (Aisling, Headteacher)

It is evident that Strategy 34 of The Migrant Integration Strategy *'Schools will be encouraged to support migrant parents' participation in the school life of their children'* (p26) is being implemented by schools irrespective of government intervention or not.

4.5.3 (v) Cloak and Dagger V Confidentiality

Whilst plausible that refugees arrived at schools without formal documentation and school records due to the war, school staff reported a 'cloak and dagger' approach to any personal information being given to schools. There was no policy or guidelines issued in this respect and it was left to the discretion of the authorities. Their inaction in giving sufficient notice and reasonable background information to school staff and public services led to considerable backlash.

Aisling (Headteacher) claimed that when they tried to elicit information about the refugees, she was told *'We weren't allowed to tell anyone that they were Syrian refugees. You were told that you were not allowed to disclose that information to your school community.'* (162) Staff were opposed to this attitude presented by the authorities as they felt it was detrimental to them being able to form a connection with the refugees. For example, they were unable to gauge if certain pupils were sad, traumatised or just introvert. They weren't expecting any more information that would be given about an Irish pupil's background but felt that in order to engage meaningfully with them and support them both academically and emotionally, more information was necessary. Aisling (Headteacher) explains how it was in her school:

'We weren't given any information on the children, we didn't know anything about them. The information that we found out about the children has happened as we built a relationship with families.' (134)
We had no documentation, no birth certs. (140)

'One child 'had never set foot inside a school building. He had never been in school, and we were never told that. (146) Can you imagine being put in that situation yourself and not knowing the language....He didn't have a clue what school was about. He couldn't read or write in his first language... I mean he didn't even know how to hold a pencil.' (150)

Furthermore, both primary and secondary school staff suggested that they felt that refugees should be able to speak proudly of their experiences and resilience. One primary headteacher in Letterkenny commented that whilst schools could not identify students as refugees due to data protection, the school community itself was well aware that the Syrians were refugees and that their experience should be addressed

sensitively and appropriately, but ultimately acknowledged. Speaking of this, the headteacher explained during interview:

'I understand the right to confidentiality, and that the Department is very clear that nobody is to know the children are refugees or about their history ... but part of me thinks that creates a stigma that nobody can talk about this really bad thing. The children themselves should be able to say, 'I'm from Syria and this is what happened to me.' (258) The reality is families are known in the school community. They're not stupid – everybody knows - It's like the elephant in the room.' (263) (Aisling)

Ben (Headteacher) argued that knowing little about the refugees allowed them to start on a clean slate yet hindered the teacher's ability to deal effectively and sensitively with any inevitable trauma issues that were commonplace with the refugees.

'I suppose there's two sides to it. I think sometimes the more information you give another teacher about a child, you kind of colour the teacher's perception of the child... it's easier if the teacher doesn't have a sort of skewed knowledge of them. (496)

'Specific trauma should be disclosed so that we can deal with it appropriately.' (503)

Overall, staff feel that, where reasonable, they would need at least the same access to information that they would have about local children so that they can respond and help them in their full capacity of the teacher's role as a caregiver and adult who is concerned for the welfare and progress of those in their charge. Lucy (EWO) argued that:

'I think it's not necessarily the community that needs to know, but I think certainly out of courtesy, the schools need to know....Do we have places?, Do we have resources? What can we actually offer? It certainly couldn't be a rehash of what happened, because that was really shocking... Schools, the hospital, GPs, childcare facilities need to know, so the services that provide the wraparound support can do their job effectively. The general population doesn't necessarily need to know.' (203)

The general consensus from school staff was that even though they recognised the importance of data protection for refugee students, the extent to which any background information was concealed hindered their ability to address the children holistically. There were blurred lines between refugees' academic ability and their mental state of mind which impeded the approaches taken by teachers and progress by refugee students. The next section will address the school experience from the refugee perspective which varies widely depending on the age and stage of the student. The challenges of the education gap are addressed, particularly for secondary school pupils.

4.5.3 (vi) Refugee Perceptions

Very few of the students who arrived from Syria had a 'normal' school experience. Towns and villages were bombed in the war, and inevitably schools were part of the casualties. Refugee students had not only missed out on schooling but had the trauma of losing a fundamental part of their childhood in the loss of the school building, the school yard, the school routine and school friends. The younger students adapted better as they had no memory or were too young to attend school in Syria, while the older ones took more time to be acculturated. Nadia, who fled from Idlib for Lebanon when she was eight years old at the beginning of the war, describes the challenges of her experiences as a refugee stating that:

'Because Syria was at war, my school was destroyed, so we didn't have any papers. I had no schooling initially. After maybe one year UNICEF people said that they would help to put us in school. So, we went to the school for the first time for 2 months, but the people used to bully us because I'm not from Lebanon, I'm from Syria. (35) The Lebanese would go in the morning until maybe four o'clock, then we, the refugees would go from around 2 o'clock until seven o'clock. The refugees did not go with

the Lebanese but it was all in the same school. When I came to Ireland, I had missed about 8 years of school.' (66)

Whilst living in the EROCs, attendance at school was not mandatory, but for those who did attend, the main focus was English. When the refugees began school properly in Donegal, the reality of school in a foreign country became more evident. In the EROCs, everyone was a refugee, and everyone spoke Arabic; now they were the minority and had a much heavier workload. Culture shock was inevitable as detailed by Hamid (Refugee).

'When I went to the school there (EROC), it was just for learning English, but when I arrived to Donegal, I did all the seven subjects...' (65)

'Everything was different to things in Syria ...I don't know what is H1, H2, H3 and I don't know what is higher level and ordinary level but I learned slowly.' (74) *'It's only me from Syria in the school and everyone likes me and I like them...I joined with some people in the school. I was sitting in the chair lonely, and one guy came to me to say, 'Can you join my team?'. I told him 'Yes'. Every day at lunchtime and break-time, I go with them.'* (79)

The Syrian War was all-consuming for the refugees who had to change and adapt every facet of their lives because of it. The journey and transition to life in Ireland was chaotic and unsettling. It took the children a period of adjustment to realise this was it, they weren't moving again. They were safe and could finally embrace a new life.

'At the start I was very scared to go to school. I was very scared to go anywhere...' (141) (Nour)

I never opened up about my story but I did tell them that I was from Syria, but I didn't tell them all of my story.' (147) (Fatima)

Mixed emotions were prevalent with refugee pupils. Overall, they were treated with great kindness but culturally and academically they were taking a lot on board. Although being a Muslim in a Christian school was not an issue for the host school and concessions were made to accommodate their faith, difficulties arose when they tried to make practice reality.

I went straight to 5th so I studied for two years (before the Leaving Cert). (108) It was super hard. I studied really hard. It wasn't fun because it was in Ramadan and I was fasting and my brain was not working because of no water or food. (112)

'The teachers they were so sweet and supportive. They used to love me so much because I was a really calm girl and they used to help me and push me a lot to learn. Sometimes I'd give up, I'd start to cry, and they just pushed me and they would tell me 'We're here to help you.' And it was amazing. I used to have a teacher and she was like my mother. (126)

'I cried a lot and was so sad, but they helped me through everything. One was like a mother to me. At first, I would go to the bathroom and cry because I couldn't understand anything but then it got better. Most girls were very kind and sweet, but some looked at me like 'what am I doing here?' 'When will you go back to your own country?' (184) 'How did you pass the exam, did you cheat?' (190)

'I went to religion class maybe once, but then I told them that I didn't want to do it because I am a Muslim... I used to sit in the canteen and just catch up with other study.' (139) (Nadia, Refugee)

One of the greatest challenges for secondary school pupils was having to sit state exams. Many were faced with sitting the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate within a year or two of arriving in Donegal. For an English-speaking student, this would be a daunting task, but for a non-English speaker, they were almost set up to fail, as described by an Arabic interpreter, Farah, who worked closely with the refugees.

'She was Leaving Cert Applied but it was absolutely horrendous. There was nothing to describe it. She was going to do her Leaving Cert but she was not entitled to an SNA to read her things. She wasn't entitled to anything. She didn't even have basic English. (284)

Due to the restrictions of Lockdown during the pandemic, students were offered the option to sit the state exams or have predicted grades. For those who had spent minimal time at school, neither option was beneficial and left school leavers in limbo, unsure of their options for third level or how to navigate their future plans for education or

employment. Hamid describes his experience as he chose the predicted grades option for his Leaving Certificate:

'In fifth year, I just went to school for two months, because I arrived to Donegal in December and the lockdown started in February.' (128)

'I got nothing, no extra support during Lockdown.' (144)

'Every subject is difficult; Mathematics, it's not too difficult because I didn't need the language as much but music is too hard... computer science, too hard because I don't speak English very well.' (148)

'After Leaving Cert, I really don't know what to do because I don't know how many points will be my score. I want to get 400 points. I want to ask you what university course can I do. Can you just give me an example?'

(161) I'd like to do engineering but if I don't get engineering, I have to go to the Irish Army or be a barber. I don't know what I have to do because I don't know what my points outcome will be.' (175)

The repercussions of only having one year support from the RRP are evident here. At one of the most important crossroads in a young person's life, no supports were put in place to ensure he was familiar with the system and knew what his options were following sitting seven exams that he was set up to fail. At a bewildering time, nobody was available to steer this teenager, who was eager to progress, get educated and become employed. Hamid's anticipated 400 points resulted in 176 points rendering him unable to join the engineering course he wanted. This is a danger spot where many can and do fall through the cracks of the system. It is at this juncture that refugees either become another social welfare statistic or become an asset to society through education or work. This is discussed in more detail in the next section, where the voices of refugees detail the challenges of bridging the inevitable educational gap that had emerged.

SUMMARY

Refugees were welcomed with open arm in schools. Many schools benefited from the added diversity of having refugees. Staff were very proactive; however no background information was given and refugees arrived with little notice. Classes

were overcrowded. Staff felt overwhelmed, under-resourced and had no training, advice or back up support. State exams for secondary school pupils were severely problematic. No extra support was given for refugees.

4.5.4: The Measure of the Education Gap – Bridged or Widened?

This segment examines both the challenges and progress of managing the education gap from both the refugees' perspective and that of the Irish staff helping them. This is complex in the sense that a gap exists from child to child and from school to school in every educational setting, but it is much more pronounced for refugees. Inconsistencies between policy and practice exist and are highlighted. This section underlines, not just the academic loss, but the loss of socialisation and the impact of the traumatic journeys on the refugees' ability to fully integrate into the education system and bridge the gap.

4.5.4 (i) The Refugee Perspective

Due to the frequent bombing of schools in Syria, many children didn't attend school in the years preceding their departure from the country. Paperwork, documentation, and assessment are almost non-existent. More pertinently, education is inconsistent and there are educational gaps for all pupils attending school in Ireland. A Syrian family reported that:

'When the airplanes threw bombs, everyone was afraid to go to school.

(51) 'They didn't go every day; maybe one day, two days, three days a month.' (53)

'We were on a break and the airplane came and bombed and all the classes went out of the class and into a big room, and then they sat there until all the parents came to collect their children.... All the airplanes kept

throwing bombs, maybe 200/ 300 people died on the same day. My son was just in school for 3 months. He was in first class.' (56)

Not being able to attend school in their own country marked the beginning of the education gap for the Syrian refugees. There was no plan, and no way of knowing when they would next go to school. The only plan was to get out of Syria as fast as possible. The priority was now to survive.

'We walked to Turkey and after 7 attempts we got there. There were lots of soldiers and police and we kept getting turned back. We spent just 2 or 3 nights there, then got the boat across to Greece. We spent two and a half months in the tent and then three and a half months in a caravan in a camp and then a house afterwards for maybe 6 months.' (46)

'There was very little (education); After Dublin we went to Ballaghadereen in Roscommon... they used to do a bit. There was a wee school where they set up with 2-3 teachers. There were older people on one table and younger people on the other table. They used to teach you verbs or basic words... just very easy things. (21) (Farooq, Refugee)

Makeshift schools in camps and refugee centres were established with varying degrees of organisation but parents often didn't feel safe sending their children to these schools. The camps were enormous, with thousands of people. Corruption was widespread and the risk of human trafficking was prevalent.

'They had nothing from 2016 until we came to Ballaghadereen in 2018. There was some kind of school in Greece, but it wasn't safe; sometimes children went missing, so we were afraid for our children'. (49) (Farooq, Refugee)

On arrival in Ireland, refugees were given temporary accommodation in EROCs. They could begin to feel safe again, but the wait to be placed in their permanent home left education in limbo. Refugee families further explained that there was very little formal education in the EROCs (Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres) and Direct

Provision Centres. The primary focus was to learn English, but it wasn't compulsory to attend. The classes tended to be very big, sometimes up to 50 pupils per teacher of mixed age and ability. Some children attended local primary and secondary schools while waiting to be resettled, however this was particularly daunting for teenage girls who were not used to sharing classes with male pupils. Hamid (Refugee) describes his experience.

'In Ballaghadeereen... it was like a small hotel room for me and my brother and mother and father. (56) I went to school for only 3 weeks.'
(61)

The government provided special funding for the Syrian refugees to learn English. No other nationality could attend those specific classes, which meant the students conversed in Arabic amongst each other. They didn't have to step out of their comfort zone to learn English which delayed the language acquisition process.

The funding from Europe can only be used for the Syrians so you can't mix the nationalities in the classrooms. We would have a load of people at the same level, but the funding structures dictate that it's for Syrians only. If it's not attributed to Syrians, it's gone. They all speak Arabic to each other...it would be better if they were mixed.' (50) (Aoibheann, EROC)

One Syrian family describes how packed and unproductive the classes were.

'There was about 50 in the class. There was a teacher at each table and there were 3 tables but all in the same room.' (67) Nour

'It was every day for 4-5 hours.' (31) Amal

'There was one teacher... she spent all the time asking 'What's your name?' Every time she wants to ask a question, she keeps asking what's your name, because there were so many people.' (36) (Nour)

'They didn't have to go but I made them go.' (72) (Farooq)

'Every day my father told us to go and learn some English words. Every day we had to learn 100 words.' (73) (Fatima)

When settled in Donegal, many Syrians acknowledged how fortunate they were not only to have safety but to have options. There now was a possibility that their children could thrive. *'I tell my children, for learning here, everything is easy. You have everything, nothing is hard. Government gives us money for books, for uniform, for life, for everything – why not good study (*study well)'* (166) (Farooq, Refugee)

This ties in with the opinion of Hamid who described life in Ireland as 'easy' and Eman (Intercultural worker) who in previous sections suggested that the government didn't offer much incentive for refugees to work as the benefits system was so good.

There was a notable difference between how the primary and secondary school students felt about school. Evidently the education gap wasn't as relevant for the younger children whose main focus was to learn English. For secondary school pupils, the gap was more pronounced as they not only had to learn the language, but they also had to catch up on lots of curricular subjects. Many felt dejected and overwhelmed. Aoibheann (EROC) felt that:

'I get the feeling primary school is pretty good for kids, secondary, not so much. (306) They have a very short timeframe to do an awful lot. For young people that is an impossible task for them to actually do that.'
(311)

School staff and refugee parents agree that for younger children, bridging the gap in education was much easier as the gap was inevitably smaller. While the younger children lacked inhibition, the transition for older pupils was much more challenging. Nadia, an 18-year-old refugee described trying to navigate her way through school:

'I tried at the school but because I don't understand them really well...it was really hard. They tried to be my friend. They tried to help me and speak with me, but when we didn't understand each other...they just don't care about speaking to me and when I sit with them, I just feel bored.'

Nadia sat the Leaving Certificate Applied examinations twenty months after starting secondary school in Ireland as that was the class suitable to her age range. Most subjects she failed. She was set up to fail. She joined an Access Course in LYIT, a course that is

intended for adult learners who have little or no formal education qualifications, and who would like to ultimately continue to third level education. It focuses predominantly on Mathematics, Learning Skills and ICT with a view to leveraging students to higher qualifications. Shortly after starting the course Lockdown happened. Nadia left this course, unable to follow and complete the tasks. *'I tried my best to go in this (online) meeting, but it was not working, because there was so much English and so many things to fill (write) that I didn't know how to go again. Then I stopped the course because it was really hard.'* (238)

Her experience reflects most of the refugees in their late teens who were on the cusp of transitioning from secondary level. This is where the biggest gap became evident, and the one both teachers and students found most challenging. Post-Leaving Certificate is very difficult. None of the refugee teenagers in Donegal who entered Leaving Cert level got sufficient points to go directly to university. There is a lot of confusion about the transition process from secondary to third level education including the non- university options. While most do Access courses, English language and the education gap is still a huge barrier. Inhibitions, fear of being asked questions, embarrassment, lack of confidence, how the points system works for third level, the funding process for refugees and the inability to complete forms correctly contribute to the barriers. Once the RRP year is over, there is nobody from the programme available to offer guidance or translate for students.

'The Access course to improve my English, I found it very hard, because I didn't study for a long time in Lebanon – seven years. My Maths and Science are really bad. I feel my brain is like a child now. I am starting from the beginning, like a child, not an adult, so it was super hard. Then Social Welfare cut my benefits by e20 per week because I wasn't a student' (28) (Nadia)

The ambitious attitude of the younger refugees is in stark contrast to school leavers and those trying to enter third level education. The realisation that they just don't have sufficient language skills, curriculum knowledge or funding to get them through is evident. They recognise the higher prospects of their younger siblings being more successful due to a reduced education gap and longer period to learn English before

embarking on formal assessment and exams. Nadia acknowledges the stark realisation in the following statement:

'At Level 5, I will be finished. (260) I don't see myself getting a really good education, so I'll just do a course for a job as a hairdresser or something just for work. My dream job was a fashion designer; I was thinking that I would love to be a big fashion designer, but I don't think that will happen. (264)

'My sister, I believe that she can do it... My brother, I don't think he can do anything at all because he has no idea about any education, about Arabic education or about English education, so it's super hard for him.' (279)

These are pitiful insights into the reality of the education gap for refugee school-leavers. Primary pupils tend to catch up and bridge the gap but for secondary pupils, the gap often widens.

4.5.4 (ii) The Irish Perspective

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, school staff voiced their concerns about the lack of background information given about the refugee children. Whilst conscious of data protection, the limited information given was more stringent than normal. Without a baseline, teachers didn't know where to start. With little guidance, most schools decided that to settle the children in school was the initial priority, so they were placed according to their age in a bid to integrate them with children their own age and then work out an educational plan. Aisling (Headteacher) explained that when trying to bridge the gap: *'We always go age-appropriate so they're with their peers. We try and focus on how much time they'll have at the school then go for the basics and build from there.'* (138)

There was no 'one-size-fits-all' rule. Other headteachers took a different approach feeling that some of the refugees were so out of the depth that that they would perform

better with children working at a lower level. Brian (Headteacher) describes the complications of trying to bridge the gap for a primary school leaver.

'We would be catapulting him straight into 6th class and I said 'I really think we should put him in 5th class and give him two years with us for a basic foundation before moving forward into secondary...' (349)

'I think one of the things that we struggled most with at the time was trying to work out where they were at in language and maths... very quickly we got the picture of where they were at and where we could take them to, and it was nothing like what the rest of the class were doing at all... They love praise and love getting it right and love getting it finished' (354)

'...how we could include those children with the rest of the class but include them at a level where they could achieve – that was the biggest challenge.' (364)

'We sat down with the language teacher and decided what was the priority for these children... we needed to get back to the basics. We used quite a lot of resources that were dual language.' (374)

SEN staff were reassigned from their normal schedules to assist with ascertaining where the refugees were at in terms of language and overall education. Chris (Headteacher) describes how valuable this was and how she approached it.

'Our SEN teacher would take a big leap with that. We would test them and try to establish where they would have to be supported and that would be done on a short-term basis, then we would try and regulate and work progressively towards that.' (281)

Ben (Headteacher) expressed concern at the ambition of many of the incoming refugees. Whilst their drive was admirable, and he wanted to support it, he didn't think it was realistic for many of the older ones who were so far behind to manage to excel through the system enough to get the exceptionally high qualifications necessary for high paying jobs. It was difficult to find the balance between encouraging them to do their best and managing their expectations.

'(They were) aiming high; they would almost put the Irish children to shame. If you're at this level and you know I don't think you're ever going to be at the level where you might be a doctor... that's not to say it wouldn't happen but they need a little bit of grounding. (161) I think it's a great thing to be driven but then I think it's about balancing it out. (176)

This echoes the sentiments of Nadia in the previous section, who came to the realisation that she could not aspire to achieve the dreams she once had. This is not to say that it was the case for all students, but it was a precarious balancing act for staff between encouraging the refugees and maintaining a realistic stance so that they would not feel like failures if they didn't get the grades or college places.

Headteachers, particularly in secondary schools, showed signs of frustration at the lack of cohesion, resources and planning for the refugees. They were fully aware that if interventions weren't put in place, the refugees would fall through the cracks of the system and end up on social welfare, without any prospects and a reduced opportunity to integrate into society. They felt the government had deserted them. Little or nothing was done by the government to aid integration and better incentives for further education. Chris (Headteacher) describes the inadequate options for bridging the educational gap:

'When they are only in for 1-2 years, they need more resources than what they're getting. The government at that stage is pulling back. (392) I think you nearly have to have individual programmes for them, that the focus at that stage shouldn't be survival; the focus should be on targeting them to achieve.'
(396)

'The two going into Leaving Cert will struggle. Half the year was lost to Covid... they're going to be restricted big time.' *(401)*

'Schools need support at this stage... there needs to be the opportunity that this person is geared towards progressing and targets set and encouraged to actually participate so they can move on to the next stage. YouthReach is more attractive than school, they'll not need a uniform... not the same focus on attendance and e40-e50 into the hand. Coming from their status I feel priority

to say 'this isn't good for them'... it will lead them out of the school system and on to the dole by the time they're 18.' (450)

'They were placed here, they were supported initially and now that they're here, they're left to fend for themselves because those parents are not educated... there's no opportunity for them to go back home. I think if we want to move them from being refugees into being members of society, we need to be integrating them more into the different cultures – not asking them to change their culture – but to appreciate and respect ours and being part of it and also enjoy their own.' (469)

SUMMARY

Staff gave up their free time to help. SETs and SENs were redeployed to help close the education gap. For older children who had missed so much school, it was almost impossible to close the gap before the Leaving Certificate. Those who wanted to go to Third Level didn't get enough points and tried Access Courses or YouthReach. It was highly pressurised and often demoralising. Staff felt there was no government support, resources, or long-term plan.

4.5.5: The Provision of EAL for Refugees

This section examines the EAL resources available for both adult and child refugees. It explores the challenges of language acquisition and the cultural implications of learning a new language. It also explores the staffing and delivery of EAL from the Irish staff. Policy proposes that EAL be made available to refugees, and for younger refugees, it is generally effective. For older children and adults, bureaucracy can be a hindrance to progress.

4.5.5 (i): Adults:

The old adage of ‘If you come to this country, you need to learn to speak English’ is a topic that needs to be carefully unpacked. The obvious benefits of language acquisition are that it allows immigrants to progress on the job ladder, increases their employment opportunities, and improves their access to better-paying jobs. Learning English is critical for integration and lack of proficiency can lead to isolation, feeling like an outsider and making daily tasks and appointments very arduous and stressful. Language apps and translation services on the internet are of great assistance but fall short of the live experience of conversing with another person and learning through natural discourse. Whilst beneficial to all involved, the debate continues on whether refugees should be forced to learn English. This question fails to consider the financial situation, learning ability and motivation of the refugees. Learning any language takes commitment, incentive, access to resources, time and money. Although all refugee adults were offered one-year English tuition as part of the Refugee Resettlement Programme, all stakeholders highlighted that this wasn’t enough, with proficiency among adult Syrians in particular remaining low. Aisling (Headteacher) explains the system:

‘All our families attended English classes during the year programme (RRP)... then the year ran out and there was no childcare so they couldn’t go anymore... There’s a break for Easter and Christmas so it’s not even really a year. These are families who want to be immersing themselves in the community; they want to be learning. They are intelligent people with a lot to offer who want to be given the means to contribute to society.

(234)

Farooq (Refugee) draws comparisons between the Irish system and other countries.

‘One year of RRP – it’s not enough. If you want to come to any other country in Europe, all have three years...Germany, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden... Just here, one year is not enough. (242)

‘There is another lady who had a baby so she couldn’t go to the classes, so she missed out, so a year is not enough.’ (246)

Adult refugees in general progressed at much slower pace than their children with learning English. This was due to the lack of exposure to the language and the RRP (Refugee Resettlement Programme) offering only one year of EAL support. Whilst adult refugees attended English classes, they didn't have the same exposure as children in school who learned naturally through play and natural discourse as well as the formal curriculum. Only refugees attended the adult classes, whereas in school, the refugees were the minority, and they were totally immersed in English used by the majority. Furthermore, Aoibheann (EROC) identified the lack of opportunity to progress further once the basics were mastered.

'My main gripe would be that once people are a bit better...and they have higher needs, they find it much tougher to get easy access to higher level education for adults.' (128)

Aoibheann (EROC) describes how motivation was evident when refugees started the RRP, but the logistics of childcare, feeling inadequate and breaks in tuition due to holidays caused learners' enthusiasm to wane. Aoibheann (EROC) explains how efforts were made by various organisations, but it was inconsistent, and the enthusiasm of the refugees was equally inconsistent.

'When they start, they are all high and they're all excited, then a low feeling sets in. There are other reasons; women with babies – you can't take a baby to class. The creche only takes children who are 3-4 years old.'

(175) One of the things I decided to do was to teach women with babies.

(183) I had certain rules; I couldn't take women whose babies were crawling...the baby had to be smaller. I'm not discriminating but it was more of a social thing for these women. (192)

Fáilte Isteach offered to do lessons online which are really worthwhile

(187) Dublin ETB had a service for unaccompanied minors... they agreed to send an English tutor to Mosney for a cohort of 10-12 teenagers.' (201)

Whilst translators were assigned to assist in the RRP, they had to cover a broad area and were widely overstretched, often rendering them unavailable elsewhere when needed. Aisling (Headteacher) explains how this resulted in volunteers or children themselves translating for parents.

'We have a couple of parents in our school who were able to help us out in terms of translation. That worked really well because translation services are difficult to come by especially when you need Arabic or Kurdish or when you need something quickly. The other thing that happened is that the families relied on the children heavily for translation and that's not always appropriate.' (222)

The consequence of this meant that many adult refugees didn't get a good footing with learning English. They struggled to get work which continued the cycle of them being left unexposed to the language and missed opportunities to integrate and make friends. In turn they were not able to assist with their children's schoolwork and communicated to them only in their native tongue. This was witnessed by Farah who worked as a translator in Letterkenny.

'The biggest challenge is communication. Some of those families have skilled people. I don't know how high their education is but they are willing to work. I would say if we put them in the workplace, the language would evolve better than leaving them just in classes...And some of them don't like the classes. Put them at the table and they feel like a child again.' (129)

It is clear that those people on social welfare are not able for work...those people have no language to go to work on their own independently; they still need programmes to support them going into work.' (345)

Overall, the provision of EAL for adults appears to be insufficient. Discontinued resources after one year coupled with personal inhibitions and family constraints means they have difficulty progressing further than basic level English. This does not synchronise with Proposal 37 of the Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) that 'Follow-on

ESOL programmes will be delivered to enable migrants to acquire more intensive language skills to assist their integration in the workplace.

4.5.5 (ii): School Children

There were mixed reviews about EAL provision within schools. Schools with a more diverse community were at a distinct advantage to the smaller rural schools who didn't have any EAL structures in place. No extra funding or resources was given by the government for EAL specifically for refugees or asylum seekers, but if a minimum of 20% of the school population was in need of EAL support, a teacher would be made available. Consequently, EAL support or advice was not given to smaller schools who had a smaller number of refugees, leaving staff to find and implement their own resources.

'EAL – we didn't get any extra support because we had refugee families. We currently have one full-time EAL teacher. In reality our SET had to pick up the rest. We would be supporting numerous children who don't have English as a first language. There has been very little training for teachers, but last year we had around 30 who would qualify for EAL support, so we already have it in place. When they arrive, we have an immersion period. We don't jump in there with withdrawal of support, because the children need to be in the classroom. (125) The challenge is the older children, and we use more withdrawal on them.' (187) (Aisling, Headteacher)

Extra English classes were offered to all Syrian pupils when they arrived. This was necessary to build up their English. Pupils described how they found most other subjects, except Maths very difficult due to the deficit of English. Two schools adopted the approach of total assimilation in class without withdrawal for the first few weeks to give pupils the chance to form a bond with the class and familiarise themselves with the daily routines and structures of the school. As expected, the younger children picked up

the language more easily than the older students, but pupils realised that to get ahead they had to learn the language.

'I got four extra English classes per week and a mentor to help with me with English. (32) My younger brother is in primary school. He's happy; I guess because he's younger, it's easier.(307) He can speak English very well and he can write,'(308) (Hamid, Refugee)

'I told myself I will be strong, and I will learn it by myself, so I started to learn on YouTube Arabic. There's an Arabic man who teaches English... I learned from him, more than I learned from the school.(293) My parents don't speak English. They are looking at work but because their English is zero, they can't find work. (317) (Nadia, Refugee)

After 2 years of primary school, all the children were fluent in English however Farah (school translator) reported how the secondary school pupils were feeling *'Some of them didn't even show up to the virtual classes because they felt they would be put on the spot; they would have to talk.'* (724)

Overall, primary school children developed English skills much easier than secondary school students. Various strategies were employed in different schools ranging between total immersion and withdrawal. Schools with a pre-existing diverse population who already had EAL infrastructures in place were better prepared than schools who had never had EAL support before.

4.5.5 (iii): Staff working with Refugees and Translators

Ben (Headteacher) emphasised the pressure felt by staff in terms of teaching English, particularly in schools that had never taught EAL before. Where there were too few pupils requiring EAL support, staff had to fight for support and where it was granted, they had to reapply each year after to qualify for the resource.

We got very little support from the Department of Education, even to make contact with somebody in the Department to explain the situation

that we were putting ourselves into so that we could put proper procedures in place for these children. You'd contact a certain department, then they would send you to somebody else and somebody else would send you to somebody else; it was just a nightmare.' (84)

'For the past two years we've been granted half an EAL post but we have to reapply every year. That sounds like a lot but it's not because each child is only getting half an hour on average.... it helps the children to just get out of the classroom sometimes and get more one-to-one, because they demand your attention an awful lot.' (105)

Other schools who had a mixed community were at a distinct advantage as they already had EAL structures in place. There were trained staff already on site with EAL resources, however with the arrival of the Syrian cohort, their resources were stretched as nothing extra was provided specific to refugees. The students got EAL simply because English wasn't their first language. Mary (EAL Co-Ordinator) explained her situation:

'I have two temporary EAL teachers that I have to reapply for every year depending on the English language proficiency level using national tests. The Department take the numbers that I give them. If you fulfil over 20% of the student population, you're granted one temporary EAL teacher for the year. I normally appeal for a second teacher because we always have between 100-115 applying every year. (78) Pupils have to pass proficiency tests across the four levels, which are speaking, listening, reading and writing, and they're tests based on European language proficiency levels created in 2002.' (96)

Although EAL staff was not guaranteed every year, it was advantageous for diverse schools compared to those where there was little or no training for EAL teachers who had to adopt the role without warning. Such schools had to juggle whatever special needs resources were already in place to accommodate EAL at a cost to those with other special needs. Aisling (Headteacher) explained that teachers worked hard to balance the social integration of the refugees whilst accommodating their language needs.

'We didn't get any extra support because we had refugee families; there was nothing like that. In reality our SET had to pick up the rest as we

have one teacher allocated for EAL. (125) We had approximately 30 children that would qualify for EAL support.' (179)

'I'm there, ready to take them because I'm already set up. (113) I'd say we are in a better position than most schools because we already have EAL set up but there's nothing extra given for the refugees.' (237) (Mary, EAL)

Smaller rural schools had to pool their resources to accommodate EAL as Ben (Headteacher) asserts that: *'SNA's duties were redeployed to help with English.'* (579) Refugees' EAL time was combined with SEN students or alternatively Irish children with special needs lost out on some of their resource hours to accommodate EAL.

The level of English of the refugees varies extensively. Interpreters were a lifeline for school staff and were utilised for helping the children with schoolwork and assisting with administration. However, they weren't always available when needed. Even when schools were prepared to pay extra from their own budget to get translators, the scarcity of them in Donegal left schools relying on volunteers or going without.

'Translators are provided for the first year We would have a translator come in for the parent teacher meetings, but it would be more in line with the girls...especially the mum would be keen that the girls do well. (193) If extra translators are needed, I buy them in out of the school budget.' (198) (Chris, Headteacher)

Farrah, a translator, asserts that *'There is a big number of refugees in Donegal, and the person who took the job (interpreter) is between Inishowen, Letterkenny and Finn Valley... if you have an issue, you're not going to get the interpreter for that day.'* (24)

'I translate letters to send home. I did make a phone call with the principal a couple of times for parent-teacher meetings.' (151)

After the initial period of settling, it proved challenging for staff to interpret the difference between those with language needs and those who special learning needs. The language barrier and lack of translators left gaps. Some children were just shy and intimidated, others were slow to pick up the language. Trauma and acculturation were other issues that affected their learning. The SNAs and SETs proved invaluable to

teachers in assisting with these concerns which proved overwhelming for staff and pupils alike.

'It definitely can be difficult to decipher. It takes time to get to know the children and then you need a couple of years really. That sounds like a long time, but it takes a couple of years to settle into school. Sometimes when the children arrive at the school it becomes apparent very quickly that they'll need additional support but in general we try to give a settling in period before you jump in with any labels. (356) (Aisling, Headteacher)

SNA's are worth their weight in gold (192) ... children need somebody by their side initially when they've come through that kind of trauma and their whole lives have been uprooted; they just need a key person and forget about academics.'(198) (Aisling, Headteacher)

In agreement with Aisling's statement, Farrah (Translator) conceded the challenges for staff and the difficulty in identifying specific needs stating that:

'There is definitely post trauma in there; I would say that there's more than just slow learner there. There is a problem with processing information. It is not language. I feel the need to mention it but I feel they think 'she's just looking for a job...' (790) I was aware of the amount of work that the ethnic groups needed in that school... I rarely speak to the principal because she's a busy lady. She was happy for me to be there... but I was never approached or shown anything. I mainly dealt with the teachers who were crying out for help to understand what the child wanted. Simple things like choosing school foods on the computer...they don't eat pork etc.' (798)

Whilst an element of government support was supplied for EAL, it wasn't specific to refugees who not only had to learn a new language but also adapt to a new culture whilst dealing with the loss, trauma and educational deficit that being a refugee entailed. Aisling (Headteacher) argues that more human resources were needed to get the job done properly. *'What is needed is extra teachers that can actually teach the*

children the basics of what they need and so that in a way that's appropriate, not just trying to jam five minutes into an already packed timetable here and there.' (489)

SUMMARY

Primary children became fluent relatively quickly. More diverse schools had pre-established EAL departments. For adults, one year of EAL through the RRP was insufficient and they couldn't progress further. In schools, there was minimal support and SETs / SENs were redeployed to help with language to the detriment of those with Special Needs. There weren't enough translators available. Adults needed English to work, but needed work to practice English, therefore were caught in a vicious circle.

4.5.6: Lockdown

The Covid-19 Pandemic had unprecedented consequences for every aspect of society. It shook the fabric of every structure and routine across the globe. As an unforeseen event, there was no benchmark from which policy and practice for refugees could be drawn. Ireland implemented some of the strictest Covid-19 restrictions in Europe. On the 12th of March 2020, the Taoiseach Michael Martin announced that all schools, colleges, and childcare facilities would be shut down in response to the pandemic. No schools opened for the remainder of the academic year resulting in the cancellation of all state exams including the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. Unlike the UK, no exceptions were made for children of frontline workers or vulnerable families. In September 2020, schools reopened with great caution with masks, sanitising stations, rigorous hand washing throughout the day, distinctive pods, staggered breaks and lunches, restricted movement, no group work, carbon dioxide monitors, freezing classrooms with windows and doors left open to circulate fresh air, eliminating lockers, creating one-way systems on school corridors, extensive cleaning regimes and a reduction in the number of children on school buses. Absences were high and extended due to stringent rules

around Covid symptoms and close contacts. In January 2021 as cases escalated, schools went into a further lockdown for Term 2, opening only for one week before the Easter holidays. Overcrowding in classrooms hindered the ability to reopen schools with too many pupils learning in cramped classrooms of more than thirty pupils.

Whilst there was limited schooling going on at the EROCs prior to Lockdown, efforts were made to engage students, however challenges with Wi-Fi access and students falling between the cracks of secondary and third level education became evident. Aoibheann (EROC) describes the devastating effect in Mosney Direct Provision.

'During Covid, I stopped working with people face to face... the focus changed to getting digital access for everyone. The homework club on site was cancelled, so I started getting in touch with schools and printing out stuff for kids who maybe only had a phone at home.' (272)

'Through different sources I obtained 30 laptops on loan, but they have to give it back. I set up a study group in a huge hall and got Wi-Fi in there, For primary school, we're working on getting laptops... that's the place now where the biggest deficit is and what we need is for the government to fund Wi-Fi. In Mosney, it has to be turned on and off at certain times because of heavy usage.' (291)

'There was a cohort of 6 x 17 years olds who arrived at Christmas 2019. By the time it came to going to school after Lockdown they were aged out of the system. Leaving Cert classes were full plus they had no English, so they simply missed out.' (282)

Headteachers, teachers, volunteers and SNAs scrambled to accommodate their pupils. Remote learning apps and sites were established. Primary school refugees worked with Alladin and SeeSaw (digital portfolio and communication tools which enabled work to be shared between school and home). Secondary school refugees worked mainly with Google Classroom, Live Online Videos while Zoom meetings became the norm for all schools. However, nothing could prepare students and in particular refugees for the loss of learning and socialisation during quarantine.

'They missed out quite a lot... because all the teachers sent homework, but the parents have a lack of English. Students will read what is in there, but they're not going to self-educate themselves, because of their age.

Google Translate was unreliable. Being in a family of Arabic speakers, there's no interaction in English. They got homework but some wouldn't show up to the virtual classes in case they would be put on the spot.

Classes were arranged by Firóige to help them through story, song etc but they wouldn't show up to that either. (720) They had no laptops or iPads' (741) (Farah, Translator)

Nadia describes how daunting and boring it was staying at home, unable to speak and learn with others with the internet being a poor substitute. *'Lockdown affected me really badly because I had to sit in the house. I had no practice with anyone and studying on the internet was too hard.'* (235)

The breadth of challenges listed by Mary (EAL Co-ordinator) caused much frustration. Despite their best efforts, staff yielded very little return or participation from the refugee students.

'Lockdown challenges: 1. language proficiency, 2. lack of devices, 3. Broadband, 4. one phone between children 5.no printer.

What I did with the class teachers was we would have phoned the houses to see if we could get talking to the kids, which was the only way you could communicate with them. Lockdown fell through Ramadan and Eid, so you didn't get a lot. We would have posted stuff to them and then we told them to come in and collect sets and booklets as well as books for them to continue with their learning. We weren't using Alladin Connect or SeeSaw but class blogs. It was lots of Apps, none of them got back to me – none of them engaged. My sister teaches in the Convent, and they would have quite a few refugees in the secondary school, and they had a whole range of different issues. She was getting work from kids at 3 o'clock in the morning. There was one or two that she might have been their only contact. All their language will be gone; it will have regressed so much.' (296)

Trying to learn from apps and devices proved that nothing could replace the human contact of a teacher and the human touch and engagement of children talking and playing together. Despite the best efforts of siblings with each other, the absence of professional teaching staff was profound as described by two headteachers below.

'During Quarantine, the kids missed school terribly. There was a period of a few weeks where we obviously couldn't go to the house, but we did a lot of just standing at the window, dropping resources off, checking to see if they were okay. We made sure food was delivered, we delivered toys, games, outdoor stuff the kids could be using. The children did the best they could with whatever we were dropping off but essentially it was time filling; they couldn't really engage with it. Every day they'd ask, 'When can we go back to school?' (402)

We did drop off iPads, but they couldn't use them, it was just too hard. (415) They tried but the language barrier was still too big to engage with Seesaw. I think it will have a huge impact especially with language modelling – they need to be hearing it every day. However, these children are resilient.' (419) (Aisling, Headteacher)

'I felt she would have suffered more than the other children, because language was her primary need, and if she had had the end of the school year, I felt that her language could have been at a stage where you could have concentrated on the rest of the curriculum. Her mum sent me a text; she was upset, the child was upset, and the child was crying doing the work. I left over all sorts of jigsaws, library books, colouring books, crayons, or even a photocopying paper. I was trying to send things to her that would assist with her learning, but not in a very prescriptive way. Then Mum was in hospital, so couldn't support her. She missed the interaction and freedom of playing in the school yard. She probably learns most language from interaction with her peers, because it's just natural discourse.' (319) (Hannah, Headteacher)

Whilst staff went to great lengths that often felt unacknowledged, the refugees themselves found learning at this time to be problematic as Nour testifies to: *'Lockdown*

was a wee bit hard because we didn't have a teacher to explain what we're supposed to be doing. (235) It was a wee bit hard for Mohammed because he couldn't do Maths...he needs someone to explain it to him, so we tried to help him every day.' (244)

Progress within the curriculum was deeply affected at each school stage by everyone, but the loss of opportunity to learn and develop their language skills in English was most keenly felt by the refugees. It affected everything. It restricted their integration and their prospects of getting through the challenge of an already unfamiliar curriculum. Secondary school students had more pressure placed upon them as their window of opportunity to complete secondary school examinations and enter third level education diminished.

'In Fifth Year, I just went to school for two months, because I arrived to Donegal in December and the lockdown started in February. (148) I won't do exams (because I've chosen predictive grades)... I just want to learn English, to get better at English.' (190)

'I'd like to do engineering ... but I don't think I can because my points will be too low.' (169) (Hamid, Refugee)

Staff and volunteers attempted to fill in the gaps where resources were limited. Some schools provided lots of technology, others didn't. However even with technology, there was a notable lack of enthusiasm as highlighted by the following staff members:

'Of all the school population, they were the ones that I worried the most about, mainly because of their limited access to technology. I did visit them and brought iPads... but I still think they needed one-to-one. They will be the ones who will have missed out the most. (513) What we saw from the online learning was that they were pretty much not engaged at all.' (521) (Ben, Headteacher)

'Through Lockdown, a lot of them just let go of the whole English thing. They stayed at home, they were safe at home speaking in their own language, but there was no English.' (732) *My contract wasn't extended in the Lockdown to support the students. (749) I did continue the work*

(without pay) as I felt that the students needed me.' (756) (Farah, Translator)

'During Lockdown the girls engaged, the boys didn't... We would have provided free meals.' (299) *'We're doing a DEIS camp in August to try and bridge the gap. We will have identified the ones that we have concerns about and try and get them back into school.'* (303) (Chris, Headteacher)

The Intercultural Worker reflected on Lockdown stating that *'It's about managing expectations. It was not something that we had control over. Therefore I would say as a general human being is that you shouldn't expect more from anyone, because that's just what's happening, and we had no say over it.'* (309) In unprecedented times, it was a steep period of adjustment for everyone. Whilst one hopes that it is an isolated occurrence in time, the repercussions of Lockdown will be felt for years to come. The educational gap created by these events had catastrophic consequences for the refugees. The lost opportunity to learn English, to integrate into the community, to form friendships left many students falling between the cracks of the system and out of the job market for meaningful employment. In an attempt to mitigate learning loss and provide targeted additional teaching supports for all students following school closures during the pandemic, to its credit, the government allocated extra teaching hours to all schools for 2021/22.

SUMMARY

Staff called, visited, and left resources to the refugees' homes regularly. Older siblings tried to help younger siblings. The government allocated extra teaching hours to help pupils catch up on lost teaching / learning time. There was a distinct loss of language development due to the inability to practice English. There was further widening of the educational gap coupled with the loss of friendships and ability to socialise. There was an inability and unwillingness to engage with online platforms. Parents felt unable to assist with children's work. Feelings of boredom and isolation ensued due to the lack of human contact. There was a lack of technology, broadband and printers.

Chapter 5 will continue to detail the Findings of this research focusing on the cultural challenges and progress of the refugees and the Irish community. The two Findings chapters are intrinsically linked. In a sense the culture gives the structure while the structure reinforces the culture. The complexity of the interconnectedness of these issues will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings – Cultural Challenges and Progress

5.1 Introduction

The impact of war and forced migration has many far-reaching effects. Disjointed family structures and disrupted education and employment, coupled with a new language, lifestyle, climate, and food can lead to pronounced effects of culture shock. The process of adapting and assimilating into a new culture may impact both social and psychological well-being. Chapter 4 analysed the Findings in relation to the structural challenges and progress of the refugees in Donegal. The following evidence gives an insight into how the Syrian refugees and their Irish hosts responded to the cultural challenges.

5.2: Religion

A report compiled in UCC (2021, p1) claimed that 90% of Irish primary schools are state-funded but Catholic-run, therefore offering little choice for non-Catholic parents but to send their children to these schools. As Catholic primary schools engage in “faith formation” or indoctrination which permeates throughout the curriculum, there is no effective opt-out option for non-Catholic students as they stay in the classroom and do ‘other’ work or are removed which runs the risk of causing isolation. Inclusion policies exist in all schools but implementing them meaningfully is complex given the influence of the Catholic church on Irish schools.

In Donegal, every effort has been made to make pupils feel comfortable in school specifically with their religious orientation. Whilst all schools in Donegal, with the exception of the Educate Together Primary School, are of Christian patronage, world religions are taught. Pupils who do not want to participate in World Religion or Christian classes are facilitated elsewhere during that time. Those who wish to perform Salah (the Islamic ritual of praying five times a day) are permitted to do so but requests to do this are rare.

Farah (Translator) revealed how some secondary school pupils requested a place to pray. Recognising the importance of prayer, they were offered an annex of a school chapel but rejected this due to the visibility of Christian iconology. Another more suitable place was subsequently offered to them. This was a significant offering from a convent school to cater for 6 out of 900 pupils and a positive example of how the Irish community enabled cultural integration by responding to the request of the refugees and providing a space for them to pray.

In relation to religion classes Farah noted that: *'Even though mixed religion is taught, they (Syrians) won't participate in case of conversion.'*

This is not necessarily a shun to Christianity, but more the absolute conservation of their own religion and their loyalty to Islam. This appears staunch given that the Intercultural Worker claims that as a group, *'The majority of the Syrian refugees I've worked with are not really practicing. The Muslim thing has become more a thing of identity rather than faith. Even for the ones who practice, they are very moderate.'* (173) (Eman) It is perhaps a matter of principle as opposed to staunch devotion and the desire to maintain their heritage and identity of which they have already lost so much.

The wearing of the Islamic veil was a first in the secondary school convent. No restrictions were placed upon Syrian girls who wished to wear it. However, without doubt, they stood out as explained by Nadia who was a pupil there.

'Thank God I didn't find any hard time because I'm Muslim. It's funny, when I walked around in cities people just look at me like they're shocked and in school sometimes it happened, but I don't really care. I just walk on and I'm confident. I know myself; I trust myself. I love myself the way I am. (131) I went to religion class maybe once, but then I told them that I didn't want to do it because I'm Muslim... I used to sit in the canteen and catch up with other study.' (143)

It was reported by staff that a small number of the refugee pupils were misbehaving and being disrespectful of the property within the grounds of a convent school, not recognising that this was a place that they needed to show respect. Farah, an Arabic translator married to an Irish man shared her thoughts on this incident.

'This created an opportunity to educate them on their role in becoming integrated to the community and the importance of showing humility to their hosts and recognise that they should show respect to Christianity and other religions even if they wanted no part in their practice.' (653)

There was a more relaxed attitude towards religion from the parents in primary schools.

'They want them to do every single thing. We went back to check if they were sure about religion, and he confirmed that they wanted the children to do everything. (628) One of the biggest issues we came across was the traditional Christmas Nativity. One of the ways we got around the first year was we just did a Christmas concert.' (643) (Ben, Headteacher)

'We've had no issues with religion, but at the same time we'd be sensitive enough and ask if there is anything that they wanted to celebrate within their own culture, such as Eid. (356) We've had no (religious) requests but would have had in previous years and we would have facilitated that.' (361) (Chris, Headteacher)

Due to the dominant religion being Christian with such a small number of Muslims attending the schools, there was little threat felt by the host schools, and great efforts were made to respect and accommodate the refugees who wanted to express their religious identity.

SUMMARY

Provision are made by schools if students wish to pray or wear Islamic dress. There is no mosque or official place of worship for Muslims in Co. Donegal

5.3 Culture and Integration with the School and Local Community

The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017) Proposal 36 states that ‘The fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference will continue to form part of the school curriculum’. It would appear from the following findings that policy does not inform practice sufficiently in some areas.

There is understandably a notable lack of cultural awareness on both sides. Neither Donegal nor Syria are sprawling cosmopolitan areas well acquainted with diversity. Adrift between two worlds where dress codes, food, religion, educational subject matter, social norms and the role of women are at times in stark contrast with each other, attitudes can often be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Marden & Meyer (1968, p36) describe the process of adjustment whereby the change in individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture and who take over traits from another culture as acculturation. Whilst the greatest change naturally occurs for the immigrants, change inevitably occurs in the host society as well. The acculturation process is a journey with both positive and negative attributes. Acculturation of the refugees arriving in Donegal was no exception.

5.3.1: Trials and Triumphs of Children Integrating into School and the Local Community

Whilst some schools in the bigger towns have diversity in their student body, many of the smaller rural schools have never had a child of a different colour, creed or language amongst them. For these schools, it was a novelty to have new interesting people in their classrooms and they welcomed them openly and mixed well as explained by Ben (Headteacher):

‘We’ve only ever had 3-4 children of a different race in our school previously. I think the children just saw them as children. (49) We did a while lot of background stuff and explained that sometimes people have to leave their country because of war... some of them were coming to Stranorlar and we were going to include them in our school. They wanted to know their names and then wanted to write cards for them to welcome them. (70) Locals wanted to help but we wanted to manage their pride. One of the easiest things we did around Christmas was to give stuff as

presents to cover up the fact that many needed it...food or fuel for the fire. They don't celebrate Christmas, but we do, so this is our gift to you.' (340)

Whilst there were many obvious differences, children always managed to find a common denominator as highlighted by Ben (Headteacher) *'They were really sporty...and I think that really helped with their inclusion and for them to make friends. They found the language barrier difficult, but through sport, they learned so much of the language,'* (58)

The younger children in particular became acclimatised to Irish culture through sport and music. *'I do hurling and Gaelic football and my sisters play camogie (231) I'm doing the violin and piano for a wee while.'* (233) (Khalid, Age 8)

Mixing and integration sometimes filtered into after-school activities but tended to stop there. Playdates in each other's houses, parties etc. weren't commonplace. Girls in particular were subject to cultural limitations which affected integration.

'The younger they are, the easier it is for kids to mix...when you're older friendships are already established...Do you know one language though that is universal – Football. (313) In terms of after-school activities, we facilitate a lot of that... being invited to birthday parties etc, I'm not sure... communities tend to stick close to each other.' (328) (Aisling, Headteacher)

This was not necessarily a case of the Irish community being unwelcoming, but the effort or know-how to go the extra mile and actively instigate opportunities to meet up and get together was lacking.

'Everyone in the school is very good (79)...only in school, I don't have friends outside school. (88) Just one time last year, I went to a birthday party; I enjoyed it there.' (103) (Hamid, Refugee)

'I haven't heard of any refugees who were invited to a birthday party from school.' (538) *Girls don't go to the cinema or do those kinds of things (without a chaperone). Having said that, I've heard from one of the ladies that her daughter will go shopping to Primark with different girls but*

wouldn't go to the cinema or eating or anything on their own.' (577)

(Farah, Translator)

It was highlighted by several interviewees that tensions had occurred between Kurdish and Arabic students. This was a cultural issue that the majority of staff in EROCs and schools had no knowledge or cultural awareness of, therefore fell short of dealing with conflicts arising. This is an issue that many staff mentioned they wish they'd been informed about. Staff training and cultural awareness in this area is essential.

'There were a lot of Kurds... the tension was really really evident. (87)

You couldn't pair certain people together because it just wouldn't work.

(91) *The Yazidi tribe – there was a lot of resentment there by everyone...*

Single Muslim women are marginalised.' (95) (Aoibheann, EROC)

'Arabs and Kurds don't get along... the Arab Muslims would not have

anything to deal with those people at all. (693) *At some event for*

refugees, both will attend, but they're not going to talk. (698) *The*

children will be friendly at school...but they should not and can't show

that they are actually friends with the other families.' (704) (Farah,

Translator)

'We have Kurdish families and Arabs; there have been issues between

them.(594) *The other issue was that we translated all our letters into*

Arabic for our families when communicating with them, but then we

found out from the Kurdish people that they couldn't read Arabic. I

suppose we were naïve.' (605) (Ben, Headteacher)

It was further noted that tensions occurred between the Syrian refugees and students from the local Travelling Community in secondary schools, where power struggles became evident, goading and mocking them, making it difficult for the Syrians to settle peacefully and further adding to their trauma. Chris (Headteacher) relays tension that occurred in his school.

'Irish Travellers had a big issue with the Syrians.' (238) *racists comments*

would have been passed to them at different stages... the Syrians actually

recorded it and translated it. (253) The Travellers said the Syrians set upon them, but CCTV proved the opposite. Years ago, the Travellers had issues with the Polish years ago but other than that no (problem).' (276)

Thus, while there are many advantages to being in a diverse school with resources and relevant structures in place, at times it proved to be a less nurturing environment for the refugees who often felt isolated and compelled to stick with their own people for security.

Refugee children highlighted the cultural difficulties they faced. *'The language and getting used to the food. (18) In Ramadan it was very hard...I was fasting and we did PE. We ran so much and I was so tired at the end. I just couldn't wait to go home.'* (110)
(Amena, Aged 10)

Meanwhile school staff did their best to accommodate. *'Food can be a concern, but we try to facilitate them to tell us what they want.'* (367) (Chris, Headteacher)

All but one of the school staff interviewed had never had girls wear Islamic dress in school before in Donegal. There was no issue with it in any of the schools except that it was unusual and impacted on integration as explained by Sarah (Befriender) *'Some teenage girls wear the veil to school, others don't. (262) The older girls don't mix with outside school, the younger sister on the other hand has friends everywhere. She's away playing Gaelic and everything.'* (276)

There are no national guidelines regarding school uniforms in Ireland. Policies are dictated at the discretion of individual schools, however Aoibheann (EROC) highlighted that one school near Dublin implemented a strict uniform policy which caused friction.

'One girl was accepted into a school, but she wasn't allowed to wear her hijab, so her father refused to let her go, but other kids go in and don't wear the hijab. It's just the school uniform policy; it's a convent school.'
(220)

5.3.2: Cultural Challenges of Integrating Adult Refugees in Donegal

One of the biggest challenges for integration is the gender roles and expectations within Arabic families. It is a cultural norm for men and women to socialise separately in Syria; the men tend to go out while the women stay at home and socialise with female family members. Sarah (Befriender) describes that in Ireland, the Syrian women are often left alone, and loneliness is common.

'Really getting the culture is hard; women being isolated while men go out all the time. (280) It's different here as the women don't have friends or family to keep them company and support them. Her neighbours don't tend to pop in for a chat, a cup of tea or a glass of wine like locals here would' (290)

It is a culture shock for Syrians who have lived in urban towns and cities to acculturate to rural Donegal with limited resources but over time, many see the benefits of a quieter, more peaceful way of living.

'At the start, it was very difficult for everybody because they're used to living in huge cities with millions of people there so coming to a rural place like Donegal is a bit of a shock. I definitely think people are falling into the rhythm of it more. The lack of a mosque is difficult and some of the families went through a really hard depression for a while after being here, but thankfully have come out the other side' (330) 'They see a future for their kids here so they're willing to give it a go... although there's some families that always want to go back.' (344) (Sarah, Befriender)

Despite some feeling isolated and culturally alienated, the overriding sentiment for adults is that their families are safe, and they can live in peace and stability. They acknowledge the freedom and opportunities that Donegal can offer.

'Everyone was very friendly (when we arrived).' (145) (Farooq, Refugee)

'I don't think about my past; I'm in a safe place, I have everything I need – just live life.' (184) (Nour, Refugee)

'Yes (this feels like home now).' (258) (Amal, Mother)

Importantly, after some time, the Syrians began to feel more settled in Donegal whilst still maintaining elements of their own culture. Farooq explains that although there may not have been local access to cultural amenities, they found reasonable access to more culturally suitable food, clothes etc. and started to find a middle ground. *'We can still have our Arabic culture a bit. There's no problem with the kids wearing veils... we can find Arabic food in bigger towns/ cities.'* (274) (Farooq, Refugee)

Many of the Syrian men joined the Men's Shed in Donegal. This is a community-based, non-commercial organisation that is open to men which provides a place where men can feel included and safe. The aim of men's sheds is to improve the health and wellbeing of their members whilst exchanging skills and engaging in community-based projects. Sinead (Befriender) explained how *'The Men's Shed here offers a great opportunity for men to be creative with their skills, get out of the house, mix with locals and use a bit of the language.'* (32)

Overall, cultural acclimatation took time for the Syrian refugees. Many women experienced isolation and opportunities are still lacking for them. The Men's Shed is a great opportunity for the Syrian men to begin to integrate.

5.3.3: Highs and Lows of Facilitating Integration by School Staff

Most staff felt underprepared to deal with the cultural upheaval of having Syrian refugees in their classrooms. Although some CPD courses on cultural training were available, they weren't compulsory and were not particularly well marketed or recommended to schools with refugees. Staff had to go looking for courses or training that might assist them. Nobody checked in on teaching staff to ensure they were adequately prepared. The following statements from three headteachers explains the status quo.

'Being an Educate Together School, we are equality based. Through our Ethical Education Programme, we would do a lot of content around

different cultures and backgrounds.’ (66) ...specifically to training and resources for refugees, nothing! (105) (Aisling, Headteacher)

‘There are guidelines but to be honest I don’t think we have ever actually really sat down and had a proper look at them. By the time we realised they existed, we were up and running.’ (38) (Ben, Headteacher)

‘It would have always been multi-cultural, so if you had walked my corridor at any stage, there would have been a mixture.’ (34) ‘Regarding anti-racism or intercultural training, not directly. At different stages, at different times, we would have always been doing that, simply because of the nature of our student body.’ (43) (Chris, Headteacher)

Only one school in the whole county had a home school liaison officer who helped to bridge the gap between home and school with issues that the school staff didn’t have the time, training or resources to deal with. This would have been an incredible support to other schools but there was no availability of this resources for anyone else. Aisling (Headteacher) emphasises the value of this staff member in relation to refugees.

‘The home- school liaison officer would link in with various community groups around diversity and around any anti-racism projects that are happening locally. (77) She has become a key figure for our refugee families... because her role is so important.’ (96)

5.3.4: The Acceptance and Assistance of the Wider Community

Whenever word broke that refugees would be coming to Donegal, many locals took it upon themselves to become befrienders to support those who were arriving imminently. A Befriending Group was set up, but it stipulated that you needed to be

Garda vetted. This created barriers. Sarah (Befriender) describes the reaction of locals to this.

'I was like 'Why? Getting vetted for just being friends, it's like, no, you're not the friend, you're treating them differently already'. We have to sign a thing to say we're going to be friends and we were going to be watched while being their friend. It just felt all wrong.' (76) There was about 50 people who wanted to help, but only 7-8 signed up to be a befriender.' (70) They had to make sure that they wouldn't have access to their bank accounts and all that kind of thing. There were rules that the befrienders had to abide by.' (94)

Despite this setback and adverse reactions in some media outlets, locals still took it upon themselves to become unofficial befrienders and worked tirelessly to make the refugees feel welcome and ensure they had everything they needed.

'There was backlash in local papers writing horrible negative stuff. and lots of negative comments on social media, newspapers etc. (7) That spurred me to form a group called 'Inishowen Welcome.' I looked for positive like-minded people to help. I work with the Intercultural platform which tries to raise voices of ethnic minorities and give representation. (17) When the refugees arrived, a few of us went to their houses with Welcome Boxes and say hello.' (21) (Sarah, Befriender)

While goodwill and open arms were apparent from some camps, mistrust and fear were evident from both sides at first, which took time and effort to work through.

'There was fear in the beginning, but people are opening up. When the families came, we did lots of stuff like teaching Syrian cooking. Some of the families have done evening classes and teaching the community, showing them how to make things, and I think that definitely broke down barriers and their neighbours were trying to see them as one of them. There was a horrible incident involving a Kurd and a local woman who was accused of being heavy handed with her, so the community shunned him and there were bad vibes all around. (122) There's acceptance and tolerance only to a certain level but if anything gets blurred, you're automatically tarred. (138) Most women wear

some form of Arabic dress / veil. There's a mixed response from locals. Some neighbours (of the refugees) wouldn't be the most accommodating people. I don't know if it goes beyond snide looks, but there's very little friendship there.' (419) (Sarah, Befriender)

In 2018, when word broke that 100 asylum seekers were being moved into the 1400 strong village of Merville, there was concern and backlash as locals hadn't been informed; schools, doctors, creches and other essential services were completely unprepared for such a large influx of asylum seekers coming to their small village. This was a mix of genuine concern and blatant racism. People were scared that their seaside tourist destination would be tainted by association. When the hotel was destroyed in an arson attack in November 2018, the mood changed. People felt contrite about their negative sentiments. Following the arson attack, locals organised an Intercultural Festival, a Middle Eastern festival, and a Global Kitchen to get the refugees together with local people and to try to raise their spirits with cultural activities.

'There were lots of nasty comments and negativity on Facebook, (144)... then the torching - it scared the shit out of them all because suddenly all these words and all these angry sentiments and everything actually manifested in pure destruction. (150) Judging by the amount of people who came to the (Global) dinner, I think they felt bad and wanted to show solidarity and show Merville wasn't like that... and decided they should step up.' (155) (Sarah, Befriender)

'The Middle Eastern Festival was all different things ... music, poetry... you know accepting everything.' (21) (Mary, Befriender)

The government's decision to maintain a 'cloak and dagger' approach and keep locals in the dark ignited anger, fear and anti-immigrant sentiment in the community which ultimately led to arson. This negativity did not all stem from inherent racism within the community, many people genuinely wanted to help, but felt ill-prepared and naturally concerned about public service overload. The arson attack, whilst vicious, led people to reassess their attitudes and consequently on this occasion goodwill prevailed and an outpouring of solidarity ensued.

In Portsalon, another seaside village where refugees had taken up residence directly across the road from the local primary school, locals raised issues on whether they had been vaccinated or whether background checks had been carried out given the close proximity of refugees to the schools. Hannah (Headteacher) describes the predicament:

'There was no go-to person if I had a problem. I felt that I was very much on my own at that time.' (129) *The local community was unsettled because there had been no consultation. The fire in Moville meant there was a lot of unease, suspicion and resentment that these people had been deposited just across the way from the school. Parents were uneasy because they had no knowledge of these people's backgrounds, nor did the authorities.'* (133)

Hannah (Headteacher) cited both structural cultural differences as being an issue. The absence of a mediator left her feeling adrift and unsure how to deal with or approach the single refugee child in her school.

'I noticed that even when the school was closed and the weather was good, you would very seldom see any of them outside.'(218) *Transport in a rural area is an issue... it was very difficult.*(223) *The child wasn't forthcoming on any innocent kind of general questions that I asked. Mum didn't offer much in the line of family background at all...Maybe it's a cultural thing.*(228) *It would have helped if there had been an intermediary between us. I was aware that there were cultural differences about eating, dressing, behaviour etc., but I would know absolutely nothing about them. It would have helped me, because I was always rather cautious about putting my foot in it.'* (242)

When the single refugee child arrived in a tiny rural school with a total of 8 pupils, it was an intriguing experience for the local children. Because there were so few children in the school and they were so young, the child was enveloped in affection and attention without any major intervention as explained by Hannah (Headteacher)

'I just said that she was new, that she knew nobody, that she had very limited language skills and could they imagine how frightening that would be if they were in that situation... I never made anything of the

culture being different, I just said 'She's new to our school community, her language... we may need to be aware of that and there may be things that she doesn't understand and that might be frightening or disconcerting, but I didn't labour it to any degree. I just let nature take its course, but I was lucky that it worked out. (279)

They would have known that she just had a room (with her mum) and they would have felt sorry for her that she didn't have a house.' (302)

Establishing friendships didn't happen as easily for older students, particularly those at third level. Language and cultural barriers proved too much effort at times and refugees often gravitated towards other immigrants whom they shared more commonality.

'Yes, I had friends, but I don't have friends from Ireland. I tried at school but I don't understand them very well.' (78) (Nadia, Refugee)

After the first two years, whilst the Syrians had settled to a degree, full immersion was difficult because the culture is so different. Donegal is very different to the Middle East and many of the refugees struggled to let go of their Arabic heritage completely. In an effort to maintain their language, progress with English and acculturation was somewhat hindered.

'Only one family I work with try to speak English at home. Most other families speak Arabic at home 100%' (517) (Farah, Translator)

Overall, great efforts were made at grassroots level to help the refugees to adapt and feel at home. However apart from the difference in food, dress, and language, they needed to acquire knowledge on social norms and etiquette. Given their strict views and control over women, this was a challenge to the mindset. As an Arabic woman living in Ireland for many years, Farah (Translator) understands the complexity of this stating that:

'They need a little bit of education in terms of the rules and regulations in the country, the cultural things. They think if girls want to drink on a night out, that is horrible and they are bad ladies... I said 'What did those ladies do wrong? ...a man drinks, a woman drinks, it's their choice. Do you

disrespect her because she goes to a nightclub? No, she's regarded as high grade because she has knowledge and is passing it on to students.' (836)

From the outside, it may appear a trojan task to blend two such varied cultures. Where losses happened, gains were made elsewhere. Where diversity was lacking, a welcoming culture where it is expected that neighbours get to know each other emerged. Parallel to the stories of adversity, stories of success, acceptance and unexpected friendships emerged.

'(Living in Donegal) will save my future; now I know what my future can be. I'm studying now and the important thing is, it is safe and that's good enough for me.' (69) (Nadia, Refugee)

'I have new people in my life, new friends, learning a new culture, learning Arabic, trying different food, expanding my knowledge of the world and people in it.' (420) (Sarah, Befriender)

SUMMARY

Refugees were warmly welcomed by staff and locals who worked tirelessly to make them feel at home, get resources for them, and organise cultural events to support integration. Staff working with refugees felt overwhelmingly uninformed and unprepared for their arrival. Many wished they'd been briefed on important cultural issues such as food, dress, Kurdish and Arabic tensions

5.4: Psychological Trauma

While no mention is made of mental health policy in the Migrant Integration Strategy (2017), the White Paper (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2021, p58) proposes that:

'At HSE national level, linkages will be developed with mental health and other specialist services, and monitor the inclusion of applicants who are granted leave to remain within the mainstream health services, when the individual health identifier is operationalized.'

This section highlights the wide discrepancies between policy and practice for mental health in Ireland, not just for refugees but also for the general public.

Hocking et al. (2015) argue that refugees who have been displaced because of war and conflict are more likely to have pronounced effects of culture shock because the Syrian refugees, as opposed to economic refugees are usually unprepared to leave their countries, have greater risks of mental health issues and they have not had the opportunity to organize accommodation or employment in the new country. There is often trauma associated with leaving their home, possessions, family members, embracing a new language and culture compounded with the trauma of war. The following three statements by staff in different schools reflect the impact of trauma on young refugees.

'Those two boys whose father drowned, and the mother is in Turkey, they are the ones who display the most trauma. (289) They cry...the more you try to talk to them, the more they cry and the more they don't want you to talk to them.' (293) (Ben, Headteacher)

'There are no behaviour issues except with one boy. His acting out is a symptom of whatever trauma he has gone through. (194) (Mary, EAL)

'No behavioural issues but they could probably do with someone who could listen and help them through counselling.' (373) (Aisling, Headteacher)

There were mixed reports from the schools about evidence of trauma in refugees, but staff faced hurdles in dealing with this. Some children weren't ready to divulge

everything they had experienced when they arrived in school. It took time for them to feel confident enough to share their stories. Aisling (Headteacher) relates to this in her claim that:

'As they become more comfortable with their classmates, the children talk about it. (288) It's something we should know. I suppose the whole thing about school for me is, I don't want any child sitting in a classroom wondering 'Where do I fit in'? They need to feel they are represented.' (299)

Another common challenge was that Arabic parents tended to revolt against the suggestion that their child could have a psychological disorder. Chris (Headteacher) felt that they responded as if there was a stigma attached to it. *'We would have had a girl who we felt showed signs of trauma, but the family didn't agree that it was trauma.'* (330)

This attitude was validated by Ben (Headteacher) who reported that parents got very defensive if you suggested getting a psychologist to deal with their child's trauma:

'There's nothing wrong with my son – he is not mental.' (214)

Farah (Translator) highlighted the cultural nuances where it was particularly inconceivable for a female Arab to allow her emotions to get the better of her in public, despite suffering from obviously deep trauma. She relayed that:

'The behaviour is more that they are not engaging. We are trying to figure out how we can help a young lady with aggressive behaviour. She's not attending classes, she fights in the yard; it's not something you see from our culture, In the Arabic culture, women don't fight in the streets, there is a ladylike expectation, but she feels she has to do that... there is some trauma there. (160) Most of the students as far as I know don't receive psychotherapy. Considering that they are coming from a warzone, they should'. (199) 'One of the girls said she hasn't slept for three years at night. She was always late going to school, She said she could only sleep when it's daytime, at night-time, it was frightening. I asked what she was frightened off; she couldn't describe. Her language is not good enough to go to a psychotherapist to explain her fears. (219)

For those who did need support and psychological assessment, they would struggle in the Irish system. NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service) is run by educational psychologists, a service that is extraordinarily overstretched throughout Ireland. Due to limited resources, meetings with NEPS concentrate on pupils at the upper end of primary school to ensure they have an assessment / report prior to leaving school so that they have supports in place for secondary school. There are only two reports done in a school per year, and not every school is guaranteed to get that. Some schools don't get access to the service and get two SCPA (Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments) per year instead (paid by NEPS) due to deficit in educational psychologists. Children with emotional, behavioural, or mental health difficulties (EBD, ADHD, autism etc) would go to CAMHS (Child Adolescent Mental Health Service) which also deals with trauma. Holly, a special needs co-ordinator seconded by the Department of Education gave invaluable insight:

'They're (CAMHS) a very good service, but they are ridiculously, ridiculously under resourced and overstressed. (148) In a system that's already overloaded, refugees are unlikely to get access. Basically, all of these services are hitting the top end of primary so that they can get them through. If children don't get an SNA in primary school, it would be very difficult to get one in secondary school. (157) Many refugees only arrive in secondary or at the end of primary so there's very little chance of them getting an assessment. Sometimes teachers will request CAHMS to write a note to SENO to ask for SNAs for secondary when there hadn't been one allocated to the children before. CAHMS tries hard to work with teachers who are saying "This child needs individual counselling," and they're saying, "We just can't do it; we just don't have people." (165)

With both services being exceptionally oversubscribed, the onus was once again left to school staff to pick up the pieces and try to navigate through an area that they weren't familiar with or trained to cope with. Aisling (Headteacher) reports that: *"There is no training and resources provided by the Department of Education for school staff in relation to trauma, conflict resolution or racism issues." (107)*

Holly (Special Needs) reinforces how special needs resources are allocated but how the system is so clogged up that there is nothing left over to deal with the mental health of refugees.

'Sometimes the school or parents will pay privately to get a psychologist's report to get e.g., assisted technology for dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia etc. Students probably won't get much extra teaching wise; it's up to the school to prioritise their SETs allocation with or without reports. (53) The assessment won't dictate the resources. Every school has a certain number of SETs and management has to manage the children in their school with those SETs. You can then apply for extra, but you probably won't get it. There's X number of SETs for your school and you manage it regardless. If refugees are welcomed into a school, they don't come with any additional resources. (133) There's nothing for them, but people do bend over backwards, it's goodwill. If you did have a difficulty and needed to talk to educational psychologists, they would probably go over and beyond what they traditionally would offer the school. That is just based on goodwill. These children are not entitled to anything in terms of extra hours, assessments or emotional support. (136)

Many barriers added to the teachers' inability to clearly decide whether the refugee children had learning needs, psychological trauma or just struggled with the language. The following observations by school staff imply how difficult this was:

'It was very difficult to decide if it's a learning difficulty or lack of English. Some needed NEPS assessments before secondary but slipped through the net with Covid. NEPS is quite a limited service. We probably have about 4-5 visits for a few hours in the year... you also have to consider the other children in the school.' (230) (Ben, Headteacher)

'My biggest bug bear is that we are just given a very vague minimum information. (42) When they come first, they can be very friendly, they can be overly friendly; there's no limits with them and then sometimes trauma comes out and they can act up and all those things that come

with what those children have come through, come out. (47) (Margaret, SET)

Psychological trauma is indicative of the refugee experience. Whether it is addressed by professionals, or the safety and peace of living in Ireland is enough to sustain a person and allow them to work through their trauma, it is certain that psychological services available to refugees in Ireland is negligible while government training and guidelines are non-existent.

SUMMARY

Volunteers tried to mobilise charities to access funding for those in greatest need of psychological assessment and help. Services to support psychological trauma of refugees are almost non-existent. Many Syrian families feel it is culturally inappropriate to address mental health issues outside of the home.

5.5: Women

There is little formal policy relating specifically to women, possibly due to the perceived equality of men and women in Ireland compared to the more restrictive role of women in Syria. The limited policy available relates to health issues as the White Paper (2021, p59) states that:

'All women and girls of reproductive age will have the information and means to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancy and STIs. All women of reproductive age will be provided with information on access to termination of pregnancy services in Ireland ...IPSS Caseworkers will ensure that where requested, women and girls can access a female GP or clinician.'

As is the cultural norm, most Syrian women marry young and start families early. Culturally, although some do, it isn't expected of them to work in their own country, therefore the likelihood of refugee women accessing the workforce in Ireland with the added challenge of the language barrier is slim. They are expected to be chaperoned at all times once outside the homeplace and wear Islamic coverings. Depending on their family expectations and level of devoutness, this can range from the hijab (head scarf) to the burqa (full body, face and eye covering) with gradients of modesty in between. Muslims are scarce in Donegal making it rare to see a woman wearing Muslim head dress.

'In the Women's centre, her community asked her just to take the burqa off and let her face be seen, as it was sending the wrong messages. (385) Young girls feel more free here and just wear the veil. The older ladies feel they should be accepted wherever the way they are wherever they go. (393) (Farah, Translator)

It can be difficult for Arabic women to maintain their identity in a country whereby the vast majority of women do not cover their hair or bodies and are culturally opposed to the idea that women should cover their hair as an act of subservience to their husband. They are fish out of water and require support to preserve their identity and sense of self in a foreign place. An EROC worker highlighted how subservient Syrian women would be in classes while the men were there. Aoibheann (EROC) observed that it is the norm that Arabic women would never deliberately show a man up, correct him or act with superiority.

'Women are so reserved when the men are around.' (101) The women would be much better than the men at times, but they just couldn't show us. If their partner was weaker than them at English, they wouldn't speak; they would never show the partner up. (110)

Another cultural deviance for Arabic students was the mixing of teenage boys and girls together in school but the majority of schools in Donegal are co-ed therefore the refugees must go where they're placed. One of the most prominent challenges is the lack of awareness on both sides about the role of women in both the Irish and Arabic culture. Ben (Headteacher) alluded that they are polite towards all staff, but it can prove

to be a waste of resources waiting for a man to come *'At a social event, they were all just gravitating towards me... the men always seem to go straight to me and bypass the teacher... but they are very respectful.'* (261)

It is evident that in the Arabic psyche, whilst still respectful of women, men hold greater standing and authority. While there are some commonalities between the two cultures, being considered to be 'of marrying age' when you are 17 years-old and the implications of that is definitely not the norm in Ireland as was highlighted by Farah (Translator):

'A student went for an interview for one of her projects for Leaving Cert Applied. She couldn't go into the room, because there was a man interviewing her and she is 17. She's in the age of marrying according to her culture, so she's not allowed to be in a room with a male on her own. It was a complete meltdown just before an interview. The teacher did not realise why the student did not want to go... if she had a female member of staff, it would have been fine. (444) It means a little bit of education because some of them are not educated enough in the respect of those kinds of cultural differences.' (454)

Neither the Irish nor Arabic participants were culturally aware that something so basic and normal in one culture could cause such upset and distress in the other culture. Education and guidelines for both parties would prove invaluable in avoiding such scenarios, but none were forthcoming in any official capacity. The translator went on to emphasize the day-to-day struggles faced by Arabic women living in Donegal and the need for a female intercultural worker to assist with normal, everyday activities that they, or their husbands are not comfortable with. Farah (Translator) suggests that the male ego is dominant in this frame and the women are happy to concede to this as this is the expectation.

'In Letterkenny, there are just two refugee workers. There is not enough funding to hire a third one. There are a few families who refused the interpreter to go in the house because the man of the house said there should be no other man in his house in front of his wife. I had ladies who delivered their babies and they refused to have an interpreter there, so I

had to stand in for free all night with the lady having a baby because she had no English.' (423)

In a culture where women's rights and expectations have come a long way in recent years, it is difficult to marry the Irish psyche with the Arabic mentality about women. Farah (Translator) explains how some families fear their daughter's education: *'If my daughter goes to college and gets a high degree, she might not get married and the father thinks 'my job is never done.' He feels like he's always going to be the protector when she is not married, until another man takes over.'* (850)

That said, there is evidence of a small shift taking place, whereby girls will finish school and consider third level education and employment. They are still expected to marry young and begin their families, at which point, their employment will likely end. Living in Ireland, where it is a social norm for girls to study and work, small steps are being made for the Arabic girls as their options become more varied. Farah (Translator) reflects that:

'Seeing progress is wonderful. One student was doing the leaving Cert and didn't want to do it. She was probably having an arranged marriage and thought she had no other future, but by the end of the year, she signed for college. That was my best thing ever... it's just that that person understood that she could be different.' (811)

SUMMARY

Syrian women have more freedom in Ireland and are taking small steps to exercise that freedom. Many women are learning to drive, and more young ladies are engaging in Third Level education before marriage. The lack of female translators can lead to tension due to cultural restraints, while cultural awareness and the etiquette of teenage girls around males working in a professional capacity needs to be addressed.

5.6: Money

Government policy relating to social welfare and benefits is detailed in Chapter 3. How policy translates to practice in terms of the refugees having a liveable income is analysed below. It was personally observed by the researcher, some school staff and volunteer workers who were interviewed, that in general, the cohort of Syrian refugees living in Donegal never appear to be short of money and they tend to have a lot of cash with them to pay for things.

During informal conversations with some of the families, the ladies revealed that they regularly pay €120 to their local hairdresser to get their hair cut and coloured. Another revealed that for her recent engagement she spent €500 on her dress for the occasion. A Syrian father asked the researcher to help him transfer €1000 to Turkey for furniture that they wanted to purchase and have shipped over. Many of the Syrian houses in Donegal are beautifully decorated in authentic Arabic furniture that has been shipped over from the Middle East. By Irish standards, such examples of spending would be considered above average and indeed extravagant for someone in a lower socio-economic bracket. Such spending suggests there is no financial struggle. Few of these families have regular, if any, employment and are reliant on government benefits and welfare payments.

Discussions with the Resettlement Support Worker (male) and a volunteer translator (female) who are both of Arabic origin revealed that although such spending may appear profligate, there are cultural differences at stake. Family occasions, particularly weddings, are a significant marker of status in Arabic culture. More akin to Irish culture several generations ago, where a dowry by the bride's family was the norm, Arabic unions operate in a similar vein. Irrespective of financial circumstances, priority is given to ensuring a family doesn't lose face and the bride is provided with whatever she deems necessary for the occasion, even if to the detriment of other things. Eman (Intercultural Worker) stated that :

‘The women in the family are in charge of whatever money comes into the house. They are very particular and very careful about what they are purchasing, therefore they are always trying to save as much money on spending. We might go to TESCO for a bag of sugar and end up spending

e200; they don't do that. They don't go online and buy things on Amazon. If one family buys a nice sofa, there is a lot of jealousy, so the next wife will want one. They may exaggerate the cost. (139) They all certainly manage to save a tremendous amount of money just from social welfare....Once you have more than 3 children, you've made it.... I know one guy who makes e850 a week. (155)

This insight gives a more balanced impression of the spending of the refugees and highlights what their spending priorities are in relation to their cultural expectations. In contrast to how many refugees live in other parts of Ireland, those in Donegal didn't show any signs of poverty. Ben (Headteacher) stated that: *'We found that anything we asked for in the line of money... they would always have loads of money when they open their wallet. I don't know whether it's just that they like to carry cash, rather than use cards, but we were always kind of shocked to see the amount of money they were carrying in their wallet.'* (306)

Arguably, few people wish or expect refugees to live in poverty and would contend that a successful society is one where there is not such a stark discrepancy between how the rich and the poor live. However, public opinion can quickly turn if people feel that migrants are 'sponging off' the system. Sympathy ebbs and has the potential to turn to resentment.

'One of the first things that they all would have bought is Sky TV... so they're able to link into TV in their own countries.' (224)

Some can take advantage. *'Some were looking for transport to school, because it was too far to walk. Old Town is well within the area, but they still thought that they should have been provided with free transport.'* (230) (Chris, Headteacher)

People's attitude to refugees having money is noteworthy. During my time volunteering with the refugees, on occasion comments such as 'How come they have a Smartphone?', 'How can they afford to wear those runners...drive a car like that? etc. will be asked by local people. It is almost the expectation that refugees should be poor. It doesn't fit their

profile to have the same as those of us who are not refugees. Images of people drowning off boats in the Mediterranean Sea doesn't marry with the idea of someone who acquires the same material aspirations as us. Whilst it is a welcome sign that the refugees are being well looked after financially, this section highlights the relatively high standard of living that the refugees in Donegal have become accustomed to while being predominantly unemployed. This in turn leads one to re-examine whether the government benefits are too generous that they hinder the incentive for refugees to work.

SUMMARY

There is no obvious sign of poverty with the refugees in Donegal. They are well provided for and have a decent standard of living. Attitudes towards refugees living comfortably lead locals to question how much taxpayer's money goes towards government benefits for refugees.

5.7: The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017

The following 12 strategies taken from the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017, (p25/26) focus on the government proposals specifically in relation to education. (Proposals 26-37) A brief summary of how each strategy has been implemented or not, is detailed below this table.

Strategy	Working	Partially Working	Not working
26: The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will be enacted, 2017	√		
27: Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions, including raising awareness of the Irish language aptitude test and adaptation period for primary teaching.		√	
28: The extension of the Free Fees initiative for Third Level Education to the children of migrants will be explored.	√		
29: The numbers of non-English speaking migrant children in schools will be monitored annually and details published.	√		
30: Current school enrolment policies will be monitored over time to assess their effect on migrant students.			√
31: The effectiveness of training for teachers on managing diversity and tackling racism will be reviewed.			√
32: The provision of ESOL classes to cater for the language needs of adults from ethnic minorities will be reviewed following the development of ESOL policy guidelines.		√	
33: The adequacy of language supports in schools to cater for the language needs of children from ethnic minorities will be kept under review.		√	
34: Schools will be encouraged to support migrant parents' participation in the school life of their children.		√	
35: The use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for recognition of English language proficiency will be extended so that people can assess their progress.		√	
36: The fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference will continue to form part of the school curriculum.		√	
37: Follow-on ESOL programmes will be delivered to enable migrants to acquire more intensive language skills to assist their integration into the workplace.		√	

Figure 7: Summary of Progress of Migrant Integration Strategy 2017

Proposals 26 to 37 analysed:

26: The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will be enacted. 2017 ***Yes, all refugees automatically are given school place since the Education Act was signed into law on 18th July 2018.***

27. Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions, including raising awareness of the Irish language aptitude test and adaptation period for primary teaching. ***The Migrant Teacher Project aims to increase the participation of Immigrant Internationally Educated Teachers. The project provides information, advice and training to migrant teachers who have qualified outside of Ireland, to help them to continue their profession in Ireland. They also provide a Bridging Programme to familiarise immigrants with the Irish education system. There are more onerous barriers for primary teachers. They must be able to teach Irish, attend the Gaeltacht and complete an exam, which is expensive. They also need a Catholic Certificate in Religious Education to teach in almost 90 per cent of schools. Limited funding is allocated through PATH for initial teacher training. With regards human resources, the increasing diversification of schools is not reflected in the teaching staff.***

28. The extension of the Free Fees initiative for Third Level Education to the children of migrants will be explored. ***Yes, refugees with Stamp 4 can apply for the Free Fees initiative as long as they have been in Europe for three years. By the time they are settled in Ireland, most refugees have spent 3 years between refugee camps and direct provision. This initiative doesn't apply to asylum seekers.***

29. The numbers of non-English speaking migrant children in schools will be monitored annually and details published. ***Data from primary schools pertaining to mother tongue and ethnicity/ cultural background is collected when a child is first enrolled. Data from secondary school pupils regarding country of birth and ethnicity are also collected and registered on the online system. The DoE publishes data on nationality for primary and country of birth for secondary students in June every year. This aim of this is to inform national policy in the future.***

30. Current school enrolment policies will be monitored over time to assess their effect on migrant students. ***Guidelines have been issued but nothing has been written into policy.***

31. The effectiveness of training for teachers on managing diversity and tackling racism will be reviewed. ***The PDST provides seminars and CPD courses, but currently none are compulsory. Wellbeing is becoming more prominent in primary and secondary schools however up until March 2022, no CPD courses focused specifically on refugees.***

32. The provision of ESOL classes to cater for the language needs of adults from ethnic minorities will be reviewed following the development of ESOL policy guidelines. ***The ETB and SOLAS provide English language provision Level 1-3 ESOL. Level 3 ESOL is equivalent to A2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is completion of Beginner User. There are 4 levels of Independent User and Proficient User after that. Little or nothing is offered to refugees after that meaning their English proficiency remains at basic level.***

33. The adequacy of language supports in schools to cater for the language needs of children from ethnic minorities will be kept under review. ***Supports are put in place but as per the data gathered, they are insufficient.***

34. Schools will be encouraged to support migrant parents' participation in the school life of their children. ***The government have drafted legislation which will require every school to consult with parents and students and publish a Parent & Student charter. This is not law yet. In terms of refugees, all schools use good practice and liaise directly with parents in person, in writing, by email or where necessary through a translator when available. Often children will translate for their parents on school matters.***

35 The use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for recognition of English language proficiency will be extended so that people can assess their progress. ***This proposal is still in progress, but individuals can check their level against the CEFRL criteria online.***

36 The fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference will continue to form part of the school curriculum. ***This is being***

carried out by some individual schools but apart from anti-bullying policies being mandatory, there is nothing more specific at primary level. Topics on positive attitudes and diversity is covered in some SESE curricula.

37 Follow-on ESOL programmes will be delivered to enable migrants to acquire more intensive language skills to assist their integration into the workplace. *This has been rolled out in some counties. It is hoped that SOLAS will provide more advanced classes in Donegal. Meanwhile, the Donegal Intercultural Platform is providing free English conversational classes once a week in several venues throughout the county. Many volunteers are also providing conversation classes, but these are not levelled. There are intended to help learners grow more confident with the language, to socialise and to integrate.*

5.8 Case Study of a Refugee Family in Donegal

The Al Rashid family consist of a mother, father, two daughters and one son. In 2011 at the beginning of the Syrian War, schooling became inconsistent due to the unrest and the children missed a lot of days. (Gap in Education). Eventually the school which the children attended in Idlib was bombed killing between 200-300 children and staff. (Trauma) Unable to attend school, the family decided to flee to Europe. (Uncertainty, Fear, Homeless) It took seven attempts to get to Turkey cross country from where they spent a large sum of money to use a human smuggler to take them across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece. (Homeless, Unemployed, Poverty) On that journey, the boat behind them capsized and everyone on board drowned causing severe trauma to the family who witnessed it. In Europe, they spent months in tents and refugee camps in Greece and Lebanon. Kidnapping was rife in the camps, so the parents didn't allow their children to attend the makeshift schools. (Gap in Education, Fear, Uncertainty, Poverty)

On arrival to Ireland, the family spent several months in Direct Provision where the children had tuition with over 50 pupils in the class of different levels. As a family, they aspired to learn 100 words a day (EAL). Six years after the war started the Al Rashid's were finally placed in Donegal. (Security, Money from government). As refugees, they were part of the RRP and received support with getting settled in their house. (Home) The children joined school and local activities, while the adults started EAL classes. (Language, Integration) The daughters wear Islamic dress to school. There is no mosque near where they live but they have discovered shops which sell Arabic food in a nearby town, where they can stock up and enjoy their own cuisine. (Religion, Culture). All three children were given language support for the first two years and are now completely fluent in English/ (EAL, Hope, Success) The three children fast during Ramadan which is very difficult in Irish schools where nobody else observes it. (Religion). The children have made good friends in school and have some contact with them outside of school. They attend football matches and birthday parties, but the girls don't go on playdates to other houses. (Integration, but not fully) The father entered a state of deep depression for several months. (Trauma)

During the pandemic, the two older children had almost enough English to engage with online learning platforms and help their younger brother, but they were very bored and found it difficult. (Gap in Education) The parents had not made enough progress with

English to help their children with their work and felt helpless. (Lockdown, EAL, Isolation) With the easing of restrictions, the children returned to school and their activities. (Bridge the Education Gap) For the past year, the father, a skilled carpenter has got meaningful paid employment. (Money, Purpose) They have bought a car. The mother has made friends mainly with other Syrian women but feels she is getting to know the parents from school. She has learned to drive and is actively involved with children's activities and projects organised by local groups for migrants. (Integration, Sense of Purpose, Freedom) Her English has improved significantly, while the father still struggles with the language. (EAL) They have a little extra money now, so can afford a higher standard of living. Overall, the Al Rashid family are content and feel like Ireland is home. Their children are happy, the parents have a purpose and live a comfortable life and they love the peace of living in Donegal.

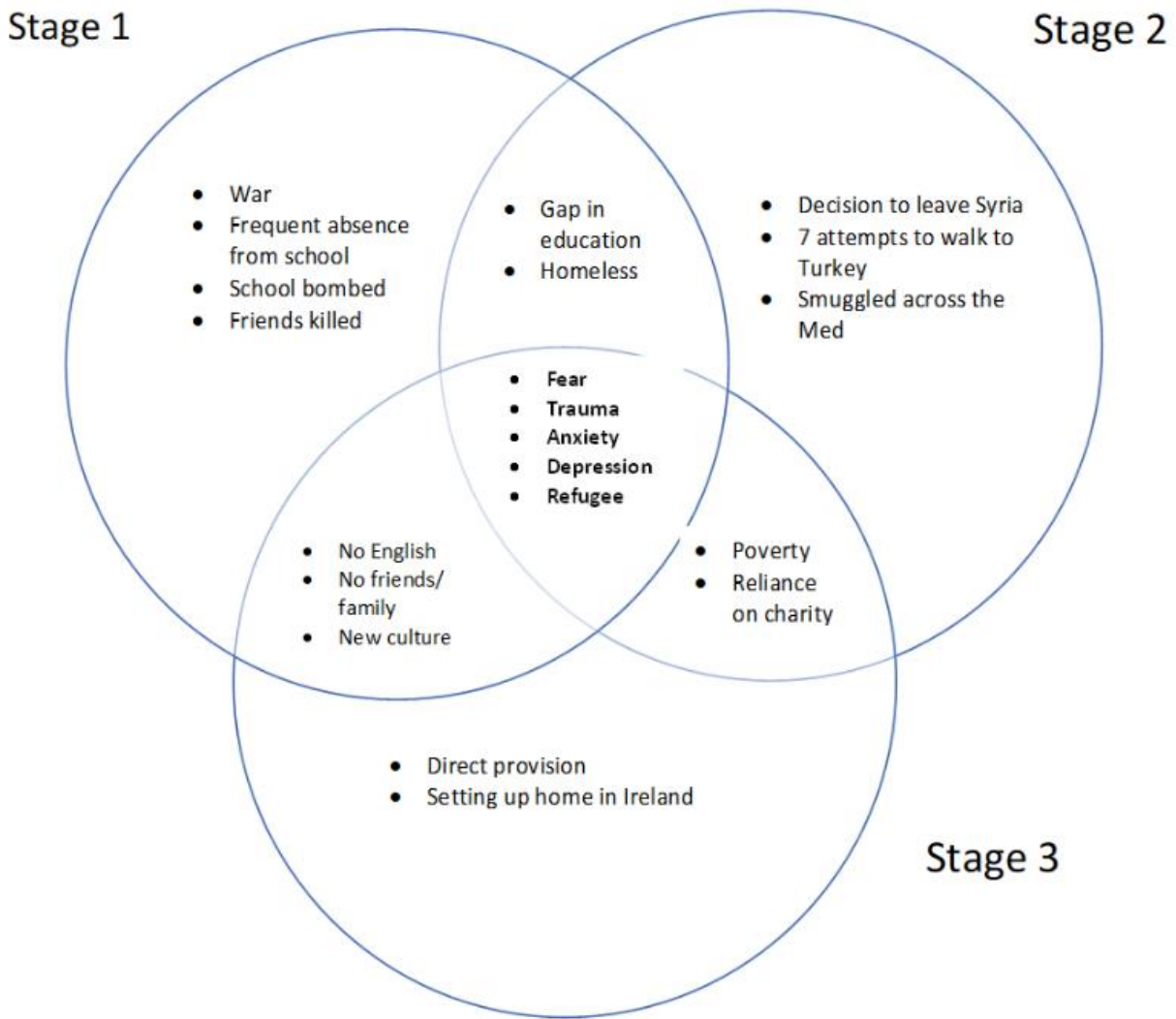


Figure 8: Venn Diagram highlighting the complexity of the refugee experience (Negative)

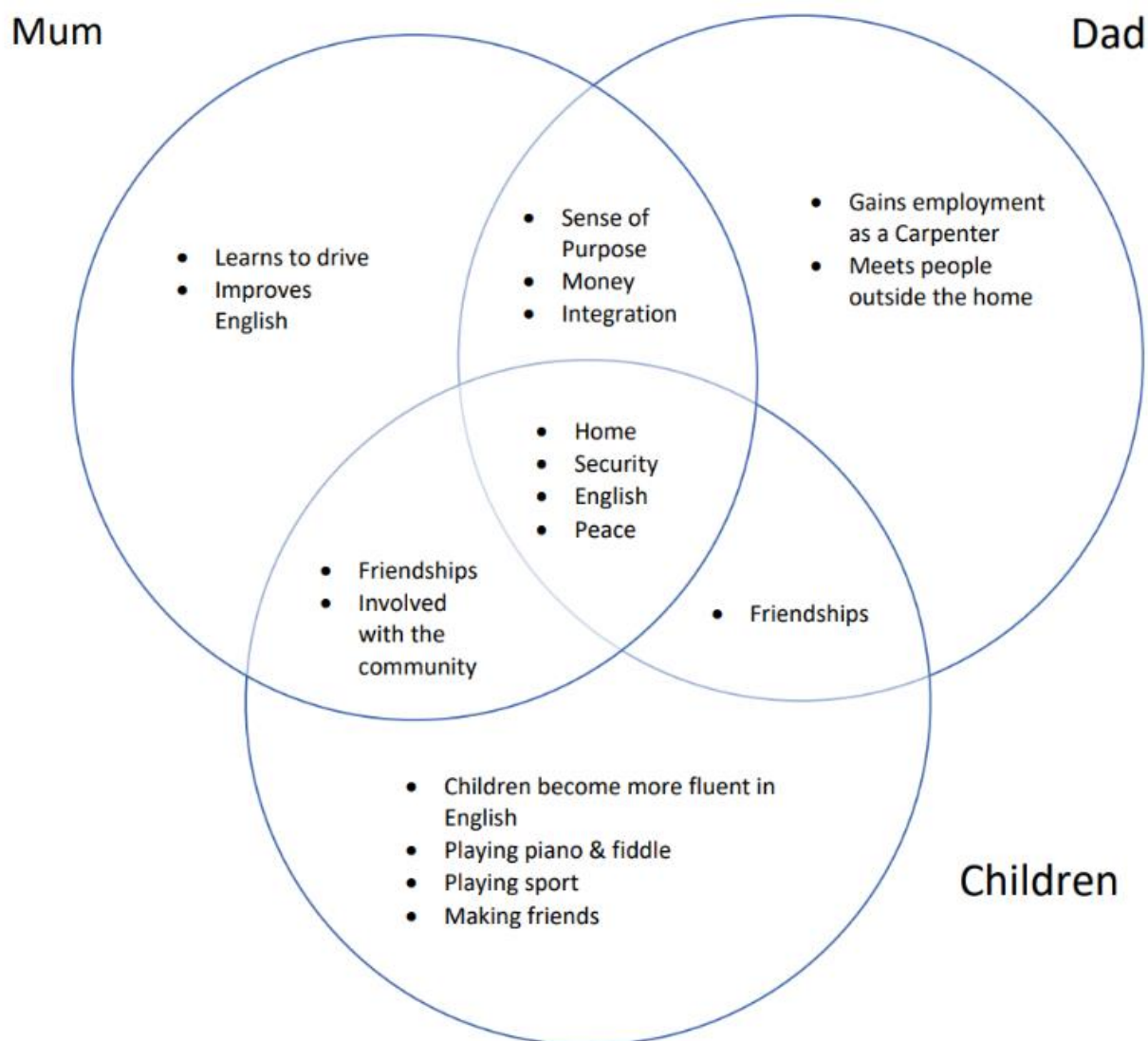


Figure 9: Venn Diagram highlighting the complexity of the refugee experience (Positive)

Using the experience of the Al Rashid family as a case study I have illustrated, through the Venn Diagrams above, the complexity of the themes as they weave through their narrative. Whilst listed separately in the findings, many of these themes are inter-related and happen as a consequence of another theme. Bronfenbrenner’s EST model is applicable here where the Macro picture that includes war, death, frequent absences from school, mass migration and the creation of millions of refugees is at play. This in turn leads to the Mezzo image of families leaving their home and making the journey all

contribute to the gap in children's education. This feeds into the difficulty in language acquisition and the ability to work which in turn leads to the micro detail of families experiencing depression and anxiety which is compounded by the trauma of war and the refugee's journey. These issues cannot be isolated from each other. As illustrated by the Venn diagrams above, every aspect of human development, or lack thereof, is interrelated and co-dependent upon multiple social, cultural, educational and political components. Bronfenbrenner argues that the environment you grow up in affects every facet of your life. The Venn Diagrams highlights aspects of this theory were applied to Syrian refugees in Donegal from both a positive and negative stance. The second diagram depicts that when the family were housed, began working, the children settled in school, collectively they felt more positive, hopeful and settled. It is interesting to note that at the point where everything finally got settled for them as a family, was the period where the father fell into deep depression for several months. The Macro System of war impacts directly on the Micro System which can include individual depression, long after the journey is over, despite successes and challenges being overcome.

While this family may in many ways be considered a success story, their journey was not without much tribulation which has far reaching ramifications for the future. It should also be noted that the socio-economic status that they had in Syria influenced their drive to ensure their children learned English, joined clubs, and mixed with local children. Whilst they observe their religious heritage, they are not so embedded in it to prevent them from integrating to a certain degree with the local community. This case study resembles the experience of many of the families settled in Donegal, with the exception of employment which is not common.

5.9: Reflexive Analysis

Conducting this research and writing this thesis has been a journey spanning five years. As with any journey, it has not been a straight road. As a researcher with years of personal experience, an emotional attachment, and a vested interest in refugees, I felt very comfortable with this subject and obliged that my research reflects the most honest version of the refugee experience, but humans and truth can both be subjective. Many assumptions made have been confirmed, many others invalidated and my proclivity for standing in the refugees' corner against all others needed to be challenged to ensure a balanced view and narrative emerged.

The challenge of moving country, away from the university mid-research, felt lonely and isolating at times. The change of my primary supervisor, due to his work commitments, caused another upheaval in my working dynamic. Undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic had the greatest effect on my research, not just in terms of the physical constraints it imposed on my research methods and methodology, but on a much deeper level it threw hard questions and realities in the way of my research. As I was dealing with the live issue of refugees in Donegal, the challenges of their acculturation, language acquisition and daily interactions were amplified.

Whilst few could have anticipated or prepared for a worldwide pandemic, it served to highlight blatant flaws and failures in the system. It plunged my research into chaos as plans to conduct investigations through art activities with refugee children and utilise focus groups to enhance my study were scrapped. This demoralising period led to a restructure which yielded much longer and more meaningful interviews than I had anticipated and indeed some lasting friendships. Further implications of Covid interrupted my study following my own hospitalisation for ten days due to a severe bout of the virus, leading to a prolonged three-month recovery.

In February 2022, during the final write up stages of thesis, the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine heralded the beginning of an ongoing bloody war. In the space of six months, almost 48,000 Ukrainians arrived in Ireland with over 2,300 placed in Donegal to date. This is in stark contrast to the Syrian crisis. In the space of 5 years, less than 4,000 Syrians were allowed to enter with only 49 families settled in Donegal. There is great scope for future research on this topic where one might compare the speed and

magnitude at which the Ukrainians came to Ireland, the resources that were put in place for them, the preparation of the host communities and their ability to acculturate to life in Donegal. Comparative studies with other counties in Ireland at two-, five- or ten-year intervals would garner potentially interesting data about migration trends.

This rural annexed county, once homogenous, is fast embracing diversity. This has impacted me personally as a volunteer who has helped place them in schools, manage their paperwork, organise integration events, get them set up with clothes, shoes, school resources and other essentials on arrival. I have witnessed at first hand the chaos experienced by those who I interviewed two years ago, as I now have 5 refugees in my class who don't speak English. I am now a teacher who must battle for EAL resources, bus passes and lunches for refugees who arrived with only 10 days' notice. Celebrating the small daily successes of the children learning a new phrase or making a new friend goes hand in hand with dealing with the daily trauma of these children whose fathers remain in Ukraine at war. Bearing witness to this daily struggle has strengthened my resolve to ensure this research is measured, accountable and gives a voice to refugees and those working with them.

I have been fortunate to be able to use my personal experiences as a teacher and volunteer to get as close to the real issues that are perhaps often hidden from view. I have stood outside this research whilst simultaneously been a part of it and used this to fuel my passion for the fair treatment and agency of refugees, and also the understanding of what it's like as a host community accepting culturally polarised and traumatised refugees into our towns and villages. Refugees, once a vague concept in Donegal, now live in my village, go to my school and play with my children. This is live research which I hope can contribute to current and future knowledge and policy.

5.10: Conclusion

Aisling (Headteacher) claims that *'The government is providing a commitment to the families and always ensuring that Ireland is somewhere that they can come to us and be open to supporting families that are coming in.'* (475)

Overall, it would appear that the Syrian refugees who are settled in Donegal are well looked after in many respects. All 49 families live in spacious, well-maintained own door accommodation. They are given a substantial benefits package from social welfare which offers a liveable amount of money to exist comfortably with their families. Due to most of the families having 3 or more children, they are entitled to a children's allowance benefit of €140 per child per month, adding significantly to their income. For many of the families, particularly those with large families, the generous benefit system acts as a deterrent to gain employment unless it is cash in hand as they will lose some of their benefits. Although some of the Syrians are working, after 2 years, the majority are not. The majority of those who are working stay under the 20 hours per week employment to secure their benefits.

The system encourages people to remain unemployed and be a financial burden on society. Without employment, less interaction and speaking English with the local community takes place thus hindering integration. Furthermore, the likelihood of the children coming through the system and following the example of their parents into the social welfare cycle is high. Whilst support and sympathy were high when the Syrian war was prominent daily on all media platforms, this exposure has waned due to the Pandemic and current Ukrainian crisis. Over time, if immigrants are seen as a financial burden to society and are unwilling to seek employment to support themselves and their families, resentment and anti-immigrant sentiments can fester. This is not necessarily the fault of the refugees but also of a government who has in a sense thrown a lot of money at a project without a solid plan.

This research has examined the integration policies set out by the government and reviewed the process by which the intended outcomes were or were not reached. As a member state of the EU, Ireland is bound, in part, by the policy of the EU. Gilmartin & Dagg (2022) state that recent efforts to define and measure immigrant integration have focused on integration outcomes, by assessing the levels of economic and social

convergence of the experiences of immigrants and non-immigrants, informed by the Zaragoza indicators (European Commission, 2010). The goal of the Zaragoza indicators is to ensure immigrants are monitored to enable comparability between the EU Member States. Integration policies provide the context for integration processes, which in turn influence integration outcomes.

The four key areas of integration include employment, education, social inclusion and participation in the democratic process. Education and employment are critical pillars of the integration process, both for the immigrant's sense of purpose and the host country's acceptance of the immigrant playing its role in contributing to society, however the data reveals that these issues remain contentious. It is widely agreed amongst all the interview candidates that there isn't enough time or resources dedicated to teaching English to adults. With no obligation to attend these tailored English classes, there is little incentive to attend these classes for those find it difficult, intimidating or don't have the time, as it has no reflection on the benefits that they will receive. As per the findings of this research, very few of the 49 families are in paid employment. Many take on casual employment for cash, claiming that they would lose their government benefits if they went through the books. Furthermore, many of the Syrians feel their lack of competent English deems them unemployable, due, in part, to the limited time they had to learn English through the RRP.

Participation in the democratic process is allowed for anyone with refugee status who have the right to vote in local elections, however few refugees showed interest in local politics.

In terms of social inclusion, how wider society has responded to the changes amassed by refugees is variable. Before the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees in recent months, the majority would concede that they have found little difference, unless they actively chose to get involved. Less than twenty schools accommodated refugees and asylum seekers in Donegal. Due to their cultural differences, the Syrian refugees in Donegal do not always socialise in the same manner and tend to do so amongst themselves in their own houses. However phenomenal work has been carried out at grassroots levels by local residents, volunteers and befrienders. This has included fundraising, world kitchens, the organisation of cultural festivals, music classes, inclusion in sports clubs, private English classes, driving lessons and much more. Local groups such as LYFS,

Foróige and TUSLA have helped to fund after-school activities, mental health support, summer camps and youth projects to support integration and fostering a sense of purpose.

The overwhelming response from the data collected is that people are kind, friendly, helpful and tolerant, but few have very close, meaningful friendships with them. Grassroots organisations endeavour to create space where the refugees can come and meet locals and take part in projects, but in the 2-5 years that they have been in Donegal, the children integrate well in school but not so much outside. The young adults are still struggling to navigate third level education and the job market, while the adults know their neighbours on an informal basis but don't socialise with them. This is from both sides.

The data collected indicates that even though the Syrian refugees in Donegal were handpicked and placed in the pre-organised RRP for a year, there was a notable amount of chaos, upheaval, and uncertainty on both sides. Schools welcomed refugees and unstintingly went above and beyond their remit to assist them but acknowledged the great difficulties that ensued with insufficient resources, training and guidelines. Communities and interagency staff clambered to get resources and learn on the job, often without any guidance. Lack of training and human resources for EAL, special needs and psychological trauma were highlighted as the greatest challenges. This is undoubtedly a failure by the government. Whilst help, guidance and assistance came from many sides, both officially and from volunteers, the greatest asset to the resettlement of the refugees in Donegal were the school staff. The compensatory role that teachers played in trying to bridge the educational gap of refugee children, against so many challenges, and insufficient resources and training cannot be overstated. Through sheer goodwill and humanity, there were teachers in every school who went above and beyond to make up for the deficiencies in the system. The Micro System compensated the failings of the Macro System. Through organising books and uniforms from their own families and neighbours, carpooling lifts to school for the new children, redirecting school resources and funds, offering advice and help to parents about non-school matters and spending countless hours outside their remit to guide and counsel traumatised students; they just made things work for the sake of the children. Teachers stood on the front line, firefighting issues that were not their responsibility, playing a

pivotal role in filling the gaps caused by the lack of planning, preparation, gathering of resources or distribution of necessary information from various government departments. It was the teachers who counted the cost of the complex needs and deficits of the refugees and through their care and integrity.

The main feature uniting the Syrian refugees is the label 'refugee.' They come from all levels of society with vastly different socio-economic backgrounds. They come with varying degrees of education, life skills and culture capital. They have all fled a war-torn country and embarked on a physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually life-changing journey. Some are eager to work, others are not. Those who were productive at home are more likely to follow suit in Ireland. One Intercultural Worker estimated that of the Syrian families in Donegal, about 10% of them have gained meaningful employment. The rest are entrenched in the benefits system in Ireland for the past 3-5 years, which doesn't offer much incentive to seeking work. They are living comfortably, so don't need to fix and what is not broken.

It is at this juncture that careful intervention needs to be applied. From all the interviews undertaken it is easy to pinpoint that the group that needs the most immediate attention are the school leavers and those at the upper end of secondary school. To ensure that the benefits cycle is broken and the potential of the younger generation of refugees is nourished, sharp focus is needed to encourage this cohort to reach their potential so that they may join the workforce and become an asset to society, as opposed to a long-term financial burden. It is this group that are struggling the most at school and who are put under unimaginable pressure to sit state exams in a foreign language for which they are grossly unprepared for academically or emotionally.

Whilst school staff have given unprecedented amounts of time to help these students, more intense English tuition and strategies to integrate pupils are necessary to raise their standard as they embark on tertiary education, apprenticeships, or the work force itself. Irrespective of whether their one-year RRP is over, career guidance with appropriate translation services should be invested in within schools to ensure this transition is feasible. The evidence shows that this area is lacking leading to devastating effects. Sheikh et al. (2018) argue that '*The relationship between education and acculturation is bi-directional, and potentially cyclical, in that acculturation may facilitate education, but that education may also facilitate acculturation.*' Education and cultural

integration complement each other and are mutually beneficial. The same theory could be applied to refugees gaining employment.

This study is unique in its exploration of the refugee experience in a place that had previously never hosted refugees before. As stated in the introduction, the key objectives of the study were to examine the real lived experience of refugees in Ireland, and to ascertain whether the Irish government adheres to the policy it has proposed in relation to their wellbeing, the provision of education and language supports. It questions whether suitable infrastructures have been established to ensure the process of implementing government policy was sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes. It examines whether those working with refugees and asylum seekers in Donegal are adequately trained and prepared for their roles. Finally, this research explores the role of the wider community in accepting the refugees and supporting them to become valued members of their community.

As a live issue, and with the ongoing influx of Ukrainians into Ireland, this research has significant implications for professionals working with refugees in the future. The collective voice of all the stakeholders has given rich, informative data on this complex issue. Those with experience at the coal face of education appear to be at the behest of the policy makers between which there is little cohesion, leaving school leaders feeling vulnerable and disconnected. Frequently forgotten is the human element of education and that those who live it, work it, and survive it daily are best placed to give credence to professional knowledge. Historically, emotion was avoided. Decision making was done objectively. Damason (1994) argues that emotions are critical to the processes of reasoning and decision making. The originality of this research is that it adds to the knowledge of the refugee experience in Ireland but also to government policy. The inclusion of the Irish perspective offers a unique insight into how both the refugees and host community coped with their new reality as the landscape of their environment changed drastically in a relatively short space of time. With thousands of Ukrainian refugees now living in Donegal, future researchers can use this research as a benchmark upon which to grow and develop new knowledge. Teachers, school leaders and policy makers can take example from this data about what works and what doesn't work, what resources, training and expertise are needed for both the refugees and local community.

The conclusions and recommendations of this research, the errors, mistakes, and issues that were overlooked or not considered, can take the field forward and contribute to scholarship by being utilised for better learning, better training and better practice. As evidenced in the Findings, so often a lot of the things that work with children are the wordless things that transcend language; the impact of playing a game of football, an invitation to a birthday party, offering a space to pray, a kind gesture to let them know that someone has their back. As a primary teacher familiar with the education system and a volunteer who gains regular access to the houses, the researcher was in a unique position to discuss and witness at first hand the significant points of transition on acculturation through small, often silent exchanges, giving originality to this body of work.

This thesis argues that the Irish government has done remarkable work in welcoming 4000 Syrian refugees to Ireland, establishing the Refugee Resettlement Programme and providing generous social welfare benefits, subsidies and allowances to allow them to live in relative comfort. Every refugee is housed and has access to education.

Proposals 26-37 in the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017 in relation to education have been enacted, explored, monitored, and reviewed but what this means in reality is that refugee children are allowed to attend school. As previously mentioned, this accounts for equality but not equity. The remaining proposals remain between just adequate or immaterial. EAL is in place for adults but there is not enough of it. Teacher training in EAL and diversity is ad hoc. Services for psychological trauma are almost non-existent. Efforts to attract migrants to teaching positions is negligible. Efforts to integrate families are mixed. However, despite the pandemic, housing crisis in Ireland and current influx of Ukrainian refugees, the government has made good on its proposals in the White Paper (2021) and efforts to eradicate Direct Provision and replace it with more independent living quarters are visible in Letterkenny with the 59 asylum seeking families housed there. Whilst this is a positive step, complexity looms. Within the next two weeks, students will resume studies at university in Letterkenny. McNulty (2022) has revealed that 'a deepening housing crisis has seen accommodation available to students in Letterkenny fall by 63% at a time when the ATU (Atlantic Technological University) Donegal campus is anticipating record numbers. The building which currently houses the 59 asylum seeker families is former student accommodation. It is

anticipated that questions and concerns will be imminently raised over asylum seekers getting accommodation ahead of Irish students.

Public services remain overloaded, but lessons can be learned. Emerging from the real-life challenges of running a school, headteachers and their staff can use their situated knowledge of learning and sharing practice for transformation within a school. By sharing a narrative of what is experienced with a school, the school leader can give meaning to events which can be used to inform professional knowledge. It is my express wish that the voices of those who informed this research serve to inform policy and practice going forward, that the good work of the government can be built upon and that lessons can be learned from the shortfall between policy and practice.

Whilst they reminisce about their lives in Syria and miss those whom they left behind, for the most part the Syrian refugees in Donegal concede that their previous life is gone. The war rages on. There is nothing for them to return to, and if and when the war ends, their country will remain in tatters for many years, by which time their children will have spent their formative years in Ireland. Some may return in the future; others have already decided that they are here to stay. They cook Arabic food in their homes daily, they pray from the Koran, they mostly speak Arabic amongst themselves, but the majority are settled into Irish life. The children speak fluent English in strong Donegal accents, the adults have functional English while the elders have resigned themselves to having the language translated for them. Life is not perfect, but they are safe and for the most part content and for that both the government and local communities in Donegal deserve credit. Many now consider Donegal home. The hope is that for those who were of an age where structures were not in place for them to integrate fully, they will be for the children currently coming through the education system.

'Like my daughter said, they were afraid to go to school at first. They didn't tell their story except that they came from Syria, but that is past. Two years ago, when we first came here, I used the GPS for getting around. We arrived to Carndonagh and the GPS said, 'Welcome to your homeland.' I felt comfort. Donegal is my home now.' (186) (Farooq, Refugee)

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ABBREVIATIONS & VOCABULARY

An Garda Síochána / Gardaí – National Police force of Ireland

Bus Éireann – State owned bus / coach operator in Ireland

CAMHS – Child Adolescent Mental Health Services

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

EBD – Emotional and Behaviour Disorder

EROC – Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre

ETB – Education and Training Board

EWO – Educational Welfare Officer

Foróige – Youth Development Organisation

GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association

HSE – Health Service Executive

INTO – Irish National Teachers' Organisation

IPAS – International Protection Accommodation Service

LMETB – Louth and Meath Education and Training Board

NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service

NCSE – National Council for Special Needs

PATH – Programme for Access to Higher Education

PDST – Professional Development Service for Teachers

RIA – Reception and Integration Agency

RSE – Relationships and Sexuality Education

SCPA - Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments

SeeSaw - Digital portfolio tool which allows pupils to store their work in an online space and gain feedback from their teacher

SENO – Special Educational Needs Organisers

SET – Special Education teacher

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

SOLAS – Further Education and Skills Service

Spraoi agus Spórt - Social enterprise: Social, Recreational & Educational Activities

TUSLA – Child and Family Agency

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

YouthReach - Education, training and work experience programme for young people who have left school early

The Irish Education System

* Pre-School (Age 3 & 4 yrs): 5 x half days per week paid for by the government ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education)

* Primary School consists of 8 years groups. Junior Infants (5 yrs), Senior Infants (6 yrs), 1st Class (7 yrs), 2nd Class (8 yrs), 3rd Class (9 yrs), 4th Class (10 yrs), 5th Class (11 yrs), 6th Class (12 yrs)

* Secondary School consists of 1st, 2nd, 3rd Year (Junior Certificate State Exam), 4th Year Transition (optional), 5th & 6th Year (Leaving Certificate State Exam)

* The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a self-contained two-year programme of the Irish Department of Education as an alternative or variant of the established Leaving Certificate programme. The programme is "intended to meet the needs of those pupils who choose not to opt for other Leaving Certificate Programmes.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Email to Participants to Request Participation in Interview

From: Claire Claydon

Sent: 09 September 2016 10:36

To: XXX

Subject: Request to participate in an interview for Doctoral research

Attached: Ethical Approval from Canterbury Christchurch University

Dear XXX

I am an EdD student at Canterbury Christchurch University and am conducting research on the integration of refugees into the Irish education system.

I am aware of your working position with the Syrian refugees, and I am writing to ask if you would consider taking part in an interview and sharing your knowledge and experience that could be used as part of my Doctoral research.

I have attached the ethical approval certificate from the university for your viewing. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
Claire Claydon

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Interviewees



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Is policy and practice for refugees in the Irish education system in rural Ireland effective?**

Name of Researcher: Claire Claydon

Contact details:

Address: Faculty of Education
Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road,
Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU

Tel: +353 879 253401

Email: c.m.claydon743@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#)
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent (<i>if different from researcher</i>)	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher

Appendix 3: Quantitative Survey for Refugees



Survey for Refugees living in Donegal

1. When did you leave your home in Syria?
2. What countries did you travel through before reaching Ireland?
3. When did you arrive in Donegal?
4. How long did you spend in Ireland before settling in Donegal?
5. How many people are in your family?
6. What are the ages of your children?
7. Did your children have any education / schooling when they left Syria until they arrived in Ireland?
8. Did your children have any education / schooling when they first arrived in Ireland while waiting to be placed in Donegal?
9. How do you rate the Irish Education system?
(scale of 1-5 1 = excellent 2 = very good 3= good 4 = not good 5 = poor)
10. Do you feel your children were well supported by schools during Lockdown?
(scale of 1-5 1 = excellent 2 = very good 3= good 4 = not good 5 = poor)

I agree to my answers being used for the purpose of research for Doctorate of Education by Claire Claydon, Canterbury Christchurch University.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

**The names of those taking part in the survey will not be used in the research.*

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Questions for Refugees

Sample Interview questions for Parents (*Bring map of Syria)

1. How long have you been living in Donegal? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?
2. What is the school experience of your child here in Donegal?
3. How does it compare to your child's education in Syria?
4. Describe the education your child received since leaving Syria until they settled in Donegal. (Refugee camp? EROC) What were the conditions like? How long did you spend there? What educational provision was there?
5. How much do you rely on school staff / integration officer/ volunteers etc.
6. Do you feel that you can trust authority figures / staff here in Donegal?
7. Prior to the war, how would you compare Syria's education to Ireland – pros and cons?
8. How do you find the mental health of your children (missing family in Syria, difficulty, friendships, awareness of the war, protracted periods out of education)? Do you feel there is sufficient support for your child/ children in this area?
9. Donegal is quite rural, and the public transport is limited. How do you get to school? How do you manage with school transport and generally getting around? Appointments? Activities etc?
10. Do your children participate in sports (e.g., GAA, music and other group/ team activities outside school)?
11. When you first arrive in Ireland, what is the process? What is involved during the transition timeframe in terms of education? How long does it last?
12. How has Lockdown impacted with teaching online? Is extra support /interpretation in place? Does this reduce autonomy?
13. Do you have access to adult education / training courses / English lessons? Do you have adequate childcare provision during this time?)
14. Would you like to/ is it your intention to return to Syria or can you see yourself settling in Donegal?
15. In EROCs, there are many families waiting resettlement, all in same situation, same language, shared affinity – did your children miss that connection when they moved to Donegal and had to mix with the locals or were they relieved / excited?

16. Do you feel able to hold on to all / some aspects of your culture from Syria? Is that easy / important to yourself and your children? (Culture: religion, food, music, language, education etc)
17. How do you feel about your children embracing the Irish culture? What aspects of that are good? What aspects concern you?
18. Is their sufficient sensitivity to Islamic norms in society or is it a case that 'when in Rome...' (e.g., halal food, pork in food products, Ramadan, facilities to pray)
19. You have been living in Ireland for? (months/years) Are you where you thought you would be with mastering the English language? Are you ahead/behind? How much, if any, of a barrier is it to a) access services b) engage with school c) integrate & make friends?
20. It tends to be easier for younger children to settle more quickly – how have the older children managed to mix with peers? From friendships? Embrace the Irish culture? Are hijabs an issue for the girls? Is there more freedom here? Is that a good / bad thing?
21. Do you have many dealings with your child's teacher / the school community? Do the school actively try to engage with you and invite you to participate?
22. Do you children mix with peers from school out with school hours?
23. Have the school community assisted you in settling in / getting your children organized for school?
24. Have you had to engage with the school regarding special needs or psychological trauma with regards your child?
25. Do you feel that there is a gap in your child's education? Are you satisfied that everything is being done to bridge that gap? Has this been the case since you first arrived in Ireland and/or Donegal?
26. What can your child bring / add to the school?

Appendix 5: Sample Interview Questions for School Staff

Interview Questions for Headteachers, Teachers & School Staff

1. How many refugees are in your school?
2. What age / gender are they?
3. How much advance notice are schools given before refugees arrive? Is your school obliged to accept them?
4. Donegal is homogenous as a society – are you involved in any anti-racism and intercultural training?
5. What training and resources does the Department of Education provide for head teachers / teachers? (trauma, child protection and welfare, conflict and resolution, cultural awareness, diversity and racism issues?) With this in mind, do you feel sufficiently informed and equipped to carry out the job of teaching refugee children?
6. What EAL provision is given to refugee children in schools? Do you believe it to be enough?
7. Typically, are refugee students motivated / enthusiastic in school?
8. Do refugee parents willingly participate in the school life of their children? What measure does the school take to encourage this? Do you need to use translators?
9. How do the local pupils respond to refugee students? What does the school do to assist with integration?
10. Can you comment on refugee's ability to mix with peers inside and outside of school?
11. What are the challenges of special needs or psychological trauma?
12. Can you comment on the mental health of the refugee children in your school?
13. What significance, if any, does the gap on education of refugees have for a classroom? How do staff attempt to bridge this gap? Do you feel you have adequate resources to do so?
14. How can the government improve?
15. What historical information, if any, are teaching staff given about refugee pupils in order to avoid prejudice, stereotyping, and low expectations? If data protection prevents important information regarding refugees being passed on, how can teaching staff successfully cater for the needs of refugee pupils?
16. Do you feel that the refugees trust authority figures or show obvious signs of mistrust?
17. What kind of educational reports / briefings do you receive on refugee pupils, if any?

18. Do refugees participate in standardized testing? If so, how do they perform? Are the tests appropriate? If not, what form of assessment if any is given for refugee pupils?
19. Is it difficult to ascertain the difference between language needs and special needs with refugee pupils?
20. Do teachers ever pay for extra resources for refugees out of their own pocket?
21. Does the school ever need to find extra money to help refugee pupils with books/ uniform etc?
22. How do you prepare your existing school population for the arrival of refugee pupils? Do you avoid alerting them to the 'otherness' factor and just hope for the best or are there active steps of integration?
23. Do teachers / heads given access to the following info without breaking confidentiality: - where have the refugees come from? -What conditions they have been living under / educated under? -What to expect in terms of language, behavior etc? Who, if anyone fills in these gaps (resettlement officer?)
24. What has your experience of Lockdown been in terms of education for refugees?
25. What, if any, steps were taken to give support to the education of refugees during Lockdown? Are you aware of any challenges of homeschooling of home schooling for refugee families?
26. Any notable discipline issues other than the norm? As an international teacher, I have on occasion had parents tell me to slap their children for misbehavior. Are there similar cultural issues similar which you have had to address which jar with the school policies?
27. Have any refugee pupils arrives mid-academic year? What impact did this have on staff and other pupils in the class?
28. How did you manage special needs / language provision of refugees who arrived mid-year? (e.g., was Resource / learning support hours / SNAs rearranged?)
29. Given that until very recently all Irish schools were either defined as Catholic or Protestant (before the first Educate Together NS was established in Letterkenny in 2006). Religion is not as much a defining issue in primary schools now. Are staff aware of the potential difficulty / awkwardness between Kurdish, Shi'ite & Sunni Muslims pupils being placed together in the same school. Would this be addressed, or would pupils just have to get on with it and learn to co-exist?
30. What attributes can refugee children bring to your school?
31. With regards to the educational provision of refugees, what are the government getting right? How can they improve?

Appendix 6: Sample Interview Questions for Intercultural Worker & Interagency Staff

Interview Questions for Intercultural Worker & Interagency Staff

1. What is your role? Who funds it?
2. What training do you receive?
3. How many refugees are in primary/ secondary school in Donegal?
4. Can you break down their age /gender?
5. Donegal is homogenous as a society – are you involved in any anti-racism and intercultural training? (trauma, child protection and welfare, conflict and resolution, cultural awareness?)
6. Is there specific training in social care or related qualifications...childcare etc? Are professional qualifications a pre-requisite of the job?
7. How can you identify with the refugees?
8. What resources are automatically available for refugee students in terms of: - Education? Counselling? After school activities? Integration into the community?
9. What is the government getting right?
10. How can the government improve?
11. Do staff have an understanding / awareness of the complex history of the refugees (war, travel, asylum process...) Are you or your staff equipped with strategies for coping with the complex needs?
12. Do you feel that refugees are self-reliant at the end of the programme?
13. Has there been a Resettlement Support Worker and an Intercultural Worker in situ in Donegal since the refugee families arrived in 2017?
14. How many families do you deal with at any given time?
15. Is Donegal the 'permanent home' of these refugees now (unless they choose otherwise)?
16. What are the biggest challenges of the job?
17. What are the primary concerns of the parents?
18. Are you able to gauge their impression of Donegal – peaceful? Friendly? Too rural? Not diverse enough?
19. Is there sufficient clarity about your role or does it merge into other roles due to demand?


20. With regards your job, are there things you do differently now compared to what you did 2-3 years ago?
21. What works well? What doesn't?
22. Have you anyone / anything to compare good practice within Donegal or in other counties in Ireland?
23. Do you feel that the English language support for the refugee families is enough?
24. Is there a budget? What is it used for? What is the biggest expense? Who decides how it is allocated?
25. How long is the programme? Is it mandatory?
26. Do you think that this is enough time, or do you think that this makes refugees overly dependent?
27. Do the refugees integrate easily / quickly or do they tend to try and get settled in first?
28. When the programme ends, are there any challenges for refugees entering the mainstream system for health, education, housing etc. If so, is this an Irish problem or a refugee problem? (i.e., the system v refugees who for example haven't learned enough English to manage etc)
29. Does all support come to a full stop when the programme ends?
30. What exactly are refugees entitled to? (housing? education? school bus? transport? food vouchers? money? child benefit?
31. Do interagency staff, support workers, teachers etc need to liaise with each other or do they just concentrate on their personal job remit?
32. Do you feel that the refugees trust authority figures or show obvious signs of mistrust?
33. Do you feel you have adequate resources and training to deliver a quality service with your job or are you overstretched? under supported? under resourced?
34. Are there additional English classes for kids outside the school?
35. What is the biggest success of the IRPP?
36. What does the IRPP need to work on? (language/ mental health/integration etc?)
37. During Lockdown, were homeschooling messages sent through resettlement worker / interpreter or is that left to the school?
38. Families arriving from Lebanon (resettlement scheme) arrive in Eire with refugee status as opposed to those arriving from Greece (relocation scheme) who arrive without official refugee status. What is the difference in the benefits they get, the integration process, housing, education etc?

39. How much advance notice do you get that a family is moving to the area/ school?
How are schools and houses allocated to each family?

40. Religion is not as much a defining issue in primary schools now. Would there be potential difficulty / awkwardness between Kurdish, Shi'ite & Sunni Muslims pupils being placed together in the same school. Would they have attended separate schools in Syria?

41. Can you give a brief explanation of the main differences between the different sects

Appendix 7: Ethics Approval Form

DATE of Assessment:	22/05/2020	RD ETHICS APPLICATION REFERENCE No.:	[Enter the RD ethics application reference]	
Assessed by:	Claire Claydon	SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT:	Faculty of Education	
NATURE OF ACTIVITY:	Ethnographic research involving interviews and discussions with interagency candidates working with Syrian refugees. Interviews and art / photography activities with Syrian parents and students.			
LOCATION:	Ireland	DATE OF ACTIVITY:	July 2020 – September 2021	
REVIEWED BY*: <i>(for students only)</i>	Patrick Meehan	NEXT H&S RISK REVIEW DATE:	Not Applicable	
APPROVED BY**:	<i>MSM</i>	REVIEW DATE*: <i>(for students only)</i>	23.06.20	
		APPROVAL DATE:	June 22, 2020	

Hazard/Risk	Persons at Risk & Nature of harm	Current Control Measures	Risk Rating (High /Medium /Low)	Additional Control Measures Required	Action by who	Action by when	Date action complete
Distress to participants due sensitive research topic	Syrian parents and children / students	Participants will have information given in English and Arabic outlining the detailed purpose of the research before the agree to participate. Participants will be advised that they can opt out at any time.	Low	An Arabic translator will be available to ensure full comprehension is secured. If participants appear overly uncomfortable, they will be advised to stop with their activities.			
Risk of psychological trauma as a result of	Researcher	Although disclosure of traumatic events or lifestyle due to Syrian War are possible, the researcher is a professional teacher and accustomed to dealing with varying pastoral issues	Low	Regular self-reflection on how the researcher is feeling after interviews with each participant.			

*For students: Your Academic Supervisor should review this form with you before it is sent for approval
 **Heads of School/Departments are ultimately responsible for Health and Safety Risk Assessments within their area, however, they may nominate senior members of staff (such as a manager or senior lecturer) who have undertaken the University Health & Safety Risk Assessment training to support them by approving risk assessments under their control.

Severity	Likelihood of Harm				
	1 Very unlikely	2 Unlikely	3 50/50 likelihood	4 - Likely	5 - Very likely / certainty
1- Minor injury or illness	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
2- Moderate injury or illness	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High
3- 3 day injury or illness	Low	Medium	High	High	High
4- Major injury or illness	Medium	High	High	High	High
5- Fatality	High	High	High	High	High

Risk rating	Action to follow
Low	No additional actions. Ensure controls in place are maintained.
Medium	Improve risk reduction measures within specified timescale.
High	Stop or restrict activity and make appropriate improvements immediately

Appendix 8: Profiles of Interview Candidates

1. Eman - Intercultural Worker: He is Arabic and multilingual. He is part of the Refugee Resettlement Programme and aids with the transition of people in Direct Provision to independent living within local communities in Ireland. Under the IRPP (Irish Refugee Protection Programme), refugees are entitled to one year of support from their resettlement worker whose remit includes the following (although this is not an exhaustive list): to guide people on how to get suitable accommodation and get settled in it, ensure refugees are aware of their rights, identifying childcare needs and accessing appropriate childcare providers, register for employment eligibility, identify schools and liaise with headteachers to assist with getting children enrolled, ensure refugees are registered with a GP and making provision for refugees with special needs, monitoring and reporting racism or discrimination, give advice on social welfare entitlements and integration into local communities and liaising with the local ETB to organise English Language Provision. Their remit extends far and beyond this as he is often used as a translator in any number of scenarios, a counsellor, and a handyman.

2. Lucy - Educational Welfare Officer in Donegal: An experienced lady in this post for 16 years. Her remit includes negotiating and securing places for refugee children in schools and supporting the parents that are having difficulty with school placements. Furthermore, she will meet with the families, go through enrolment forms with the families with an interpreter, or one of the resettlement workers and go through all of the needs of the child in relation to education, then secure the school places and arrange meetings in the school to introduce the families and the children to the school. The EWO will liaise with the Refugee Resettlement Group, Donegal County Council and other interagency staff working with refugees. Once the refugee children have been placed in schools, any follow up is done in line with any other student deemed eligible for consultation with the EWO.

3. Holly - Special Needs Co-Ordinator: Previously seconded by the Dept of Education for 15 years to establish the current Special Needs programme for schools nationwide,

this candidate is currently a primary deputy head. Knowledgeable and informed about every aspect of special needs, she is familiar with the realistic workings of NEPS, CAMHS and other special needs providers in relation to children and adolescents, including refugees.

4. Sarah - Befriender: A strong advocate of refugees and civil rights, who has become a befriender for refugees in Donegal. She established a Welcoming Committee when the first refugees first arrived in Donegal in 2017. Furthermore, she arranged cultural and heritage gatherings, gives voice to the refugees, assists with daily tasks that are difficult for them (hospitals appointments, children's homework etc) and lobbies local councils and the government for an end to Direct Provision for refugees and better conditions.

5. Syrian Refugee Family - Farooq/ dad, Amal/ mum, Nour, Hamid, Fatima / 3 children: The first refugee family to arrive in Donegal in 2018. Following a tumultuous journey from Syria to Ireland, the parents, two daughters and son (all in primary school) have embraced Irish life completely. They chart their experience from their school and house being bombed in Syria, to a perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe and the subsequent stops before settling in Donegal.

6. Hannah - Headteacher of a one-teacher primary school in rural Donegal: Located on the coast amidst stunning scenery, but over 30km from the main town (Letterkenny), this school has only 5 pupils including 1 refugee. Information and support for the headteacher was almost non-existent as the refugees in Direct Provision House located across the road from the school struggled to settle and integrate, causing suspicion and mistrust amongst the locals of the tiny beach village.

7. Mary - EAL Co-ordinator – Primary School: An experienced teacher who has worked in a large, diverse, urban school in Letterkenny, this candidate discussed the supports already in place in her school due to the 30+ nationalities on the roll. Having taught many nationalities over her 30 + year career, she is cognisant about the extra

challenges for refugees and the challenges of embracing another education system for them.

8. Aisling - Headteacher of an Educate Together Primary School: Being the only non-denominational school in Co. Donegal, this school serves many nationalities and cultures. Supports are in place for EAL, and it is unique in that it has no religious iconology. The Headteacher reports on the issues experiences by staff and pupils alike, as well as the success stories that have emerged with regards the refugee experience.

9. Chris - Headteacher of Secondary School: The Headteacher of this large co-educational secondary school in Letterkenny is very proactive in implementing diversity and advocating intercultural experiences both inside school and within the wider community due to its diverse ethnic population. With the arrival of refugees, although EAL supports were already established in the school, staff and students faced challenges regarding large gaps in their education as a result of their unpredictable journey from Syria. Another challenge was truancy and rivalry between various ethnic groups.

10. Ben - Headteacher of a three-teacher primary school: With dwindling school numbers, this Headteacher was enthusiastic about taking refugees pupils into his school to increase his roll and embrace the diversity that they would bring to their completely homogenised school of 66 pupils. While 12 refugees were a large ratio of pupils to bring into the school, they were dispersed fairly evenly through the year groups. The candidate explains the challenges of limited EAL support, cultural differences with the parents, an absence of psychological support and his concerns for older children who were transferring to secondary school. He also detailed the benefits that the refugees brought to the local pupils.

11. Farah - Interpreter: A female Arab who has been married and settled in Co. Donegal with her Irish husband for many years. This candidate is well placed to understand the cultural, religious and gender-based issues from both the Irish and

Arabic perspective. She is familiar with the nuances of language and tradition and has worked as an interpreter in the capacity of both a volunteer and employee. She has worked in both primary and secondary schools in Letterkenny as an interpreter, as well as a local creche. She is a valuable resource, particularly to the refugee girls who, due to their culture, would be hesitant about speaking to a man about their various issues. She is an advocate for empowering women and letting their voices be heard and lobbies for free training courses so that they can integrate into society.

12. Aoibheann - Direct Provision Staff Member (ERO): Based in Co. Meath, this candidate gave an insightful interview into the real-life workings in Direct Provision. Formerly 'Butlins Mosney Holiday Centre,' in 2000 it became Mosney Accommodation Centre, run under contract on behalf of the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) to accommodate some 600 asylum seekers. She details the provision for education in the centre and in the local schools and highlights the difficulties of learning while living in limbo. The challenges and limitation on education during Lockdown are also discussed.

13. Sinead – Befriender /Volunteer: A former teacher, she visits some Syrian families to help teach them English, while they teach her Arabic in return. She is one of 7 volunteers who is heavily involved in an established Conversation Group which congregate each week to enable people from Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Syria to come together and practice speaking English in an informal setting.

14. Hamid - Male Secondary School Refugee: Arriving in Donegal shortly before the Pandemic and subsequent Lockdown, this student discusses the difficulty in settling into life in rural Donegal, the challenges of trying to do the Leaving Cert curriculum through his very limited English having only been at school for 3 months, the difficulties of online learning and the isolation of having few friends. In subsequent discussions, he faced the confusion of Third Level Education which was restricted due to poor grades, low level English and lack of guidance about how to navigate the application forms for Further Education.

15. Nadia - Female Secondary School Refugee: Settling in Donegal the year she was due to sit her Leaving Certificate, this interviewee, whilst eager and ambitious to better herself struggled with tackling the curriculum and exams through English as well as the 8-year gap in her education. She describes the challenges of the transition from secondary school to undertaking an access course at third level, unprepared and ill-equipped for either from an academic or social perspective.

Appendix 9: Interview with Eman

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Intercultural Worker)**

SP1 When did the first refugees arrive here?

5 SP2 The first group arrived in Carndonagh in January 2017.

SP1 That's about 6 years ago. Can you tell me about the one-year programme, were you working on that?

10 SP2 Yes, was working on the Refugee Resettlement Programme. I wasn't working on it from the very start. I came in 6 months into the programme. The refugees were originally supposed to be resettled in Buncrana, but because of the floods that year, a lot of the council houses were affected in the Buncrana area, so they moved them into Carndonagh because they needed to keep the houses that were designated for refugees in Buncrana, to give it to other locals who were affected by the floods. That put a delay on the programme for about 4-5 months until they got organised in Carndonagh.

15 SP1 What was your job at that time?

SP2 From when I started all the way to the end of the programme, I was working as the Intercultural Support Worker.

SP1 Who else was working with you, were you the only Intercultural Support Worker?

20 SP2 Yes, I was the only Intercultural Support Worker. There was another gentleman before me that I took his place. He was promoted to become a resettlement worker, so I took over from him. He was doing an excellent job; therefore, he was promoted to take more of a managerial position and then I took the job on from him.

SP1 It's a big job – what did that entail?

25 SP2 The job description and the role mainly revolves around trying to close the gap between the Syrian community that is going to be established within the Irish community close the gap between the Syrian community that is going to be established within the Irish community, and also to work with the Irish organisations and Irish communities and explain to them the whole situation with the Syrian refugees, to
30 integrate them a bit, to do a bit of awareness presentations, especially with services providers for the Syrian people, because there's a lot of differences between the way things are done in the Middle East to Europe, so that was mainly the job, just talking to service providers, schools, creches, ETB, community organisations in the area that were providing support.

35 SP1 Do you think the one-year programme was enough for them? What did they receive as part of that programme?

SP2 The one year is definitely not enough. The refugee resettlement programme was taken from the original model in Canada which was 3 years. The Irish government tried to implement it in one year, which is definitely not enough.

40 SP1 What all did they receive as part of that programme?

SP2 As soon as the refugees arrived, they were taken to EROCs. From there depending on the makeup of the family, they are sent to different counties based on the necessities and the needs of the families. When they come to us first, we receive them, we have them already registered with GPs, we have their kids already in schools before
45 they even arrive. We do everything in our power to help them. As soon as they arrive we open bank accounts for them. The houses they come into are already fully furnished. They don't take a grant to go and buy furniture, the furniture is already provided inside the houses. Every single member of the family is accounted for. My job was to go around those houses before the families arrived and make sure that everything was there. You
50 had to attend a lot of meetings with the agencies that are working with us, interagency groups, schools, County Council, the Garda. Also, as you are aware, the refugees have diverse needs, so if someone is sick or someone needs medical attention, we had to work with the HSE, we had to provide them with a GP that will understand their needs.

SP1 What would happen if somebody was sick, and they had to go to hospital and
55 they didn't have English?

SP2 This is also a continuation of answering the first question, for the first year, they are provided with my support with interpretation and translation. In case of an emergency even after working hours, they have open communication with me at all times, so if any of them were stuck or needed something or were feeling overwhelmed
60 or helpless, they always called me, and I was always there for them.

SP1 So, were you available to them 24/7?

SP2 24/7, 7 days a week.

SP1 Was that on your remit or did that just evolve?

SP2 My boss comes from a community work background. She's very empathetic and
65 she's super helpful and she waived some of the boundaries that other community workers may have had to try and give them as much help as possible, so I was working alongside her direction so that meant 24/7 is 24/7. The programme itself does not tell you that you need to do that; the programme says that after 7pm you can switch off your phone, but the first part of my job contract was to assist my resettlement worker
70 and that was her wish, I stuck with it, and I done by it until the end.

SP1 Did you find that the refugees would take advantage of you working after hours, and not take into consideration that you are a husband and a father, and you need our own family time, or did it tend to just be emergencies?

SP2 No, they definitely have taken advantage. At one point I thought about it in a
75 humorous way, that some of the families that I was working with treated me as if when they didn't want me and they're not asking me to do stuff for them, they felt like I was

just being put away in a closet somewhere like a robot. I only existed when they needed me. Regardless of what I was doing, if I was sick or not. Even on my birthday I got called from a guy because there was a bee outside his house. This happened, the story is
80 documented even. The guy was yelling at me to go and get the County Council to remove some bees from outside his front door because he was worried that his children might get bitten.

SP1 These are people who have come from a war zone?

SP2 Absolutely yes. It's actually created a lot of dependency problems for us. People
85 who have managed to make it all the way here, you have to understand, they are resilient but at the same time, they're not too slow. Some of them might pretend that they can't do anything but that's only to get you to do the work for them. When the programme ended, we didn't see any of them being stuck. They all managed to get on with their lives but the picture they were painting for us is that they would really be
90 devastated if the programme ended, but that wasn't true.

SP1 If the programme had lasted for 3 years according to the model, do you think you would still have that level of dependency, or would the remit have said they should get less attention? How do you think that would have worked?

SP2 The thing is the programme was designed to take on the families from when they
95 started in two periods of time where the support stops being as general as it was in the first 3 months and becomes more directed towards certain things that they will need help with. Towards the end they will have a plan – 'Right we've done this with you, we've taken you to all these things, we've registered you here, we've paid for your transport... now it's your turn.' Little by little we would withdraw some of the services
100 and they will start finding it easier for them to get on because they've already done it alongside us multiple times. But some families, even though you've done the same thing with them multiple times, they still say, 'I'm stuck, I don't know' and it's much easier to go and do it for them than try to explain, since they clearly don't want to know.

SP1 Do you think they get enough support from all the interagency groups or are they
105 left very much to their own devices in certain areas?

SP2 Because I've worked in the entire county of Donegal, I can tell you that the service providers and agencies, they are not consistent based on the area and based on the different personalities. It's not standardised services unfortunately.

SP1 There are 49 families. They are all here as refugees. Are they all genuine refugees
110 or do you think some of them have managed to come in as economic refugees, or do you think they were all in a situation where they were genuinely fleeing war?

SP2 They get screened before they come here. The Department of Justice will have sent teams alongside the UNSCR, and those teams would have met them in the countries where they were seeking refuge before they were relocated to Ireland. Those teams
115 were brilliant at their job, so I can't really tell you because I'm not aware of any of them being an economic refugee. I know for a fact that they're all from areas that I heard on

the news were bombed. The situation in Syria, even if you are not in direct danger from the war, you're still better off gone.

120 SP1 Would you say out of the 49 families that they want to work, are they actively looking for work or is the social welfare system in Ireland too generous for that – do you think that it is a deterrent?

125 SP2 Thank you, this is a great question. I'll tell you the truth, the fact that they are all labelled as refugees is the only thing that unites them as a group of people. Some of them have been very productive ever since day 1, since they arrived in the EROCs. I know 3-4 of the families and since they arrived, they started working in kebab shops and started working in fruit shops and tried to help and make a living. There's a guy who works in a shop here in Letterkenny. From day one he literally started working. When in Direct Provision, he was going to work, and he used to cycle across the M50 to go to Meath (which is not allowed by the way). If I was to break it down to percentages, 130 I would say 5% came here with the intention of continuing to live a dignified life and try and work do as much as they can to provide for their families. The rest were chancing it; some of them were never going to get off the social welfare, because to be honest they were not very productive back home in Syria so when they came here, they're not all of a sudden going to change, so they're just going to continue to do that.

135 SP1 From the families I know, I've been in a few houses – generally the houses I've been in are lovely. They are beautifully decorated with really nice Arabic furniture. In conversations with the girls about normal thing – where you got your hair done etc.....it was e120 to get my highlights done, an engagement dress that cost e500 - there's no sign of poverty there – that's a good standard of living. Where is the money 140 coming from if they are not working? Is the social welfare that good?

145 SP2 What you need to understand is that those families have a system going that they even are not aware of. The women in the family, the mothers and the wives are in charge of whatever money comes into the house and they are very particular and very, very careful about what they are purchasing therefore they are always trying to save as much money on spending...for things that we would go to TESCO for a bag of sugar and come out having spent e200, they don't do that. They don't go online and buy things on Amazon or find an ad on Facebook and go in and buy things. They don't do that; they are very careful of their spending. At the same Syrians back at home, their homes are always lovely, it's a habit. The other thing is that there is a lot of jealousy between them. 150 If one of the Syrian families managed to buy a suite of sofas, they buy it, they bring it into the house, they don't tell anyone where they bought it from. They may exaggerate the cost. Then the next-door Syrian family, the wife will say 'What about us, why didn't we do that, how come they can they afford to do that, and we can't?' so the jealousy starts then, and the husband goes out and buys it, but they all certainly manage to save a tremendous amount of money just from the social welfare. One more thing, in the social welfare system in Ireland, once you have more than 3 children, you've made it, because 155 a lot of payments that go towards that. Some of the families here have 6 children so you can imagine how much they are making weekly. I know a guy who makes e850 a week. He tried to go and work as a painter, but whenever I talk to any employer they say

160 'What – you're making that much – go home, we can't help you'. Honestly, because he has no certificates, no training, he doesn't know how to do anything, so if he works, he's going to be getting paid minimum wage. He makes twice as much as minimum wage by staying on the social welfare payments. Basically, because they have a lot of children, they get massive amounts of social welfare, and they choose to spend it accordingly.

165 SP1 Where are the areas of Donegal that the live?

SP2 They started off in Carndonagh, then Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Donegal Town.

SP1 There's not going to be any more refugee families coming in, is that correct?

170 SP2 The decision was taken by the development team in the Donegal County Council that they could no longer accommodate refugee families. There are other asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, but you couldn't really limit their numbers, because they're not accounted for in the first place, but as refugees who are brought into the county and given residency even before they land, no more, that's finished.

175 SP1 This is Christian society, they're not all practicing but they identify as Christians – would you say the cohort of refugees that are here, are they devout Muslims... Are they practicing but quite mild?

180 SP2 The majority of the Syrian families I've worked with are not really practicing. Socially they would identify as Muslims but whether they are practicing...I haven't seen many of them for instance stop to go pray, but if you ask them, they will tell you 'Yes, yes of course I am a practicing Muslim'. The Muslim part has become more a thing of identity rather than faith. Even for the ones who practice, they are very moderate – I wouldn't even put them in the radical margin. No one here in Donegal I've met has any opposition towards any other religion or activity.

SP1 So, they feel quite comfortable moving and living among a Christian society?

185 SP2 Yes and No – they need a lot of time in order for them to be comfortable. They're not yet comfortable. They don't understand so many things. It's not their natural habitat, it's not their neighbourhood, they don't know what to expect.

SP1 I know you are highly qualified and experienced, but did you receive any training for this job?

190 SP2 When the programmes started, two families came then, 3 families and between them was a couple of months between them. The people who were working on this originally, they were given a lot of training because that's the way it's meant to be done, but then miscommunication between the agencies we ended up getting about 10 families at once, so they needed to hire somebody else. I was interviewed on 25th April and hired on the 14th May when my Garda vetting came in. I didn't have much time to
195 train but I was highly supervised by my supervisor who I would say is a community work guru. She was micromanaging me at first until I started getting the gist.

SP1 Would you have had any training in war and conflict, intercultural training, cultural awareness?

SP2 No

200 SP1 Do you think they are happy here or would they prefer to go back home if the war was over? Have they a better life here?

SP2 I would say 50/50 - if you split the families into 2 parts, one part would say once the war is over, I want to go back, I want to see my family, I want to live in my house, I want to raise my children back home where they belong. Some of them would say thank
205 you for the war because we're now here and this county is great and we love it here, but even the ones who want to go back, they don't hate the country, they still love it. It's very different, the weather, the food...if you come from Syria to Ireland or to any other European country, it's really expensive. Like whatever you pay here for a bag of tomatoes from TESCO equals the whole salary of one of them working back in Syria.

210 SP1 What do you think the government has got right?

SP2 What they got right is that they started the Refugee Programme. They allowed the people stuck in Greece and Turkey, Jordan Lebanon to come here because to be honest their life has changed drastically since the second they landed here. Their life has become so much better even if they don't know it yet, they will find out, they will know.
215 Things have just got much much better. Just the fact that they allowed them to come is a great thing. Also, this programme was done in many counties, some were more successful than others, but I can only talk about Donegal. We were doing everything in our power, even in our personal time, in our personal decisions, we haven't shied back from providing support and love and empathy and we were paid by the government, so
220 the government did do something right in that sense.

SP1 Arguably it is an incredibly generous social welfare system, although that could be seen as a double-edged sword?

SP2 Yes, I couldn't agree more with you. That's 100%.

SP1 What could the government improve upon in terms of the refugees?

225 SP2 Make it mandatory to involve them in more programmes that will lead in the end to integration and these programmes will have to bring them all together not just as refugees but let's look at them as people who are settled here and try to integrate them based on their hobbies, based on their skills, based on their education, based on their age, based on their abilities or disabilities and just get them mandatorily involved in
230 things because right now, I'm afraid they're just going to stay at home and mingle amongst each other, rely on their children to translate for them and just not progress.

SP1 Do you think that it should be mandatory that they go out to work after a certain amount of time?

235 SP2 Yes, absolutely, because they are all very capable of working. You have to understand that before they came to Ireland, they spent years in places like Greece and Turkey where they weren't given any social welfare money. They had to provide for their families, they had to work 12 hours a day but when they came here, they sat down and rested, and they became comfortable not working.

240 SP1 What do you think the government could do to improve that – invest more in language? Is the government doing enough for the language?

SP2 The language will not come from just sitting in a classroom – you want them to go out and work or maybe placement programmes where they have to go....at the same time educate themselves and learn the language from other members of the same job. If you work in a kitchen, you're bound to learn the language of the kitchen and you make friends and these friends will help you improve your language.

245 SP1 What would you say was the biggest challenge of that role?

SP2 The biggest challenge was different personalities of the refugees. Some of them were very grateful for the support we provided, some of them were violent towards me and my colleagues. Several times fist fights almost started, and a lot of insults were 250 hurled at us and if they asked for something, 4-5 families especially in Letterkenny, they were extremely violent. If they asked for something, even unrealistic and we told them 'Sorry we can't do it'.... 'No, I want it now, I'm leaving, I'm going to France, I'm going to kill myself'. We had to deal with this bullshit all the time. The other problem is that some of the families have 10 children, and they care for them, but we have a system in 255 Ireland that children come first.

SP1 Would you say that's different to the culture of the Middle East?

SP2 Not in the Middle East specifically – Specific families have been travelling since 2011 when the revolution started in Syria, and they were labelled as refugees. They weren't given much attention by the governments where they were living so they chose 260 not to send their children to school, because they're not forced to do that. When they arrived here, there were children who were 8 or 14 years of age who never had any formal education before and you're taking them into the schools in Letterkenny or a primary school somewhere and the children are not used to it. They don't understand what a teacher is in the first place, so you can imagine, they are not listening to them, 265 and the parents don't care so they're not really pushing them to engage.

SP1 Did you have anything to do with placing the children in the schools?

SP2 Yes, absolutely. The schools here are very. There is a waiting list even for locals and not everyone is accepted whenever they apply because of overcrowding issues. The government was generous enough to provide spaces for everyone based on where they 270 live and the age group obviously. I filled in the forms, I went to the PTA meetings, I sat down with the principals and the teachers. Obviously, we did some workshops to explain a lot about the Syrian children before they arrived, and we also spent a lot of time with the Syrian children trying to explain to them the way things are done in education in Ireland.

275 SP1 How do you think the schools and heads and teachers here have coped with the kids– how do you think it has been for them?

SP2 This is something that I am a firm believer in. I think Ireland is the second-best country in the world for education for children to grow up safe and happy. Every school I dealt with were absolutely brilliant and the staff were very pleasant to deal with. I

280 never had any issues with that. I still am in contact with all the Syrian families, except
for a couple of them who tried to hit me in the past, but the majority of them I would
say they don't have any big problems. I'm still in contact with some of the teachers.

SP1 Some of the teachers and heads, although delighted to get the kids, they felt that
once the kids were left there, the job of the Department was done, even if they didn't
285 have resources. The bigger schools in Letterkenny will have EAL set up but for the child
going into the smaller schools, where they've never had any diversity, they've never had
a child of another ethnicity - do you think the government could have done more there
or who do you think could have done more there?

SP2 To be honest there was an issue with placing the families in certain areas. If you
290 bring someone from Syria and you want them to integrate, Carndonagh is definitely not
the place to put them because certain rural areas in Donegal are even known not to be
super accepting of outsiders who are Irish. In some schools, it's not really based on
integration of foreign nationals because there are none. I don't even blame them for
that. Why would anybody move there? There are no jobs, there's nothing in Carndonagh
295 for them. I think it's a brilliant place but I'm just stating that if someone is from Syria
and they're disadvantaged already and marginalised, you bring them into a community
that needs a lot of development itself, that maybe is not the best idea, but saying that,
it's been done already and it's been dealt with and they're happy where they are now.

SP1 What happened in Moville, the torching of the Caiseal Mara Hotel - so there was
300 going to be 100 refugees put in there in a population of 1400 - do you think that was a
good idea to put that many in such a small village, or do you think that awful as arson is,
that they dodged a bullet?

SP2 In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, they're happy to be put wherever
there is availability for them, that's the mentality they will come to. If you put them in
305 Moville, they'll be happy. Moville is brilliant place, it's close to the beach. I know the
arson attack was not really because they are foreigners going to live there. It was a
business-related issue, and it was translated to become this thing where all the people
of Moville didn't want any refugees, that's not true.

SP1 You thought Ireland was the second- best place, what's the first best place?

310 SP2 Canada

SP1 Some families came here just before Lockdown - how do you think the families
coped and how do you think the system worked for them during that time, especially
those on the one-year programme?

SP2 I think it's about managing expectations. Some families arrived at a time when
315 some of the things we would have done weren't available due to a pandemic where 15
million people died. It wasn't a joke, it wasn't easy, you couldn't do much - it wasn't
something that we had any control over. Therefore, what I would expect as a common
general human being is that you shouldn't expect more from anyone because that's just
what's happening, and we have no say over it. Now if the circumstances were different,

320 then they would have taken as much support as anybody else, but it was unfortunate - I feel maybe we should revisit that.

SP1 How do the different sects get on – the Suni, Shia and Kurds?

SP2 We have a number of Kurdish families. Some of them get along well with the other Syrian families, some of them don't, based on their political affiliation back home.
325 In Syria they were all one, now after the freedom that they're all calling for, they started falling out with each other, but overall, there's not been any incidents of violence of mistreatment based on race.

SP1 So, do they move okay within the schools and communities together?

SP2 There's no bother unless it's an individual issue, then its regardless of the person
330 or their face or their affiliation. Some of them didn't like each other which is understandable, but I'll tell you one thing for sure, that every family that fell out with the other family, a couple of months later they are sitting down together, drinking tea and playing cards. None of this has come into the roots of their relationship amongst each other. Everything changes all the time, they fall out, they become friends, they
335 make up and break up. It's normal.

SP1 How much advance notice did you get about more families coming?

SP2 If I was lucky at the time, when we were very organised, we would have had one- or two-weeks' notice.

SP1 And that was for a family coming?

340 SP2 No, there never was one family coming. The minimum number of families coming was 5. We had 10 families coming one day in July 2018.

SP1 So, if 10 families come, you immediately have to sort 10 families for schools, GPs, for social welfare, for housing and all of that.

SP2 We did have a lot of support with the school thing from TUSLA. There were two
345 lovely ladies working in TUSLA and they were super supportive, so that wasn't too bad. GPs were organised by a member of the HSE who were meeting with us as well, but we had to accompany them of course. AIB -open a bank account, register them in the schools, fill the forms, then we had to have meetings with the teachers. It was a very busy time. The 3 years I was working there passed like a week.

350 SP1 Generally, all the teachers said they didn't get any extra resources because they're refugees. They might get resources if there's certain amount of EAL students but not specifically because they're refugees. However, one teacher said she got e1200 from an office in Letterkenny. Do they all get that? What is this money for and who is it from?

SP2 One teenager who was 14, he was falling behind and his family were not
355 supportive of him going to after school clubs or anything, so we contacted the school and tried to get him extra support in the school itself, but they said they didn't have any funds for that. We talked to them to see how much it would cost for a couple of monthsit wasn't me personally who did that, because that is the job of the resettlement

360 worker, but I'm aware of that. We did pay a couple of thousand here and there for some of the children who were being left behind and their parents weren't too supportive.

SP1 That was at the discretion of who?

SP2 The resettlement workers.

SP1 Where do you get those funds from?

365 SP2 We had plenty of funding. There were different categories to help the families; some of it was for the programmes, some of it for schooling, some for emergency medical support. I wasn't really into the decision-making process of that.

SP1 So, you get money from the government that's given to the resettlement programme?

370 SP2 There are many categories - Some of education, summer camps, activities, medical, housing, transportation when they arrived first for a couple of weeks. Some of them needed buses and taxis so they were calling taxis and we were paying them once a month when they gave us the bill. There is funding for the different stages of the resettlement process

SP1 So, you think the government looks after them well?

375 SP2 Oh Yes 100%.

SP1 That was great; we'll leave it at that, thank you so much

Appendix 10: Interview with Lucy

SP1: Interviewer SP2: (Educational Welfare Officer)

SP1 Could you just tell me a wee bit about what your role is?

5 SP2 As Educational Welfare Officer with TUSLA our role is around school attendance and ensuring children attend school. In relation to the refugee children, the Syrian children - it was to secure school places for those children. Part of our remit is in relation to supporting parents that are having difficulty securing school placements. I suppose the role changed a little bit with the refugee children in the sense that women
10 don't. we went out and we found school places for all of those children. Generally, it's around school attendance for children that are already enrolled and aren't attending school - that's what our remit would be around, or children that have been expelled from school and are looking for alternative school places.

SP1 I suppose it is quite unique because Donegal was only had refugees since 2018, is
15 this the first time your remit has had to change to specifically accommodate them?

SP2 Yes

SP1 Who is your first port of call? Is it the Department of Education? Is it the Department of Justice?

SP2 There was an interagency group set up, like an advisory group or steering group.
20 The initial contact actually came from Donegal County Council to myself, and my colleague would have been invited to attend a refugee resettlement meeting. It was all managers at that meeting, I suppose from the management perspective within TUSLA, the contact of came from the Department of Justice. There was an agreement, and we were going to take on this remit and I suppose it would have been the Dept of Justice
25 that made the contact alongside Donegal County Council.

SP1 So, the Dept of Justice contacted the County Council and the County Council contact you?

SP2 Yes

SP1 Had you worked with refugees before?

30 SP2 I have worked with refugees over the last 16 years on and off, so I would have had some background in relation to the families and needs and complexities, but this is quite unique, in that there were so many families coming with different needs so this was a little bit different.

SP1 How long have you been Educational Welfare Officer?

35 SP2 Just over 16 years.

SP1 Has that always been in Donegal?

SP2 Yes

40 SP1 So, your experience dealing with refugees prior to these ones coming to be resettled here - would that have been elsewhere in the country, or would it have been an outreach type thing?

SP2 It would have been families that would have been enrolled in school and wouldn't have been attending, so it was through the attendance avenue. And again, it would have been just a very, very limited number of families at that time.

45 SP1 Obviously, you are very experienced from all your years working, but with regards to dealing with the very unique situation with refugees did you have any extra training?

SP2 Nothing, nothing,

SP1 No guidelines?

50 SP2 No guidelines. To be brutally honest, it the very ad hoc. We weren't really made aware of this at all. There was a huge lack of communication and I'm based in North Donegal and there's a lack of school places in Letterkenny now anyway. Then suddenly, there's all these families being placed because there may be housing, but there may not be school places. There was a huge lack of communication and absolutely no training.
55 No, absolutely zero.

SP1 With your colleagues, people who you work with who have had dealings with the refugees, would you say broadly, that would be the case?

60 SP2 There wouldn't be a lot of communication with colleagues if truth be told. We don't generally come together as a bunch that much. I suppose some colleagues that have had similar experiences to myself. Other colleagues that would have been placed closer to the EROC centres, they might have had prior knowledge that others wouldn't have had, so they would have been more aware that these families were coming and what their remit was, but we wouldn't have had that information at all.

SP1 Am I right in saying that it was all very last minute?

65 SP2 Yes completely.

SP1 That's what I seem to remember - that it was all quite cloak and dagger, and nobody was letting anybody know.

70 SP2 Nobody was letting people know, and when I probed into that a wee bit more, it was that didn't want negative publicity. They didn't want racism and they didn't want communities to react negatively. I suppose hindsight is great thing and what I said to Donegal County Council and Dept of Justice at the time was, that we want these young people and families to integrate into the community - you haven't told the community they're coming, so already you've got people's back up. Schools were quite annoyed; families may have arrived on a Monday, and I was trying to secure places for the
75 Wednesday.

SP1 Would that have been midterm as well, it wouldn't have necessarily been September, they could have come at any time, right?

80 SP2 They were coming at any time, I can't even recall exactly but I know some were coming during mid-term break when the schools were closed, so it was a difficult time, to be honest.

SP1 You basically have to go to the head teachers and negotiate a place?

85 SP2 Negotiate school places, meet with the family, go through the enrolment form with the families with an interpreter, or one of the resettlement workers and go through all of the needs of the child in relation to education, then secure the school places and arrange meetings in the school to introduce the families and the children to the schools as well. The remit seemed to broaden.

SP1 That was the next thing I was going to say. For example, your remit is already massive in terms of you're in Northwest Donegal and you've all that area to cover. Do you have to follow up on these children once you have them enrolled and settled?

90 SP2 No, once the children are enrolled and settled again, those children are treated like any Irish children, so if are absent from school for 20 days or more or school are concerned, the teacher in that school will make a referral to ourselves. We don't have a remit to be following up unless there's an issue.

95 SP1 So, once they're in the school, they just follow the normal protocol like the Irish kids?

100 SP2 That's what's supposed to happen. In practice that didn't happen. Schools were constantly ringing me. If there was any child protection issues, schools were ringing me. It took up a lot of time unnecessarily. That sounds awful. But schools were so so frustrated saying 'You've placed these children here, now what are you going to offer us?' But we're not Department of Education so we can't offer you anything. It was the phone calls and the conversations around that which was very time consuming.

105 SP1 The impression I'm getting, having spoken to a lot of headteachers is that, as soon as the kids were delivered, their job was done and there, but for the good graces of the staff, the teachers who would go the extra mile. What would you perceive to be the biggest challenge of your job with relation to the refugees and then what do you think the biggest challenge for the refugees are?

110 SP2 For myself it was the lack of communication and the lack of time. It's not that we were suddenly taken out of our current role on a sabbatical or something or seconded. You were trying to deliver the best service for these families while also being mindful of the 40 or 50 other families that you have to deal with that may have been in court or high end, so it was difficult to manage. People were working extremely hard; clocking off time and starting time didn't even to come into it to be quite honest; it was just difficult to manage. The biggest difficulty for me was the lack of school commissive, and it was that negotiation with schools and then schools going above and beyond and placing children in classes of 34 and 35 just to get bums on seats - that that was
115 nightmarish.

SP1 Would that have happened in a lot of schools?

120 SP2 Letterkenny was quite unique. The population of Letterkenny has increased but schools haven't caught up with that or the Department of Education don't seem to recognize that, so there is a shortage of school places. I was bringing that to the County Council, to those resettlement meetings but the priority for Department of Justice was to get the families in and get them housed. The other stuff, I wouldn't say it really didn't matter, but it was not prioritised.

SP1 What do you think the biggest challenge for the refugees was, would you say?

125 SP2 For the families, they were all landed into various places. A lot of the families were split up. A lot of families came with just one part of the family. I know one family who came - the son and daughter arrived with grandma and granddad who were elderly, and the mum remains in Turkey. The families were just taken out and slotted into rural Donegal, Letterkenny obviously isn't, but there were other areas in rural
130 Donegal where they were put -there you go and that was it; that was very challenging.

SP1 In terms of education do you think there was enough provision for them? My impression from speaking to headteachers is that teachers in general were going over and above, but would you think enough was put in place for them?

135 SP2 Nor really; in the EROC tuition was provided I'm not sure what the quantity or quality of that was. I suppose there was a lot of young people, particularly the teenagers that opted out of that, so I had a lot of young people in the 11 -13-year-old age group coming with barely any English, never mind talking about education. They barely had the language never mind talking about arithmetic, history and geography and everything else that's expected, so certainly not. Plus, a lot of children had been out of
140 school for years anyway the war so there was a huge gap in education there anyway.

SP1 Donegal is obviously quite a homogenous society, obviously Letterkenny is becoming a wee bit more diverse, but are you aware of any anti-racism or intercultural training on trauma or child protection, or war and conflict?

145 SP2 Through TUSLA and through the Donegal Travelers Project, I recently attended some training in relation to racism and interculturalism but it's not compulsory; you can opt in or opt out.

SP1 That's teachers or staff like yourself, that's just off your own bat that you do that.

150 SP2 It's off your own bat. We're very separate to the Department of Education so if there was any training from them it will generally be through the Education Centres. I don't know what they have offered or what they haven't, but certainly at that time they would have been saying 'We need training, and we need support.' While the intercultural workers were pretty good, they were so stretched as well, and they couldn't provide that training really really wanted.

SP1 And that should have been really done from the department do you think?

155 SP2 I think so.

SP1 What do you think schools are getting right in terms of provision for the refugees and what could be improved?

160 SP2 I have to say 99% of the schools are fabulous. They just absorbed and welcomed these wee people provided everything they possibly could. A lot of the schools didn't have enough or any English language support or teachers, so they were fighting constantly with the Department to get additional EAL teachers. While they were waiting for that, they did what they could, and they pulled resources. They were great, they really were great. They were fabulous without the support which should have been allocated by the Department of Education.

165 SP1 The refugees have only been here since 2017. We weren't set up for it and there's teething problems, do you think it's getting any better or do you think they're still severely lacking in the resources?

170 SP2 I think post-primary are certainly lacking. That's where a lot of the issues arose was for the post- primary children in schools that were completely overstretched anyway and weren't fully resourced. The primary seemed to manage a little bit better. The primary school children were also resilient, and so eager to learn. They were just like sponges, they've completely settled them, they're completely part of the school community and doing fabulously, while post-primary kids struggled because the schools just doesn't have the resources that were needed.

175 SP1 I suppose the earlier you integrate with the language, the easier it is for all that?

SP2 Yes of course, absolutely.

SP1 In terms of Lockdown and Quarantine, what effect do you think this has had for the refugees coming? Did you have any dealings with them over that time?

180 SP2 No. I have no dealings with them. I actually don't have any of those children on our caseload at the moment so I'm assuming they're all attending school. I know, for some of the families they are quite close-knit. They would be in and out of each other's houses and potentially not sticking to guidelines because they have nobody else.

185 SP1 There's one of the families that I'm quite close to, and I went up around Easter with eggs. They have four kids with three of them at school, and they were home-schooling on a phone; there was a lot of that going on. I managed to get an iPad for them. That's only touching the base of the ones that I do know so I'd say there will be big gaps from Lockdown.

190 SP2 I would imagine some schools did provide laptops where they had accessibility to laptops. Other schools didn't have that, but I would say for some families, there was no home-schooling and even understanding of how to log on.

SP1 That was another thing I noticed. When I was eventually able to go into the house, I found that they didn't know how to log on. It was something simple like getting onto a reading website. There are rumours going around that there's going to be another 200 refugees coming to Donegal and that there might be a Direct Provision

195 Centre here. Some sources are strongly denying it and the government is keeping a stony silence. Would you have any input into that?

SP2 We have heard absolutely nothing, other than whatever is on social media. We haven't been told anything. I have posed the question to management if this is happening or if they are aware, because we need to be organized and prepared, but we
200 have been told nothing, so I don't know.

SP1 What would you say the government is getting right and what could be improved?

SP2 The interagency group was right when we were all sitting together, that was right. What they're not getting right; no communication, absolutely zero communication
205 and lack of resources. I think that's the two pieces for me. No communication and no resources being provided to schools.

SP1 Whether it's 200, or whether it's 20, do you think that schools or the County Council should be given adequate notice? Do you think that it makes a difference to community, or do you think it riles them up and causes problems if they do know too
210 much in advance?

SP2 I think it's not necessarily the community that needs to know, but I think certainly out of courtesy, the schools need to know. We need to know if there are school places, schools need to know 'Do we have places, do we have resources? What can we actually offer?' It certainly couldn't be a rehash of what happened because that was
215 shocking, it was really shocking. I think not everybody in Letterkenny Town needs to know that we've 20 or 30 families coming, but the schools certainly need to know, the hospital needs to know, the GPs need to know, the childcare facilities need to know, so the services that provide the wraparound support, those are the services that need to know. The general population doesn't necessarily need to know.

220 SP1 Do you feel that any of the refugees who you've had any dealings with, do they show any sort of obvious signs of mistrust towards authority figures, given the background they've had?

SP2 Some of the families would, some of the families don't. In fact they would see you very much as a support and they feel you as honest and open whereas some of the
225 families are wondering who you are, what are you about really...you have this TUSLA logo – what does TUSLA actually represent...is it child welfare, is it child protection?' so a few of the families very sceptical and very private whereas there would be another cohort of families and you hear everything and 'what can you do to help me and come in for the tea or coffee...'

230 SP1 I'm going to let you go now. I really appreciate your input. It's just so valuable, thank you.

Appendix 11: Interview with Holly

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Special Needs Co-Ordinator)**

5 SP1 We were chatting about school psychologists; so, if there's an issue, the psychologists from NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service, Department of Education and Science; Ireland) contact you, is that right?

SP2 Most schools have the services of the NEPS psychological service. Some schools don't.

SP1 Why?

10 SP2 Because there's not enough of them. They have been actively recruiting and getting more so that's getting a little bit better, but for a long time there were several schools in Donegal who wouldn't have had access NEPS psychologists come under anybody's remit, so they would be given two SCPA assessments (Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments) which are outside assessments. They
15 have a list and there's a couple of psychologists who work outside the service, who are not NEPS psychologists who will do private assessments and NEPS will pay for two of those for a school who don't have NEPS service

SP1 Is that because of a deficit and educational psychologists?

SP2 Yes, and one of the problems was they couldn't come to Donegal.

20 SP1 Why?

SP2 Location - It's just so far, but this is a problem all over the country.

SP1 Is there not actually one based in Donegal?

SP2 NEPS, yes, they're based down there in McKendrick Place. There are a number of them based here in Donegal, there's at least five but they're all allocated to a number of
25 schools.

SP1 Does NEPS cover everything from behaviour to dyslexia - what all do they cover?

SP2 NEPS does cover all of those things, but they're educational psychologists so they couldn't for example by themselves diagnose ADHD or those things; that would probably go through CAMHS, and a lot of the EBD (Emotional & Behaviour Disorder)
30 stuff would be referred to CAMHS, which is a different service and is very oversubscribed.

SP1 I heard that.

SP2 So, for a diagnosis of EBD or autism or ADHD, you would need a multidisciplinary team so NEPS can't do that, but NEPS can diagnose things like specific learning
35 disabilities - mild, moderate, general learning disabilities and those kind of wants. All the ones that have come under the umbrella of specific, which would be dyscalculia, dysgraphia and dyslexia.

SP1 Do you specifically get the call because you're the Special Needs Coordinator?

40 SP2 I am the special needs coordinator so NEPS will make contact, or we will contact them. We have two NEPS psychologists in our school, because we're so big so one of them helps us out with the children in the special classes, and then one of them sorts out the mainstream. We have a working relationship with them, so we'll contact them and say, 'How are you fixed this year?' Then we will immediately look at the children who are leaving (primary school) to see what they need in terms of updating their report to
45 get the accommodations and the supports that they will continue to need at second level.

SP1 In our school there's only two per year, and you've said that that's quite a lot for a school our size. (176 children)

50 SP2 Yes, that's kind of the standard. We would look at our sixth-class kids; they might not need the whole cognitive piece done again, because you don't have to do that again, you might just need a little part of the report updated. So that's not a full assessment so they'll works away on a couple of kids to get them sorted everywhere we can.

55 SP1 In our school there's already one child who has slipped through the cracks; she couldn't get assessed because there were so many ahead of her, even though she has severe dyslexia and she has severe dyscalculia, so the school paid privately for it.

SP2 That means that child might get assisted technology. You might be able to apply for assisted technology given whatever it is the psychologist comes back on. She probably won't get a huge amount of extra teaching-wise because that's up to you to prioritise anyway without any reports.

60 SP1 There are three or four other children, who need assessed, who definitely need extra resources and there's not a hope of them getting assessed.

65 SP2 The assessment won't dictate the resources anyway. Your school has a certain number of SETs and management has to manage the kids in your school with those SETs. It doesn't matter if you get any reports to say anything, you can then apply for extra, but you probably won't get it. There's X number of SETs now for your school and you manage it regardless.

SP1 Do you think it's better that the schools have that autonomy?

SP2 It is, as long as there are enough SNAs to go around, as long as I'm not really going to claw them back and be savage about it.

70 SP1 How is it determined that a school gets an SNA?

75 SP2 There's a formula. This system only came in in 2017 so September last year was the first time we could do this, that we were autonomous. They gave us the number of SETs that we already had, nobody lost an SET. Then presuming that X number of kids would leave 6th class and X amount of kids would come in. Yeah. It's a formula and it's to do with numbers in the school, the number of boys in the school, you have to look it up now and get the actual formula. I don't know how much socioeconomic status of the school has to do with it, but it's the formula the Department use to determine how many

SETs and how many SENs that the kids are getting in school and that's published every year.

80 SP1 So, it's not specifically to do with the fact that I might have a child with Down Syndrome, refugee or another specific need - it's nothing to do with that?

SP2 No, the National Council through the SENO applies this formula. So, on a certain date, you get notified that you have four SETs in your school. If you know in September, that you're going to get five children with autism and four with Down Syndrome. That's
85 a huge number of children with additional needs, so you can then apply for extra. Schools are quite loathe to do that because oftentimes, the SENO comes back because it's usually one child who's coming in with Down Syndrome or with autism, for example, and the SENO looks at all your paperwork and at everything that's going on in your school as regards their services, and they could cut you. It's not an automatic; they
90 might say, 'What's that SNA doing up there and who is she...she's only two kids, she can do this as well.' It's not that there's an automatic entitlement. There used to be in 1998, Michael Martin was the Minister of Education, and he announced the automatic entitlement, which meant that parents had the right to send the kids to any school they wanted, regardless of the disability or the ability of the child. So, if you were a child who
95 traditionally would have gone to a special school, you now had the right to put them into your school next door.

SP1 Was that generally welcomed?

SP2 It was kind of coming from the EU, there was all sorts of agreements with the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, so all that was
100 coming, so the pressure was on the Department to do that. It was kind of a whirlwind. Nobody really knew what was going on, so this was announced and then the children started to flood into the schools and then they played catch up. It was mayhem, because then they didn't have the resources; resources to the schools in relation to the children who had the need, but there weren't enough colleges to assess the needs, so there was a
105 ridiculous time at one stage where there was this form, called an SCR that the principal would get it. All the principal had to do was tick it if she thought the child needed access to an SNA or resource hours, because there were no psychological assessments to be had. Of course, schools went crazy, and schools got so many resources in the doors, that maybe all of them didn't need. Then the Department had to scramble to try and sort out who was getting what and claw back the SNAs. That's all happened over the last number
110 of years and now it's not that the children are getting resources according to their statement, or their label, or their assessment, they're now the schools are getting X amount of resources, and they can prioritise what they do with them. The fact that there's not so many assessments for children in your school with dyslexia, would have
115 made a huge difference because your resources would have been tied up to the number of assessments you have. That's not the case anymore. Even if your child goes off and gets this assessment that says she has severe dyslexia, your school won't get anything in terms of additional resources for that child. The child might be able to go and apply for assisted technology. If it was the case, that the child needed the services of an SNA, that
120 that will be stated in the report as well, but it really won't increase the number of

resources you have. It will not fix anything for that child. That child is probably getting what they're going to get anyway, in terms of resource.

SP1 For example, she goes out for help a couple of times a week with Maths and language but that's it?

125 SP2 It might change, like the psychologist, if they're good, might give recommendations about what kind of programmes s/he needs, or what kind of teaching she needs, but generally speaking, teachers are quite good at that anyway, they're better than psychologists are, so chances are, she's getting as much as she's going to get. The report is not going to change anything.

130 SP1 Almost all of refugees, particularly if they're older, are going to have a language deficit; they're going to need EAL. If they are placed in one of the smaller rural schools, there is no EAL provision at all, because it doesn't meet the quota to qualify. It's down to the goodwill of the teachers, and from what I have seen and read, the teachers go hell for leather to try and get them up to speed. In terms of resource hours, what I'm hearing
135 is a lot of the resource hours are being used to try and get the language needs of the refugees catered for. Therefore, those resource hours aren't used, as they would have been intended. Does that sound in line with what you're saying about school autonomy for using resource hours?

SP2 My understanding is if refugees come and are welcomed into a school, that they
140 don't come with any additional resources. Zero.

SP1 The loud resounding message I'm getting from everyone I'm talking to is, once the refugees are delivered to the school it's over to you!

SP2 No there's nothing but people do bend over backwards, it's goodwill, if you did
145 have a difficulty and needed to talk to educational psychologists, they would probably go over and beyond what they traditionally would offer the school. That is just based on goodwill. These children are not entitled to anything in terms of extra hours. They're not entitled to anything in terms of extra assessments, or extra emotional support. So, it's up to the school to go and look for that and source that.

SP1 Ireland is becoming more diverse, and Donegal is sort of slowly entering that
150 sphere, particularly in Letterkenny and those schools, but there's a big difference between being a migrant and being a refugee. The migrants may be coming over from Poland or other parts of Europe, but their families are all working. There's no refugee that hasn't come here with some element of trauma. In general, would it be NEPS or CAHMS who deals with trauma.

155 SP2 CAHMS

SP1 Do you think any of their resources are going to refugees?

SP2 They're a very good service, but they are ridiculously, ridiculously under resourced and overstressed. That's not to say that NEPS don't work with them either because if we have children who are leaving the schools who needed some basis of an

160 assessment, just because it's needed it, not because they are refugees, NEPS will come on board as well.

SP1 They're saying you are equal; you are welcomed into our schools, you have a right to be in school and you have a right to the services that all the other children have. It's equality, but it's not equity.

165 SP2 They're not giving the children who need more more; they're giving them the same as the children who are coming into our traditional system. They just have access to what everybody else has – nothing extra. In a system that's already overloaded, they're unlikely to get access. Basically, all of these services are hitting the top end so that they can get them through. That's exactly it.

170 SP1 Are you saying that if children don't get an SNA in primary school, you automatically don't get one on secondary school?

SP2 It would be very difficult.

SP1 So, the onus is on primary teachers to get that sorted?

SP2 Yeah, but for example, if you had a significant number of children leaving you had SNA support for, for example, EBD. We could write to CALMS and say 'These four kids are under your service, and they are going to second level schools. Will you write us a note to say that they continue to need the services of an SNA.' That would be for children who are currently with CAHMS, so CAHMS would actually write that note and SENO would accept that for second level.

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180 SP1 Do CAHMS usually work quite well with the primary schools, understanding the situation?

SP2 They do, but we're saying, 'This child needs individual counselling', and they're saying, 'We just can't do it; we just don't have people.'

SP1 Is that nationwide or is that mainly Donegal as well?

185 SP2 That's Nationwide.

SP1 Would Donegal fall short compared to the rest of the country?

SP2 Traditionally down the country, you have charities like the Brothers of Charity, St. John of God, who run the Special Ed section of things. As regards the special schools, they would employ the speech therapists and OTs and provide all those services traditionally, to those kids. Up here in Donegal, we had nobody, we didn't have one of those. So, our health board had to take over and try and get things. Our health board is probably better equipped and better experienced at managing this thing that some of the health boards down the country, because we don't have the services of those outside charities. The implications of what we're talking about is that, if you're in school, trying hard to sort what you have and the Educational Welfare Officer comes to you and says 'Okay show me your numbers, you have provision here for 10 kids. I'm giving you 10 refugees.' And you say 'That's fine. I have the numbers; I have the space...we'll take them' – you get nothing.

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- SP1 That's what I'm gathering.
- 200 SP2 You get nothing, nobody's saying it (out loud), but you don't want to take them in because you know they're coming needing a lot of additional support, which you physically don't have availability for in your school. You're trying to manage the needs of the kids you have, so you're trying to protect that because you're overstretched, and now they're bringing in these other kids so instead of saying as we would want to say,
- 205 'Come on in come on we'll make sure you're okay, we've got you...instead we're saying, 'Do we have to?' ... and of course, we do have to.
- SP1 The way numbers are going, many schools in the locality are eager to have more kids in so that they can keep a teacher. Schools have to take children in if there's room, it helps them to retain staff, yet they know there are few resources for them; it's such a
- 210 can of worms.
- SP2 You've definitely highlighted a weakness in the system, but the system is not completely as broken as you might think. I suppose they're coming at it from the term of equal rights, but it's just when we go looking for the extra that we need for some children, we can't get it – that's the problem.
- 215 SP1 You mentioned some time ago, when you were seconded by the Department of Education, that at one stage, the government was throwing money at special needs.
- SP2 Yes, and then there was loads of cuts.
- SP1 During the recession, there were massive cuts in special needs – would that be right?
- 220 SP2 Yes, when they announced automatic entitlement, schools weren't ready first and so all these kids landed into our schools. They threw resources at the schools and then they suddenly realised that this was costing an absolute fortune. The did a review and found that for example a school might have had children who needed the support of 4 SNAs, but they might have something like 17. It was beyond ridiculous. The NCSE was
- 225 only up and running, so they started to slash the numbers.
- SP1 That's fair enough because that was their teething problems, and they were trying to iron it out.
- SP2 That's exactly what it was, so that's when the big cutbacks started and then they started really looking at these kids and not making it difficult, but you really had to
- 230 justify your allocations. That was it until 2017 where the new model gave you X amount of staff, and you work with it.
- SP1 Did you say that started last year?
- SP2 I think it was proposed in 2017 and in September 19 it actually kicked in.
- SP1 Is there any teacher training done on diversity or trauma?
- 235 SP2 I see the INTO running one on trauma at the moment.
- SP1 So, it's more CPD?

240 SP2 Yes, called ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) dealing with trauma. That seems to be an up and coming one. In the teacher training colleges, I have no idea. In the postgraduates, I would imagine there's a couple of lectures or maybe a module here and there.

SP1 Are the CPD courses are all run through the INTO?

245 SP2 There are outside providers, ICEPE - These are all just companies who provide training like that. Then there's a network of education centres and they run courses. Then the NCSE run the teacher training courses and CPD and the PTSD runtime of the non-special ed ones. They're the two big CPD providers for teachers.

SP1 So that would be more how teachers would get specialised rather than teacher training?

250 SP2 Yeah, in college, you can do a module or write or an elective on SEN, but if you are working with kids with SEN, as a teacher, you can then apply to go on a postgraduate course that the department fund and they're there in seven different centres around the country. They train the teachers while the teachers are still in school and it gives them a pathway to a Masters, so there was an awful lot of postgraduate qualified teachers in the area of SEN compared to other countries. We're different in that we can only qualify with that quantification when we are a fully qualified primary
255 teacher. We could only specialise after we qualify.

SP1 Do most of those teachers go into special needs schools?

260 SP2 No, they could just be SETs just looking for career progression. A lot of them will go on the following year and they'll take on a Masters. They'll pay for that themselves so it's quite a cheap way to get your masters. You get the first year paid for by the Department, take time off school and then you take on a Masters the following year, so we've an awful lot of teachers with Masters. It used to be in my day when you got that qualification, we used to take a full year to do that. They used to train 25 teachers a year, that was it. We were then given a qualification allowance, and as long as you stayed teaching for three years in Special Ed after you got that, you got that allowance to
265 keep for the rest of your teaching career. Now in 2002, when they opened up that teacher training, they did away with that allowance. It used to be that there was only one place to train; that was St. Pat's (Drumcondra), and they only took 25 a year. Then in 2000, they opened up the training, so they put the training around the country and made it they made it part time and in and out of school training, and took the allowance
270 away that year, so that the teachers who got the qualification are no longer entitled to that allowance. So, it's not costing the department a fortune. We would have a highly trained SEN teaching force as a result of that since 2002.

SP1 That's all good -Thank you for your time.

Appendix 12: Interview with Sarah

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Volunteer/ Befriender)**

5 SP1 Can you tell me what role you do in engaging with refugees? What does your remit include either officially or not officially?

10 SP2 I'm just to a befriender to the refugees that are living now in Carndonagh. Whenever I heard that they were coming, I saw a kind of backlash; Donegal Daily, Democrat Donegal – papers like that, the comments section was horrendous and I thought, 'No, that's not on', so, I formed a group of people that wanted to help welcome them, about half a year before they were due to come.

SP1 When you say the Donegal Democrat or the local papers, what was the tone of their print?

15 SP2 What they had with just bare facts, that there was going to be Syrian refugees coming to relocate in Inishowen, so that's basically what they printed. Then I saw, so many people writing in the comments (which is usually awful anyway), but the usual stuff like 'Why don't they go back to their own country ... they're stealing stuff from us.... They're Muslim...' – horrible, negative stuff. That kind of spurred me to form a group called Inishowen Welcome. I got a group of like-minded people. I was working with the County Council on this and with IBP and I was also with the Intercultural Platform; I've
20 been a member of them for years. They offer equality and try to raise ethnic minority voices, given the representation and stuff like that. Through them I got guidance on how to do stuff, so whenever the families arrived, we got their addresses, and me and another lady just went in twos to say hello, and we gave them a wee welcome box. We were just chatting to them and we've kind of been friends since. I've been organising the
25 Intercultural Festival in Carndonagh since they arrived. A year after they arrived, we had the Middle Eastern Festival. All of the families, or whoever wanted to, contributed something of their culture, and just shared it with the rest of us, be a cooking or games or herbal medicines and things like this. So that festival (we finished the second one this year) it' now turned into the Intercultural Festival, because we're trying to not put so
30 much pressure on the families to entertain everybody. Then we have like a big dinner, and I work with students in a Global Kitchen. After what happened in Merville, when the hotel (Caiseal Mara Hotel) was torched and the backlash and all the negative press that was coming from Merville, I organised a huge dinner like a Global Kitchen for people who lived in Direct Provision in Sligo. They travelled up and they cooked wonderful food
35 from all around the world and it was free. We had over 400 people come to that in Merville and it was amazing. That was just a couple of months after all the horrible stuff. Currently now, I am still running the festival and I am just a befriender really.

SP1 How many families are in Inishowen?

SP2 5 families in Carndonagh and 8 families in Bunrana

40 SP1 Would it be the ones in Carndonagh that you're befriending?

SP2 Yes

SP1 How often would you engage with them?

SP2 Every week.

SP1 What kind of things do you do, what's kind of typical day?

45 SP2 I'm an easy port of call for them if you need help with anything. For example, one of the ladies was in touch with yesterday that her husband needed to go to Dublin for a hospital appointment and they didn't know about the buses or the bus timetables - you know, stuff like that. A few times when the electricity goes off or when the trip switch goes - that's happened to two of the families, and they're like 'I don't know what's going on'. Sometimes I just go to the beach (with them). There's one of the ladies that lives in the same estate as me and she was she's been finding things pretty difficult. She has two young children, so I've kind of been a shoulder to lean on. I was teaching all the kids piano. I offered to teach them piano, so I did that for a year and then one of the families kept it up and they came to me for another year.

55 SP1 Fantastic. Within your group, Inishowen Together (a merge of Inishowen Welcome and Fáilte Inishowen), approximately how many are in that group? How many volunteers or befrienders are there who help out?

60 SP2 There was a befriender programme, which was set up with the support worker. I worked closely with her. She got people together to sign up with a friend but the biggest stumbling block, because it's asylum seekers with the Department of Justice, you have to basically be vetted in order to befriend them through the Befriender programme, so that put a lot of people off just being organic. There's probably about 10 people working with and befriending the families and then the families have made their own friends, organically as well through neighbours and stuff like that, but there's about 10 in our group that make a concerted effort.

65 SP1 Just to confirm, you have to be Garda vetted in order to get their addresses to go to their houses. Are you an official befriender?

70 SP2 That's what was happening at the start yes. I actually never went through that, because I befriended them prior to this programme being initiated, but I know some people were saying that the 'officialness' of it all put people off. I remember that initial meeting in the Town Hall, and some of the families came along to meet other people from the community. There was about 50 people from Carndonagh there who wanted to extend a welcome, but I think only seven or eight people signed up to be the befriender. Then I think there was a deal; It was recommended that you would meet them once a week and that you would be this family's contact, and you would help them with anything they need to learn about the area, or how things go. I don't think it was as successful as they thought it would be.

75 SP1 Do you think the Garda vetting contributed to that?

80 SP2 Definitely it creates barriers. For me I was like, 'Why? Just being friends, it's like, no, you're not the friend, you're treating them differently already'. We have to sign a

thing to say we're going to be friends and we were going to be watched while being their friend. It just felt all wrong.

85 SP1 I'm Garda Vetted because I'm a teacher, but I actually can't remember if I had to pay for that. I know there's exhaustive forms and addresses, every address I've ever lived at. Is that pretty much the same thing that you have to go through?

SP2 I don't think there was a fee but it's the same thing, and because I do workshops all the time I'm constantly being vetted.

90 SP1 So, you're used to the process, but that definitely was a deterrent for a lot of people. Did you then receive any training for the post or it's just you're bringing yourself and your good will?

SP2 There's no there's no formal training. I myself have worked with Musicians Without Borders. We received conflict resolution training and how to work with people on an artistic basis creative basis who have dealt with a lot of conflict and post-traumatic stress. I kind of have that in the back pocket.

95 SP1 When you had to go through the official part of getting Garda vetted, after that you didn't get any official support as such. Did you get any guidelines?

SP2 I think there was a meeting. They had to make sure that they wouldn't have access to their bank accounts and all that kind of thing. There were rules that the befrienders had to abide by.

100 SP1 What do you perceive to be the biggest challenge for refugees and Donegal?

SP2 Integration. I think it's very hard. Two the families came later with young children and the language isn't there, and they don't have the same language supports that the other families had.

SP1 Who doesn't have the same language support?

105 SP2` The family that came later; I think maybe a year later, so the language supports the other family that had was coming to an end. The new families were tagged on the end, and received the last bits, but I don't know what they have after that. Because their key worker was leaving her job and somebody else was coming in, but he was going to be doing the whole of Donegal. They kind of lost out. I definitely feel for those other two
110 families, because they didn't get as much support as the rest of them does.

SP1 Is that because the resources weren't there, the manpower wasn't there?

SP2 Yes

115 SP1 In terms of integration, do you think the challenges with the refugees as in they're here, but our culture's too different, and they're kind of sticking to themselves, or do you think the community is doing enough to welcome them, or is it a bit of both?

SP2 It's definitely a bit of both but I'm of the altruistic measure, where I think the onus is on us to welcome them and invite people into our community and make them a part of our community. That's been my whole goal this whole time.

120 SP1 Apart from the obviously, fantastic work that you're doing, what do you think the
general consensus is of the people of Donegal, having Syrian refugees living amongst
them. We are a very homogenous society with the vast majority of people being white
and Christian - do you think people are open to them are thinking 'Why not' or are they
still very wary - what do you think?

125 SP2 I definitely think that they're opening up. I think there was a fear at the
beginning, a fear of the unknown and the troll comments of people. Then when the
families came, and we did lots of stuff like teaching Syrian cooking, some of the families
have done evening classes and stuff like that, teaching the community, showing them
how to make things, and I think that definitely broke down barriers and their
130 neighbours were trying to see them as one of them, but there was an incident last year. I
saw horrible, grotesque side of everybody. Everybody's very quick to judge and blame
the Muslims 'Oh they'll definitely be wrong' – so his whole family is tarred. It was one of
the families that came later. The dad is in his early twenties, he's got 5 kids. A friend of
his came up to visit him and they went to a nightclub. Supposedly they were trying to
chat up women in the nightclub (it's all heresy). Afterwards one of the women that they
135 were trying to chat up fell. The Syrian friend of mine went to pick her up to help her.
This was seen by other people, that they were trying to drag her into the car, take her
away and do whatever and it just blew up completely. They still want to leave
Carndonagh because they know that their neighbours are constantly watching them and
don't trust them and are constantly judging them; it's disgusting. It was on the front
140 page of local papers and it's just rotten. The guards were called, and I just seen how
quickly people jump on the bandwagon. There's acceptance and tolerance only to a
certain level but if anything gets blurred, you're automatically tarred.

145 SP1 So that's definitely an undercurrent. In Merville, you were setting up this group to
welcome the impending refugees in 2018, then The Castle Mara was torched. Were you
aware of the feeling of the community prior to that happening, and then when it
happened what was the feeling of the community?

150 SP2 I remember prior to it, Facebook was nasty, it got so bad. I wasn't allowed to
comment on it because I'm not from Merville. It was only Merville people that were
allowed to comment, and it was usually the people that were very negative about it,
talking about ghettoising and all this kind of stuff. Everybody, especially the local hotel
owner, he was very sensitive and vocal. He's an employer, he's trying to bring tourism.
He may be seen as a pillar of the community, so everybody felt like 'No it's okay we
don't have to put up with this'. There was a legitimacy to their anger in a way or
something and then the torching - it scared the shit out of them all, because suddenly all
155 these words and all these angry sentiments and everything actually manifested in pure
destruction.

SP1 Do you think people felt bad about how they had reacted, or did they think 'we've
dodged a bullet' - what do you think?

160 SP2 Judging by the amount of people that came to that dinner, I think they felt bad. I
think they wanted to show solidarity and show people that Merville wasn't like this.

Even the people that may have been quiet and weren't vocal in saying 'it's grand' decided that they should step up and make an effort.

SP1 What do you personally think about the fact that 100 Syrians were moving into Merville which has a population of 1400?

165 SP2 I don't think there were all going to be Syrians though. I don't think anybody knew where they were from.

SP1 Yes, but they were refugees and asylum seekers.

170 SP2 I would say like 'Bring it on you know - it's a whole mix, it's a new culture and we're all going to learn about each other and help each other out'. I'm probably seen as a far lefty tree hugger by all of them people but share the wealth.

SP1 Do you think if it was a smaller group that people would have been more welcoming, or were they just absolutely terrified because their community was potentially going to be so diluted? What do you think was the fear?

175 SP2 I don't think they would have let anybody in even if they said it was only going to be 20. I don't think so. I think they were scared that they would be tainted by it for some reason.

SP1 Negative connotations?

SP2 Merville is a tourist destination, it's beautiful. They don't want that association. I think it's a complete missed opportunity.

180 SP1 There was talk of them rebuilding the hotel, and that it would still in the future be used as Direct Provision? Do you think that will still happen or is that gone?

SP2 I think that gone now. I don't know if they found anybody yet because that's what was holding everything up because the insurance wants to know whether it was arson or who was at fault.

185 SP1 And nobody has ever been named for that?

SP2 As far as I know, nobody has been named for it.

190 SP1 Do you have any involvement with the education of refugees, assisting with administration for schools or sourcing of school resources or translation or anything like that? I don't know if you speak Arabic - do you have any involvement in their education?

SP2 I would be helping kids with their homework, and I do an Arabic English exchange with some of the parents but on an official level, no.

SP1 Do you ever have to go to the schools and speak on behalf of them or have a word with the class teacher - you don't have anything to do with the school?

195 SP2 No

SP1 Do the parents, or the kids ever speak to you about their school experience? Do they think it's a positive experience going to school in Donegal, or do they complain about certain aspects?

200 SP2 I'm just thinking of one family I'm close with – they love the fact that their children are at school; academic achievement is paramount, and even during the summer holidays like the older kids, they have to try and master new languages in the summer. So, they have to learn 100 words in a language. One of them was learning Spanish the other was learning French, and then if they learned all of them, they would get a phone.

205 SP1 I better not tell my kids that.

210 SP2 There's another friend, her kids are quite young. They're going to preschool - the eldest is at preschool, the youngest will be going in September, but there's a real lack of communication with her. Her English was quite good. I don't know whether they just don't bother telling her because, I'd arrived over and be like, 'Oh, how come your child is off today?' She didn't know; she just got a text saying they're only allowed in 3 days a week. I thought 'that's not true, you should get five days', but she just accepts it. There definitely a lack of communication in the pre-school area. This is the easiest age to integrate therefore would make the transition much easier if the two-year free pre-school facility is availed of.'

215 SP1 The families that you deal with, are those kids mainly in primary school or secondary school - what's the mix there?

SP2 Yes, it's a mixture of preschool, primary and secondary?

220 SP1 Do you feel that the refugees who settled in Donegal trust authority figures like the guards, the teachers, anybody in a position of authority or acts in an official capacity? Do you think they trust them, or is there obvious signs of mistrust, given their background with the war, where it was almost ingrained in them after many years. How do you think that that works in Donegal?

225 SP2 I definitely think that with the school there's trust. As far as the parents that I'm involved anyway, what the teacher says is golden and they would go with that. Gardaí, no – there's a lack of trust there. Me and the community garda had a big standoff at one stage because they asked if they could be part of the festival just back in February and they wanted to have a stall at it. I was like, 'Yeah, sure, come to the big dinner- Just come along'. It was a dinner and basically everybody would bring a dish and we just shared food, so there was food from all over the world, but they showed up at the festival, not
230 at the time that they said they would come. It was during the day and there were loads of kid's activities, and they showed up in their Garda car in full body armour. Four of them got out of the car. I was intimidated and I could see the male fathers just whitewashed and trying to get away and they were coming up to me wondering why they were there...just really scared.

235 SP1 Were the guards just calling in to check over things. Genuinely did they didn't rough them up in any way? Did they question them unnecessarily? The guards weren't doing anything wrong?

SP2 They weren't.

SP1 Were they throwing their weight around in any way?

240 SP2 No. I just think they have a lack of foresight. I don't know. I don't know about you but if four Guards showed up my house in bulletproof vests you'd be panicking. That was us, but they showed up at the kids' part of the festival, even like the photographer looked scared. You could tell the panic went through everyone. I think there's a lack of foresight with them, not thinking about their impact on others. They were just coming
245 in to say hello and saying that they were going to be at the big dinner later on. I asked them if they wanted to come in and do something right. They said 'No' and were just standing there very loose. Then when they showed up to the big dinner, I took the community guard aside, and I was just saying that it was a bit intimidating and I that I
250 could tell that the dads especially were just a bit taken aback, and they didn't feel comfortable. And I was like, 'That's really unfortunate that this festival is so they're welcomed and part of the community.' I suggested that maybe the next time they were going to show up, they come just in a shirt and just tone it down.

SP1 Did the guards take that on board?

SP2 No, they laughed at me.

255 SP1 So, when they arrived for the dinner later on, were they toned down a bit?

SP2 Yeah, they were. There were two or three of them and in fairness some of the other dads made an effort to go up and chat to them.

SP1 Okay, I suppose it's just a bit of awareness needs to be made on both sides. Would you say that that - okay these are our police force, but they're not deadly or
260 threatening and also to the Gardaí to make them aware of the impact they can make just by wearing their full uniform?

SP2 Just a bulletproof vest and ready for attack - whereas just come casually, and or Garda uniform.

SP1 Do you think the schools are getting things right, and terms of their provision for
265 refugees? Or are you just not aware of that...that's something that's not on your radar?

SP2 I'm personally worried about two of my friend's kids who are in secondary school. They're both girls. Her mum spent the whole of last year prior to lockdown, asking if her daughter made any friends that day or chatted to anyone, trying to encourage her. She is a little bit shy in the way but herself and another Syrian are in the
270 same class, and they just spend every minute of every day together and they don't interact with anybody else.

SP1 Do they wear the abaya on burqa, do they wear the veil?

SP2 Yes, some teenagers will wear the veil to school.

275 SP1 To your knowledge, are there any other teenage girls who are wearing Muslim dress at school?

SP2 I don't think so. I doubt it.

SP1 Do you think that they are isolating themselves by choosing that, or do you think that the local kids just can't identify with that, and find it hard to bring them into the group or both? What would you say? What's your take on it?

280 SP2 I'd say it's a bit of both. I suppose at the start, it would have been the language barrier. Salma went into 6th class when she arrived here, and then went straight into 1st Year (secondary), the same with Nour. I would love it if the school could do more. I don't even know if they tried anything, but just to demystify things for both sides.

285 SP1 Are you aware if those two girls and ever mix with the local kids outside of school, would they ever go to the cinema with them? Go shopping with them? Go for a walk with them? Go to each other's houses?

SP2 No. Not those two older ones. The younger sister on the other hand has friends everywhere. She's away playing Gaelic and everything.

290 SP1 What's the biggest challenge for your role? What do you find most challenging in terms of dealing with the refugees?

295 SP2 Really getting the culture is hard, like women being isolated while man go out all the time. I suppose, like at one stage, it was my friend; she and her husband were going through hard time from prior to being here. She was stuck at home with two young kids, and he was working, and then coming home in the evening, then disappearing again. She just felt like lots of mothers... isolated while the men go out all the time. It's different here as the women don't have friends or family to keep them company and support them.

SP1 Or friendship groups, her girls that the rest of us probably would have to fall back on.

300 SP2 Yeah, exactly. I was finding that difficult because I was her go to. In their culture with their families, the husband's mother or father would talk to him, put him in his place and tell him to cop, but he doesn't have to listen to that, because they're on the other side of the world and he can turn the phone off. Her neighbours don't tend to pop in for tea and a chat or a glass of wine like locals here would. I was then brought in as a mediator and that was just really strange. The wife wanted me to just tell him.

305 SP1 Also culturally, as a woman telling a man from the Middle East how it is, might go against the grain.

310 SP2 He is slightly more open minded than some of the other dads. He would listen to me but me might just be placating me. Recently, they seem to be getting on great so hopefully that was just an adjustment thing for the two of them. Another think that's pertinent, as a young mum, she's been lacking in support. I'm not a mother, I don't have kids, so I don't know what it's like to be stuck at home with toddlers, but I know that Spraoi agus Spórt do stuff. So, I was talking to Spraoi agus Spórt and asked them if there

315 was any way that they could come and introduce themselves to her so she'd know someone and then when she's there, she can she'll feel comfortable, and she would be able to come back on her own to the mums' support group but they don't have the resources to do this. They said I'd have to come in and be her support and I would have to be part of this group.

SP1 Was that a language thing?

320 SP2 No, it wasn't a language thing. It was just having a link to make things more comfortable for her.

SP1 In general, what level would their English be?

325 SP2 It's a good mix - the families that came here later, they find the language a lot more difficult. The ones who have been here a few years, I think they are getting on okay. They get the older kids to translate for them. I go along and help fill out forms for some of the families who are doing their citizenship applications at the minute. I would help with that.

SP1 Do the kids seem enthusiastic about school?

SP2 Yes, some of them - they seem to like going out and mixing.

330 SP1 Do they do they show any obvious signs of trauma? Do they ever open up about their journey from Syria or their experience?

335 SP2 We attended a film screening in Ballyliffin of Sama - the film that was shot in Syria during the bombings, so we'd all gone to see that, and I was kind of scared for them. Afterwards they opened up a bit. Some of the families, like the parents would talk to me about stuff here and there but the kids have never spoken about anything, but the Nour was like 'Oh yeah, I recognise that,' - I definitely think they've been a bit desensitised because of the trauma.

SP1 Are there any behavioural problems with the kids at school?

340 SP2 A few maybe but nothing major. A friend of mine was a teacher for one of them, so she worries for them. I don't know if it's just ordinary growing up stuff or if it's something different.

SP1 Are you able to gauge well you know the parents' impression of Donegal - do think it's peaceful or friendly or to rural or not diverse enough - what do you think their impression of Donegal is?

345 SP2 At the start it was very difficult for everybody because they're used to living in huge cities with millions of people there so coming to a rural place like Donegal is a bit of a shock. I definitely think people are falling into the rhythm of it more. The lack of a mosque is difficult and some of the families went through a really hard depression for a while after being here, but thankfully have come out the other side. One of them is now working and just really appreciate that. He really loves getting out in nature and taking the family to the beach. He loves the rural life and the isolation. He's found a peace in it

350

as well. Some of the younger families would be still missing shops – they're in their twenties.

355 SP1 Do you think they feel Donegal is home or do you think they still have a desire to go back to Syria, that that's the end game, or do you think they feel like they could make a life here with their kids and this could be home?

360 SP2 There are three families at the minute applying for citizenship, but there was always a thing where they would apply for citizenship and then go move somewhere else once they have it. There's talk of Canada and talk a lot of things but now those three families are insisting on staying. They've seen their kids be part of the Gaelic Club they see a future for their kids here, so they're willing to make a go of it. I know there's other members of families that always want to go back. There's a Kurdish family – there is a definite distinction between them and the Arabs. They would want to go back but I don't know what they would go back to. They always talk about not being here long
365 term.

SP1 Religion isn't so much of a defining issue now in Ireland, but are you aware of any issues between the different sects, between the kids or parents inside or outside school?

370 SP2 Definitely there's a gulf between the Kurds and the Syrians. The incident with the Kurdish father didn't help.

SP1 Do you mean the incident in the nightclub?

375 SP2 Yes, that didn't help. Even from both sides, when I asked the father to be part of the festival and to talk about Kurdish lifestyle and culture....I didn't know if it was nerves, but he didn't show up so the guy that was working with him did it. So, we had a white guy from Malin Head telling everybody about Kurdish culture.

SP1 But the majority of them are Arabic Muslims?

SP2 Yes, apart from that family

SP1 That's the equivalent of a protestant family living up the Falls Road in the 80s.

SP2 Yes

380 SP1 Do you think they had adequate support from school during Lockdown?

SP2 I don't know. I would get texts off the kids. I think they were bored out of their minds like everybody else. I know they were given enough work to keep themselves busy.

SP1 Were they able to engage properly given that there was a language barrier there?

385 SP2 No. One child needed help with his homework – he would be given words to learn for spelling which he had no idea to pronounce, he had no idea what they meant. He needed that communication, he needed that extra support and understanding and that goes with every piece of work he was given. To him, it was just a jumble of stuff. Luckily, he had his sisters there to help translate and help him along with it, but I think

390 other families, particularly the Kurdish family, their eldest is 9 years old, she's really smart and she was helping all her siblings, there were 5 of them - I would say their education did suffer.

SP1 Of the families that you deal with, do they have laptops or computers – do they have any devices other than phones?

395 SP2 Most of them would have a laptop apart from that Kurdish family so 3 out of 6 of them would have a laptop.

SP1 Have the school, headteachers or SNAs ever contacted you to help out with schoolwork or is that not part of your remit?

400 SP2 No, I'm more informal. The families might give me a shout to help them, but not anyone else.

SP1 Do you think that there's adequate language support provided for them inside and outside of school?

SP2 My friend who is a teacher gives them about 1 session a day maybe. I don't know if that's enough.

405 SP1 Do the parents get language support?

SP2 They did but then it all stopped after the One Year Programme. Myself and my friends set up a conversation class, just an informal thing where adults can come and just chat to other people, so they have that option, but nothing more regular with a syllabus where you can gauge their level.

410 SP1 What frustrates you most about protocols that are / are not in place, or things shouldn't be this hard that should come easier. Is there anything that you find challenging.

415 SP2 There was a lot of frustration at the lack of resources. For example, if they are going to the doctor. That all has to be booked in advance and you have to make sure that you can get a translator on the phone at the right time so that you can speak to your doctor, that's ridiculous.

SP1 What would be ideal in that situation, that an Arabic translator be employed?

SP2 Even if they were available 9-5pm Monday to Friday - you shouldn't have to book ahead, because what if they're stuck if there is an emergency.

420 SP1 How many translators are there around the area?

SP2 I've no idea, I just know that that's a national phonenumber that they have to book in advance. I don't think it's a localised thing at all.

SP1 So, if they have any emergency, they have a national phonenumber to ring for a doctor, a dentist...

425 SP2 I think the doctor has to organise it then. I think they have to ring the doctor, then the doctor has to try and get a translator on the phone and then try and do your appointment.

SP1 With regards to them getting citizenship, I assume that's a long drawn-out process?

430 SP2 It seems to be. I don't know if they get to skip the queue because of their situation and they don't have anywhere to go back to.

SP1 Do they do most of that admin in Letterkenny or does it mean a trip to Dublin?

SP2 I'm not sure. I've been asked to help with the forms. I don't know how long it takes but I know that two weeks ago they had the first citizenship ceremony for 42
435 people over the internet.

SP1 I saw that on RTE, that's cool. Do most of them have a car?

SP2 Yes – that was the first thing – all the fathers went to get their licence and got a car and 3 of the women are applying for their driving licence as well so that's great.

SP1 Do most of the women wear abayas or burkas or some form of Islamic dress?

440 SP2 Yes

SP1 How do you think the locals feel about that?

SP2 I'd say there's a mixed response. Some neighbours (of the refugees) wouldn't be the most accommodating people. I don't know if it goes beyond snide looks, but there's very little friendship there.

445 SP1 What's the most rewarding part of your job?

SP2 I have new people in my life, new friends, learning a new culture, learning Arabic, trying different food, expanding my knowledge of the world and people in it.

SP1 That's all my questions for now - Thank you very much, that was brilliant.

Appendix 13: Interview with Syrian Family

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: Farooq (Father)** **SP3: Amal (Mother)**
SP4: Nour (Daughter) **SP5: Mohammed (Son)** **SP6: Fatima (Daughter)**

- 5 SP1 How long have you been living in Donegal?
SP2 2 years and 2 months
SP1 And in Ireland altogether?
SP2 3 years and 6 months
SP1 Where did you first go when you arrived in Ireland?
- 10 SP3 First in Dublin in a camp for one month
SP1 During that time was there any education / schooling provided for the kids?
SP3 No
SP1 What age were the children when you arrived?
SP3 10, 11 and 5
- 15 SP1 What are the benefits of living in Donegal?
SP2 Everything is good. Good house, everyone is friendly.
SP1 What are the challenges/ difficulties?
SP2 The language and getting used to the food is difficult
SP1 Are you able to get your type of food around here?
- 20 SP2 In Claremorris (250km away)
SP1 So you had no education for the kids until you came to the Donegal?
SP4 Very little. After Dublin we went to Ballaghaderreen in Roscommon. There was a hotel there. They used to do a bit; there was a wee school that they set up with 2-3 teachers and there were older people on one table and younger people in the other
25 table. They used to teach you verbs or basic words (walk, talk etc). It was like junior or senior infants there....just very easy things (e.g., I went to the supermarket, alphabets, numbers, easy words)
SP1 Did you do other subjects like Maths, Science?
SP5 We did easy Maths, times tables 1-5
- 30 SP1 Did you think it was at your level or below your level?
SP5 I think it was at my level.
SP1 How many hours a day did you go to that?

- SP3 It was every day for 4-5 hours and for adults maybe 2 hours. There were things for the adults as well.
- 35 SP1 Just to learn English?
- SP4 Yes – there was one teacher and they used to bring the same verbs like for Junior Infants as well.
- SP1 Do you know how many people were in the class?
- SP2 There were 100 adults and only one teacher.
- 40 SP4 She spent all the time asking, ‘What’s your name, what’s your name?’ Every time she wants to ask a question she keeps asking what’s your name (because there were so many people)She spent half of her time asking names.
- SP1 Before that, were you in school in Syria right up until you left?
- SP4 Yes
- 45 SP1 And then you left Syria and then you got yourself to Turkey and to Greece?
- SP2 We walked to Turkey and after seven attempts we got there. There were lots of soldiers and police and we kept getting turned back. We spent just two or three nights there, then got the boat across to Greece. We spent two and a half months in the tent and then three and a half months in a caravan in a camp and then a house afterwards
- 50 for maybe six months.
- SP1 Did you have any education in Turkey?
- SP5 No
- SP1 In Greece?
- SP5 No
- 55 SP1 No English classes, nothing! So, you had a gap in education from when?
- SP2 They had nothing from 2016 until we came to Ballaghadereen in 2018. There was some kind of school in Greece, but it wasn’t safe... sometimes children went missing, so we were afraid for our children.
- SP1 So, you had 2 years with no education?
- 60 SP2 Not just two years. When the airplanes threw bombs, everyone was afraid to go to school.
- SP1 So, your school in Syria was not consistent?
- SP2 They didn’t go every day – maybe one day, two days, three days per month. I forgot to tell you when we made the decision to leave. When the Russian airplanes
- 65 dropped bombs beside the school, 17 children died in the school.

- SP4 We had break, we were on a break and the airplane came and bombed and all the classes went out of the class into a big room and then they sat there until all the parents came to collect their children.
- 70 SP2 Yes, and all the airplanes kept throwing bombs, maybe 200, 300 people died on the same day. My son Mohammed was just learning Arabic in school for 3 months. He was in first class when he came out of Syria, he was only there for 3 months.
- SP1 That's why you're teaching him Arabic now?
- SP2 Yes, he just knows how to talk.
- SP1 Did you ever go back to the school after it was bombed or was that it?
- 75 SP2 No khalas (finished) - that's it!
- SP1 When you came to Ballaghadereen, how many kids were in the class?
- SP4 There was about 50. There was a teacher at each table; here was 3 tables but all in the same room.
- SP1 Did you have to go every day?
- 80 SP5 No, you didn't have you go?
- SP1 Did you guys go every day?
- SP2 Yes, I made them go.
- SP6 In the hotel every day my father told us to go and learn some English words. Every day we had to learn 100 words.
- 85 SP1 You would be a good teacher.
- SP2 Yes because it is very hard for me for learning English so now they translate for me.
- SP1 Is this your second year at school in Carndonagh?
- SP5 Yes, we have two years done.
- 90 SP1 So, you had absolutely no English when you came here?
- SP5 No
- SP1 And 2 years later, the 3 of you are definitely completely fluent.
- SP4 When we came here we couldn't talk; we had words, but we couldn't use them because we don't know how to use them but when we went to school, there was people talking. Every time we hear them talking, we were like 'Ah that's how you use this word...how you put it in a sentence'.
- 95 SP1 How many are in your secondary school?
- SP4 1200

- SP1 And how many are in the primary school?
- 100 SP5 Around about 200. When we first came we were both in primary.
- SP1 So not only are you fluent, you're fluent in a Donegal accent! Obviously in Syria, the school wasn't safe (but it was your home), how do you feel about the education that the children are getting here?
- SP3 Yes, we are very happy.
- 105 SP1 Do you think the choice of subjects is good? You're happy with how the school is run?
- SP3 Yes
- SP1 Any problems with the teachers, the Head?
- SP4 No – not any problem. When I was in 5th class when started school, we had a special teacher. We didn't do religion or Irish, so we had 2 free classes, so we went to an English teacher, and she did reading with us, writing, spelling and extra.
- 110 SP1 So, as you get an exemption from Irish and religion, is there any provision for Islam or for accommodating Ramadan either for yourselves or any of the other (Syrian) kids? If you wanted to, are you allowed to go to pray? If you're fasting during Ramadan, or you're tired, did you still go into school?
- 115 SP5 We still did go to school, and we did everything the same, but we didn't eat with them or drink anything.
- SP1 That's difficult especially as Ramadan is during the Summer and it's bright until 11 o' clock at night and then it's bright at 4 in the morning.
- 120 SP4 I remember one day when I was in school, and I was fasting, and we did PE; it was very hard. We ran so much, and I was so tired at the end, and I just couldn't wait until we went home.
- SP1 But you're strong – you walked to Turkey! You've already said that that you had no education in the period of time between leaving Syria and coming to Ireland. So let me recap – you walked to Turkey (after 7 attempts), then spent just 2 or 3 nights there, then you got the boat across to Greece, spent 2 and a half months in the tent and then 3 and a half months in a caravan in a camp and then a house afterwards for maybe 6 months.
- 125 SP3 Yes
- 130 SP1 Then you were flown to Ireland.
- SP3 Yes
- SP1 When you came to Donegal, you didn't have much English (parents), and you (kids) had no English – so who helped you get everything set up?

135 SP2 When we first arrived here, we arrived at the council and there was a lot of people there and they were the ones who organised everything. There was a woman who looked after us for a year.

SP1 With regards to school, did somebody go with you to the school and translate?

140 SP4 Yes – there was translator and the girl that was looking after us. She went to school with us and told them that we had just come new, and we needed more help. They don't have any English; they don't do this and that.

SP1 Did they help you buy uniforms? Do you get the bus to school?

SP5 No, it's just down there

SP1 Okay so you can walk. Were the staff helpful to you?

SP6 Yes, everyone was so friendly.

145 SP1 Everyone welcomes you?

SP6 Yes

SP1 You didn't get a sense from anyone that you weren't welcome?

150 SP2 No, not all – everyone was very friendly. It was just very different when we first came in because no one knew you and no one knew who are you and where you came from.

SP1 Do you feel there is any sense of a status or a stigma around you? Everybody has watched on the news, Syrian refugees coming over and how heart breaking it is, but did you feel you could fit in okay, or did you feel uncomfortable about it?

155 SP4 At the start I was very scared to go to school, I was very scared to go anywhere. No one knew, no one knew, they watched the news but not small children.

SP1 Yes, I guess I wouldn't have let my small children watch it

SP3 Why would you!

SP1 I think your story is amazing, but it's tough. Do you open up with your friend about your story?

160 SP6 Well, I never opened up about my story, but I did tell them that I'm from Syria, but I didn't tell them all of my story

SP1 In Syria, because there was so much corruption with the police and the authorities, do you feel you can trust authority figures here – like the guards, the police, the teachers, the headteachers?

165 SP2 The guards are so friendly, they're so different than Syria. They're so scary in Syria but when you see them here, they're so friendly and kind. We were going to Clarendon one day in lockdown and they stopped us and asked, 'Hi how are you, how are you managing lockdown?' They were very friendly

SP1 So, you've no problem with authority figures?

170 SP2 No

SP1 That's great. And prior to the war in 2011, what do you think of the education system in Syria before the war compared to Ireland? Would they be the same, or do you think the education system was better in Syria?

175 SP2 In Syria if the education was the same, maybe now I am (would be a) doctor, because my father was not very poor, but he had 9 children and all the same age (one born after the other). All need books and pens and pencils - when the school asks me or my brother to bring e10, and I ask my father, he said I don't have e10. I hated the school because the teacher (kept asking) 'Where's money, where's money?' and my father said 'I don't have money' - I hate the school... I'm smart but the opportunity wasn't there. I
180 tell my children for learning here, everything is easy, you have everything, nothing is hard. Government gives us money for books, for uniform, for life for everything - why not good study (study well).

185 SP4 He always says, 'you have everything - why not study and do good in school, because you have the opportunity to do that, and you have everything you need to do that'.

SP1 Your three children are very balanced, but obviously the journey coming from Syria and the war can affect your mental health and make you anxious. Do you feel at a safe place now or do you still feel anxious?

(All) No safe

190 SP4 I don't think about my past, cause why - I'm in a safe place, I have everything I need -just live life.

195 SP2 Like my daughter said they were afraid to go to school at first. They didn't tell their story except that they came from Syria, but that is past. Two years ago, when we first came here, I used the GPS for getting around. We arrived to Carndonagh and the GPS said 'Welcome to your homeland.' I felt comfort. Donegal is my home now.

SP1 Do you feel this is your home now?

SP3 Yes

SP1 That's great - it's lovely! Because there was a gap in your education, do you feel that the school has done enough, to bring you to a similar level as your peers?

200 SP4/5 Yes, yes

SP1 By taking you out of Religion and Irish, the teachers gave you a lot of help. Even if you're very smart, you've been out of school for a couple of years, but the teachers have helped you come up to the same level?

SP6 Yes

205 SP1 When you came first and did Maths or Science, did you have to start at a lower level than the other people in your class?

- SP4 Yes, in the hotel we did. But we always had a special teacher, one for English, one for Maths in school, and here we have 3 women friends, they come every Wednesday to the house to help us.
- 210 SP1 Like tutoring?
- SP3 When Nour was in 6th class there was a teacher that came to help her and teach more English. She still does that til now.
- SP1 I always feel the younger people pick it up more quickly, it becomes more natural to them, there's no inhibitions.
- 215 SP4 Yes - when I started 5th class, I didn't do any of the work they did. They used to do reading, I used to just listen to them read. They used to do English work, I just saw them do it, but I went to the extra English classes, and I did lower level and when I went into 6th class I was a wee bit better. I didn't do the same work, but I was a bit better. Now in 1st year (secondary school), now I do everything.
- 220 SP1 So, when the time it comes for you to do your Junior Cert and Leaving Cert, you feel you can go at them the same way as the others?
- SP4 Oh yes.
- SP1 That's really good. So, you walk to school - When you came here first, how long did it take until you got a car?
- 225 SP2 It took a year.
- SP1 How did you manage with appointments, with going places?
- SP2 We just walked. We can walk with the GPS you know.
- SP1 But there's not a lot of public transport because it's not a city and Donegal is quite rural.
- 230 SP2 Now no GPS - now I can go anywhere, and I can read the signs whereas before I cannot.
- SP1 You've got used to it?
- SP4 Four days ago we went to my uncle in Claremorris and he (dad) didn't need any GPS. For 3 hours he knew all the way. He'd only gone twice before to visit my uncle, but
- 235 now he knows the way.
- SP2 What I say is that education is very important for life.
- SP1 Do you do any sports or any cultural Irish things? For example, do you do GAA?
- SP5 Yes I do hurling and Gaelic football....(sister) and I do camogie.
- SP1 Do you take part in any musical activities in Ireland?
- 240 SP4 Yes I'm doing the violin and the piano for a wee while.

SP1 Amazing! How has lockdown impacted on your education with regards schooling?

SP4 It's a wee bit hard because we don't have a teacher to explain what we're supposed to be doing.

245 SP1 But because you had the language, you had no problem understanding what you had to do? Did you have Alladin or Seesaw or how did you communicate with school?

SP4/5 Google Classroom (secondary) and Seesaw (primary)

SP1 Were you able to manage that okay?

250 SP4 I would just have some homework and I would take a picture and send it to them (teachers)

SP1 So you didn't have different work from the Irish children?

SP4 It was a wee bit hard for Mohammed because he couldn't do Maths. He was doing everything new in Maths and he needs someone to explain it to him, so we tried to explain it him every day.

255 SP1 Back to when you were learning English – you are given the provision of learning English for one year and you don't think that's enough?

SP2 Not enough

SP1 Realistically, how long do you think you need to learn a language?

260 SP2 If you want to come to any other country in Europe, all have 3 years, here is one – why? In Germany, 3 years, maybe more. In Belgium and Holland, 3 years. In Norway, Sweden, all 3 years. Just here, one year, not enough. And now I am 46, I am not young.

SP1 I know other families; the kids end up translating a lot – is this the case?

SP2 Yes, there is another lady who had a baby so she couldn't go to the classes, so she missed out, so a year is not enough.

265 SP1 You've said you feel Donegal is home now – are you happy to settle here?

SP2 Yes

SP1 And even if Syria became stable and safe again and you had the opportunity to go back, you feel this is home now, you're happy?

SP2 Yes, very happy.

270 SP1 When you were in Ballaghaderreen and the camps, was everybody still speaking Arabic there?

SP3 Yes

SP1 So, you weren't developing our English?

SP3 No

- 275 SP1 Did you miss the group of families there or were you happy to move on?
 SP2 No, we were happy to move on.
 SP1 Are you able to keep your culture to a certain level here? Is there anything you're missing (apart from your family and the weather)?
 SP2 No
- 280 SP1 Do you feel, even though you've come here and are embracing the Irish culture, are you able to maintain your own culture a bit.
 SP3 Yes, we can still have the Arabic culture a bit.
 SP1 You don't feel any problem wearing your veils to school?
 SP4 No problems with the kids wearing veils.
- 285 SP1 And you can get your Arabic food?
 SP3 Yes, we can find it in the bigger towns and cities
 SP1 Is there anything else that you miss from Syria
 SP2 No
 SP1 Are there any mosques around here?
- 290 SP2 Yes - in Derry.
 SP1 I didn't know that . How do you feel about your children embracing the Irish culture? You're happy for them to learn Irish music, play Irish games.
 SP3 Yes, we are happy with that.
 SP1 Is there sufficient sensitivity to the Islamic way (culture) here?
- 295 SP2 In what way?
 SP1 By the way you dress or if you're going to the mosque – is there any problem with that?
 SP2 No
 SP1 In school are they sensitive towards you? For example, is there halal food?
- 300 During Ramadan what do you do at lunch time?
 SP4 We just take our own lunch and in the Community School we can buy whatever you want.
 SP1 What do you do during lunchtimes at Ramadan?
 SP5 Just walk around. It's very hard. I always look at the time wondering when is
- 305 break finished.
 SP1 That's tough – Ramadan is so hard in the Summertime.! Have you found it hard to make friends here?

- SP6 No
- 310 SP1 I think obviously being on a sport's team is a massive help. Do you feel you've got a good set of friends now?
- SP5 Yes
- SP1 Do you meet up with friends outside of school? Would you go to their house, or would they come here?
- SP4 I have when I was in 6th class
- 315 SP1 Do you have any playdate or meet up for swimming or cinema?
- SP4 No we don't do that .
- SP1 Do you feel that you have more freedom here than what you had in Syria?
- SP4 Yes
- 320 SP1 Do you think the children have too much freedom here compared to Syria? (For example, my 16-year-old daughter will go to the cinema with her friends and doesn't need a chaperone, whereas another Syrian family I spoke to said culturally their daughter would have to have a chaperone if they're going to meet friends outside – do you think it's too liberal here?
- SP2 If they're all girls they can go, boys No
- 325 SP1 You're like my dad!!! My dad was like this with me!
- SP1 Do you have many dealings with the school? Do you feel you get enough information about events that are going on? Do you school communicate well with you?
- SP3 They send papers and letters about what's happening in school and what we have to do.
- 330 SP1 Do you help to translate them for your parents?
- SP4 We just translate it all for them and then they understand.
- SP1 Parent teacher meetings, do you need a translator there or can you get by?
- SP2 Now maybe okay but before maybe the Integration officer would translate for the first year.
- 335 SP1 Have the school community done anything to specifically welcome you at the start? When you came in first, did they make a big effort with you to make you feel at home? (A buddy)
- SP5 Yes yes.
- 340 SP1 Because you can't just be given all the instructions in one day and remember it – were people welcoming to help you get from A to B to C?
- SP6 Yes, they were

SP1 What can you bring to the school? How can you benefit the school and this community, being Syrian and with the experience you've had?

SP4 Having 2 languages.

345 SP1 And you're resilient.

SP4 Yes

SP1 Is there anything that you think the school, or the government can do better to help with the education of your children? How can they improve?

350 SP2 In Syria, if you're not good in school, like history, geography or another subject, you get a teacher to help you with that subject at home (not in school)

SP1 A tutor?

SP3 They come to your home to teach you that subject and the things you can't understand in school...isn't stuff like that here.

SP1 In Syria, if a tutor comes, do you pay them?

355 SP3 Yes

SP1 We do have that here – it's called grinds. It's a private tutor. Overall, if you were to ask the government to do something better, it would be to provide the adults with more English, not just one year. Is there anything that you (the children) would like different about school?

360 S4/5/6 No, it's good as it is.

Appendix 14: Interview with Hannah

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Headteacher of one-teacher school in Portsalon)**

SP1 First of all, how many refugees are in your school?

5 SP2 Just the one.

SP1 That's a female. What age group is she?

SP2 She started last September she was six and turned seven in November.

SP1 So, she would be in 1st Class?

10 SP2 Well, actually because she had no English, she might have had some comprehension of spoken English, but she doesn't have much English and because she had never attended school before we actually placed her in Junior Infants to get her started.

SP1 How much advance notice were you given for this child's arrival to the school?

15 SP2 I got absolutely no notice. I saw it on the local radio website on the 16th of July that children were among the group of asylum seekers that were being placed locally. I was actually going on holidays and when I returned, I started making phone calls ringing TUSLA and the HSE to see if anybody had any information, which they had not. In the end it was the local doctor's reception that put me in touch with somebody in the HSE, who put me in touch with the manager of the house where they were staying.

20 SP1 But that was only because you sought that information? You heard it on the grapevine, but nobody approached you. When you contacted the Department of Education, what was their response, when you were trying to find out if there was any possibility (of the child being in your school) because obviously, the child would be in your catchment. What was the response of the Department of Education?

25 SP2 That there would be no resources available. That it was more or less 'get along with it'. Several agencies of TUSLA and the Department enquired as to whether the child was Syrian. When I said that she wasn't them, they were made clear that there would be no support available. I had never worked with a child with EAL needs. I was even looking for some guidance on that but there was nothing. At that time, I was unaware if
30 there was any trauma going on in the child's background. I was looking for advice on that. The NEPS psychologists did come around to the school, a young girl who more or less said, because I've been teaching for 32 years, 'You would know more about this than me' so that was it. I did cope because of all my years of teaching experience but I had to put together a learning plan for the child. I had no guidance as to how to
35 approach the child or her mum. Even any issues that I might have wondered about...like her mum and her little sister and her shared one bedroom in the house.

SP1 When you say, 'the house', do you mean the Direct Provision house that is beside the school?

40 SP2 Yes, I think there were 25 people: adults and very small children. There were two
4-year-olds, one being her little sister and her, she was six at the time. There were
several small babies and there were other people living there as well. It's very hard for
me to know much as mum wasn't very forthcoming, and I was in a position of
wondering, 'how many questions can I ask without seeming intrusive?

45 SP1 When you eventually were told, were they presented as a refugee or an asylum
seeker? What information did you get? Did you even get that much?

50 SP2 No, no, the lady at the RIA, Judy Harte's words to me was that 'they were put on a
bus from Dublin and God love them they ended up in Portsalon and that was it. She gave
me no background and she seemed to think that the child had very good English. As it
turned out she didn't seem to have very much detail about the child. She thought I was
50 making a mountain out of a molehill when I had concerns about the child's background
and the child's ability to speak English, anything I should look out for or help that I
might need.

55 SP1 I know you said she's from South Africa so presumably if she has come here
under the RIA, she's either a refugee or an asylum seeker, so she has come from a
dangerous or traumatic background. You weren't made any aware if it was a warzone or
if it was domestic - you've got no information.

60 SP2 No, no information, and the child didn't strike me as a child from a background
like that. She was remarkably like any other child who was in school. She was a pleasant
friendly a little girl. Her mum was very nice, very helpful, very interested and very
supportive. Dad is in Newcastle in England and what I asked them on because when I
met her first about it, because I was conscious that there may have been trauma in her
background, and I asked her how she got here - she said we flew to Dubai and then we
flew from Dubai to Dublin. I know that Dad has been over on at least one occasion
between September and the Lockdown on the 12th of March.

65 SP1 So, he seems to be involved to some degree?

70 SP2 Yes, and she talked about an order sister. I got the impression that the sister
could have been in her late teens / early 20s so maybe she has a half-sister because I
don't think mum would have been old enough to have a child of that age. Apart from
that, if you asked her to draw her family, she drew loads and loads of people. Maybe she
probably had an extended family back in South Africa. She doesn't speak very much
about South Africa. When you would do something a topic like 'Housing' or 'Where We
Live', I would ask about where she lived before; Was it very busy? Was it a town? Were
there lots of cars or whatever, she could never give direct answers even though you
knew she would have understood that kind of questioning. Things like food... she would
75 say that she would have preferred the food in the hotel in Dublin to the house in
Portsalon. Neither I nor the children in the school ever got any information about what
life was like. It would have been a great opportunity to talk about how things were
different, but she wouldn't give anything.

SP1 She would never engage?

80 SP2 We talked about things like animals or flowers, but nothing would ever come out to indicate her background and Mum never provided any background information either. The mum changed their names for both herself and for the child. She gave me the child's real birth name and her own paperwork, but her reasoning was that she was using both their middle names which were more anglicised and easier to pronounce.

85 SP1 I'm just going to go back again for clarification - when you spoke to the Department of Education asking if these children or asylum seekers were coming to Donegal, they said they didn't tell you because they didn't want to interrupt your summer?

SP2 That was the RIA - eventually the manager of the house gave me Mary Smith's name from the RIA. It was only after I was speaking to her that I started to contact the INTO, TUSLA and NEPS. I contacted Joe McHugh who was the Minister of Education at the time. I spoke to the Department of Education because I'm dealing with a different matter with the Department they more or less said 'it's different for a big school maybe if you were getting 20 children, then you might be looking at getting an extra support teacher, but not in your case where there was only one child', even though at that stage there was a possibility that there might have been more, but I was the one who was going around fishing for the information. They weren't coming to me; like I said, Judy Howard didn't want to disrupt my summer holidays.

SP1 When in the summer did you get definite confirmation - July or August?

100 SP2 It would have been the end of July.

SP1 Were you given any paperwork on her educational background? Were you any anything from previous schools?

SP2 No, I asked, and I thought that was unusual for 6-year-old who had been in Dublin because after the age of six, a child is meant to be in school in Ireland. Before that there wouldn't have been any legal requirements. I thought that strange that she hadn't attended any educational establishment in Dublin between St. Patrick's Day and the end of the school year in June 2019. The only paperwork that I got was a little booklet related to her birth or the equivalent. I was told by Judy not to expect a birth certificate because paperwork in these countries was different, and the people wouldn't necessarily have been able to access them before they left. She had a little booklet with mum and dad's name and the address. Another thing was the local parents were very apprehensive because the local community hadn't been consulted at all but one of the things that the parents raised with me was had the child received vaccinations. When I contacted the local public health nurse, she said that when they land in Ireland, they're not subjected to the vaccinations we get here. It's acknowledged that the vaccinations that they have received may have been different to what would be required of a child of the same age here in Ireland. There have been outbreaks of things like measles and mumps in Ireland, localized outbreaks over the last number of years. I suppose the parents had concerns about things like that. I asked the mum about the vaccinations, and she gave me the little booklets but that was the only paperwork that I received.

SP1 Leading on from your responses, obviously Donegal is a homogenous society; its majority are Christian and majority white - were you involved in any anti-racism or intercultural training?

125 SP2 No, this was the first non-Irish children we had – actually there were a couple of Spaniards and a couple of Swedes, but I suppose from a non-European background and different culture, she was the first. However, she is Christian from a Methodist background.

SP1 So, there's no problem with her family and therefore her taking part in religious classes or practices within the school?

130 SP2 No

SP1 Therefore, can I then conclude that there was no training from the Department of Education offered for trauma, child protection or welfare other than what you would usually have for child protection; conflict and resolution, cultural awareness, diversity or racism - there's no training offered for that?

135 SP1 No, what I found was that there was no go-to-person if I had a problem. I felt that I was very much on my own at that time. As it turned out, it has been a very positive experience, but I was very aware that if something went wrong, that professionally and personally, because I would live in the community, that this could all blow up very much in my face. The local community was unsettled because there had been no consultation.
140 There was a fire in the proposed asylum seeker hotel (Caiseal Mara) as the reason for that. That meant that there was a lot of unease and suspicion and in some cases resentment that these people had been deposited especially just across the way from the school. That was one thing about the parents being uneasy because they had no knowledge of these people's backgrounds, or nobody else such as the authorities didn't
145 either. If there was a child protection issue around a person, because of a conviction or an allegation they wouldn't be allowed to live so close to the school. She (the child) was in the school a few weeks when somebody from Bus Éireann came out to organize transport for her to school, even though she lives directly across the way from the school. I found that Judy Howard (RIA) in Dublin didn't even know that it was a one
150 teacher school, so the authorities didn't seem to have any comprehension about the locality, the school or where they were sending them. They were just sent there, and it would all work itself out. They didn't seem to think that they should take it upon themselves to contact me or the Board of Management or the Chairperson or anything.

155 SP1 Are you obliged to take that child? Thankfully, it has worked out to be a positive experience but when it was confirmed that this child was been assigned to your school were you obliged to take her?

160 SP2 Yes, if you haven't reached the quota. In a big school, I could say, we could only take 30 Junior Infants this year and we have reached our quota so I'm sorry we can't, but our enrolment policy is open and welcoming and in a school our size, unless it was a large number of children, it wasn't going to be an issue. I'd say if there was a large number of children, I may have got more support. I may or I may not, you just don't know. You could imagine if you said, 'Hang on a minute – No', I just got the feeling that

they would be very quick to go to the media about that. But it was in our enrolment policy that is any child had approached us last summer looking to come to the school, she would have been welcomed the same as this particular child.

165

SP1 Can I just ask about the other 25 people who are living in that Direct provision house, opposite the school - Are they all South African?

SP2 No, quite a mix. Some of them would be of African origin, I would say because they're very dark skinned. Some of them would be Middle Eastern. Quite a few of the women would have head coverings and they dress in the Muslim style, but there would be a small number of what would strike me as maybe being Eastern European, but there's a mixture.

170

SP1 With reference to support you've been given - you haven't really been given any extra hours, resource hours, EAL hours - how do you manage with regards language, EAL or with her English language provision?

175

SP2 I suppose we're lucky that we have quite a good provision of SET and that was based on a year when we did have a lot of needs. The children with those needs have left ironically and we've been left with the hours. The other children wouldn't have (special) needs really. They wouldn't be receiving any SET in the big school at all. So, I was lucky to have three full days of SET. So that teacher, she worked together, and she would take her out by herself with another little girl of similar age, and the children were very, very good. I think she understood at the beginning more than she was able to speak so that was helpful. But there were things that she didn't understand that you would ask her to do so it was just kind of trial and error. It did get easier as time went on and then I found that if she didn't understand something, and she didn't want to ask me that she would ask the little girl beside her. There was a great improvement with the total immersion from September until the middle of March. There was a great improvement in her language.

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185

SP1 Were you able to identify then that she was within the parameters of a normal functioning child, or did she show any special needs, apart from language - special needs, or trauma background, anything like that?

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SP2 She wasn't in the parameters of a so-called normal child, because I went back to basics very much with her because of her poor language, but in Maths, number identification, counting and things like that, she would have been quite advanced. We started off with the sounds and the alphabet and that was very hard; she didn't get that. Then we switched to flashcards and sight vocabulary and that was better. Then we got to the stage then where she needed to be sounding out, and by the time the school closed in March, we were back to the alphabet on the sounds, and it was going better than it had been. So, it was very, very difficult but she was making progress. I know it's very hard to say you because you're just going on the evidence that you're presented in class but there were absolutely no behaviour issues. She was a lovely, well behaved, well presented little girl was impressive. Her mum was, before the school closed and since the school closed, interested in her education and her development, so she wouldn't have struck me as a child who had come from a traumatic background.

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200

205 SP1 Okay. You did mention that the kids in the class were good at helping her with the language and obviously, it was total immersion. Do you feel they welcomed her? Were they curious about her? Did they have a good positive response to her?

SP2 They did, and this is children like who would never have had a non-national child in the school, and they would probably be related to most of the other children in the school in some shape or form. I was really amazed, from the youngest children right up to the senior children in the school, they were so good to her and so helpful. They included her in all their games in the yard, they were very patient while she learned the rules. She did GAA skills, and the Christmas play with them. They were really, really good. I must say it was a very positive experience for them. With all the talk about racism in society, I think that they'll carry that positive experience with them for the rest of their life and she was very fortunate also to be in this unique situation of a one-teacher school. I think the fact that there were older children was good. If she had gone to a bigger school, she would have just been mixing with children of her own age whereas with the older children were really, really good to her and looking out for and including her.

215
220 SP1 Was she able to integrate with the school children outside school hours? For example, would she have been invited to a birthday party or go to a friend's house to play or gone to GAA training or music or anything like that?

SP2 No – again this is due to a lack of communication but when they arrived, there was a whole thing that somebody does their and somebody does their laundry for them and so on. Then they weren't allowed to leave the house. While some of them would have been out and about, I noticed that even when the school was closed, and the weather was good, you would very seldom see any of them outside. There's a little grassy area beside the house - if I was cooped up with two small children in one room with the beach right beside you, I'd be out

230
SP1 So, they wouldn't be out walking on the beach or anything?

SP2 One day, on the June bank holiday, I saw them. I saw mum, the two little girls and another family from the house on the beach but transport in a rural area is an issue. I know that there was a local Presbyterian Church that included them, collected them and took them to service on a Sunday and laterally then they were going up to services in one of the Episcopal churches or gatherings in Letterkenny. Those people were coming down and bringing them up to that. It's very difficult - the children would ask things and I just didn't know. I didn't want to push; the child wasn't forthcoming too much on any innocent kind of general questions that I asked. Mom didn't offer very much in the line of background, and nothing in the line of family background at all.

240
SP1 Do you think there was a mistrust for authority amongst them?

SP2 I never got that impression. Mum was most respectful of me from when I met her first and very appreciative of everything. When I sent out the report at the end of the year, she thanked me for the child's reports and wished me a nice summer; she was always very respectful. So no, I never got that. I never got that sense. Whether it's a cultural thing - maybe if you were going to school in South Africa, you wouldn't share

your family background with the local principal. There are cultural differences, and I had no experience of it before and I just didn't want it to be seen as intrusive or nosey. When things were ticking along nicely, I was reluctant to damage the relationship or rock the boat in any way.

SP1 Do you feel that whilst she was respectful and polite, that she was guarded?

SP2 No, she never gave you the impression that she was guarded. Do you know what I feel would have helped - if there had been some sort of intermediary between us - not just in my case, but I think this would help in general - that there would be somebody who would say 'This is the family and the background that these children come from', because although I was aware that there were cultural differences about eating, dressing, behaviour or whatever. I would have been totally unaware of that. I would know absolutely nothing about them. It would have helped me, because I was always rather cautious about putting my foot in it.

SP1 Yes.

SP2 I know that she doesn't speak very much in class, but I know that she would have understood more than she would have spoken so I was always very conscious of that. I do think that if there had been an intermediary who would be able to answer Mum's questions, it would have been good. One example is that the children have to be collected by their parents, or mums will ring and say, 'The babysitters collecting them, or granny is taking them to the dentist', or whatever and that's fair enough. But a bus used to come on a Thursday at 10:30 in the morning, and the people over in the house would all pile onto the bus. Vanessa would be at school and mum would head off to Letterkenny and wouldn't be back till about 5:45 in the evening, so some of the staff in the house would collect Victoria. So, after the first week of that, I spoke to the manager of the house. There seems to be these two couples that run the house and they're from Northern Ireland. I don't know if they are familiar with the education system in the North, but I presume it would be the same in any school in there as well. I said 'Listen if a parent can't collect child for any reason, they can nominate people or family members to come collect the child otherwise. He said 'That's no bother at all' so she dropped over a list of about five names on it; a couple of ladies who lived in the house, the managers of the house and one of their wives who could collect Vanessa on a Thursday. Generally, it worked all right but occasionally it would be somebody else from the house or from the staff, and I would say 'Hang on a minute, it has to be somebody from the list'. They would say 'That's okay' and they would go over and get somebody who was on the list, and they would come and get her then. I thought if I moved to South Africa as an asylum seeker and I have a 6/7-year-old child and I was in the situation that she was living in, I wouldn't be heading off for the day. She was finished school at 2 o'clock and mum wasn't back until 5:45pm and leave her with complete strangers really. That would have been the only thing in the course of the year really that would have really jarred with me. As a mother, it wouldn't have been something that I would have done with my children were small.

SP1 With regards to the rest of the children in the school, did you just let nature take its course and let them try and mesh together and get on with it, or did you feel you

290 needed to sort of alert them to her otherness here as a child from a different country, a different culture. I'm sure physically she looks different because we do live in such a homogenous society - did you sort of have to give any introduction like that or sort of guide them into how to behave?

SP2 Not so much - I just said that she was new, that she knew nobody, that she had very limited language skills and could they imagine how frightening that would be if they were in that situation, they were in a country with a language that was completely new to them and all new faces. I never made anything of the culture being different, I didn't go into that, I just said 'She's new to our school community, her language...we may need to be aware of that and there may be things that she doesn't understand and that might be frightening or disconcerting, but I didn't labour it to any degree; I just let nature take its course, but I was lucky that it worked out.

SP1 I suppose with just one child that it was easier. Do you think the children in the school, particularly the older ones, are aware that the house across the road is a Direct Provision house? Even if they don't really understand what Direct Provision is, are they aware that this is something different to a normal house and that these people live very differently to everybody else in the community?

SP2 Yes, yes, they would.

SP1 Do you think it has negative connotations for them, not this child who they were obviously very supportive of, but is that house and the people in it, do you think it holds negative connotations particularly with the press coverage that had come with that house?

SP2 At the start of the year, I had no 6th class, but I had 4th and 5th class children who would have known that the community was wary about this, maybe not so much Vanessa, but the others, especially the women who were walking around with the Muslim dress.

SP1 Did they wear the burqa, hijab and abaya?

SP2 Yes

SP1 Okay, so that's very, very different.

SP2 Yes. They would have also known that that she just had a room, and they would have felt sorry for her that she didn't have a house, but the younger children, they sort of view the whole thing as her house, and it was quite a big house. They viewed it the same way that they lived with other people, so she lived with other people.

SP1 It was like a big family.

SP2 It was never discussed by the children, we have at a small school of course, and we have quite an open relationship with the children, but it didn't it doesn't strike me as registering with them, if you like.

SP1 Okay. You did mention that you had SET and that was for three days a week, and you were able to concentrate most of her time on the child?

330 SP2 Most of her time, and then sometimes she would come to work with other children, and I would take Victoria out in small groups.

SP1 With regards lockdown and quarantine, how do you think that she has managed or what steps if any, were put in place for her?

335 SP2 It was very difficult. I felt that she would have suffered more than the other children really, because language was her primary need really, and if she had had the end of the school year, I felt that her language could maybe have been at a stage where you could have really concentrated on the rest of the curriculum. Her mum sent me a text; she was upset, the child was upset, and the child was crying doing the work and I would say 'Listen let's pullback here'. I concentrated a lot on activity-based learning; I left over all sorts of jigsaws, library books, colouring books, crayons, or even a
340 photocopying paper. Then Mum was in hospital. TUSLA contacted the manager, and he said that there was no education – he was just answering yes and no questions, and I was able to explain to the lady from TUSLA that she was in a hospital. I was sending texts and Mum did explain to me then that she was in hospital. I was trying to be helpful and supportive. I was trying to send things to her that would assist with her learning,
345 but not in a very prescriptive way. That seemed to work, and Mum seemed to be in better form and things seemed to settle down and she was she was happy, but I would say definitely that she missed the interaction and the freedom of playing in the schoolyard playing with the toys. I thought there's no point in books and games and jigsaws sitting in the school while she's at home, so I did send those over to her, but it
350 actually has been hard.

SP1 And I suppose the language and as she probably learns most language from interaction with her peers, because it's just natural discourse.

SP2 Yeah.

SP1 I'm not sure if I asked you earlier, how is mum's English?

355 SP2 Yeah, Mum's English is good. She may not get all the nuances of some things that I might say. I might say things to all the parents where I would be confident that they would understand what I mean but there were a few instances where I realized subsequently that she didn't get the gist of what I was talking about.

360 SP1 Was there ever any mention that you could have access to a translator or anything like that?

SP2 No. All the time I was told 'Mother and child have good English'.

SP1 Whereas the child had little or no functioning English when she arrived with you - is that the reality?

365 SP2 Yes. At the start of the school year and at the end of the school year, very often the children would pick up skipping, you know....that skipping rhyme, and that was the first English really that she was speaking to any degree was that, 'Teddy bear, teddy bear' skipping rhyme....she was reciting that in the yard with them. That's real natural development. We concentrated very much on functional English, whether it was the

word for things like food items or school or clothing - that's very much what we
370 concentrated on, and I suppose them from interacting with the children then she would
have been able to put those words into sentences and context. It was all just starting to
come together very much just before the Lockdown.

SP1 Yeah. It's such a shame. I'm not going to keep you on much longer - just the very
375 last thing, what would you say the government is getting right (if anything), and what
do they need to improve upon?

SP2 From what I can see I received no help or guidance at all. I didn't know anything
about the child; I had to go fishing for information myself. It was really just myself, and
the school and the child and her mum. Once she wasn't Syrian, nobody wanted to know
and when a young psychologist said, 'You probably know better yourself, more than
380 me', that's telling. I was very much left to handle it. Now I was in a good situation in that
I was an experienced teacher, and the children were very nice (to her). I had no issue
with the parents other than their initial concern with the house being there but nothing
to do with the actual child. I was very lucky that we had no problems with the little girl
or her mum, but if there had been any difficulties there I had absolutely nobody to
385 contact, no backup. The local GP was able to say 'I can only take 6, and the rest of them
have to go to the practice in Milford. (15km away) Like I said in our enrolment policy,
we welcome everybody. Like any school, the only reason a school would have for
turning people away would be numbers, if the numbers have been exceeded. There was
one child in our situation where that was never been the case, but I could safely say that
390 we got absolutely no help or support whatsoever, or guidance.

SP1 The very last question, what benefit has this child brought to your school?

SP2 Well as you say, we're very white, homogenized society, because it was such a
positive experience, I think that this child has taught the children a lot; this child is just
the same.... just the same as their little brothers and sisters. I know that when they
395 would go to secondary school or go to college, or get a job, I would hope they would
carry that positive experience and interaction with them because I was always full of
praise to them for how good they were to her, and how they helped her without my
prompting. They would see things before I would see them and include her in things
without being asked so it was definitely a positive experience. I think, even for the local
400 community, you know they were unsure start, maybe mistrusting at the start with kind
of fear of the unknown. Initially, they (the refugees) were invited down to the
Lighthouse to an event last summer shortly after they arrived, and apparently some of
them made derogatory remarks about Fanad being in the back of beyond and it rubbed
people up the wrong way. There again, like I was saying to you about the need for an
405 intermediary between the school, the parents, the child - it's the same in the
community, somebody who works between everyone.

SP1 That's so interesting.

SP2 I did wonder about where they go; you know the way in Ireland if the sun is out
everybody goes to the beach...was it not part of their culture? People here would go for
410 a walk on the beach, walk the dog on the beach, they had that amazing amenity on their

doorstep. To me, I would rather that than be in an apartment in a city especially during the Lockdown.

SP1 It's really interesting that you're saying that about the community because I don't know the situation, and I'm reading between the lines but perhaps if they haven't
415 got refugee status yet, and they have so many appointments in Dublin, or they need to apply for social welfare or translators and they are stuck four hours away from Dublin, and also 40 minutes from Letterkenny with no mode of transport, then getting the most basic things done is a huge ordeal because they're so far away. I suppose the amazing beauty of Donegal is not a priority but who knows. But I think that's a really good point
420 about having an intermediary for the community. I just want to say thank you so much. Your information is just amazing.

Appendix 15: Interview with Mary

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (EAL Co-Ordinator, Primary)**

SP1 How many refugees are in your school that you know?

5 SP2 I would say about 8.

SP1 Approximately what age are they and what's the gender mix?

SP2 There's only 3 girls and the rest are boys from Infants right up to 6th class.

SP1 How much advanced notice are schools given before the refugees arrive?

10 SP2 I'd say we were notified about 4 to 6 weeks prior to them being enrolled. We might have just got an email and then people from the Refugee Council and then the families would come in with the interpreters and meet with us and the principal.

SP1 Is your school obliged to take them?

15 SP2 No, I don't think any school is obliged to take them. It depends - the last intake in June 2018, the first time that they arrived, the Educational Welfare Officer and the support worker were just going around all the schools and it just depended on where they were going to be living as to where they would be placed. If the availability of numbers were there, we could take them and there was no problem with us taking them. We have EAL in there anyway, we have supports so probably it's more suitable in our school. Some of the other schools would have no experience with any ethnic
20 minorities even coming into their school but we have so many.

SP1 You have quite a diverse school; would you have any idea how many nationalities or languages are coming into that school?

SP2 I did a quick survey before Christmas and in our school population we have 33 different mother tongues and even more nationalities, so EAL is well established.

25 SP1 Therefore 33 countries?

SP2 Possibly, in parts of Africa some of the children might have been speaking Europa some of them might have been speaking Arabic depending on what area they were from. Some of the kids from Pakistan or India might speak Punjabi, Urdu or Arabic language depending on what area they were from, so it could be more nationalities.

30 SP1 Comparing your school to other people I've interviewed in a 1 or 2 teacher your school who have zero diversity, you definitely have a wee bit more than that, but Donegal being a homogenous society, the vast majority of people are white and Christian - Is there any anti-racism or intercultural training for teachers either in general in your school because it is diverse, or specifically for the refugees?

35 SP2 No. Anything that we would have in place, we put in place ourselves. I am the EAL co-ordinator; we haven't gotten intercultural policy, but we have the all-inclusive policy being drafted at the moment. EAL, ethnic minorities and intercultural education

all comes under that umbrella policy would come under Special-Ed as well as part of the all-inclusive policy.

40 SP1 Specifically in terms of the refugees, because presumably they've all come from a warzone, and it's taken them a year or two to get here, are you given much background on them?

SP2 Now that's my biggest bug bear. That is my biggest problem with children coming in. We're just given a very vague bare minimum. They just give us the basics that
45 they came from Syria, that they spent time maybe in Turkey in camps, maybe that they've moved, that's all we're told, we're not told anything else more than that. When the parents come in to meet with us, you can see how timid they are; it's all alien to them. In the last year, different issues would have arisen. For example, refugee children when they come in first thing, they can be very friendly, they can be over friendly,
50 there's no limits with them, and then sometimes trauma comes out, and they can act up and all of those things that come with children that have been through what some of those children's have been through. But we wouldn't have had a background check. I work closely with the class teacher, both in terms of making sure that the textbooks and the supports are in place for, getting the money organized for their swimming, and if
55 they're allowed to go, making sure that we can get adequate communication with the parents. I work with teachers in that way, but the class teachers will come to me and say, 'Have you the idea of what happened there, or what's the background there?' In the last year, myself and the other EAL teacher have noticed the way sometimes Muslim children, especially children from war torn areas, they might have more of a rapport
60 with a man than they do with a woman. Because their English has improved as well, those children are able to communicate better, because they're here over a year and possibly another year in Ballaghaderreen or from the other (EROC) centres; they would have disclosed more information to him than to me. Nothing that has to be reported so far but, it's just that we wouldn't have known. We're not aware of a lot of trauma that
65 those children would have gone through. We do what we can to try and piece it together ourselves from what they say. That's very difficult and because their culture is so different to ours, when you're talking to people like this, for example, when we say to come in at 10 o'clock for a meeting, it might be 11. They're unaware of the importance of cultural nuances. I think that's the greatest thing for them to get used to. When
70 they're asked to come and if they make an appointment to fulfil that appointment; This is what you have to do.

SP1 The government have issued various directives and papers on what they are offering to any refugee children who come to Ireland in terms of everything; housing, social welfare and all the rest, but I'm obviously focusing on education. What I'm looking
75 to see is are they fulfilling that, and if they are, which parts of it are being delivered and then which parts of it are not being delivered? I'm hearing various stories from schools depending on how diverse the school is, but obviously Donegal is so rural. You already have EAL set up in school. What provision do you have for that just in general as a school?

80 SP2 What do you mean?

SP1 Do you have 2 full time EAL teachers?

SP2 Two temporary teachers that I have to reapply for every year, depending on their English language proficiency level using national tests. The department take the numbers that I give them. It has to be over 20% of your student population and if you
85 fulfil that over 20% of the student population, you're granted one EAL teacher for the temporary year. I normally appeal because we always have over 100 - between 100 and 115 over the last six or seven years is what I would have been applying for every year. I would always make an appeal; they would always grant 1 teacher around April. Then I make an appeal for the second one, and we always have been granted two. I still have to
90 confirm those numbers at the end of September, issue them back into the Department by the end of October, but usually we would have 2 EAL teachers on staff as part of Special Ed.

SP1 What's the roll of the school?

SP2 It's 370 , so we're always 20-30% that I apply for - there are children whose
95 speaking and listening could be on the B1 proficiency levels, which means that are able to engage in a curriculum, but they can't. Maybe they're reading and writing might be less than that. It depends on the amount of space that I have as well to try and support those children. It's always around between 100 and 115, over the last 5 to 10 years that I've had that number.

100 SP1 What you're saying is, if children pass a certain standardized test in one area of EAL, they're not deemed eligible for EAL?

SP2 No, they have to pass it across the board, across the four proficiency levels, which are speaking, listening, reading and writing, but they're tests that were based on European language proficiency levels that were created in 2002. I started this job in
105 2002 and I was part of the pilot scheme for those assessments. They were set up by a linguistics professor in Trinity and they're the tests that are kept and done every year. But I spend my life online on the UK website, checking to see what they're doing. The European proficiency levels are possibly all the same but there are huge differences in the testing that we do. I might find that my children are getting a B1 in reading and
110 writing, which would deem them as being able to engage, but if I was to do a Cambridge assessment test on them, using some of the stuff that's been used in England, they might not reach it on them. Those tests are supposedly assessing EAL language proficiency but if you give them tests such as Sigma T, or the Drumcondra tests, they're going to score hardly anything on them because they don't have the nuances of the language. They
115 haven't got the scaffold to engage properly and that includes refugees.

SP1 You have around about eight refugees and because you're already set up with EAL, you don't have to make extra provision for EAL specifically for them because you have enough kids so you can give them the same service.

SP2 That provision is fantastic because there are twins and first class that haven't a
120 word and I take them every day. I'm there ready to take them because I'm already set up. It's their language I'm dealing with so when they come into us, they automatically are put into EAL support so for that, it's brilliant. We are not a DEIS school. We don't

have home-school liaison. We don't have a nice wee place for you to come and sit on the sofa and talk. We don't have any of that. I'm just thinking of before we closed, the RSC program was being taught for an eight-week sustained period, with sensitive lessons. You know you have to send out a letter to the parents to get permission for the children to take part in these lessons and 6 Muslim families had queries and questions and 4 refugee families did not give permission for their children to take part in the lessons. There was nothing...I was read the lessons, I put it up on the board for them, the interpreter was with me as well. He knew that they'd already spoken to their own friends and family. The 7th refugee would possibly have opted out, but he never brought back a letter, and we didn't get that far. I was going to have to try and contact a brother to see if I could get somebody to speak to me about it, because there are families who just have absolutely no relationship with the school.

135 SP1 Do you have an interpreter? I know that when they come here first, for the first year (of the programme) there is some sort of help to coordinate things, but do you have an interpreter (other than that)?

SP2 No, no access to that.

SP1 Do you find that the parents engage much with the school?

140 SP2 There were 8 children, but one has left. There are 7 now, and their parents came in to discuss the RSE, so somebody spoke to them about it. I sent out all the letters, I didn't translate the letters, but I put it out there just to see what would happen and they didn't bring them back. I rang Fadl to ask if he could maybe speak to those people and get them in here.

145 SP1 What was the content of the RSE roughly?

SP2 There would be lessons about growing and changing, my body etc. They can be quite explicit from 3rd class up. There's a lot of stuff in the media about it and it's all rubbish. One of those kids was in Junior Infants, 3 were in 1st, 3 were in 2nd and one was in 6th class. All their parents came in and would not let them participate. One family actually let the children set for all the lessons except the sensitive lessons, which would have been two lessons, but in actual fact it didn't happen anyway because the schools closed (due to Lockdown)

150 SP1 So, it's the same ones that go on in all our schools, it's the same thing?

SP2 Yes

155 SP1 The reason I'm confirming that is to check if it's you that does the lessons or the other EAL teacher or the class teacher?

SP2 No, the class teacher does the lessons, but I met the parents. I sent around an email, and I made sure to go around and ask all those teachers to see did they get a letter back. And they came to me as well, because all of us are very aware of the cultural part of it. It wasn't only refugees; there were three or four other families that came in who weren't refugees, but they are Muslim that took them out of lessons. Then there were a few others who we sat down and spoke to and explained, especially in the junior

end, like there was nothing in it.....like talking about 'My Family' and so on. They said no and headed off. It was a no from the refugees and some of them weren't in the programme anymore so Fadl couldn't contact them. They're not in the program, so you're kind of dependent on them. If you phone those families directly, they just fob you off.

SP1 In parent teacher meetings if the parents don't have any English, what do you do about that?

170 SP2 Google Translate. Visuals. Fadl if he's available.

SP1 So, it's really challenging when there's no interpreter?

SP2 Yes, but not just for the refugees. There's a lot of kids in our place that are from Afghanistan, that maybe their parents are British citizens, that were working with taxi drivers. I remember speaking to one of the kids, and they said that families are moving to Britain have to do language proficiency test. But the kids told me that they came here because we didn't have to do the proficiency test, so we came to Ireland, and we'll move to Britain in a year.

SP1 Okay, they're just getting a loophole?

SP2 They're not refugees, they are mostly from Afghanistan

180 SP1 Yes, and probably not in dissimilar circumstances. The Afghanis won't get through, because they're considered economic refugees rather than war zone refugees. Specifically with the refugees, how do you feel that they mix with their peers?

SP2 No, bother.

SP1 I'd say being diverse that helps.

185 SP2 Our place is so diverse, there's no issues about anything.

SP1 Would you say that the Syrians mix with peers outside of school.... would you say they go to the birthday parties?

190 SP2 No, they don't mix outside of school. A few of them who live next door to one or two of the wee girls that are in our school, the girls play together outside, but they are not involved in any extra-curricular stuff together.

SP1 Do you have any girls, particularly at the upper end of the school like 5th or 6th class who are aware of the abaya, or veil any of that?

SP2 No, none of that.

195 SP1 With regards to these kids coming in, inevitably they all have a gap in their education, how do you place them? They're not going to be on par with their peers through no fault of their own, and it's not a mark of their own intelligence, it's just because they have had the gap. So how does the school try and bridge that gap? Me and another SEN are the points of support. As soon as they come in, we get them out of that room as much as we can - twice a day anyway from 9:30 until 11 and then from 2-3pm
200 for language immersion and we would give them a wee welcome booklet with all

visuals. That's done in school or at home because most of the parents are very eager for the kids to learn and they do the homework and everything with them.

SP1 Are the kids enthusiastic themselves?

SP2 Yes they are.

205 SP1 Any notable behavioural problems with the refugees?

SP2 No except for that boy that I talked to you about that I don't know what the right background is. He's out of the program now, but his acting out is a symptom of whatever trauma that child has gone through, and I don't know what that is. We would often say that we are worried because we just don't know.

210 SP1 What age would that child be?

SP2 About 11, but the rest are great wains (kids). They're enthusiastic and they just want to learn. They're coming on with their language and they can communicate very quickly because they're very adaptable. That's not to say that trauma can't appear in a year's time because that's what they say that will happen in a year's time, but so far, no
215 problems.

SP1 Are you able to decipher the difference between 'here's a kid ...they're not communicating' are you able to decipher whether that's a language thing, a communication thing or whether it's a psychological thing as in trauma or whether they actually might have a special need? What I mean is if you have a child in front of you
220 who is not really meeting the benchmarks, are you able to say, 'that's because of their language difficulty or that looks like it's trauma or maybe they just actually have a special need like autism or ADHD'. Is it difficult to decipher that?

SP2 No, it's exactly the same way as when we're standing in front of any group of children, you know what straightaway.

225 SP1 I suppose just when you don't know the background. Do any of the children ever open up about their journey?

SP2 That wee fella who I mentioned before said one or two things just to Rory... I think it's because he was a male and he's living in quite a male dominated house. The rest are just easy going and chat away the same way mine or yours would chat.

230 SP1 Is there a psychologist that comes in? For example, for a child who did show very obvious signs of trauma, is there a child psychologist for that?

SP2 No nothing like that. There're only three assessments given a year per school, so no we don't have anything like that. There's a NEPS psychologist but you have to refer them and there's a waiting list and you have to identify needs

235 SP1 Just to confirm; you don't have any historical background as such. Do you have any information about their education from when they left Syria to when they arrived in Donegal?

240 SP2 No, I rang the EROC centre last year. They had spent six months in the EROC centre, and whoever came in with them were quite closed, you know, 'you're not going to be telling me. I'm telling you this much but I'm not telling you anymore'. There were definite boundaries about what they could say or what they could tell you.

245 SP1 Which isn't much help to a teacher.... there are things that can be said within the bounds of data protection, but at the end of the day, a teacher can only work with what they have. Is there anything different done specifically for the refugees that isn't already in place in the school?

SP2 No

SP1 Are you given any guidance or guidelines about how you should treat them or deal with them given their past?

SP2 No.

250 SP1 Do you feel you have enough resources to give them what they need as a school?

SP2 I'd say we're in a better position than most schools because we have EAL provision but there's nothing extra given just for refugees.

SP1 There's nothing extra specifically given because they're refugees?

255 SP2 There was e1200 I think, I got last year. A e1200 cheque from Donegal Local Development or was it the other place for refugees?

SP1 The IRPP?

260 SP2 I went down and got a cheque there in June at the end of last year, and it was e1200 for support that you could put in place for refugees. What we used it for was for paying for swimming, keeping a bit of money back for different things that would come up during the year that we wouldn't have to ask for and I think I bought 2 sets of EAL language visuals to be used by them.

SP1 Do you feel that the refugees trust authority figures or do they show any obvious signs of mistrust?

265 SP2 I don't have any real experience with that. It's hard whenever you're dealing with Google Translate and you're relying on one interpreter to get the information from the other. Whenever one family were enrolling their wee boy and girl in January 2019. The wee fella was 7 so he was definitely the right age to start into Senior Infants, but the wee girls was 5 in March, and they wanted her to start in Junior Infants halfway through the year which was January. We went through the principal and had a discussion and at the
270 end of the meeting I was very, very adamant about the wee girl going to preschool for six months before she would start in mainstream. The father was very much for her starting school. The support worker was also saying that he will not listen and he's adamant that she was going to start school. Using Google translate, I got the number of pre-schools that would cater for a lot of the diverse populations as well. I told them that
275 in Ireland you are entitled to two years pre-school, which is my opening line with everybody that tries to send their kids to school, because there's an awful lot of cases

with parents that are arriving from other countries, they look up Education and it says in Ireland, we start they start formal schooling at age 4. So, they think they have to start at age four which means we sometimes end up with a lot of kids that are very young
280 because there's no cut off. I would have the numbers of preschools about me and explain to them that they're entitled to 2 years preschool and to do so before you attempt to send them here. In some cases, they listen, in some they don't, but I got through to him anyway. And he did. I think it was because I got the number, and I rang and sent her down with him to the preschool and the wee ones did go to preschool for
285 the six months.

SP2 That support worker was inclined to say, 'well this is what he thinks, that's their culture and stuff.' And I said, it's not happening, she needs to go to pre-school before she comes here, and she did. I don't know if they'd been informed of that, but the wee one was only coming five, and they thought she should be going to school. I thought the
290 opposite. She's fine now and getting on the very best. A lot of them, even though they're of age to go into 4th, 5th or 6th class, they still need to go back a year just to try catch up. They're going into classes according to age, they're not put into classes according to their proficiency.

SP1 Any religious issues, any of them sort of pulling out of religion lessons or needing to pray? Ramadan or anything like that?
295

SP2 No.

SP1 What is the government getting right and what can they improve on in terms of providing for these refugee kids?

SP2 In my school because we have an EAL provision, that's what you need. You need
300 EAL and language provision. Because we have sustained support in English that's fine but other schools don't. Other schools have learning support but don't have any experience of EAL. I would have people (teachers) ringing me now going 'What do you do? Where do I go? What do I look for?' It's okay for me, because we have a lot of resources built up but in a lot of places they wouldn't have. At the same time, there is
305 supposed to be an intercultural policy and intercultural education is part of the buzzword these days so every school should have that. In the future we might see it a wee bit more. I still think town schools and large urban schools, because the catchment area, these people live in the town apartments, and rented accommodation, and they don't have cars, it's the town schools that these children come to. They don't go to the
310 schools on the outskirts, then as a result, they have nobody.

SP1 With regards to Lockdown, how did the school manage with that in terms of the refugees, I suppose they are treated the same as other kids with EAL.

SP2 That's the thesis on its own. My biggest issue with remote learning and portfolios is 1. language proficiency, 2. lack of devices, 3. Broadband, 4. one phone between
315 children 5.no printer. What I did was with the class teachers we would have phoned the houses to see if we could get talking to the kids, that was the only way you could communicate with them itself. Lockdown fell through Ramadan and Eid, so you didn't get a lot. I'm not just talking about refugees you didn't get a lot from them on the phone

320 the first time, but you might have got them in the evening which is fine. We would have
posted stuff to them and then we told them to come in and collect sets and booklets as
well as books for them to continue with their learning. We weren't using Alladin
Connect or SeeSaw; we were using just the class blog on the website. If you go on our
school website, there's an EAL section and everything that I would have put up for them
325 to access is on that. It was lots of Apps you know, but with the refugees, none of them
got back to me – none of them engaged. My sister teaches in the Convent, and they
would have quite a few refugees in the secondary school, and they had a whole range of
different issues. She was getting work from kids at 3 o'clock in the morning. There was
one or two that she might have been their only contact; they weren't all refugees, but
Muslim kids.

330 SP1 When you sent out stuff on apps and all of that were they able to follow them or
did they need any translation, or would they have just used their own Google Translate?

SP2 I would presume they used Google Translate because I didn't speak to them after
that. I contacted the Support Worker to tell them about the book collection and a few
came up and collected the resources because I presumed he contacted them. They
335 would have got text messages. They use Google Translate all the time anyway so
whether they had checked it anyway or if the support worker had connected with them
and that's how they got the stuff, but as far as sending work back for feedback, we didn't
get it, and I am fully prepared for September for having to start all over again. All their
language will be gone; it will have regressed so much.

340 SP1 I really appreciate that thanks a million.

Appendix 16: Interview with Aisling

SP1: Interviewer SP2 (Primary Headteacher)

- 5 SP1 Okay I'm going to start off by asking how many refugee children are in your school?
- SP2 So we currently have nine refugee children in school.
- SP1 And are they all Syrian refugees?
- SP2 They're all Syrian refugees
- SP1 And can you give me a rough breakdown of their age and gender?
- 10 SP2 Okay, so we have three boys and six girls, and they are roughly five, seven, an eight-year-old, two 10-year-olds. Yeah, that's roughly their ages.
- SP1 What's the population of your school?
- SP2 We have 335 kids on the roll.
- 15 SP1 As you are an Educate Together school, would you have a large number of migrant children or, other ethnicities?
- SP2 Yeah, we would have. I think we think at last count we had over 30 different nationalities. We have a very diverse population
- SP1 How many languages would you have coming into the school?
- 20 SP2 So we have, we have well over 20 different languages. About a third of our population don't have English as a first language.
- SP1 I didn't realize that was that many. That's amazing. So, in terms of the refugees that you have, how much advanced notice are you given that they're on their way to your school?
- 25 SP2 So the way the process works with us was initially we were contacted by our Education Welfare Officer to say that there were families arriving in Letterkenny and what capacity and availability did we have in our school and essentially, she was looking to see what classes we had spaces in. So that was the first contact, and then there was a little bit of back and forth around that, about spaces that were available, then I think we were given about six weeks' notice. When it was decided what children were coming to
- 30 our school, it was about six weeks before they arrived.
- SP1 Are you obliged to take them?
- SP2 Yes if you have space in the school there was no question of whether or not we would take children; it was just how many children we would be able to facilitate?
- 35 SP1 When you say six weeks' notice, was that so that the children could start at the beginning of the term, or did they come midyear?

SP2 I suppose the thing when you're looking at capacity in schools, one of the first things that happened with our families was that we weren't able to take all of the siblings. So, children were placed in different schools in Letterkenny; some siblings were placed in different schools in Letterkenny because we didn't have capacity. Our school was developing so we recently moved into a new building, as you know, which means that we're growing from the junior end up, we have three Junior Infant classes, two Senior Infant classes, but we still only have one, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth. We have less capacity further up the school. So, we couldn't take all the children they were asking us to take so siblings ended up being split between a number of different schools. From memory, our first cohort of children arrived after the May bank holiday, so they did maybe like six or eight weeks with us before we broke for the summer holidays.

SP1 How did you and the staff feel about that? I know you're obliged to take them and it's great that you did, but on a practical level, is that very unsettling for the staff and pupils with the kids coming in?

SP2 We generally try as best we can to avoid transfers in term three, because it's difficult for the staff and difficult for the children but to be honest, that was the way we looked at this was we use those first few weeks purely just to get to know the kids and it allowed us to do that and then when the children came back in September, we weren't coming back to completely new environment and that really helped.

SP1 So they were able to start well.

SP2 I guess they got to know their classmates a little bit. Coming in September in some ways it's easier because everyone's coming back and starting a new school year, but it's not necessarily easier when you're the new kid; getting to know a new teacher and new classmates and teachers are only getting to know the class also. At least when the refugees arrived in May the teacher already knew the class well, there were good routines in place; all of that was really well established so the children into a very settled classroom environment, which in hindsight now probably actually really helped and it allowed us to start building a relationship.

SP1 As you know Donegal is a very homogenous society with mostly white Christians. Yours must be the most diverse school in the country.

SP2 Yeah, I'd say we're probably close to it.

SP1 Are you involved in any anti-racism or intercultural training - you yourself and your staff - are you given guidelines by the department, or do you do that anyway?

SP2 I suppose being an Educate Together school, obviously we're a multi-denominational school, so we're equality based. Through our ethical education programme, we would do a lot of content with the kids around difference and around different cultures and family background. That's a big part of our ethical education program but we get support from the Educate Together head office which is our patron body around that. They would provide us with lessons to follow, they provide the teachers with training, the teachers can sign up to courses with them. They have a

person who works part time in head office just solely for that purpose of running our ethical curriculum, so we would already do a lot of that anyway. We don't do any kind of religious instruction at all during the school day. We do religious education the kids
80 learn about lots of different world religions but not religious instruction. We're lucky we have a home-school community liaison teacher and she would link in with various community groups around diversity and around any anti-racism projects that are happening locally. She would link in with that, so our school is very much part of a wider community. We don't operate in isolation. Good things are happening in the
85 community that we feel are beneficial for the children to be part of that we will reach out and get involved in at the community level as well.

SP1 Is that staff member is just for Educate Together schools because I haven't heard of that for other schools?

SP2 She's called a home-school community liaison teacher. She's a permanent
90 member of staff in our school. They're only assigned to DEIS schools, and I think we're the only primary school in Donegal that has a full time HSLO teacher working with us. Her job is not to be class committed so she doesn't have a class teaching job. Her job is to be the link between parents, school and the community. She does things like running parent courses, she links in with the local community groups, she does home visits, for
95 all of our new families. She'll go out and meet parents in their home and chat to them - she really is just that link, that stepping stone.

SP1 So she would be a really key member for linking the refugee families?

SP2 She's been a huge part of that. To be honest without her I can only imagine what a struggle it is for other schools not to have that staff member available to do that
100 because the support you get anybody else is very limited, so for us having Linda has become a key figure for our refugee families; there's no doubt about it because her role is so important. The class teacher just can't do it, if you've got 30 kids in your class, you just can't do it.

SP1 Absolutely - just to confirm the reason your school gets her is because it's a DEIS
105 school. There's lots of DEIS schools but because of the level of diversity is what qualifies you to get her?

SP2 It's about being a DEIS school, it's about the level of need in your schools and the demographic of your school community. That's why we were also appointed a HSLO teacher.

110 SP1 This next question is specifically in relation to refugees, but you probably have supports in place that other schools don't have because of your diversity, but specifically to the refugees, what training and resources, if any, does the Department of Education provide for you or your teachers in relation to trauma, but conflict resolution, racism issues, that kind of thing?

115 SP2 Nothing Claire, nothing

SP1 That's the message I'm getting across the board. Do you feel sufficiently informed and equipped to carry out the job - you and your staff- or is it that you have to figure this out yourself?

120 SP2 I suppose, predominantly, it's figuring it out yourself. I think as a school, we are quite proactive anyway, which was a great benefit and support for families when they arrived with us. We had done a lot of training around trauma and attachment disorders and the importance of Early Year attachment because we had a number of children in our school who were adopted. When those children came to us, they came with some challenges from those early childhood experiences that they had. At that stage maybe
125 six, seven years ago, we reached out to NEPS and people like that, that said we need training, and all that training has proved really beneficial for us moving forward. But in terms of what was offered to us, there was absolutely nothing, you were really just left on your own to figure it out.

130 SP1 That seems to be clear; once the children have a school place the Department has done its job. I didn't realize how diverse your school is, but I knew it would be much more so than other schools. Moving on to EAL - what did you already have set up in the school and do you have anything extra offered because of refugees?

135 SP2 No, we didn't get any extra support, because we had refugee families; there was nothing like that. We currently have one full time EAL teacher. In reality our SET had to pick up the rest, but on paper, we have one teacher that's allocated for EAL. Like I said to you before, we would be supporting numerous children who don't have English as a first language. Over the years, we've learned how to do that because there's very little I mean, even moving away from refugee families, there's very little training for teachers, and children who don't have English as the first language, so we already have that in
140 place. So, usually what we do for any child that arrives is an immersion period. We don't jump in there with withdrawal of support because the children need be in the classroom. The other thing is we weren't given any information on the children; we didn't know anything about them. The information that we have found out about the children had happened as we built a relationship with families. After a while the families
145 got comfortable, and the family told the school stuff. We were told nothing. I don't even think we have the correct date of birth for these kids.

SP1 No documentation?

SP2 No documentation, no birth certs.

150 SP1 Do you know if they've come from EROC centres around the country? Any liaison there?

SP2 One of the families were down in Mosney for 6 months so they had a little bit of whatever kind of schooling happens down there. One of the other families had that. Two other families joined at the same time; a fourth time came slightly later. That child started at the end of fourth class. He had never set foot inside a school building. He had
155 never been in school, and we were never told that. We found that out through conversation with his family.

SP1 That's incredible. Let me see fourth class, so he is going to be ten. He's now going to secondary school in 2 years. How do you even begin to bridge that gap?

160 SP2 We didn't even know that- can you imagine being put in that situation yourself and not knowing the language. We then discovered that he had never even been in the classroom, he didn't even know how to be in school....and he is the quietest – don't get me wrong, there was no trouble with him, there was no issues whatsoever. We were just so taken aback when we realized that our expectations of him were totally unrealistic. He didn't have a clue what school was about. He couldn't read or write in
165 his first language, which is a big disadvantage too because usually that's the way in sometimes. If you can get books and do a little bit of something in the first language but, I mean, he didn't even know how to hold a pencil - it was incredible.

SP1 I don't even know how you would start like the gap. You assume with all of these kids, there's going to be a gap in the education. So, there's no information about their
170 journey at all, as in, they were taken from a refugee camp in Lebanon, or elsewhere?

SP2 Nothing is given, it's all confidential. We weren't allowed to tell anyone that they were Syrian refugees. We were told you're not allowed to disclose that information to your school community.

SP1 I can understand, there's nowhere that tells me what schools the refugees are in
175 and that's fair enough. It's only through contacts and speaking to people that there are refugees, that's how I have to go about my study. But I would have assumed that within the sort of parameters of data protection and confidentiality that a teacher or certainly a head teacher has to know something so that they can do their best for the child.

SP2 No we weren't given anything at all.

180 SP1 Have you any reports from the EROCs?

SP2 Nope, nothing.

SP1 So with your full time EAL on it, and at your own discretion, you use your resource teacher for a bit of EAL. If you have such diversity within your school, how many do you reckon need EAL provision?

185 SP2 I think last year we had around 30

SP1 Presumably they're going out individually or in small groups. Although a full-time teacher you think is great, it's not given that you have 30 children.

SP2 We would have approximately 30 children that would qualify for EAL support. Down the Infants end there's a lot of in-class support. We do a lot of group work. It's
190 amazing actually how much the children pick up on their own. When they start in Junior and Senior Infants, they might not have a word of English; it's amazing how quickly they pick it up.

SP1 It is the wee ones particularly.

SP2 Yes, the wee ones in particular, but the challenge for the families that arrived
195 with was that the children were further up the school and that was much more difficult.

When you're five, you're not as self-conscious and have no inhibitions. You just play, but when you arrive and you're ten, that's hard for you. Everything is so different for you. In those instances, we were doing more withdrawal and we targeted basic language like, 'I need to go to the toilet, 'I feel sick, I need help'. We were lucky when the children
200 arrived with us, just coincidentally, the older children landed in the classes that had SNAs in them, and those SNAs are worth their weight and I couldn't speak highly enough of them, particularly for the little boy I was just telling you about who had never been in school. There was an SNA in that class with him, and he was fantastic. So, if the SNA was going to the photocopier, he would take the wee fella with him, and he just talked to
205 him, going downstairs you know, to try to use just natural discourse. He very quickly became a key figure in the classroom for the children. Like I said, it was pure luck that we happen to have in those classrooms because it would have been incredibly difficult. Children need somebody by their side initially when they've come through that kind of trauma and their whole lives have been uprooted....they just need a key person and
210 forget about academics.

SP1 Presumably, your teachers have between 20 and 30 kids in the class anyway?

SP2 None of our classes are less than 30. We have between 30 and 33 in every class.

SP1 Okay.

SP2 There's a wide wide range of needs in these classes already so you could see how
215 someone could very easily slip through the net.

SP1 Would you say they're enthusiastic, are they motivated?

SP2 Yes, highly motivated - Once you get over the initial barrier and children start to relax and feel a little bit more comfortable, then they just want to learn, they want to be there. Their attendance tends to be brilliant. The families have engaged so well, and the wonderful thing was over the course of two years as some kids have left our school, we
220 actually have all the siblings there now and it's just been a game changer. It's so great that the kids are all in the same place. Education is so important - the families want their kids in school, they want them to learn, they come to every event, they come to every meeting. We have a lot of hands-on events - we do Family Fridays on the last Friday of
225 every month, where the family is invited into the school and like that families want to be involved.

SP1 How do you manage with the language with the parents? Do you need a translator? Did you have a translator?

SP2 The first year the families are with us they have the resettlement workers but
230 that can be hard because the resettlement workers aren't necessarily always available when you need them. I found that there wasn't a great relationship between the families and the resettlement worker they were allocated; there seems to be some tension - there wasn't a very beneficial relationship. I don't know the ins and outs of what's going on...there doesn't seem to be a positive relationship there, that's the way we felt about
235 it. We have a couple of parents in our school who were able to help us out in terms of translation, obviously, with the consent of the family. That worked really well because

translation services are difficult to come by especially when you need Arabic or Kurdish or when you need something quickly. The other thing that happened is that the families relied on the children heavily for translation and that's not always appropriate.

240 Initially, we would have had to have some conversations because the eldest girl in one of our families is going into sixth class and she was missing a lot. It transpired it was because her mom had hospital appointments and she needed her daughter there to translate for her. If the car broke down, she needed to go to the car garage because her dad couldn't speak English. There's a lot of responsibility on the children because they
245 tend to pick up the English a lot quicker.

All of our families attended English classes in Rosann College – during the year program with resettlement worker where childcare was provided. These English classes were going brilliantly, then their year ran out and there was no childcare so they couldn't go anymore. They couldn't avail of the classes. There was nobody to look after the younger
250 ones, and that's a huge issue. These are families who want to be immersing themselves in the community - they want to be learning. These are intelligent people with a lot to offer who want to be given the means to be able to contribute to society. I thought that was really hard to actually, particularly for one of the moms who was a teacher from Syria. She was loving these classes and was so disappointed when the childcare was
255 taken away, and she couldn't go anymore. It was really important for her. A year is probably not long enough to learn the language. A Junior Infant or a Senior Infant will pick up a lot more quickly than an adult will because there's no inhibitions and they're not thinking about grammar, and they're not thinking they have to get it right. It's not really a year; the classes might not start till September or October. There's a break for
260 Easter and Christmas, so it's not really a year.

SP1 So you have sometimes used parents with proficient enough English to help out with the translation?

Sp2 If it was appropriate – but if it was something that we felt was a bit more confidential then we would pay for translation services.

265 SP1 Are there translation services around Letterkenny for Arabic? I would imagine European languages are much easier to come by than Arabic.

SP2 Yes, it's very hard to come by. Again, we know of one person who we've paid who does it for us. She actually works in a local creche and did a placement with us years ago, so we know her. She offers little bits of translation and services.

270 SP1 How did your local pupils respond to the refugees?

SP2 Here's the thing; I understand right confidentiality, and that the department are very clear that nobody wants to know the children are refugees or their history and I do get that to a certain extent, but part of me thinks that creates a stigma that nobody can talk about this really bad thing. The children themselves should be able to say, 'I'm from
275 Syria and this is what happened to me'. I don't know what the families are being told but certainly we're being told 'Don't say that. Don't let anybody know.' You know, and the

reality is families are known is the school community. They're not stupid – everybody knows - It's like the elephant in the room. Everybody knows that families are relocating.

280 Go back to that question, as part of our education program, we will talk about refugees in all of our classes we talked about. These are displaced. We talk about all different reasons why people might move. We have a conversation about why someone might land in our county, and it might not be because they decided this is a wonderful place to live – there are 100 reasons why someone could end up somewhere. We have all those conversations with children. I suppose sometimes our school population can be quite
285 fluid – children come and go. There tends to be lot of movement in our school community anyway, so children don't really bat an eyelid when someone else arrives because of the diversity in the school. So, if a person of colour or from a different country arrives, it doesn't really make any difference. Syrian families didn't arrive and all of a sudden it was like, 'Look at these people who are so different to everybody else.'
290 It wasn't a question of that.

SP1 Your school is so different to the one and two teacher schools that are completely all Irish background, so I suppose your school is at an advantage in that way, but I actually think yours is the only school that teaches that ethical education curriculum.

SP2 The curriculum, it's an ethical education curriculum

295 SP1 That's something that really could benefit other schools. I know there was another school which was typically all white, all Donegal background and the teacher had to explain where Syria was and why people have to leave, but she felt as well that it was almost creating negative connotations by not addressing it in some way. Of course, you can tone it down for children but you're saying it's an absolute No from the
300 Department, that you mentioned refugee status.

SP2 Well, that's my experience. The only thing is the children themselves, as they become comfortable with their classmates, the children talk about it. The little fella I was telling you about, he actually was in class with my daughter, and she came home and said to me 'Mum did you know that he told me he was never in a school before and
305 where he lives, they had to hide because there were bombs.' The kids talk about this. I said to her 'Remember we did that thing in assembly...' and she's like 'yeah'So we can link their experiences, and then be more empathetic.

SP1 Yeah 100%.

310 SP2 It wasn't like she had never heard of this before. She kind of said it, which was quite funny in a way like, 'Oh yeah Mum all that stuff you told us is true'. They are so empathetic, because we talk about stuff like that, because it's not a secret, it's not something we should be ashamed of. Because it's something we should know. I suppose the whole thing about school for me, personally, I don't want any child sitting in a classroom wondering 'Where do I fit into this?' They need to feel they can be
315 represented. What I think is really important, and that we can talk about your experiences and it's not always easy. I do assembly every week where we take different themes. So maybe one was all about human rights and other one might be about democracy, and I've had parents come to me and say, 'I don't want my child to know

320 that these things happen in the world.' I told them it was done in a very age-appropriate way. They wanted them to know about these good people, they wanted them to know about human rights activists, but they didn't want their child to know the reasons behind problems in the world. So, it's a little bit like us doing a fire drill but saying to the children we'll never talk about the possibility of a fire. They're not easy topics but adults have more hang-ups than the kids.

325 SP1 They're not easy topics; kids take it on and board more easily. How did you find the kids mixed? Because you're more diverse, do you think that happened mor easily?

330 SP2 I think the younger they are, the easier it is for kids to mix. There's less language involved. You know when your older and come into a class, friendships are already established; that's hard. When they're younger, everybody is their best friend. They just get on with it and play in the yard. Do you know though one language though that is universal – Football.

SP1 That's coming across from a lot of people I've spoken to.

335 SP2 Tag is another one that is universal. There are these games that actually, you know, are very good at making people feel welcome, but it is hard. The translator that I was talking about, in the beginning, I called her into the school maybe every day, maybe every two to three weeks to talk to the children and the parents, because from the outside initially I was thinking this is going great, but they were actually finding it really hard, but they couldn't tell us that. We kind of proactively tried and make it easy to have somebody there for the kids to talk to every so often. Yes, it's hard.

340 SP1 Do you think on it that outside of school they mix? Are kids invited to birthday parties or to go for the play date, or would you be aware if there is any mixing going on?

345 SP2 I'd say so in terms of after-school activities, we facilitate a lot of that. There's a lot of that at school, things that we make sure the families are involved in. We facilitated getting them on to summer camps and all that kind of stuff for about two years, so there was some activity during the summer and things like that. And again, it's part and parcel of being from a DEIS school. We did that anyway, not just for the refugee families – we offer lots of family support in that way. In terms of being invited to birthday parties and stuff, I'm not sure but one of the brilliant things about our school is that it's so diverse in terms of the population, but that's a challenge too, because out with are some types of
350 communities tend to stick close to each other. For example, our Polish community with very much socializing with the Polish community, same with the Indian community... so the school brings everyone together, but outwith school it can be very fragmented. I wouldn't surprise me if they weren't maybe as involved with their peers outside of school.

355 SP1 Obviously, you don't practice religion within the school, but you teach religious education. Are there any requests for them to have a place to pray or are there any issues with Ramadan, or fasting or anything like that?

SP2 No, nothing has ever been brought up about anything like that. And obviously, we know that in Ramadan is going on, things are happening, and we celebrate it in

360 school the same way we celebrate lots of festivals. Generally primary school children don't take part in the fasting element and one of the older children from refugee families did last year and the reason we knew is because he fainted because he was exhausted, but it's never been an issue.

SP1 Yeah, I've heard of stories like that.

365 SP1 It's never been an issue. Are any of the pre-teens wearing their abayas or burqa or veils or anything like that?

SP2 No – and because we don't have a uniform – they can wear whatever they want.

370 SP1 Moving on to special needs and psychological trauma - is it hard because of the language barrier to decipher – is the lack of communication due to language or does this child have a special need or actually or maybe it might be trauma – is it hard to decipher between those elements?

375 SP2 It definitely can be and usually, it takes time to get to know the children, and then you need a couple years really – that sounds like a long time, but it takes a couple of years to settle in the school to see is it because the children have much so much schooling. Sometimes when the children arrive at the school, it becomes apparent very quickly, that there's maybe additional needs and they'll need additional support, but in general, we try to give a settling in period before you jump in with any labels or anything like that. It's hard sometimes to assess if it is a language barrier or learning disability or is it because they've missed the first five years of school; you know, it's hard to know what the issue is.

380 SP1 There's missed so many developmental points. Do any of them have psychological testing or analysis?

SP2 Not that I know of – we haven't done anything like that in school?

385 SP1 Do any of them show any mental health issues that obviously could come from trauma or anything any behavioural issues?

390 SP2 No, no behavioural issues. I suppose some of the older children have disclosed in conversation experiences that they've had that were challenging. Sometimes children disclose these things quite matter of fact in a way that we might talk about shopping trip, and it's a sad fact that that has been their experience but there certainly has been no behavioural issues or anything like that. I would imagine, they could probably do with someone who could listen to them and help them work through counselling. You can't go through something like that and for it not to have an impact.

SP1 To your knowledge, are there any counselling services for the kids inside or outside of school?

395 SP2 No

SP1 I know we touched briefly on the gap; there'll definitely be a gap in education for the refugees, due to their circumstance. How do you attempt to bridge that gap? Obviously, it'll be easier for the wee ones starting off, but do you put them in age-

appropriate classes, or do you try and pull them back a year? How do you how do you manage that?

SP2 We always go age-appropriate so they're with their peers and then we have the settling in period. We try and focus on how much time they'll have at the school then go for the basics and build from there. Like if a child arrives in 5th class we have to think what basics do we really need to focus on here, because they're going to be leaving us again in a couple years. That's kind of where we work from. We will do a lot of literacy and numeracy so that they have the basics in terms of that. Once that settlement period happens, it's amazing to see how quickly kids can pick up concepts and things like that with that little bit of additional help depending on what their experience is. Someone who's never been inside school is obviously going to need a lot more support -ongoing support, than someone maybe who has been in and out of education and has some kind of literacy, numeracy or whatever; definitely having that foundation helps.

SP1 Do you feel you have enough resources to tackle that with 12 refugees?

SP2 You never have enough resources. Of course, we don't. We need more people – that's what these children need. We can buy all the fancy books and programs and laptops in the world. That's what became clear during this whole COVID experience. I could have given them state of the art iPads; it doesn't matter. They need a teacher, an adult there beside them helping them, that's the most important resource.

SP1 With quarantine, how did you guys manage with them? And how do you think they manage? How do you what impact do you think it had on them?

SP2 They missed school terribly – what we did was, we did a lot of phone calls. There was a period of a few weeks where we couldn't obviously go to the house, but we did a lot of just standing at the window, dropping resources off, checking to see if they were okay. We made sure food was delivered, we delivered toys, games, outdoor stuff the kids could be using so really, our aim during Lockdown was to keep contact because it was very difficult. The children did the best they could with whatever we were dropping off but essentially it was time filling; they couldn't really engage with it. You know, the older kids tried to help the younger kids, but really, we just wanted them to know that we hadn't disappeared, we were still there, so at least three times a week, we would go and just drop by and say hi. And every day they'd ask, 'Can we go back to school?' 'When can we go back to school?' That was the questions every day.

SP1 Do you know if any of those families have their own laptops, iPads or devices on which they could learn?

SP2 They have phones, and we did drop off iPads, but they couldn't use them - it was just too hard.

SP1 Was it seesaw? Or Alladin? What were you using?

SP2 Seesaw

SP1 Were they engaging?

440 SP2 They tried but the language barrier was still just too big to engage in something like that. They would really try a couple of times they managed to log on, really, for the kids to log in, because it's the kids, you have to do what the parents just were lost. The only way we could help them log on was if I was on the phone, I had the wee girl on the on the end of the other side. We're like, 'okay, go look at your iPad. Can you see the blue button? ...' because they couldn't follow the instructions. 'Click on the app and you're into a literacy game..' We would deliver packs for the rest of the work, but they were 445 just getting really stressed. You would pop over the next day on the doorstep and they'd say, 'We really tried, but we couldn't press the button.' They tried.

SP1 I went into a house and they've four kid and they had just phones. I know the mom had got a message from one of the schools and just hadn't a clue what it meant. It was just it was literally directing or to an app that they could that they could use. 450 Inadvertently I said you'll probably see it better on a laptop or an iPad. And they said 'oh, we don't have it.' I suppose it in my house, we were fighting over who was using all the internet because we'd so many devices, it's that realization that they are trying and do a reading exercise on a phone screen is so against the grain.

SP1 How do you think that impacted on them? If we go back in September, it will 455 have been six months off school?

SP2 I think it'll have a huge impact. Yeah, even the modelling of the English language. I mean, the kids need to be hearing the language and with the best will in the world there was no way that was happening for our families. And of course, they were just scared, and they were worried, that we were worried about children and they're still 460 extremely anxious about coming back in September – what if their kids get sick. There's a lot of fear around it for families. The only thing I'd say is that these kids are so resilient, and they want to be back at school.

SP1 They've been through a lot worse, bless them. Moving on then to historical information okay - so you're not given any historical background?

465 SP2 No

SP1 And you're not given educational background and reports or briefings?

SP2 No

SP1 And they don't do standardized testing, do they?

SP2 No - the younger children will eventually but the older ones - No

470 SP1 Do you feel they trust authority figures; is there any problem with them given their background - are there any issues with that?

SP2 Like I've said before, we've worked hard to build the relationship. I'd say they probably were a little bit wary of us to begin with. The families knew the children had to be in schools, but I felt when we first met the families with the resettlement worker - I 475 felt the approach of resettlement workers were a little bit heavy handed. It was nearly an assumption or a preconceived idea that the families wouldn't get the children to school, and they would be a bit lazy about it and that's very much what I felt, which

hasn't been our experience at all. I kind of think maybe there's a negative preconception about what the families would be like and that wasn't our experience ...There was an
480 assumption that these children wouldn't be attending and that the families wouldn't be interested in education, and we'd really have to be on top of this to make sure they would pay book rental. That's the vibe I got when actually that wasn't our experience at all.

SP1 Does the school have to pay out of its own budget for any extra resources
485 specifically for the refugees or is just whatever you do is for everyone?

SP2 Whatever we do is for all families.

SP1 Okay so there's nothing specific to them. The last two things - Is there any obvious difficulty or awkwardness between say the Kurds and the Arab Muslims - have you noticed anything like that. Do you have both Kurds and Arabs and has there been
490 any obvious friction?

SP2 No no

SP1 The last thing is what, if anything, would you say the government is getting right and what could it improve on in terms of the refugees and resources and guidelines and support?

495 SP2 I suppose the government is providing a commitment to the families and always ensuring that Ireland is somewhere that they can come to us and be open to supporting families that are coming in. I think what needs to be looked at now is more a long-term plan and continued support for the families once they are placed in Letterkenny. For example, I felt very much from the school perspective, once they were in school that box
500 of ticks for the government.

SP1 That's exactly what other headteachers are saying.

SP2 The children need that key adult beside them for more than nine months, the families need a key person longer than nine months to make sure things are okay and to help them.

505 SP1 What could you and your staff do with? If you had carte blanche, what would you ask for from the government to help you to help these refugees?

SP2 I think definitely personnel - I think if children are placed with additional needs, which undoubtedly they will have, then you need extra personnel. We're lucky that we have Linda who can link with the families. You need somebody who can link with the
510 families - you need to start building that relationship and find out about the kids and then you need extra teachers that can actually teach the children the basics of what they need, and do that in a way that's appropriate, not just trying to jam 5 minutes into an already packed timetable here and there for them - so personnel would be the key for me - you need the staff.

515 SP1 I suppose you and your staff are ahead of the game anyway because you have so much diversity so they're used to dealing with that compared to other schools so really

it's resources, as in more EAL and more people who can teach them to their level and bridge the gap?

520 SP2 Yeah for us a resource for diversity, that wouldn't work for us – that happens the minute they step inside our door in Junior Infants. That's when that begins, about acceptance, that kind of celebrating difference and all that kind of stuff. I guess for the children particularly if they are at the senior end of the school, they need a teacher there to help with academics

525 SP1 Yes, intensive care. I can't thank you enough. I'm just going to turn off the voice recorder now and I will be in touch

Appendix 17: Interview with Chris

SP1: Interviewer SP2: (Headteacher of a secondary school)

- SP1 We'll just start off with asking you how many Syrian refugees are in your school?
- 5 SP2 I have 5
- SP1 Are they all Syrian?
- SP2 They're all Syrian yes.
- SP1 What kind of age? Are they sort of gender? What's the breakdown there?
- SP2 They go from 14 to 18 years.
- 10 SP1 Mix of boys and girls?
- SP2 3 boys and 2 girls
- SP1 Do the girls wear Muslim dress?
- SP2 No
- SP1 Do they have their hair covered?
- 15 SP2 No
- SP1 How much advanced notice are you given before they arrive?
- SP2 The first group, probably a couple of days.
- SP1 Are you obliged to take them if you get that call?
- SP2 Schools are obliged to take anybody if they have space in their classes. If you
- 20 have space in your class, you don't have the option.
- SP1 Did they begin the academic year, or did they arrive mid-year?
- SP2 Most of them came at the beginning of the academic year, but some may have come during the year, but earlier on.
- SP1 What's provided for you as a head teacher and for your staff? Donegal is a very
- 25 homogenous society, the vast majority of people are white Christian, it is becoming a wee bit more diverse, but are you given any guidelines on behalf of the Department of Education or any other government department on how to deal with them?
- SP2 Initially, when they came first, they came with an interpreter and a support
- 30 person and we would have been briefed on how we should meet with these people, how we should refer to these people and there were interpreters to translate the conversations and given guidance, but I would go back to our school culture has been European for quite a while, because we would have dealt with Polish people initially, and we would have dealt with quite a lot of foreign refugees, wrong to refugees, but quite a lot of Africans and in some cases, South Africans that may not have had English.

- 35 It would have always been multicultural, so if you had of walked my corridor at any stage, there would have been a mixture. Added to that, being in Letterkenny there would have been quite a few foreign nationals working especially in the hospital, the local industries and Pramerica, you were always having people come in.
- SP1 So, your school is quite diverse anyway.?
- 40 SP2 Very diverse.
- SP1 I'm just thinking Errigal, is probably one of the most diverse schools in the county.
- SP2 Absolutely. The reasons for that being is that Letterkenny has a diverse population, more diverse than any other place in Donegal.
- 45 SP1 Were you given you or your staff, are you given any anti-racism or intercultural training that would help you with the refugees in dealing with their sort of particular complex needs?
- SP2 No, not directly, at different stages, at different times, we would have always been doing that simply because of the nature of our student body.
- 50 SP1 But nothing from the government?
- SP2 Nothing from the government. Well wrong to say nothing from the government because if you look at PDST, or some of those groups, they're all from the government. Even though there are different names associated with the government, we would have been doing that, not today, but over the years.
- 55 SP1 Would you feel that your staff are sufficiently equipped to carry out the job of teaching refugees?
- SP2 I would feel that they are comfortable enough in doing that.
- SP1 Great. Okay.
- SP2 The language barrier can be a problem, but we had that same problem what
- 60 when we had the Polish. At one time, we would add 34/35 Polish and a lot of them, and their families had no English. To work around that we would have offered a Polish Sunday school where parents were doing English, and the kids were doing Polish (who were born here). Now, that's still available, and has also extended also to do Russian and Croatian, where the parents come to do the actual English and Russian with the
- 65 young ones that are born here are actually doing Russian; that happens a Sunday.
- SP1 Who funds that, Charlie?
- SP2 The different embassies.
- SP1 Do the teachers who teach the English, are they staff from your school or from outside?
- 70 SP2 I have 2 Polish members of staff, but they would be sourcing other people that are settled in Ireland, that may also be graduates. The Polish community are very well

set up. They would even have a Polish library in the school. They travel from across the county to come to the to the school to be there on a Sunday to participate in the Sunday Polish school.

75 SP1 There can't be another school in the county that does that?

SP2 I can assure you that there's not. Covid has prevented it now but when the actual general election was on Poland in November last year, we were one of four voting centres in the Republic of Ireland, for the Polish community to come in to vote.

SP1 So, they could vote remotely for their candidates at home?

80 SP2 They were voting for candidates in Warsaw, but there were participants, and there would have again participated for the general election, but because of COVID. So that may have gone to a postal vote for COVID.

SP1 I had no idea that that was going on. That's amazing.

85 SP2 To bring you back two years ago, we would have the Polish consulate in Letterkenny for a weekend to enable people to renew their passports. They would have gone around a few areas and Letterkenny / Errigal would be the base for the Polish community for organizing things in Donegal. Previous to that two years ago, we had the Polish Games, which was only been taken out of Dublin once and we would have all the Polish communities throughout Ireland come to Errigal for a weekend - like football
90 teams qualifying, different types of sports cookery different again, drama. All of them came to Errigal, traveling from Kerry, Cork, Limerick, all around. Polish are European; we don't consider them refugees. They came to Ireland in a way but we're looking at 127,000 of them now.

95 SP1 Your school is obviously very diverse, so you're used to having to deal with that but with the Syrians, are you given much background information? They've obviously come from a warzone. Are you given much background? Does data protection prevent that? The reason I'm asking is, if they've come from a war zone, and presumably it's taken them a couple of years to get from Syria across the camps in Europe and to get resettled, are you given information about their education? Do they show signs of
100 trauma? Does that manifest in their behaviour, that type of thing?

105 SP2 That depends, in some cases, it seems to be from five to seven years that they've being on the move. There would be very little (information) coming from camps. What we would find, is if taken down under a Direct Provision Centre, possibly in Waterford or somewhere, we may get information from school that they may have attended there, but it would be very limited. The most I've got is a student showing their folder of the work they did in schools

SP1 Nothing on standardized testing or of their levels or anything like that?

SP2 No. Absolutely not.

110 SP1 What TEFL provision is there in the school? Obviously, you are a diverse school so can I assume that you have TEFL up and running anyway or do you need to put an extra specifically for the refugees?

SP2 We will assess everybody individually. Technology - even though I would have noticed ones coming initially had little or no English and you would see a marked improvement after a while, but with technology now and the mobile phone, they use the phone themselves to translate, and they can communicate with you where they will write it out and what they're looking for and translate it to English and hand to you. Some of them that want to communicate with you at 9,10 ..12 or 13 years of age will do that with you.

SP1 Do they did they go to specific English classes?

SP2 We would probably withdraw them, not so much my English classes, but maybe technographics or some other subject choice options.

SP1 When these children have come to you, how has their level of English been?

SP2 It was a very poor level of English.

SP1 The first year, coming into the school, the Educational Welfare Officer will play a big role. She's always available to be there to assist to help, but the translator resigned. We would have had three different translators in the first group of three students we had. We seem to now have only one translator and he would say to me, 'that's not one of my students, but I'll still deal with him', but they would also be having difficulties dealing with them.

SP1 Do you mean on a behavioural basis?

SP2 Not so much behaviour but coming out of the camps at 13 or 14 years of age, especially with the boys, you could have some of them smoking and parents would consider that acceptable. That would prove an issue straight away in this school and the school would be trying to address it to the actual interpreter that this was conveyed back. The girls, yes, you would have a positive response. With the boys, they'll still have access to cigarettes, but they'll be told you're not supposed to smoke in school but boys being boys, that's still one of the issues. Getting the homework done can be an issue. In most cases, I would find that the girls are very committed and want to actually be progressive - the boys, if they can find ways around it, they'll find ways around it.

SP1 Do you think that's boys being teenage boys or do you think just they've been through so many systems, so many places that they've lost their enthusiasm? Do you think that's more the case?

SP2 I would say that's a direct reflection of what they've been through what they've suffered. If you took back to their own life, back to the own culture that a boys have the freedom to be out and about do and do their own thing.

SP1 In terms of the translators, is that something that is provided to you by the Department of Education because you're taking on these refugees, or is it something that the school needs to foot the bill for?

SP2 A translator is provided for them and when I have an issue, I would ring the interpreter or translator and say to them, 'Can you come? I'm having an issue with somebody. Can we arrange and make a meeting? Can you attend? And these are the

issues they have that needs to be dealt with... and can you communicate with parents to actually bring them in on it to make sure there's no repeat'. With the girls there's never a problem, I wouldn't have had it. I've only had one issue in two years with the girls,
155 that's about it but we can have problems with the boys. The other thing that came to the fore very early on was that there were different ethnic groups and even though they were enrolled with me and there were Syrian, I very soon discovered that in Ireland that we had two different religious groups that had friction at different times of the year. In Syria, we had some very serious friction between groups too.

160 SP1 Between the Shii'a and the Sunnai and the Kurds?

SP2 Absolutely, a video came back of one crowd beheading another group, and that was like black and white. We had that in the one class. There was no pre-notice about that.

165 SP1 You didn't know that they were different sects of Islam, you weren't given any information about that?

SP2 None whatsoever.

SP1 That would have been the equivalent of putting a Catholic and Protestant in the same class years ago during the troubles, for example.

170 SP2 That's exactly how we explained it to staff. In fairness, it was other Asian kids that I had in the school- from chatting to the students realised that there was friction between the students because one group had shown another family the video and the other guy, because we're understood and settled, came to us to alert us to say, just be careful, because this has happened outside. This has happened back in Syria and the photographs, and the evidence have only come through now and there's serious friction
175 between the two groups. And in some cases, even though they may acknowledge one another, but that friction would still be lurking in the background.

SP1 What can you do about that? Are they in the same classes? Do they need to share the same space?

180 SP2 They would have been in the same classes, and we would have had them in the same groups, but we would have had to actually ensure that if you were doing any groupwork, or if you had them in an EAL class, that you weren't doing the same bit of work with the two students or having them work together. You'd be aware of that. You would also be trying to encourage them to be involved in school. It wouldn't be a case that that if you were doing a topic about where you're from or about your country, you
185 wouldn't be putting yourself or them in any spot where there might be controversy from what they were going to talk about.

SP1 I know what you mean

SP2 You don't refer back. They could have been doing a project in EAL looking at where they come from, you know, you would avoid the likes of that.

190 SP1 That's sort of natural thing that you would do with other pupils. Do they open up much to the kids themselves open up to you or other members of staff or to the kids about their journey and what's happened to them, just sort of a natural discourse?

SP2 They do open up a little, but it takes a while to build that bridge.

SP1 When you were chatting about the translators, do you have them indefinitely?
195 How long do you have them for?

SP2 That translator might have 10 kids and 8 somewhere else and 2 kids somewhere else and that somewhere else could be Donegal Town, Carndonagh or Buncrana. So that's where I would have to phone and say, 'can I send a text to say, I need to meet with such and such... Are you available to attend?...these are the times that suit me...do they
200 suit you?' In fairness, we would have had a translator come into school for the Parent Teacher meetings and go around. That would be more so in line with the girls because the girl's parents, especially the mom would be keen that the girls do well and knowing how the girls are doing. They will go around and chat to teachers and the translator will be there. We would ask the teachers to bring the (pupil's) work to the to meeting for the
205 parents, then you can debate it.

SP1 But you don't have an endless access to a translator?

SP2 No, no. If extra translators are needed, I buy them in out of the school budget.

SP1 Okay, are you able to comment or do you know if these kids mix with their peers outside of school? First of all, how do they mix inside of school?

210 SP2 I would have had a group of maybe 9 or 10 from that area and they would all gather together, and you'd see them chatting and some of them were older than the Syrians come in and so some of them have been in school for two or three years. They would be very much settled, and they could communicate with them and also at the same time would have good English. The Syrians would tend to pocket together in their
215 own little factions. These people would tend to move between them. You would see that a bond had been built between certain individuals and at the same time and with the Irish communities, their nature is always to involve people. You'll also seeing younger classes....one coming along and chatting to them, then the next thing you'll see them moving off with them. First thing every morning, the Syrians, you will have the boys
220 congregating on the one side, you'd have the girls down below and another side. I don't know why, but the Moldovans seem to link in well with the Syrians.

SP1 Presumably their language is not the same. The Moldovans don't speak Arabic?

SP2 No, Moldovan would be European.

SP1 Do you think that the Syrians refugees mix in any way with the local Irish kids
225 outside of school?

SP2 Well, I had a local lady that worked in a chemist in Letterkenny, and she had spent a number of years living in Syria come in to translate for one of the families one day. They brought her in, because they had got to know her. Whether she had made the initial contact, or whether they had made the initial contact, I don't know. But she was in

230 an interpreter, and she's retired now but she had run a business and she has seemed to bridge links with them. The one thing that I would see that once they got house and once they got their income in place, one of the first things that they all would have bought is Sky TV.

SP1 Why?

235 SP2 Obviously, they're able to the link into TV in their own countries.

SP1 It's so that they can have home in their own living-room?

SP2 All our students would walk to school, and parents would collect them, but I know we've had (refugee) families that would have said, they were living down in the Old Town and they were looking for transport to school because it was too far to walk.
240 That's well within the area, but they still thought that they should have been provided with free transport.

SP1 And other kids like the local kids would walk?

SP2 Yes, and I would have been very direct. I would have addressed that early on and shut that down to say No, I couldn't support that area for walking. I would also have had
245 clear evidence in the school that the group that had the biggest issue was the Syrians when they came into Ireland was the Travellers.

SP1 The Travelers had an issue with the Syrians or vice versa?

SP2 Irish Travellers had a big issue with Syrians.

SP1 Why do you think?

250 SP2 I don't know, but the younger Traveller group would have been taking serious offence. I have the boys and the girls go to the Convent. I had a situation where the parents would come to me and say that they were sitting in the car parked down at the Convent waiting on their daughter to come out (of school) and that people had come to the car and spat on the windscreen. I had friction in the school where I had fights
255 between Syrian boys and Traveller boys. Some of the Syrian boys were big lads too and the Travelers always had a thing where they would claim 'I'm King of the Travellers'.

SP1 Do you think it was a sort of claiming their own turf or something?

SP2 I don't know. I haven't a notion, but I would have had experiences where I would have Traveller boys going up to Syrian boys and say, 'I fucked your mom or I fucked to
260 your sister, I did this, or I did that.'

SP1 Goading them?

SP2 It could simply be the fact that they had no English, but this was upsetting the Syrians, and the Syrians actually recorded it and translated it, and some of their own friends that had English outlined to them what had been said. This was a common thing,
265 racist comments would have been passed to them at different stages, most in school initially, but also in the town. Some of them were boys in my school and some of them were students from other schools or not in school at all from the Traveling community.

There was a serious issue with the Travelling community. Luckily, I have CCTV, because I had the case where the young Syrian fella was walking out the door, and one fella ran up to him, and said to him, (and he knew what he was saying at the stage). He ran back, but when he ran back, he ran into a group where there was 3 of them waiting for him. I was out at the gate supervision, and I was told to make my way back in as there could be friction going on inside. When I got there was friction. I had the scenario then where the Travellers went to tell a story that they were set upon by the Syrians. That happened in the evening time, so I rang the interpreter to ask him to ring the parents to say that I had an issue and asked if they could actually come in and collect the young fella and could they also come and see me in the morning. At the same time at the door, I had the Travellers saying that their son had been attacked by Syrian boys and the school were not defending him. I was able to get that resolved by actually sitting down with the mothers, and I was able to show the Traveller mothers two videos of what had happened and why it happened and put it directly to them what was being said.

SP1 Did they accept it?

SP2 Initially they didn't, but when they came in, I showed them individually the videos. I allowed them to watch it and I also got on to the Donegal Travellers Association to say that this had to be addressed. That problem was addressed and moved on but that was a lot of friction at the beginning. We've always had Travellers but that would have been the first time that we had an issue with Travellers and different groups. Years ago, there was an issue with the Travellers and the Polish but other than that no.

SP1 Do you notice is there is a significant gap in education when the refugees come in and if so, how do the staff attempt to bridge that gap? If they if they have been in a camp and spent a year or two trying to get across Europe, how do you manage that?

SP2 Our SEN would take a big leap with that. We would test them and try and establish where they would have to be supported and that would be done on a short-term basis, then we would try and regulate and work progressively towards that.

SP1 I presume it's more difficult for the older children because they have less time to catch up. I just want to confirm, because Errigal is very diverse and you have lots of different nationalities, do you have a full time TEFL or EAL teacher there?

SP2 No

SP1 What kind of provision do you have?

SP2 No, at one stage I did but I don't anymore. I think our allocation includes 0.5 off a teacher for the EAL.

SP1 Do you have to up that (increase that) from your own budgets according to your needs or do you share that out and use it accordingly?

SP2 It just depends on our needs.

SP1 Ok and that's provided by the government because of the language thing?

SP2 That would basically be included in your SEN allocation.

SP1 What has been the experience during Lockdown for refugees? Have they had access to an interpreter? What happens with them during Lockdown?

310 SP2 We've only had one interpreter working with us and we'd have refugees who would have no interpreter, but he would facilitate. So, what happened during Lockdown was the girls did engage but the boys - very little engagement. In the line of free meals, we would have provided free meals, but we would have asked the interpreter to make contact with home to say we were doing that. We provided bags every few weeks as
315 part of the free meal's facility. We're doing a DEIS Camp now in the middle of August and again we would have used the interpreter that's there, even though he's not working on a contract, to make contact to say the school will be open and that they will be more than welcome to get involved.

SP1 Is that to bridge the gap?

320 SP2 Just to bridge the gap yes.

SP1 Is that specifically for refugees?

SP2 Being a DEIS school we will have identified the ones that we have concerns about and then we would try to get them back into school.

SP1 So, the refugees would be part of that as well as other kids?

325 SP2 Yes - the fact that they are refugees would make no difference.

SP1 Charlie, in relation to these being specifically refugees, because your school is so diverse, did you or the other staff let them get on with it and just introduce them as new pupils or did you need to do anything with the student population to alert them to the more sensitive issue of them being refugees?

330 SP2 No, if they were coming into first year, we do team building and there would be a student mentor working with them. If they were coming into another year, we would hand pick 1-2 students that would work along with them and who would link in with them for the first while.

SP1 Like a Buddy system?

335 SP2 Yes, and we would have a member of staff who would monitor and keep a close watch.

SP1 Are there any of the refugees that have special needs, apart from the language - are you even able to identify if they have special needs?

SP2 We don't have any, no.

340 SP1 None of them have Special Needs.

SP1 Do any of them show signs of trauma which manifests itself in any kind of behavioural problems / being withdrawn?

SP2 Yes and No – we would have had a girl who we felt showed signs of trauma, but the family didn't agree that it was trauma. We would have tried to work with her within the school system. There was another one (not a Syrian refugee but South African) who we would have worked closely with different supports both inside and outside the school to enable that girl to progress.

SP1 What about engagement with the parents. Do the school reach out much to them? Do they participate? Do they engage? Do they show much interest?

SP2 Limited engagement, in fairness, mums are very prominent in dealing with their own issues but it's like everything, it depends on the culture and what the role is at home too – in some cases we would have had the mum very much involved (especially with the girls) and very much part. We had a case with one family where the father was blind, but he would also be involved but there's a boy and a girl and the way they treat the boy and the girl, there's a big difference.

SP1 In what way?

SP2 Well, the girl's focus is education, the boy's focus is different. They would nearly feel that the boy shouldn't be chatting to other Syrian refugees because they have bad habits. But at the same time, they would portray that when they come in but outside of school he's openly seen with other Syrian boys, and he doesn't try to do anything to engage elsewhere.

SP1 Okay, he sticks with his own?

SP2 Yes, he sticks with his own but when they would come in they'd be trying to claim that they don't want them to be together and that they should stay apart but you know there's a limit to what we can do.

SP1 Yes, for sure. Is Errigal a Christian school or non-denominational?

SP2 Multi-denominational.

SP1 Are there any issues with religion – do they attend religion classes – is there any bother with that?

SP2 We've had no problem with that but at the same time we'd be sensitive enough and ask them if there is anything that they want to celebrate within their own culture such as Eid.

Sp1 Are there any provisions or do they request any provisions for such things? For example, during Ramadan, are they coming into school tired and fasting? Do they need to go off anywhere to pray? Is there anyone who makes any requests specific to religion?

SP2 No, we've had no requests like that at the minute but in previous years we would have had requests and we would have facilitated that.

SP1 Having worked in the Middle East myself, I have been asked by parents to wallop/ beat their child if they were misbehaving - have you had any such cultural awkward requests?

385 SP2 Not directly, but you do feel sometimes that that might be their way in dealing with issues, but we've had no experience of it. The food thing can be a concern, because we would offer breakfast in the morning, and we would try and facilitate them to tell us what they want.

SP1 Do you mean like kosher food?

390 SP" We try to facilitate that and would say that to them, and we would have a teacher allocated who they could speak to so in turn we could alert the canteen. Unless they have very strong religious beliefs and I don't see that too evident within the actual Syrian group, within a short time, most of them are eating our food.

SP1 So, when in Rome, do what the Romans do...

SP2 We would give the opportunity for them to have different food of their own. Initially they would say yes but they might feel it easier to stop going for a while but we're happy to provide what we can.

395 SP1 Is there anything that you would say that they bring to the school?

400 SP2 Yes, it's like everything, they all bring their own traditions. We would have a group (and they were part of it). The simple thing is playing badminton and that would have been facilitated. When you're chatting to them, they all wanted to play football and the Liverpool lad Salah, even though I don't think he's Syrian (I'm not sure) they would have all been 'Mo Salah, Mo Salah' - ...it doesn't seem to be a big player with them once they're in. I would say they boys would have played football in their camps.

405 SP1 I worked in some of the camps and wherever you went they were playing football and I suppose it's a good thing, it's a universal thing that can connect them all. The last thing is, what do you think the government is getting right in terms of the provision of education for the refugees and also what else could they be doing to help? How can they improve? Do you feel you have enough resources and training? Although your school is probably better set up than others because it's so diverse anyway but what would you add?

SP2 I would always say that we are restricted in resources.

410 SP1 What type of resources?

SP2 My own opinion is that when they are in for a year -year and a half- two years, they need more resources than what they're getting. The government at that stage is pulling back. The government is looking and saying they should be fitting into the student body.

415 SP1 So, what would you like more off from the government?

SP2 Well at that particular time, I think you nearly have to have individual programmes for them, that the focus at that stage shouldn't be survival (they've survived at that stage) - the focus should be targeting them to achieve

420 SP1 Are they doing the Leaving Cert and the Junior Cert...the normal State exams and assessments?

SP2 I have a group this year going to Junior Cert – two going to Junior Cert and two going to Leaving Cert so that's the first challenge. The two going to Leaving Cert will struggle because they would have come in to TY (Transition Year) and they're 15/16 years old – they did TY, we got them to do exhibits etc, but then last year they came into 5th year, half the year was lost (with COVID) and they're coming in now to Leaving Cert, they're going to be restricted big time.

SP1 Because of the time lost socialising and the language barrier?

SP2 Yes - And they're no different to some of us and I highlighted the fact at the beginning about them having war on Travellers and now I know one of my two boys was looking at going into Youth Reach and I'm discouraging it and I know I'm fighting a losing battle. The reason I'm fighting a losing battle is because it's not the group he's going to be with, it's the money part of it...and Youth Reach would pay them a small bit, maybe e40 or e50 a week into their hand – that is going to be a big attraction.

SP1 So that's more attractive than sitting at school for them?

SP2 That's more attractive than being at school and they'll not need a uniform even though the uniform is not an issue for them but there may not be the same focus on attendance, but the money into the hand is going to be. Coming with their status, I feel priority to say, 'this isn't good for them'. I would have other students who may have the same line – when I needed an interpreter, I would have to buy in the service. I haven't had to do that yet with the Syrians but next year if I need somebody, I'm willing to buy a translator.

SP1 And you'll have to buy that out of your own school budget?

SP2 Oh yes

SP1 You touched on the subject of uniforms there, do the Syrian kids have to buy their own uniforms, books, stationery and those kinds of things?

SP2 We do a book lending scheme where they pay X amount of fees...they pay e110 and that gives them all their textbooks.

SP1 Okay do they pay that out of their own pocket, or do they get benefits?

SP2 They pay that to me – whether they get that through social welfare or not, I'm not sure

SP1 But that's standard across the board...and that's the same with the uniforms I presume?

SP2 The uniforms – they get their uniforms and I'm not sure – probably they qualify for Back-to-School Allowance. There is one thing that they are very aware of and tuned into is what supports are available out there for them, whether that's coming from their own group or from someone else, I don't know, but they're very aware of what's there for them.

SP1 What's the biggest challenge for you or the staff with having refugees in the school?

460 SP2 Attendance is a big problem.... especially with the boys.

SP1 And is that because they can't be bothered turning up or are they doing something in the house to help the family?

SP2 Put it like this, with some of the boys, it was too wet.

SP1 There'll be a lot of wet days in Ireland!

465 SP2 I have said to the family – you have travelled from Syria to where you were and lived in camps and then you then came to Ireland and now, you're in Donegal and we deal with this weather, and it doesn't prevent us from getting out and getting on with it. They would try and justify a claim that they should get a taxi – if they thought they could source or benefit, they could get a taxi paid for them

470 SP1 Is that the kids or the parents – where's that coming from?

SP2 Kids would say it and the parents would encourage it.

SP1 If you were to put an appeal to the government for what you could get for your school, what would be your top priorities be?

SP2 I think schools need support at this stage, to actually liaise – the home-school
475 liaison officer cannot do it because there's a language barrier, but there needs to be the opportunity that this person is geared towards progressing and targets set and encouraged to actually participate so they can move on to the next stage because ...I give the example of going to Youth Reach...that will lead them out of the school system and on to the dole by time they're 18.

480 SP1 They can't better themselves?

SP2 There's nothing there to actually encourage them to better themselves. It's more so a survival line.

SP1 If you were able to put in an appeal, you would need somebody in the school all the time with them, translating, setting personal targets, forming their own programme,
485 that type of thing?

SP2 I'm not saying that they would need to be there all the time, but I mean I look within the ETB , we have a NEPS psychologist that comes around – I'm able to prioritise and say work with this person, work with that person but I don't have that luxury with the Syrians and they need that type of support too... that this person wouldn't be
490 dealing with them in class (or shouldn't be dealing with them in class too much) but would be able to be linking in with the parents to see what their concerns are and to actually bridge the gap between school and home. That brings them more into the school community and brings them more into the town community. That aspect...they were placed there, they were supported initially and now that they're here, they're left
495 to fend for themselves, and I don't think that's helping them enough because those parents are not educated – I mean they've survived...but there's no opportunity for them to go back home – there won't be in the short term. I think if we want to move them from being refugees into being members of society, we need to be integrating

500 them more into the different cultures – not asking them to change their culture – but to appreciate and respect ours and being part of it and also enjoy their own.

SP1 Do you think in general the parents / families integrate with society much – do they mix with the locals?

505 SP2 I'm not so sure; they would mix with themselves and have their own groups within themselves, and they may have established other people who arrived here earlier than them but otherwise I'm not so sure.

SP1 I'll leave it that; I really appreciate your time. It's been a valuable insight – thank you so much.

Appendix 18: Interview with Ben

SP1: Interviewer SP2: (Headteacher of a three-teacher primary school)

SP1 How many refugees are in your school?

5 SP2 So we have 14

SP1 Are they all Syrian?

SP2 Yes, they are all Syrians

SP1 Could you give a rough breakdown of their age and gender?

10 SP2 There's four between the age of five and six, then there is a group of five or six (they're kind of the older group), they're 11 to 13. Some of them are quite old compared to our general 6th class and then there must be five or six then in the middle band who are around 8-10 years old.

SP1 What's the role of your school what's the population of your school?

SP2 We have 66 altogether

15 SP1 So that's three classes?

SP2 Yes, three classes.

SP1 How much advance notice are schools given, or were you specifically given before the refugees arrived?

20 SP2 I think we had probably about a month. We were approached by the Education Welfare Officer Joanne Rafferty who covers South Donegal just to say that there was a possibility of it and would be open to enrolling some of them. Other schools in the area were also offered some pupils as well, so we took 12 initially and then took a further two later on.

SP1 Are you obliged to take them?

25 SP2 I think if you have space in your school, you're obliged to take them. You can refuse but that could go to an appeal with a Department of Education

SP1 How did you feel about taking that number?

30 SP2 I suppose we had a long discussion about it because we kind of felt that that amount of pupils being brought into the number of pupils that we'd have at that time would be swamping the other children, but then once we saw the breakdown of ages and classes there will actually be thankfully the kind of ended up an even spread between the three teachers, so we kind of felt that if we had maybe say 10 of them arrive in to one classroom that would just be too much for the class teacher and the other pupils. But yeah, roughly we had about a month's notice. I did discuss it with my
35 board of management, and they were very much open to including them and basically we wanted to be seen to be interested.

SP1 Brilliant! So, Donegal is obviously a very homogenous society; predominantly white Christian, although it is becoming more diverse - are you or the school involved with any anti-racism or intercultural training? Are you given any guidelines by the Department?
40

SP2 There are guidelines but to be honest I don't think we have ever actually really sat down and had a proper look at them. By the time we realised they existed, we were up and running. I suppose what we would find in recent years is that the textbooks that children use have evolved a little bit to reflect the wider society that our alumni has
45 whether the child have different skin colour or whatever. It would be included in a lot of interactive stuff, but the children are getting more exposed to it. I suppose children in Donegal within reason are not exposed to that. Maybe in some of the higher urban areas in the county, but not so much Stranorlar, I would have thought.

SP1 Were there any other kids in the school who were not from Donegal?

50 SP2 We did have three or four other children from the Philippines and two from Germany, but of course the child from Germany wasn't a different skin colour. We did have a child that was adopted who was South African as well. They were exposed to a smaller degree, whereas now with the 14 we have suddenly been more exposed.

SP1 How have the kids responded to that?

55 SP2 I think to be honest the children just saw them as children. You know I don't think it ever occurred to them 'Oh look they have a different skin colour to us'; they're just children to them. I think a lot of the attitudes that the public has kind of adult attitudes. I don't think children come with a given attitude to a certain skin colour or
60 race. I think one of the major benefits we saw was that all the children were really sporty, and I think our children thought they were sporty themselves. Then they saw these other children and I think that really helped with their acceptance and inclusion and for them to make friends. That was a major eye opener. They were just so physically active and very big into football and sport. It really helped to include them in. They found the language barrier difficult, but through sport, they learned so much of the
65 language. Our children, I suppose I've never really asked them, but from what I could see, there were just other children. When I first told them as well, they were quite excited.

SP1 So how did you how did you broach it with them?

70 SP2 I said to each class teacher that we should discuss this. We didn't want them just suddenly to arrive and not been told. So, we've just basically said that; we talked about different people from different countries and asked if anybody had ever met anybody from Syria? Does anybody know where Syria is? We did a whole lot of background stuff on that and then we explained that sometimes people have to leave their country because of war and that some families were coming from Syria to Ireland; some of them
75 were coming Stranorlar and we were going to include some of them in our school. They wanted to know their names and then they all wanted to write cards for them to welcome them. And then we have posters, and they wanted to stick the posters up on the glass the door so they could see. It was never an issue.

SP1 So, the children sort of welcomed them with open arms?

80 SP2 Not one of them ever said, you know, I don't want this

SP1 There were no negative connotations?

SP2 No, it was just children being children.

SP1 That's wonderful.

85 Did the Department of Education provide any specific training for the staff who were working with the refugees? Did you get any extra training or resources, or specific guidelines for dealing with refugees? I suppose bear in mind that you know, things like trauma, (you would have Child Protection anyway) conflict resolution, cultural awareness, diversity, racial issues, that type of thing?

90 SP2 Generally, we got very little support from the Department of education, even to make contact with somebody in the department to sort of explain the situation that we were putting ourselves into so that we could put proper procedures in place for these children. Basically, you'd contact a certain department, then they would send you to somebody else, somebody else would send you to somebody else and it was just a nightmare. We did have the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) and they did offer us training in trauma because a lot of these children would have experienced trauma mainly through war, but unfortunately that never actually happened. It was offered to us at the time but then between one thing and other not having a NEPS service and more than another was actually supposed to happen this school year and it still hasn't happened, so we have virtually no training at all. We felt that the only thing
95 the Department did give us was half an EAL post for teach them English language.
100

SP1 You did explain to me before that with regards the EAL, you had to have a certain percentage of your school rule, you needed it

105 SP2 You have to at least 20% of your school needing EAL in order to qualify. Thankfully, at that, we were just about 22% I think it was when we worked it out. We had to send in a staffing appeal to the Department and thankfully, they did grant us the 12 and a half hours a week for English language. That sounds like a lot but it's not because if you take on average if each child was getting half an hour on average, which
110 is nothing to what they really need. They were grouped in certain groups. But it wasn't always possible to group five or six children together because of the different age groups. Then, for the last two years, we've been granted the half EAL post, but we have to reapply for it every year. I think it helps the children to just get out of the classroom sometimes and get a lot more one to one because they demand your attention an awful
115 lot and they expect your attention a lot even though there might be 20 other children in the classroom as well as them. So, it has been a help, but it's not enough.

SP1 So, if you qualify and you're above the 20% quota, why do you only get a half a teacher?

120 SP2 It depends on the number to pupils as well. Basically, I think you need 25 pupils to get a full-time post. So of course, with us having 12, they decided to give us half a post.

SP1 What level of English did they arrive with?

125 SP2 It was a huge mix. Like, one of the boys that went into 5th class had pretty much no English so that was a major effort to start to teach him English from scratch, while trying to also include the general 6th class, the general 5th class and the general 4th class that had come to me. What we saw was, the younger the children were coming in at Junior Infants, Senior Infants and First Class, the more progress they made. Because all that oral discussion and phonics that's been done at the end of the school, you know, it's been reinforced day in day out whereas when you get up to us, there's not much
130 emphasis on phonics and CVC words and all that kind of stuff. The definite thing was the younger they were coming into us, the more open they were to learn and receiving language and picking up language.

SP1 Typically, are the students motivated and enthusiastic in school?

135 SP2 One of the major things that we noticed with these children was the huge drive for education that they had- every single one of them from day one. I remember giving worksheets to some of the pupils that I had. They put up their hand and said, 'Can we get a more difficult worksheet?' And the Irish children or the children from the area that were sitting beside them were looking at me as if to say, 'did he really asked for more difficult work?'

140 SP1 And could they understand the worksheet?

SP2 I suppose the worksheet would have been at their level. The teacher would have decided what they thought might have been the most suitable level for them; it might not have been a 5th class worksheet, it might have been a 2nd class worksheet but they were basically asking if they could have a 3rd class one or a 4th class one or maybe even
145 a 5th class one - they wanted to try it.

SP1 They wanted to be pushed?

SP2 Anything with a lot of text and they found difficult, but something like Maths where there were less words, they were really quick doing that. And we find in general, they were really strong in maths.

150 SP1 Would they have been on par with the Irish kids because they've obviously had an educational gap?

SP2 For some of them maybe. When I think one of my 6th class pupils that just finished, he would have been getting a Sten 9 in his Maths which is pretty good. Now he would have fallen down a little bit because obviously, within the assessment, there
155 would have been certain questions phrased in a particular way, which he might not fully have understood, which might have brought down his score, but certainly for some, they would have been on a par, but then there would have been others that were definitely not. There was a huge range within 12 children; you could have 12 different levels of ability with some really strong at Maths, and then some really weak at English;

160 some really strong at English. Certain aspects of English that they found difficult, like
grammar and tenses and that kind of stuff they would have found difficult to learn and
learn with the rest of the class - you would have to bring it back to a more basic level for
them to start off. That's the sort of thing that the English language teacher would have
been focusing on. They were going out to her on three days a week. I suppose some of
165 the children have probably had quite a good experience in recent years. Some of the
families have been to Greece before they were brought to Ireland so they would have
had an English language teacher there and somebody also doing maths with them, but
definitely the children were so driven. If you ask them what they want to be, they all
want to be doctors and...

170 SP1 Aiming high?

SP2 Yes, aiming high; they would almost put Irish children to shame -absolutely. I
think it's a great thing to be driven but then I think it's about balancing it out. So, if
you're at this level, you know I don't think you're ever going to be at the level where you
know you might be a doctor or something. That's not to say it wouldn't happen but they
175 need a little bit of grounding to sort of make them realize 'you know you are good but
you're not that good'. We had a boy in 6th class who kind of thought he was actually
better than all the others and would have said it quite openly and would have found the
other pupils annoyed him a lot because he was so studious and so focused on academia
and all that sort of thing. So, I think there's a balance there to be had. I wouldn't like
180 them to think that they were better than somebody else but I'm happy that they're
driven

SP1 Yeah absolutely

SP2 I wouldn't like them to be come across as arrogant as 'oh you know I'm definitely
going to be a doctor'. There's no harm in that but I think there needs to be a balance.

185 SP1 How did you engage with the parents? Were they on top of their kids' education?
Were they enthusiastic or did they just let the school get on with it or did you need
translators?

SP2 Initially when we first met them on the very first day that they arrived literally
about 40 people arrived on a bus in our little, small school and I honestly felt a bit
190 intimidated. I honestly did - and I don't know why I felt like that, but basically the whole
family came. It was like uncles and aunts and older sisters and brothers, and it was like
literally the whole clan arrived on a bus outside our school. We brought them into our
school, and we did have a settlement worker there who did all the translating for us.
That was Fadl Mustapha, and we couldn't have survived without somebody doing that
195 because like we could do basic hellos but apart from that when you're trying to explain
to them about uniforms and the school year and so on. They arrived at the very
beginning of June which was good and bad, and we were trying to explain to them that
the school doesn't happen in July and August. They wanted to know why they could not
go to school in July and August. It was useful that they had seen in the schools, seen the
200 other pupils and had a couple of weeks to get settled down before the school closed
down for nine weeks.

We definitely needed an interpreter, and we would have used him quite a lot initially especially over that summer just trying to get everybody organized and to explain to them about when school reopened and all that kind of stuff. One of the interesting
205 things we found was that they would just turn up at the school. It was just maybe out of interest, and they would literally want to come into the classroom to see their son or their daughter or their nephew or their niece and all they ever wanted to know about was if they were doing good work. That was the only thing they ever asked; they never asked if they were sad, were they lonely or were they crying? It was all about if they
210 were doing good work. Are they doing writing - and this was asking children in Junior Infants who had just started if they're doing writing. I can see why the children are so driven because this is the sort of focus that the parents and that they wanted to know about. I suppose some of them did want to know about their behaviour and if they were being good. That was a common thing as well - are they been good?

215 SP1 I worked in the Middle East when I started off a parent actually told me that if they child was playing up to beat them (which was a cultural norm) That obviously goes against the grain, but have you ever had any parents react like that or request that type of thing, something that is so against our culture and actually completely unprofessional for us?

220 SP2 No, I honestly don't think I've had anybody say that. All I found was they were genuinely interested in how their children were doing. Some of them were quite aware that their children would have social or emotional kind of difficulties and I think some of them were a little bit unsure because I use the word psychologist; they were very much anti that and were saying 'there is nothing wrong with my son- he is not mental'
225 and all that kind of thing.

SP1 They weren't getting the nuances?

SP2 Trying to explain a school psychologist to a family from Syria - that was difficult. I think they were mixing it up with psychiatrist. I was trying to explain that this person would help me to help their child cope better in class and have less outbursts?

230 SP1 Bar the language barriers, were you able to decipher that communication problems were perhaps a learning difficulty or actual trauma?

SP2 I suppose it has taken us quite a while to work out some of the children, you know, does this child have a learning disability or is this child just generally struggling to learn English? I still think we have a few children in school where I have question
235 marks and I will be using the National Education, Psychological Services to help us to work that out a little bit more because I worry about them transferring to secondary school. I had a boy transferring to secondary school this year, who I did have concerns about NEPS were going to do like an assessment on him prior to transfer but with COVID-19 that never happened. Now I constantly think of that boy going into secondary
240 school not having that done. I did put it in a letter to the school to say that I would suggest that there be some sort of follow up from their school psychologists in relation to that child. I think it's very hard for us to decide if that is a learning disability or if it is just the lack of English?

SP1 Are the NEPS services available to?

245 SP2 Well, yes, we do have NEPS but that's quite a limited service. We will probably have about four or five visits of a few hours in the year. So really that's not a lot, because you also have to consider the other children in the school

SP1 I take it you would need a translator?

SP2 Yeah, we would.

250 SP1 Have you had a translator, or do you feel you need a translator other than the resettlement worker coming in at the beginning and doing the orientation and the introduction?

SP2 No, I think we've coped reasonably well. One of the interesting things that I've found is that the parents always come to me- they will bypass the class teacher.

255 SP1 Can I just ask are your other staff female?

SP2 Yes, the other staff are female. Some of the staff have found it difficult because instead of coming straight to the class teacher they come straight to me and ask me about how the child is getting on in the other classroom where the class teacher is teaching them. I've explained in staff meetings that there's obviously a social society thing and because I was the first point of contact when they had first come. I still think it's that more that and I am the head of the school, so they do see me as the go to person.

260 We had an occasion in school once where there was a social event where we had food and everything and once they saw me they were all just gravitating towards me, and they weren't talking to anybody else. I think it's mainly a mix of maybe just mainly the men always seem to go straight to me, but they are very respectful. We've had no difficulties with any of the families at all, it's greatly respectful.

270 SP1 Do you know, or are you given any information, or have they divulged any information about their journey from Syria? For example, have they gone underground to get to Greece, or have they been taken in from the camps in Lebanon? Have they had to make their own way? Are you aware of their journey?

275 SP2 We received very little information in that regard. Most of the information that we received is from the EROC centres and that has mainly been from the teachers that were in their centres. The amount of information we've got from the EROC centres was the main information we got. We did get certain background information through the resettlement officer, depending on what the situation was, maybe in relation to a family where the father had died and the mum was in Turkey, we've got a lot of background information in relation to that, but in general we didn't get an awful lot of information.

280 SP1 Those two children whose father drowned, I assume that was coming across the Med and they got as far as Turkey, how come those two children got out as far as Ireland and the mother didn't?

SP2 I think the background to that is that the dad tried to escape by boat from Syria across the Mediterranean, and he didn't survive but the children were still back in Syria with the grandparents. I'm not 100% sure about the whole story of both the mum; she

285 definitely wasn't on the boat but for some reason, she has gone across the border into Turkey and is still in Turkey. I've written lots of letters to try and make a plea to have her brought back to Ireland. I think is a lengthy process, because basically, I suppose there might be 500 more....and also Covid.

SP1 What age are each of those children?

SP2 One is nine and one is ten.

290 SP1 How long would you say it is since they've seen their mom?

SP2 The last time I visited them they'd seen her on Skype a few days before. I find it but confusing because when you're in the house with the grandparents, they call the granny 'Mammy', and they call the grandad 'Daddy', so that really gets my head bamboozled, because I'm thinking, 'Oh, my goodness, what have they told them?' but then I did talk to the two boys, because they're 9 and 10 and I said, 'Why do you do that?' and they said, 'Oh, we just do that.' I don't think that they know their dad drowned and they openly tell me all the time and they know that their mum was in Turkey so it's not as if somebody has told them that this is your mum and this is your dad.

300 SP1 Do the kids open up about their story and about their journey much either to you or their peers?

SP2 I think it's been reasonably limited. Those two boys whose father drowned, and the mother is in Turkey, they are the ones that display the most amount of trauma. They're not in my classroom.

SP1 How is that manifested - do they lash out?

305 SP2 It is more like they cry. The more you try to talk to them the more they cry, and the more they don't want you to talk to them. The two brothers sometimes fight with each other so it's hard to know whether it's just boys fighting or if one has said something. There's quite a lot of cross talk between the different families and we find at certain times a certain child will say to us, 'oh, such and such said that I'm a pig', but we don't know whether that child actually said the word...which isn't such a big deal to us but obviously it's massive deal to them. Yeah, it is difficult sometimes to work by if it is genuine Yeah, if somebody did say it, or is it just them winding each other up, like normal children would try to get each other in trouble so it is hard sometimes to work out what exactly is going on. What we find is the easiest thing to do with them is just leave them alone. The more you try to work out what happened or who said what, the worst they get, and they go to themselves but generally, it's relatively mild what people are experiencing.

320 SP1 You've said the local pupils have responded really well to them. Did you have to do anything specific to help with that integration or did you just let nature take its course with them? You obviously did some work beforehand, explaining about Syria and how war happens - did that seem to be sufficient?

SP2 Yeah, I suppose because they arrived at the beginning of June, we only had a very short period of time before they were off the summer, so it was really the next school year that we did some more work. Some of the children would have told us about their

325 country and food and all that kind of stuff, just general discussion in the classroom but we didn't do anything specific. I think we were asked to hold an International Day where they would all bring in their different foods and stuff, but it just didn't happen.

SP1 Do you know, or can you comment on the refugees' ability to mix? You said inside school they mix well. What about outside school? Do they go to birthday parties
330 do they play Gaelic together? Would they go to each other's houses for playdates?

SP2 We've seen quite a mix of stuff. I think the longer they've been here, the more they've learned that 'alright, we get an invite to a birthday party, we can bring our child to the party'. I think it's not that they don't want to be included, it's more they don't understand the process of you get an invite, that means you come, you bring a present
335 and we go to a certain location or whatever. We've seen a few children engage with that a little bit. Some of the older children were definitely brought into sport by other pupils. They would have said to them, then the parents of the Irish children would have made contact with the Syrian parents to see if they would like to go to Saturday training and that was really nice. They definitely made an effort to try and include them more. Now
340 some of them didn't make much effort but for some of them there definitely was.

SP1 Would you say there was a welcome around that area in general - how were the locals about having these families in the community?

SP2 I think, in general, there was definitely an awful lot of welcome. We were not aware of any feeling of objection or ill-will. The main there was all about 'oh my goodness, these people that come from Syria, what have they not seen in Syria? What
345 have they not experienced?' We would have found an awful lot of families coming to us asking if they could help. I find it difficult, because I don't want to insult these families by saying somebody has offered to provide clothes, or somebody offered to provide furniture, so it was quite a delicate thing to manage. I was out at quite a lot of the houses
350 and St. Vincent de Paul were involved as well, because they were basically saying to me, if you think there's a need, all you have to do is say to us, 'Do you think they need coal for the fire? Do you think it's beds or whatever and I think it was a fine line to try and work out; we didn't want them to feel that we were thinking that they needed it, while
355 at the same time we did want to manage their pride. We didn't want to insult them either. One of the easiest things we did was around Christmas time was to give them stuff as if they were presents to sort of cover up the fact that many needed it. It was more like food or fuel for the fire. They don't celebrate Christmas the way we do but this is our gift to you. This is what we do.

SP1 What significance if any, does the gap in education have for the classroom? For
360 example, you mentioned your 13-year-old in sixth class, which would be unusual; would you tend to put them at their level if it was within a year plus or minus? How did you manage that?

SP2 I suppose, in that particular instance, we saw that that boy was coming into 5th class, and he would be going straight to 6th class the following September. So basically,
365 we would be catapulting him straight into 6th class. So, we were having a discussion was the resettlement worker, and I said, I really think we should put him into fifth class and give him two years with us for a basic foundation moving forward into secondary,

whereas otherwise he would only have had a year. That's why I suppose he is 13 while the others are 12.

370 SP1 How did you manage in terms of the work, if they had a gap in the language and a gap in their education, which would be probable for most of them?

SP2 I think one of the things that we struggled most with at the time was trying to work out where they were at in language and maths, but you know, very quickly, we've got sort of like a picture of where they were at and where we could take them to... and it was like nothing like what the rest of the class were doing at all. Some of them were quite aware that what they were doing was quite basic compared to the others, but some of them it didn't bother, and they were so driven to do well and progress. They love praise and love getting it right and love getting it finished.

380 SP1 Do you feel that you had adequate resources for that? Did you have to take it out of your own budget or were you given any budget?

SP2 No, we weren't getting any budget, but I think what it challenged us to do was I to think about how we could include those children with the rest of the children but include them at a level where they could achieve. That was the biggest challenge.

SP1 That they were having success?

385 SP2 Yes like if they started on the Monday and finished on Friday - what had they achieved in that week or even in a day? It wouldn't be anything compared to the others but at their level; that was a major challenge to try and continue with the general class work of the other children who were basically much on a par to their class but then including these children who would have been different classes what not doing any of the work that the others were.

390 SP1 Did the teachers have to do something equivalent to IEPs for these children?

SP2 Basically, we sat down with the language teacher and decided what was the priority for these children. We needed to get back to the basics of the days the week, the month of the year and all that kind of stuff. It sounds very basic, but they picked it up so quickly. We used quite a lot of resources that were dual language, so they were both in Arabic and in English.

SP1 Did you have them in the school, or did you buy them?

400 SP2 They were available from a website called Twinkl. They have quite a lot of resources that were both dual languages, so we used that quite a lot and then we tried to ween them off that. We don't want them to lose the language but at the same time because there's such a focus on everything through English, we felt that that was the main priority for achieving in school.

SP1 We were talking about historical information. You're given very little in terms of what education they've had on the journey or in EROC centres.

405 SP2 We did get some information from the EROC centres. We would have been sent all their textbooks and work that they had completed so that was the biggest help us. We were able to see 'Okay he's going into 6th class but he's actually working on 2nd class

textbook so that really helped us work out where we need to start because this is where they were at three months ago when they left the EROC centres. We definitely got the most valuable stuff from the EROC centres because they had teachers going into the EROC centres and teaching them and they would have had sent us all the notes about their social emotional side of things as well and where they were working on that.

SP1 Would they have had psychological testing?

SP2 No, none that we had had psychological testing. They would have raised certain issues with this particular pupil about behavioural issues, like this child will lash out... this child will cry if they don't get their own way.

SP1 Do you feel that the refugees, the kids themselves or the parents, showed any kind of mistrust for authority figures, be it teachers, the guards or anybody in a position of authority? Was there any obvious difficulty with that?

SP2 No, I can honestly say no to that, because in relation to my own experience definitely not. I know the community Garda in Ballybofey/ Stranorlar, she would visit our school and when she visited our school, she was able to name all the pupils because she's one of those community Garda that goes on feet so she learns an awful lot by doing that, whereas if you drive in with a car and drive back out again you really don't know what's going on.

SP1 That's very cool.

SP2 She would walk from the Garda station in Ballybofey over to this development and she would literally talk to anybody, and she knew all these children by their first name and I started going 'My gosh how does she know all that?' but that's why because she is a community Garda and she literally went out into the community. I think initially because the children will have been picked up by a bus and they were going to an after-school group, and they weren't wearing their seatbelts so the bus driver was talking to me about this, and I was thinking 'Well there's not very much I can do'. So, we got community Garda involved. She stopped the bus one day going from the school to the after schools. She got on the bus. She explained to them very nicely that when you sit on a bus, you must wear the seatbelt. That's all it took.

SP1 That's brilliant. Yeah, it's fantastic.

SP2 She's actually a very good community garda in that she knows how to approach these things without creating resentment or mistrust.

SP1 That's fabulous. Do they participate in standardized testing?

SP2 No, we haven't done standardized testing with any of them.

SP1 Or any EAL testing?

SP2 Yeah, we've done EAL testing with them. It's not a standardized but they have done testing. They've all come out with certain levels and depending on their level then that decides where they will be for the following year, but none of them will have been at the stage where they could have done without it.

SP1 You said you had to appeal to get that again?

450 SP2 Yeah, it's not easy to get - we have to submit an application every year in the month of May. Just say we have X amount of children that are on this level, and we have to include the Junior Infants who are coming in the following year if there are any. We always sit every May thinking we're not going to get it but thankfully, every time we've appealed it, we've got it so this will be the third year coming.

SP1 So presumably the Department of Education or whoever is supplying that think one year is enough?

455 SP2 Well, no, it's not even that. I think it's because we don't have the number of pupils to create a full-time post. They are basically saying it's taken from one year to the next. They're not going to say, 'Right, we're going to give you the teacher permanent job', because you may not need it whereas some of the bigger schools in Letterkenny, they would have three or four EAL teachers and most of them would be permanent
460 positions. It's not really that they're saying it's not needed. It's just that they don't want to be giving a permanent job and then suddenly, that person would lose their job if the children have moved away, or families moved away, or there just wasn't enough children.

465 SP1 Or even going on to secondary... Does the school have to pay for any resources out of your own budget specific to the refugees that you wouldn't have had to pay before?

SP2 Not particularly. One of the things that happened was that St. Vincent De Paul paid for all their textbooks, so that was 750 euro. It's quite a significant amount of money.

470 SP1 Do St Vincent DePaul do that for all the refugees in Donegal, or is it just within your community?

475 SP2 Basically, they meet with me every year, and they say to me, I feel that there's certain families that would benefit from it. So, I send out a letter every year just telling all the families (I don't select any particular families) and say that St. Vincent de Paul approached me, and said that if anybody has experienced difficulty, they would be quite happy to help out with paying for uniform, textbooks or whenever. Whenever I sent out that letter, nobody responded to it at all, so whenever I met them, I did say to them about the Syrian families and because of the language barrier, I said that we just bought in what we felt was the textbooks they needed. I said the bill was E750 and they said
480 they would be very delighted to pay.

SP1 How wonderful!

485 SP2 They also offered to pay for buses and taxis to get these children for after school clubs as well. That actually never actually happened, because we did try to arrange it, but we actually discovered that the children didn't want to go. They felt it was an extension of school and you can't really blame them. The after-schools they were going to were focusing on doing homework and basic reading and that sort of stuff, whereas all they wanted to do was play.

SP1 When you're communicating with the parents, is it difficult? Do you have to get a translator at parent teacher meeting or if there's any issues or problems, good or bad?
490 How do you communicate?

SP2 For the first parent-teacher meetings we brought in the Integration Officer, and he did all the translating, mainly because of the fact that we felt it was an unknown for us. We didn't know what kind of questions they might have for us, but we haven't used that since. Anything that crops up we just generally talk straight to the parents. We
495 would either phone them, or we would ask the child to tell their mom or their dad that the teacher wants to talk to them. Now there's a few families and their English is quite limited, so you have to keep it really basic. One of the things that we have done in the past, and we don't know whether it's fair or not, but we would have used some of the older children to translate and sometimes we question doing that.

500 SP1 Do they pay for anything? What happens for example, if you're going to school tour or have a non-uniform day, and you send a letter out saying, 'Can you bring in a euro or five euros?'

SP2 What we found was the older the children, the better that that happened, mainly I suppose because of peer pressure...not quite peer pressure, but the children will be
505 saying to their mom or their dad, we have to bring in five euro because they are going to Garten...

SP1 They are more aware?

SP2 Yeah, we generally found that anything we asked for especially in the line of money... in relation to uniforms, they would always have loads of money when they
510 open their wallet and you go, 'Gosh, why do they have so much cash?' I don't know whether it's that they like to carry a lot of cash, rather than use cards or whatever. I don't know what it was, but we were always kind of like shocked to see the amount of cash they were carrying in their wallet.

SP1 You did mention about how you prepare the existing school population
515 regarding the whole issue of avoiding alerting them to the otherness of them. I suppose you did that in a really lovely way and sort of explained that. How do you feel the teachers and your staff managed with them? Without breaking confidentiality, do you think they would have been better off knowing more information about them or do you think you've got sufficient information to get on with the job?

520 SP2 It's quite a difficult thing to answer because I suppose there's two sides to it. I think sometimes the more information you give another teacher about a child, you kind of colour the teacher's perception of the child. Sometimes, for them to realize things about a child is far much more beneficial than for somebody to say, 'Now, be careful with that child there because he will do this, or he'll do that.' Sometimes it's easier if the
525 teacher doesn't have like a sort of skewed knowledge of them. Of course, something in relation to their family background or a trauma or something in relation to those two boys who lost their dad, that would have been told. I feel that specific trauma should be disclosed so that we can deal with it appropriately, but other information, unless it was very vital that they knew it, they wouldn't generally have been told.

530 SP1 And you think that's a positive thing?

SP2 Yeah, I think it is, because I think that it's a bit like when people move from teacher to teacher, sometimes we kind of think we should just leave the teacher to figure it out, and suddenly they might have a different perception of the child.

535 SP1 That's really interesting because a lot of staff feel they haven't been given enough information but that's a really interesting way to look at it because we all have preconceptions. Obviously, teachers have their own personalities, too, whereas one child might thrive with one teacher but not with another. What has your experience of lockdown been in terms of the refugees?

540 SP2 I suppose of all the school population, they were the ones that I worried the most about, mainly because of their limited access to technology. I did go out and visit them and bring them iPads and they really welcomed that, but I still think that they needed that kind of almost one-to-one. I'm not saying they weren't getting it, but certainly they were asking for it when they were with us in school. I think they will be the ones who will have missed out the most due to not being in school since the 12th of March. They
545 needed that constant interaction with either the class teacher or their peers, and especially even for their spoken English because I think they will have regressed because they don't have English at home, and they would have been speaking Arabic at home. I think what we saw from the online learning that we'd set up, was that they were pretty much not engaged with it at all. Even though when we would have visited their
550 houses, they would have wanted the iPads, they would have asked for them because they would have basically said, you know, 'do you want another one and you want another one or whatever?' It seemed like initially, they were thinking, 'yeah, we're definitely going to be doing this' and they're going to be on the iPads and they're going to be engaging with SeeSaw every day and we can see progress with them through
555 SeeSaw. You could see if they completed tasks, but we found even the Reading websites like EPIC - they weren't engaging with that at all. I did FaceTime them a couple of times, and literally talked them through how to get on to the actual website, put in their username and password, told them to start at Level 1, even though that was the most basic level of English. I asked them to progress through it as it charts how long they
560 spent reading the book, what book they read, what day and everything else but basically, they didn't engage with it at all. I think of all the children in our school, they would have needed the daily kind of interaction with a teacher doing x, y, or z whether it was through video, or whatever - setting them a task, getting them to complete it, whereas when it was left to parents it just didn't happen.

565 SP1 So, do you think the parents didn't drive them, therefore, they didn't do it or was it was more a language thing?

SP2 It's difficult to work out why it doesn't happen?

SP1 Did they definitely understand the instructions?

570 SP2 The attitude I was getting from them initially was that there were some issues around understanding what they were being asked to do, but once I explained that they were going to do this Maths on this particular website, and they had to log in with their

name and everything and we provided them with all the passwords and stuff by post. I got the feeling that the next day that they would be on it 24/7 but the engagement was extremely low. Our middle-class teacher was using SeeSaw before we closed down and she said even when they were using it in the classroom, and at home, prior to being locked down, that these children weren't engaging with it either then. They're much more used to we're used to the one-to-one, not quite one-to-one but the teacher was constantly saying 'Right, we're now going to do this...and you're going to do this worksheet...human interaction, all that kind of interaction and seeing other children doing the same thing as them and then trying to be finished first. The motivation disappeared. It just wasn't there.

SP1 Any notable discipline issues?

SP2 I suppose there was nothing that we felt we couldn't manage. We felt that we only had to speak to either a parent or an uncle of the children or grandparents about a certain issue, and we would see a major change. We felt that they were definitely motivated enough in that area. They wanted to make sure they (the children) were behaving themselves, that they weren't being naughty, and they weren't being cheeky, and that sort of thing. They were definitely supporting us and that was great.

SP1 Did all of the refugee children begin in September or were there any kids that started mid-year?

SP2 We initially had 12 come at the beginning of June. They came in on a Friday and they saw the school, and we took them on a tour then all they wanted to know was when could they start. Then they started the following Monday.

SP1 Wow.

SP2 It was as quick as that. I also said earlier, as well about them wanting to know why they couldn't go to school in July and August. We did have families that arrived during the summer. What we did was we arranged to meet them at the school with the class teacher during the summer. It was a bit difficult in that none of the other children were around, but we let them see the physical building, the classroom and where they would be sitting and they then started along with the rest of the children the following September, so they did right during the summer.

SP1 Do you have an SNA in the school, or did you have to reassign your resources more towards the refugees? Obviously your EAL you would, but any other resources like SNA or special needs- did you need to rejig some of your hours to try and make up?

SP2 Yes, a little bit, SNA duties were redeployed especially in relation to the older children. When I talked about that boy that went into my 5th class with basic sight words that he had never done before, we did use our special education teacher with him as well as our English language to give him a daily drilling on that. It might have only been for 10 minutes but the biggest concern we had was the transition to secondary school for a child like that. Not alone the social emotional side of it, but the academic side of it. Now we made progress in two years with that child but again, when we spoke to the secondary school to do transfer meetings by Zoom over Lockdown, I was basically saying to him, this boy is really 3rd class in our school. I said, we've tried our best in two

615 years to bring them along, but you know, you have to be realistic and that he is definitely not going to be able to engage with First Year.

SP1 Given until recently, it was only either Catholic, Protestant or Church of Ireland schools here. Obviously, we have our Educate Together school since 2006 now. Were you or your staff made aware of the potential difficulty or awkwardness between the Kurds and the Arabic Muslims? Do you have a mix of the two within your school? If so, 620 has there been any problems with that? Are staff aware of that background?

SP2 We definitely have that issue within our school. We have a couple of families who are Kurdish, and we have the Arabs. There have been issues between them. I talked about that earlier, you know, telling on each other and one saying that the other called the other pig, and all that sort of thing. We've seen that much more between these two 625 sects, and we don't know whether it's because of that - we think it possibly is. The other issue in relation to that was we translated all our letters and to Arabic for families when we're communicating with them. And any text messages that would have gone out from school, we translated them as well into Arabic. But we found out then from the Kurdish people that they couldn't read Arabic, that they only knew Kurdish.

630 SP1 So, nobody made you aware of that you are the staff?

SP2 No, we actually knew that when we initially took them on, we did definitely know that. I suppose we were naive, we thought they would be able to understand Arabic. We didn't think about translating that into Kurdish for the Kurdish families. It has definitely been an issue in our school, and I can still see that there are difficulties, but we can't 635 honestly say whether it's due to that, or whether it's just the personalities involved, or whether it's just boys and girls being boys and girls. I think definitely there was an element of it.

SP1 You are aware of it?

SP2 We were constantly commenting on it, and we were saying we think it's 640 definitely something to do with the fact that one's black and one's white. We can't honestly say it was because of that but generally think that there's an element of it being separate cultures.

SP1 Are you aware or are you able to comment if there's any of that going on within the wider community with those families? How many families are in your area?

645 SP2 See, that's another aspect, which I'm not as clued in about is that, of course not all the children went to our school. They went to other schools in the area as well. What we see from our families is that we can pick up on certain parents, would you say, maybe not falling over each other to speak to another... divisions. We might be reading the situation wrong, but we did kind of notice a bit of animosity between certain 650 families.

SP1 Do the kids take part in RE lessons?

SP2 Yes, they do. One of the shocking things that we had on our first day when we first met was, we explained to them what our school was and what we did and all that kind of thing. A huge majority of them said we want our children doing everything that

655 every other child in the school does and we were so shocked. We thought 'do you really understand what we're trying to say?' That's why we were so glad the Resettlement Officer was there because he was just translating what we were saying directly for them, so they understood perfectly well. He came back to us and said, 'they want them doing every single thing.' We went back to him to check if they sure about religion and
660 he confirmed that they wanted the children to do everything.

SP1 So, you haven't had to make any allowances for Ramadan or prayers?

SP2 No, Zero, nothing! When we discussed this with our School Board, we said we needed to prepare ourselves for the fact that this may be an issue for these families, and they may not want them included on this. The whole discussion on the very first day
665 was so much about them being brought into our school and included, and they didn't want them not to be doing anything, because they didn't want them to feel excluded.

SP1 That's really interesting.

SP2 And the way around that was to include them in everything. We did explain that with us being a Christian school, a broad outline about the way that is taught in our
670 school. They were only encouraged to take part, but not made to take part. Like when we do prayers (for example Morning Prayers or Grace Before Meals) and they choose not to take part it wasn't like, they would get into trouble. So, I think that they said, 'No, we want them to be included in everything.' One of the biggest issues was we came across was the traditional Christmas Nativity. One of the ways we got around that the
675 first year was we just did a Christmas concert. We didn't push the Christian side of it too much. I suppose a lot of parents thought it was quite funny, because, you know, we were doing songs more about Santa whereas we weren't doing the more traditional pushing Jesus. Then when it came to the second year, when we would do a musical or
680 production, we stayed away from the more traditional Nativity kind of production. You know, I think for us it was a bit of a relief, because you can do the Nativity to death. You could go 10 years in a row and that's the story of Jesus being born and that gets a bit monotonous.

SP1 I'm just wondering, just when you mentioned that, would it ever come back from a local parent to say, 'Hang on, this is a Christian school? Why are we avoiding talking
685 about Jesus?'

SP2 We've had these discussions at our Board and people have been very direct and they were saying to us, 'Why should our children miss out on having a Nativity because of them?'

SP1 What's your take? You've done the Nativity to death. Would you never do it
690 again?

SP2 I'm quite sure I'll definitely do it.

SP1 So, was it just to ease them in?

SP2 We had literally spent 10 years doing the Nativity every year and suddenly we thought 'Do we really have to do the Nativity every year? Why can we not do something
695 else to include people?' Once we explained that to the parent reps on the board, I think

they were much more accepting of it. They thought that because now we've got Syrian kids in the school will never have a Nativity again.

SP1 And they became defensive?

700 SP2 Understandably, they were thinking 'there's only 12 of them and the rest of them-why should they miss out?' I said 'they're not missing out on anything and said that they were probably getting an experience of something they might not have got to experience otherwise. Once you get the opportunity to explain your rationale for something most people realise that you just didn't just do it on a whim.

705 SP1 What attributes can the refugee children bring to the school? What are the good things that they can bring?

SP2 I think the main thing for me is this drive and determination, that no matter what you experience in life, and they have experienced terrible things, that that doesn't shape your future. You know 'we might have had a bad two years in Syria and there was war and bombings, but now we're here and going to make the best of it.

710 SP1 Do you feel that spurs the other kids?

715 SP2 I think it does. We think our situation is bad sometimes but when you take a child like that you get perspective and realize maybe my life isn't that bad actually. There's a genuine kind of kindness in them all and looking out for each other and very empathetic about a lot of things. They might have, well some of them might have like a bravado like 'I'm too cool for school' but deep down there's a real kind of empathy and sensitivity....they have experienced a lot.

SP1 Do you think they see Donegal as home now or do you think the parents think 'Hopefully we will get home to Syria someday,' or do you think they they're able to say, we could make a life here... this could be okay?

720 SP2 I think I see both sides. There are a few families I know for definite, who are quite unhappy. The Settlement Worker would have spoken to me about these and said, basically the mum cries all day and all night. So, this is the kind of background he's coming to school from, because this is not home- She wants to be back in Syria. You have that contrast where the ones who say they're going to be here, and this is now their home. Some will talk about Syria about what they don't talk about in the way as if 'I'll be going back there one day'. I suppose they've had so much change in their life that for some of them change is difficult and for some, the ultimate would be to go back to their own country, but for some, there is a level of acceptance there that they are in a reasonably welcoming country. I think the main thing is that if their children are happy,
730 they will stay and they will want to be here. For three of our families the fathers have already got jobs.

SP1 That's great.

SP2 One of the things initially was they didn't have cars. That was a major disadvantage because they were constantly walking to school and getting wet.

735 SP1 Is your school quite rural, or is in the town?

740 SP2 It's actually in the town. For the closest of them to walk would be about 20 minutes. Some of the other families would have offered to either pick them up or drop them off. I think initially, there was a kind of feeling like 'Should we really do this kind of thing?'. It's hard for them to work out 'Would they steal my children or what they never come back with my children?'

SP1 They've been through so much so they would just walk to school with them instead?

SP2 Within a year, they all had cars

SP1 How do they get money to buy a car?

745 SP2 I suppose they are living in a free house, and everything is provided for them by the State. What we found with some of our families is that we actually don't think they're overly poor based on what they've worn and their jewellery and that kind of stuff. Some of them would have worked on farms, one worked in a factory and compared to people working in Ireland, maybe they weren't earning an awful lot, but 750 maybe back in Syria, it was quite a bit. There doesn't seem to be any major poverty what the families that we have.

SP1 The very last thing, on the basis of what my thesis is about is with regards, the educational provision from refugees, what is the government getting right and what are they not getting right? What can they improve upon?

755 SP2 I actually spoke to Joe McHugh (former Minister of Education) in relation to this. He was at our school on the 21st of June 2018. He asked me to do a bit of work for him at the time, which I never actually did. He asked me to basically do have a memo on my experience of the whole scenario, and I suppose now, I do regret not doing that at the time. Basically, what I find is that there are people in very high up jobs within this 760 country who are making decisions about these people who have no understanding of either the education system, or even how people like that might survive or cope in somewhere like Ballybofey or Stranorlar. It's all very much high-level decisions are made and then it's left to people on the ground, to try and include these people, provide them with accommodation, try to get them into schools. To be honest, I think the whole 765 system in relation to education is very low priority, I honestly do, even for the Department of Education, it's like 'Oh the schools will sort it out themselves, or the Educational Welfare Officer will.'

SP1 So, it's more the good grace of the teachers that keep it going?

770 SP2 Yes, and communities being open to it, and prepared to accept these people. Basically, as far as I'm concerned, they've provided no support to us whatsoever - absolutely none. The only small thing they did was grant language assistance for them of 12.5 hours a week.

SP1 How much EAL do you think you really need to get these kids on par? What would it take?

775 SP2 In our situation where we have 14 children, I honestly feel we need a full-time teacher because the difficulty with the one we currently have is that the teacher works

2.5 days a week, which is a Monday, Tuesday and half day on a Wednesday. That means for the other half day on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, they don't have anything. So, to make progress it's slow anyway, but there isn't the general reinforcement on a daily basis. It's only a drop in the ocean what those 12.5 hours is providing for those children. They're motivated and good at picking up another language, which most of them are, they will survive. What I think the key is, the younger they are the better, whereas when they get older and they're 10 or 11 years of age coming into our system the gap is too wide. I honestly think you might never fill it. You could certainly try but I think you know the secret definitely is the younger they are the better. They are definitely very open to languages mainly because they've had to. I think in general with Irish children, that same 'having to' isn't there for them in relation to language, even with the Irish language because they don't have to. They haven't learned it, or they don't pick it up as quickly.

790 SP1 Are the Syrian children learning Irish?

SP2 Yeah, they are. One of the most amazing things that we've had is that the Syrian children use Irish as a way of communicating much more so than the Irish children. On a daily basis when they're going home it's 'Slán a mhúinteoir' (Goodbye Teacher) and all this kind of like, whereas the Irish children and going 'Why is her talking Irish to the teacher?'

795

SP1 That's so interesting.

SP2 I was talking to this school inspector about this, and I said, it's almost like the Irish children would put you to shame and she thought that was very interesting. I think whether it's Kurdish or Arabic, they've come from, they've gone to Greece, and obviously, that was another language there, and there would have been some English there as well. Then they would have been catapulted into Ireland and had to learn English very quickly and pick it up very quickly.

800

SP1 Do you think the main thing needed from the government is more EAL provision?

805 SP2 I also think there has to be a proper sit-down practical plan about how this happens. The situation that we have in Stranorlar, where we were asked to take 12 children was not acceptable. But I accepted them because of the fact that of the situation they were in, and it wasn't their fault. It was the fault of the Irish government and the Department of Justice for creating the situation where we're literally plonked into Stranorlar and hoped that they survived. I think there has to be a long-term plan for how those families, and adults especially, how they're integrated into society, what provisions are made for those families and that basically people are there to support them.

810

815 SP1 To take into account, particularly if they're children above first class, that there is inevitably going to be a massive gap in their education?

SP2 Not even education, but I think just even an idea that I thought would have been useful was that there would be family support workers that would be allocated to these families, to go out into their homes, to say 'Do you have beds? Do you have this or that?'

820 But there's not, because those type of things only happen in our system when there's a child protection concern.

SP1 I know the Resettlement Program that they're under for the first year is very stretched, so do you think there needs to be more support workers, more people on the ground in the individual communities?

825 SP2 There does – this idea that we'll provide them with the house; they (the government) kind of see that as the end of their responsibility. I think it goes much broader than that, as the idea of them being integrated into other things that are happening in the community, because I think that, as good as they are, they're not naturally going to integrate.

SP1 We live in a very different society.

830 SP2 They have to be brought into these things and told about these things and even how society works. You know if you want to join a football club, how that happens - you just don't turn up and all that kind of stuff. I think there's massive opportunities there for community development workers to go out into that sort of situation and try to include those people.

835 SP1 Are there Befrienders? I know in some of the communities there are people who are Befrienders.

840 SP2 I think I was aware of that happening but again, I think it's a bit ad hoc. It depends on whatever community you arrive in. You might find that there's loads of those sort of people, I'm very much open to that. Whereas you might find certain other certain areas, it's very much everyone keeps themselves to themselves and they don't want to get involved. I think there needs to be a proper plan for that to happen and I think it's just too much ad hoc at the minute. It's just depending on schools too much. We're responsible as you know, we're paid by the government, but I think it's too ad hoc at the minute. It's very much 'Hopefully they'll survive, and they'll be okay' but there's
845 not really anybody there to check and see if that family is okay, do they need support or whatever. They're very much left to their own devices. It could be so much better, the support they could receive.

SP1 Do you think they would need a lot more intensive support?

850 SP2 And long-term as well because I think the Department of Justice, their ultimate aim is that they get them into our community, and they have accommodation and then that's them done whereas that's only the start.

SP1 One more thing what's the best part of having for you for your job dealing with the refugees? Are there any positives?

855 SP2 I suppose for me personally I find that we all live in our own little bubbles and what that has done for me is to expose me to different backgrounds and to the hardship that some children experience. You're sitting in school and you're teaching lessons and you're kind of wondering why a child doesn't engage but there is a whole history there of why they might not be engaged and the whole issue around their experience that children have, especially in the early years is so important to they develop in later years.

860 I think that's probably one of the things that I've learned the most from it. Just because the child is 10 that doesn't mean that they behave like a 10-year-old and if they don't there's a reason for it.

SP1 Have your staff found it stressful?

865 SP2 I don't know whether you would say stressful; I think that we were reasonably lucky in that the children were spread out quite evenly among the three teachers which I think definitely was a bonus. I think it has challenged the teachers in how to include children like that within the mainstream classroom, maybe differentiation of work and stuff but I think at the stage we're on year three, so it's like second nature to us because they are spread out throughout the whole school and it's not as if any one particular
870 class doesn't have one or two of them. Sometimes I think the teachers feel a bit frustrated and they think they could do much better with them and give them much more one-to-one but being realistic it doesn't always happen, and they do demand your attention a lot. They thrive on constant reassurance whereas in general the Irish child will get on with it a bit more, but that's understandable as they've come through a lot.

875 SP1 They need validation for their efforts?

SP2 Yes, that's a regular thing and they crave adult interaction as well and constant reassurance. It's not good enough for somebody sitting beside them say 'it was right', it had to be the teacher. I suppose that goes back to their parents as they would be the ones that would reassure them or say something is right or something is wrong.

880 SP1 I'll wrap it up with that, thank you very much. That was fantastic

Appendix 19: Interview with Farah

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Interpreter)**

SP1 What role do you play in engaging with refugees; what does your remit include?

5 SP2 Basically, it was more like support for the woman, I was basically as a volunteer; it is not paid work. Initially, I was interviewed to be an interpreter for them when they arrived. I wasn't from the successful candidates so I took on as a personal role to help around like volunteer because I felt like the person who took on the job was male, and from my cultural background, the woman would have been left out.

10 SP1 So interesting.

SP2 So, I contacted the Woman Centre, and tried to see if I could help out in that kind of matter.

SP1 Is that the Women's Centre in Letterkenny?

15 SP2 Yes. I worked for them on a volunteer basis to try to support the women because the women have very little English. Based on their culture, they were not allowed to go out, they were not allowed to communicate with others. The male, or the head of the family is the father, so the woman were slightly left out.

SP1 Even though that was within their culture in Syria, or in other parts of the Middle East, is that still what follows through here?

20 SP2 It still follows through here. There are loads of different things going on, especially with the woman and that's my main role to support the woman. When they get support... the woman, I found a difference. Things like with the children, the children's education, going with the parent to the school sometimes, because there's lack of schools who have interpreters to communicate with the parents. If the
25 interpreter is not available to take them, because there is a big number of the refugees in Donegal, and the person who took the job is between Inishowen, Letterkenny and Finn Valley. Basically, if you have an issue, and your worker is away in Inishowen, you're not going to get it for that day so they would probably contact me if they were stuck.

30 SP1 How many schools do you volunteer between?

SP2 I worked for Educate Together primary school, and I worked for the Convent, a secondary school. Loreto did pay me for my work, but with Educate Together, it was just completely voluntary.

SP1 When you were in the schools, what exactly do you do with the refugee students?

35 SP2 First of all, the worst issue was when I was called to support one of the students. The family asked me to come as the child didn't want to go to school or anything. So I went to the school, and I offered to volunteer to help him out. It was a lack of communication; the child was unable, and he was unwilling to learn, because he said, 'I

40 moved around too many places, and this is another spot to move around from.' If it wasn't me there to take him aside with his teacher and try to explain what was happening... He said that particular child was in the camps in Syria, they moved to Turkey, they moved to Greece... I think they were at the border of Germany, when Ireland took them in here and he was never schooled in any period of time in any camps, no education at all. Now he was in 5th class in primary school based on his age.

45 SP1 How many years prior to that had he left Syria?

SP2 He was 12 years old I believe when he was put in 5th class. He was a lot older to be in that class. He said he left Syria when he was three or four years old so most of his memories for nine years were from camps. Those camps could be tents, could be apartments, could be hotels, houses, or anything.

50 SP1 But no education?

SP2 No education - basically they didn't stay long enough in any place so he couldn't get an education.

SP1 Approximately how many children do you deal with within Donegal?

55 SP2 That's a very good question. You're talking about 20 children of various ages. I did work for a creche as well, an ETB creche before it's closed down, when the refugees just settled in. I had children aged around 1.5 / 2 years old. That's where I actually got close to share the parents and saw the women because the women care for the children, that's their job.

60 SP1 Would you say that that would be a typical experience for the children you deal with, in that they have not had any education in the transit from Syria to Donegal?

SP2 I would say for that particular age, yes.

SP1 Primary age?

65 SP2 Yes, none of them I believe although I'm not 100% accurate. That's because the war in Syria is going on for about 10 years now, so most parents were fearful of sending their kids to school. They are feeling afraid to send them to school in case something happened to the school. The parents do not send their kids even if they are in the camps, even if there is some particular area for education. Parents hold back the children.

SP1 Why do you think that happens?

70 SP2 One of the mommy's concerns is that she's worried that something will happen; somebody will take them away, they will be kidnapped or taken. It's something that is very common in the camps, really, according to that particular lady. I haven't been in camps before I didn't experience it, but based on what she said, she would not have sent her child to any of those little school in the camps themselves for fear of a kidnap. It is the fear of the health and safety of her child basically.

75 SP1 How long have you been doing this job?

SP2 This is my second year.

SP1 Obviously, this year has been strange because of Lockdown and quarantine, has it changed or evolved as you've gone on, or do you think the same challenges that were there in the first year are the same?

80 SP2 No absolutely not. They are different. I would say the more the family settles, their problems start to become more different or more difficult. When they move to Donegal, some parents want to take on driving lessons. They want to be able to move freely around the county. Obviously, we don't we have public transport and it's so rural. I haven't worked with anybody in Bunclara or Inishowen even for Letterkenny, which a
85 busy town, public transport is very rare. So, the challenges for those families to get a car and get it insured, and get it taxed and get it on the road, they have no language. The other issue is with communication with the Social Welfare. Social Welfare don't send letters in different languages; it's all standardized letters, so those parents are missing deadlines on different things, and they don't know what to do. Just yesterday, that is an
90 example, I was just on a friendly visit to a certain family. I was asked if I could read what was the registration for this child to go into secondary school, and they didn't know what was. It was a packet, and they knew it was from school, but they didn't know what to do with it. Because they have a full year program of refugees, they are no longer having access to an interpreter after a year.

95 SP1 The program is finished and there is the flying solo.

SP2 Yeah, exactly. I said it was expired, its deadline was a 30th of June and said I have to contact the school to see if they can do anything even what they need to pay the fees.... Do you need to arrange lockers they need to do all different things? They have no idea how to do that.

100 SP1 It's difficult. Have you received any training for this post? How would you say your experience assists in this?

SP2 I haven't really received the training to do work to deal with the refugees. Basically, because my cultural background knowledge and I would say the training for Special Education needs help because when you I typically deal with Special Needs
105 children as they have some emotional baggage with them and try to make sure that they're heard more than anything. I am there if they need to talk. I don't fix problems. I try to reach out and if I find the problem is really difficult or someone needs professional help, I'll try to reach out to their previous workers and try to highlight the problem and pass it on, but personally, I don't (have specific qualifications for refugees).

110 SP1 Speaking Arabic is a huge bonus.

SP2 Yes, at least they know that there is a person somewhere that they can lift the phone to and call that they can are comfortable with it.

SP1 It's the communication, isn't it?

SP2 Yes communication, that's right.

115 SP1 You were saying, in terms of schools, you've dealt with about 20 students - how many families would you say you're involved with here?

SP2 It could be around seven or eight families.

SP1 Fantastic. Do you liaise or communicate with them, not just in school, but out with school as well?

120 SP2 Yes, I do. If they're stuck, or they say, 'Look, Fatima, we want to buy something, what do you think? Where should we go?' There is a lady who is absolutely amazing that loves gardening, but she has no idea which plants will survive here, and which won't. What kind of food should she buy? She showed me her roses which were actually dying, because they got some kind of bugs in them so I thought 'What can we do here?' so I
125 sent her a picture on her WhatsApp. Most of them have WhatsApp and most of them have phone, which is very good for communication. I can send a picture and say, 'that is the name of the place, you can get it there.' Or if I'm available or have time, I'll get her in the car and say 'Okay, this is the place you need to go like a garden centre. That's where you should go get your garden stuff'.

130 SP1 Fantastic! What do you perceive to be the biggest challenges of refugees in Donegal?

SP2 I would say communication. I said they arrived here, it is amazing that they got a safe home, and they got an income to feed their families. But in some of those families they have some skilled people. This is my personal opinion, based on the families that I
135 go to, and based on what they tell me, but some of them are skilled carpenters or painters. I don't know how high their education is, but they are willing to work. I don't know what the challenges are of language. I would say if we put them in the workplace, the language will evolve better than leaving them just in classes. And some of them don't like classes, they feel like they are back to school. They are students and whatever
140 they were in back at home, in charge, now they are not. Put at a table you feel like your child again. You're not, so that channel of learning is not there.

SP1 Are any of the families that you deal with in employment?

SP2 No, no, none of them.

SP1 Do you think they're willing to work?

145 SP2 They absolutely are. Some of them are willing to take volunteer work for no pay as long as they can go out there because they feel like the language is not coming along enough. They don't use it at home, so the practice of the language is not there. I would say the children are not benefiting. They are in school, and they are learning English, they come back home, no English. It is slow process for the children and same for the
150 parents, but it is not benefiting the children in that regard.

SP1 Do you have any involvement within the schools assisting with administration? Do they ask you to help with letters, for communication, putting information out for the refugee families?

SP2 Yes, I did actually translate a few letters to send home. I did make a phone call
155 with the principal a couple times for parent teacher meetings because parents coming

to see the progress of the children, if they don't have language, they're not going to be able to understand where the children are or where's the problems, so I did attend.

SP1 Do you sit in on parent teacher meetings?

160 SP2 Yeah, I did. I did phone calls when there were issues at school or the child having problems and we had to call the parents. I would have made the phone call behind on behalf of the school.

SP1 Do you find that there's many behavioural problems with the children?

165 SP2 Yes. The behaviour is more that they are refusing to be involved in anything, not engaging. In one particular case we were trying to figure out how we could help this little young lady, she's 14 with aggressive behaviour. I haven't worked with her school but when she knew I was in a different secondary school, her parents wanted to move her where I was based. When we ask the principal said no, she couldn't move her in the middle of the year, you know the process. But she's not attending classes, she fights in the yard... it's not something you see from our culture. In the Arabic culture women
170 don't fight in the streets. There is a ladylike expectation, but she feels like she has to do that.

SP1 She's angry.

SP2 Yes, she's angry. She feels like some of her needs not met so that's her way of showing it.

175 SP1 Do you feel that it is some sort of trauma, or do you think she has special needs, or do you think this is simply post-war trauma, like PTSD?

SP2 I would say there is some emotional problem there, there is some trauma there. I don't think she is heard enough. According to her she said she was picked on. She's not veiled or anything, like they know that they are in Europe, and they have that freedom.
180 Because I worked in the Girls' School I feel like I have the need to empower these young women to have a little bit of voice so that they don't have to do something unless you are happy to do it, you are protected here. She said that she was bullied; some of her friends picked on her. She didn't understand what they were saying so they have made hand gestures and stuff like that to make sure that she's getting the negative message
185 that they wanted. Because the lack of language, anything they say could be anything to her, but because of the hand gesture and all of that....

SP1 Is that coming from other Syrian or refugee students or is that coming from the local students?

190 SP2 From the local students. In fairness, the refugee program did amazing, in the way that they didn't put people all the refugees in one school, they put them in different schools.

SP1 Do you think that's beneficial?

195 SP2 I think it is, because when they are all in one school in one place (I think the families prefer all-girls school and all boys school because of the culture), but when you when you have them all in one school they don't communicate with others.

SP1 They would naturally speak their own language with their peers.

SP2 Yes, they would naturally group themselves in small groups, so I feel like it is good for them to be spread out in different schools

200 SP1 Do you think from what you see in the schools that you're in, that the provision of education for refugees is good in Donegal, and do you think it addresses their very complex needs honestly?

205 SP2 Honestly no - like in the terms of inclusion for example, if a child has a problem with anxiety, you get to psychotherapy and prove that the child needs special need assistance and then they will receive it. Most of the students as far as I'm aware did not receive any psychotherapy. Considering that they are coming from a warzone they should, because who told us it is a language barrier, or it is other problems in there? Even if it is just a language barrier, why wouldn't we have a Special Needs Assistant for a year, just one year, a temporary one until they get the confidence with the language to move on.

210 SP1 There's no Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) within any of the classes to help with language, to help with trauma, there is no psychotherapy?

SP2 No, as far as I know the students I've worked with, none of them received any psychotherapy.

SP1 No psychologist comes in?

215 SP2 No - which I feel like it should have been one of the major things considering that most of those children come from a war zone.

SP1 Have any of the parents ever spoken to you about this?

220 SP2 Yes, at the moment I'm trying to reach out for two particular young people for psychologists through another charity. It's Foróige so I'm actually working with them and part time basis as they need me so we're trying to reach out for two particular students who we feel that really need psychotherapy. What we did during the year was we invited them into Loreto to have extra-curricular activities, like get them involved in art, get them together, get them to use the English language as a medium. It was just something different that the parents wouldn't be able to afford ...that little extra work. 225 Through that the students would open up and start talking. One of the girls said she hadn't slept for three years at night. And I asked, 'Why did she go to school?' She was always late going to school. She said she could only sleep when it is daytime, at night-time, it was frightening. I asked what she was frightened off. She couldn't describe it. She couldn't say it. Her language is not good enough to go to a psychologist to explain 230 her fears, but you can see it in her.

SP1 I'm sure - how old is she?

SP2 She's 14 and she hadn't slept for three years. And I said, 'how can you function?' Like she will sleep during the day. Obviously, parents are struggling to get her to school at 9 in the morning and all of that but for somebody that's exhausted and tired attending
235 classes in completely different language can you imagine that?

SP1 It's so difficult! Donegal is quite a homogenous society. It's starting to become more diverse but traditionally, it has been majority white Christian. And are you aware of any anti-racism or intercultural training that goes on with the staff in the school or any of the interagency staff or with the parents? Is there anything that you have seen?

240 SP2 I haven't seen anything about that. Nobody approached me or I haven't heard anything going in school about that.

SP1 With regards to trauma, Child Protection, welfare, conflict, and resolution, and very importantly, cultural awareness - do you know if any of the staff have any training in that?

245 SP2 I don't think so. Not that I'm aware of, based on who I work with that, no.

SP1 With the parents, are they given any advice or training on those things, that you know of?

SP2 No, I was in the Woman's Centre, and I was suggesting different training. For example, I said we want First Aid for parents, which is common thing in Donegal. We
250 don't want to go, but we want them for women in that culture because they're so relaxed back in their countries, but here there is more regulation about how to look after your kids. If like you have a child cut, choke, choking hazards, we need to teach them how to deal with those kinds of things - simple things, you can't just call the doctor or the nurses for every simple thing, dealing with temperature and so on. I was told that
255 they can't because obviously it is English, it's too complicated in English for those parents. I asked Why. I'm willing to sit there and translate and do it.

SP1 But they're not allowed to attend any of this?

SP2 They were saying that there was no funding for such a thing, because it's expensive to do First Aid in a way, but I'm sure as it's a Woman's Centre as a charity, if
260 we approach any training thing to do a discount for the whole group, they will do it. We're talking about 30 ladies so why not? It is for the benefit of the child, but I was told that they can't. Wherever you go, you end up with the barrier. And I wonder whether I'm sceptical it just because of the race or was its language or can we not get a mix of the different races, like with the Polish and so on. It should be mixed but I just was told No.

265 SP1 So funding was the problem?

SP2 The big problem.

SP1 What are the schools getting right in terms of education for the refugee pupils, what are they doing right?

270 SP2 Inclusion in a way like they are. Even though I would say, they don't have a proper program on inclusion education, but I see that the children are included in all

variety of activities. If there's something going in the school the children are invited into those activities. It is up to the parent or the child to attend or not attend. For example, Educate Together have always done a Homework Club after school to support students who have difficulties, so all the refugees were given that program for free. Even it cost
275 money, you have to pay for this service, the school offers this for free for this particular group (refugees) to help them get along. That is one thing that I thought was a brilliant idea. Even though that is still work in progress. They need more than just being there, they are included in that group, but they needed a little bit more than just what others need. It's not that they're behind in Maths or behind in writing, they're behind in the
280 whole concept of language. That is one of the things that I feel- the schools are not treating them any different to other students. They are part of it; if you are in the school, you're included in everything, they're treated equally well, but are they achieving in the same way – I think not.

SP1 Okay. So, they are all treated equally, but these are pupils who need extra. You
285 did say Educate Together offers a free homework club. Do you feel the other schools are giving anything extra? Do you think the school is, or individual teachers are?

SP2 There are a few individual teachers in Loreto, one in particular who actually offers extra English classes for them. There were six in that group, so she used to give it to them whenever she was free. Even if they were in different classes, she took them out
290 because sitting in a class not understanding what's happening is awful. The worst one was actually my Leaving Cert classes who have no English.

SP1 That's tough

SP2 I started with her last year. She was Leaving Cert Applied so, but it was absolutely horrendous. There was nothing to describe it. She was going to do her
295 Leaving Cert., but she was not entitled to an SNA to read her things. She wasn't entitled to anything.

SP1 She wasn't entitled to an SNA or an interpreter to read the papers for her?

SP2 No.

SP1 She still only had basic English?

300 SP2 She didn't even have a basic English. The school was very good. I was hired to give her a little bit of support, because the school at that stage, they didn't even know exactly what they were going to do. She was in 5th year which is the first year of the Leaving Cert but based on the Department of Education, she wasn't entitled to anything. I did sit with her in the interviews for her project because she couldn't understand the
305 person asking the questions.

SP1 Did you feel she had potential anyway?

SP2 Absolutely.

SP1 So, if she had had an SNA, or if she had had extra English that she would have had the potential to do much better?

310 SP2 Much, much better. She is so clever. I would say she had the basic education because of her age. Her Math was brilliant. You give her problems, she would be able to work it out, as long as she knows what it means. I found that the students were very good in algebra and things that were numerical, but when you get the problems in math, because of the language, the wording, she couldn't get it. One of the English teachers, she took them on. She did work very hard with them and dedicated two hours a week, which is amazing, but it's not enough. I'm sure it makes huge difference.

SP1 And that was her own time?

320 SP2 Yes, she volunteered her own time. This special tuition- I don't think the girls understood it exactly. The school allocated certain hours for those students with different teacher of different subjects. I don't think the special hours should be allocated for English language only, because if you go to Home Economics, and the teacher is asking you to do a couple things....if you don't understand the basics, you can't work.

SP1 Approximately how many refugees are in the schools that you're working in?

SP2 Four in the secondary school and five in the primary school.

325 SP1 I'm going to ask what can be improved. I suppose you've already touched on that - you said extra language allocation?

330 SP2 I would say English Additional Language (EAL) used to be a special need, because basically, it is a limitation for the child if he's in the classroom. But I think, based on the Department of Education, they're taking the approach of the full immersion. You're talking about the language in full immersion, but you forget about the culture coming with baggage which can hold back a little bit, which I feel is have a huge impact in the full immersion. That's why a lot of times, it doesn't work 100% the same way it should work with kids going to for example an all-Irish school; it's full immersion work, because it's simple, they encounter the same thing that they actually encounter in their real lives and how they live them. But those one who come in from completely different cultures, and you put them in full immersion of a language you don't know and the culture they don't know, most of the time, most of the time you will get rejection, because mentally they're rejecting it, because it is not what they grew up with. It is not something they wanted. It's a setback. They do get there eventually, but it's not at an equal rate as typical as local students.

340 SP1 What is the government getting right that you're aware of, if anything?

345 SP2 To start with, a safe home and an income is a big thing. Most families that I spoke to who were in different camps in different countries, there said that the Irish government was the best so far to deal with in a way, because they got proper homes, they got a proper wages to go out and feed the kids, even if sometimes those wages are not actually enough because if you have children in secondary school, and a lot of those families are big families, like six and five children all at school, the basic social welfare is not enough. Even though I will say most of them are content and happy that they have home, and they have an income coming in. Other than that, I would say one year refugee

350 program is not sufficient. You can't cut them off after a year. A year is not enough to learn a language, basic language and understand the culture to move freely around.

SP1 How long do you think that program should be?

SP2 I would say probably around three years. The first year would be intense then reduce the help in the second year. Then by the third year, people should be in
355 workplaces or volunteer workplaces or something like that and be happy to gain employment. It is clear that those people on social welfare are not able for work. Even if they did go for interviews with the social welfare officer, it'd be clear those people have no language to go to work on their own independently; they still need programs to support them going into work. Apart from the language, I personally believe, which was
360 helpful to myself, because I moved to Ireland with no English that being in society, going out to work, going meeting with people all the time who speak the language, it helps tune their ears to the language, gives them a little bit more confidence to talk. I would say there is a lack of better and one year is not sufficient.

SP1 Do you feel that the refugees who have settled in Donegal trust authority figures, given the history of the war in Syria, or do you feel that they see this is a completely different country and they can trust authority?
365

SP2 Honestly, I don't think many of them give it much of a thought when they have no right to vote in anything yet.

SP1 Do they feel safe? Do you think they feel safe?

370 SP2 They feel completely safe, but I don't think political things are in their mind yet. At the moment in their mindset, it's 'we're in a home... we have kids at school... we need work'. It is a need kind of culture at the moment.

SP1 It's not on their radar?

SP2 No, it's in their top layer.

375 SP1 Do you think they feel welcome here; welcome by the country as a whole, welcome by the community or do they still feel Like outsiders?

SP2 I would say it's still a little bit of outsider they still group together and go to festivals and things together. It was not a funny one, when a Syrian lady called me, and the guards were at her front door, and she had no idea what was happening. Her
380 daughter was playing with the neighbours and the neighbours called the guards because she thought that the woman was asking her to come in. It is normal for us. Like if my daughter is playing and it starts raining, I will say 'Okay, come in, don't stay outside, coming inside,' but the Irish lady felt like there was a problem with that because this woman took them in.

385 SP1 So there was mistrust from the Irish on that because it's normal for us to have our neighbour's children in also, especially in Donegal. It's rural and people tend to know their neighbours.

390 SP2 Yes and the front door is rarely locked, you can usually open the door and come in, but in that particular instance, and it is in Letterkenny, the woman was completely frightened because she asked the neighbour's daughter to come in with her daughter and, and I said, 'Okay, don't invite anybody to come in unless you know them and you speak to the parents beforehand', because it is a different way. The parents don't know the background, except what is stereotypical, so it's different.

395 SP1 Do you feel that if the Syrian ladies and the teenagers are dressed in their burkas and their hijabs and abayas - do you think that people have more mistrust for them?

SP2 Yes. 100%. I know one lady who came in with the whole burka and she was told to remove it.

SP1 Where, in school?

400 SP2 No, we were in the Women's Centre and we're discussing it and all her community asked her to take it off, the veil is okay, but just take off the burqa to let your face be seen in public because it's sending the wrong messages. I think, genuinely people are afraid of the unknown if they don't see your face.

405 SP1 How do you think the Syrian ladies feel - obviously, it's their tradition and their culture- do they feel freer over here? Do they feel they need to wear their burqa as part of their culture and that's just what they do, or do they feel pressure not to wear it because of the stereotypes?

410 SP2 I would say it depends on their age group; I would say the younger ladies feel like they are freer. They don't have to wear it anymore. They will be happy to just to cover the hair with the veil, and that is fine, but the older generation, they feel that they should be accepted the way they are wherever they go.

SP1 For teenage girls who are starting to wear it, do you think that limits them in terms of integration and making friends in school?

415 SP2 Absolutely 100%. I would say that wearing the veil itself, never mind the burqa, just the veil itself is something different. You don't see a person with black hair and heavy makeup as different but automatically, you see that veil and your hair is covered - it's something different. They are wearing too long sleeves and they don't choose. They think those women are controlled, and that's why they covered but they are not; they're happy to wear it. If you ask them to take it off, they will be so uncomfortable not having it on. That is their familiar thing - it could be anywhere in the world and that is one thing
420 that they are familiar with, and they are happy to do it.

SP1 I remember when I lived in the Middle East, the girls used to say they were so proud when they started to wear it, it was a sign that they were growing up, that's how they felt.

425 SP2 Exactly, when you get to a certain age basically you are told that you're too attractive to be not covered. You cover yourself because you're too beautiful. It is a compliment to the woman in that culture. You are beautiful. You're covered so you can hide some of your beauty basically.

SP1 What's the biggest challenge of your role?

SP2 I'm actually not trained to do the role.

430 SP1 You're obviously very good at it even if you don't have formal training for it.

SP2 The other thing is I have my own commitments for my life, and I feel like I can't take on that all the time and sometimes you've got to say, 'I'm sorry I can't get to you, I'm busy I can't really do it.'

SP1 Do they become dependent on you?

435 SP2 No, they will call me often, but they are aware that I don't get paid to work with them, so if I'm busy I will say I'm busy so you can't take offense with that you have to reach out for somebody else, which is understandable. I feel if I was trained enough, if I got paid to do the job differently it would be much better. I don't know why, but in Letterkenny as far as I know, there are just two refugee workers; one manager and one
440 who actually looks around. There is not enough funding to hire a third one who caters for children and families. There are a few families who refused the interpreter to go in the house because the man of the house said there should be no other man in his house in front of his wife, and I had ladies who delivered their babies and they refused to have a male interpreter there, so I had to stand in for free all night with the lady having a
445 baby because she had no English.

SP1 Why did she refuse an interpreter?

SP2 Because he was male; it is the culture that you can't have a man present when a woman is giving birth. Even some men can be very strict; they don't allow other men to be there. Like there's only one man in the house and you can't bring in or show
450 somebody who knew better than the head of the house. The interpreter will come into the house, and they might think 'He's better than my husband, he knows more than my husband,' so the husband refuses those men to come into the house. There were a few occasions that they were refused to go into the house. It was for to help them but that is a cultural barrier that the refugees, that the Syrians are creating because of their
455 culture. It is the culture. I am not allowing another man in my house - full stop. That is that and what can you do. So, the program didn't notice a little bit of cultural difference and they should have hired male and female workers to deal with the problems. I know most of woman who want to go to the doctor for birth control, would they like to take a male interpreter man with them - of course not, it's a personal thing.

460 SP1 It's just those everyday things.

SP2 One more thing, when I was with a particular student who went for an interview for her one of her projects in secondary school, it's part of the Leaving Cert Applied - she couldn't go to the room.

SP1 Why not?

465 SP2 Because there was a man interviewing her and she is age 17. She's in the age of marrying according to her culture so she's not allowed to be in a room with a male on her own.

470 SP1 Do you think there is any sense of 'When in Rome do as the Romans do'; not to get rid of your culture, but to say we are in a society now where women and men move more freely together.

475 SP2 It means a little bit of education of those families because some of them are not educated enough in the respect of those kinds of differences in the culture, and the more you force it in them, the more defensive of that they become and the more they hold back. And you try to say 'oh it's just a teacher' No. I was growing up being told that I can't....

SP1 It's indoctrinated into them.

SP2 It was a complete meltdown just before doing an interview. It was a disaster, and the teacher did not realise why that student didn't want to go.

SP1 And would that student had been accompanied by a female member of staff...?

480 SP2 If she had a female member of staff, it would have been fine. That's all it would take...for another member of staff to stay in the corner.

SP1 But that wasn't available?

SP2 It wasn't offered at the time.

SP1 I suppose people are learning as they go.

485 SP2 I would say, even the schools, what you said when you touched on earlier about the teachers being educated on different cultural backgrounds and stuff, that would probably be snapped up on this spot if a teacher knows 'okay it's a male... and based on the culture, that will happen'. For younger students it should be okay, but for the teenage girls, it's a little bit more sensitive. Another thing is, the parents don't
490 understand; they don't teach their children that when you are in school, you are safe. If you're with the teacher on your own it is still safe, and that you look at a male teacher as a professional, before you look at him just as a man.

SP1 So learning needs to come on both sides?

495 SP2 I would say the Irish Education System has a little bit of a lack of understanding of different cultural backgrounds. I'm from Morocco, North Africa, Arabic speakers, Middle East are very similar, so if we cover the similarity, we are happy, like you're covering at least 20 or 30 countries and the basic course of culture like Arabic culture, Islamic culture...it could cover so many different things. We have a lot of immigrants from Eastern Europe, if you cover Lithuania, Poland, and so on...they are very similar
500 because of the geographical location; probably one time they were one country before so if we cover that culturally, we could cater for those students as well. If we understand what they mean.....that was one of the things they asked before why people are not trying to understand their point of view, and it's like 'They are coming to our country...they should understand us.'

505 SP1 I suppose still there only 49 families, so it is relatively new for people to get their heads around. I think we've probably touched a bit on this, but what are the biggest challenges for teachers?

510 SP2 I would say communication and cultural backgrounds. I'd say for students who don't have enough language to speak out, or you'll get students who are very clever who have a little bit of English but wouldn't pass on the message to parents, so you have lack of communication with the parents, not with the students, which like it's equally important; parents have to be involved in education and all that.

515 SP1 Are you able to gauge the parent's impression of Donegal? Obviously, they've come from Syria which was a beautiful country but post-war they're now in Donegal - do they think it's peaceful? Friendly? Too rural? Not diverse enough? What do you think the impression is?

SP2 I think they like it here. It is beautiful and a lot of them try to go different places like going to Ards, most feel free to go to different places where they can explore the beauty.

520 SP1 It is a stunning place to live

525 SP2 It's not as busy as Syria because of the population the city is different than Donegal which is completely different to the cities that they've come from, but they seem to be happy, they like it so far. Many of them will ask me 'Where should we go to around here where it is not too far?' They managed to go to the beach but did have slight problems as well. That is lack of training. Some of them had inflatable boats and ended up with a lot of problems, but they were not educated that not all of the beaches are suitable for swimming and not all of the beaches you can go to if there's no lifeguard, so there were different little things, that is common sense to us but not to them, but they seem to be happy enough where they are.

530 SP1 You've already said you don't feel the English language support for the refugees is sufficient?

SP2 I don't think so, no.

535 SP1 Do you think that the kids are eager to mix? I'm sure you find the difference between primary and secondary, but are they eager to learn and enthusiastic about mixing? For the majority of those who you work with, do they feel this is just another place, or do they get it that this is home?

540 SP2 I don't think most of them get it is home. I can probably give you one particular family that the children try to speak English at home; one family of the seven that I work with. They have six children. They managed to get all the four girls in the same school so when we come home and do the homework together, they are using English to do the homework. That's the only family I felt that they are happy enough here and they call it home. The daddy is painting the house, they will try different things. They cook and they try to live a peaceful life. They actually ordered their furniture for their house to make their home as a home for them. That's the only one I would say it feels like home. See
545 when you feel it's like home, you start to appreciate it and language is not a problem.

The girls speaking English - parents are not complaining that they are not speaking the home language that they still want to hold on to that identity of your home language, but at the same time you're reinforcing and supporting the girls.

550 SP1 That's interesting; do you feel that most of the families are still speaking Arabic at home?

SP2 100%

SP1 Is that because the parents have little English or because they are eager to hold on to their culture?

555 SP2 I would say a bit of both. I think they feel like if they speak English more often, they're going to lose a little bit of their identity.

SP1 You've given that example of the neighbour who was upset that her child is going into the house, but do you think that the locals and their neighbours are welcoming? Do you think that the children for example go to birthday parties with their peers?

560 SP2 No, I haven't heard any of the refugees who were invited to any birthday party from the school?

SP1 Or any gatherings? Obviously, Lockdown has been different, but you know my teenage daughter is now going out for dinner with her friends or going to the beach. Are the refugees - is that an unwillingness of the locals or an unwillingness of the refugees?

565 SP2 I would say they would not go with the locals. They might manage to have some organized activities for those particular students to take them mixed with the locals. We have few different people from Ballybofey and then a few from Letterkenny and we went to Bundoran to the beach on the bus, and we tried to sit them in different seats on the way down beside the person didn't know before...

SP1 Are they all Syrians?

570 SP2 All Syrians were put a local student, so we got a mix of both to try to see if they were trying to use whatever they learned at school, to try to use it in real life. They use English at school, of course it's limited English, but are they using any further learning outside of school? No, so we took them out and they were seated with different people they didn't know but, on the way back we had all the Syrians in the backseat and all the
575 Irish up front. It's not to force them, if you actually organize it and put them in that situation they will try, but they wouldn't do it voluntarily.

SP1 Would the Syrian parents be comfortable with their children going to another person's house?

SP2 I'm not sure

580 SP1 I'm wondering is it's an Irish thing or a Syrian thing...for a playdate for example?

SP2 I'm not 100% sure with that. I know the girls have limited outings because obviously girls are not free. They have to ask permission to go. If we organize a little bit

of activities for them, the parents will say 'As long as Fatima is there, that is fine,' so the girls are not allowed to go on their own.

585 SP1 Like a chaperone?

SP2 Even if there's an Irish teacher there who says, 'Okay girls we're having an activity this week' and I'm not available to go with them, they will not be allowed to go.

590 SP1 Let's say a few girls in the class decide that at the weekend they're going to go and catch a movie at the cinema- would that daughter 13,14, 15 years old be allowed to go?

SP2 No, no, no!

SP1 Would that be from her side?

595 SP2 That would be from her side; that would be from their cultural side, that the girls don't go to the cinema, girls don't do those kinds of things. It's just a cultural thing, they are still learning slowly what is a safe place. I don't know what the cinema is like in Syria, but I assume it's male dominated. In my home country, I can't go to the cinema on my own unless I take a male with me, like my brother or my father. It just a domination thing. The coffee shops are male only, so it's still a thing that the girls are attractive, they're too precious to go out in their own. Having said that, I have heard from one of the ladies that her daughter will go shopping to Pennys (Primark) with different girls but wouldn't go to the cinema or eating or anything on their own.

600 SP1 So interesting. Within your remit and the valuable work that you do, do you then feel that you have to liaise with the class teacher, the head-teacher or any other interagency staff or do you sort of just go in and do your bit?

605 SP2 I do work with other teachers. I can't just show up and say, 'we have to do this, we have to do that.' When one of my students was doing a history project, she had very limited English. We still wanted her to achieve certain marks, even for her confidence, so I'll work with a teacher and see what is the best we can do for this student. I will take on her recommendation before I'll pass it on to the students. I'm supporting the students but at the same time, I feel like I'm supporting the teacher. It was funny that students always have 2 out of 100 when she started, and we were ecstatic when she got 25.

SP1 It's progress.

615 SP2 It's fantastic. At one stage we actually given her the classroom exam a day before, when we asked her to read it and try to understand it. We highlighted where the answers were going to be and where she has to learn because of the lack of language, she is not going to remember that. For an Irish student it will be like a piece of cake - 100%, and we got 25%.

SP1 That's amazing progress. That's fantastic.

620 SP2 That's the thing; I'll work with the teacher. I don't feel like I'm qualified enough to give the education support that the students' need without having the support of the

teacher in any way. That is in secondary school. In primary school, I used to take the students in a reading session, but I'll only take the students who have a lack of language like the refugees, or we'll have some Polish. We'll read a story, a very basic story, and we'll try to make words out of that. 'Tell me the word that you remember from it' to support it, but I could not have done that without the permission of the teacher or the principal and get called to the library. My work is not completely independent; it will be independent if I'm dealing with lifetime things, like to take the lady to the garden centre. If you're in school, it has to be 100% - I can't go to do any planning activities with the students unless, obviously, (without the permission of) the teacher and the principal .

SP1 Is there ever an occasion where you would liaise with the teacher or the head or another member of staff to say, 'actually, the problem here is more than the language this child hasn't slept in three years, or this child is crying. She's feeling trauma, she's feeling x, y and Z' - completely unrelated to school, but that's why she's not progressing. Are you able to pass that information on?

SP2 Yes, I did give that several times because of a student having problems or not attending enough? It was every Monday for several weeks. We had to call the parents and said I said, 'Can you not just leave it with me, and I'll check out for you exactly the reason behind it before we call the parents.' I found out that the mother had to collect something from the post office every Monday and her daughter has more English than she does, so she has to be the interpreter for her mother.

SP1 So, she doesn't show up at all on a Monday?

SP2 When I asked her why she doesn't show up after the post office, and she said she felt embarrassed to show up late. But she has to explain herself, but she doesn't have enough language to explain herself, so I said we'd sort that one out in different way. But the principal wouldn't have known that actually the children now are at the stage where they are used as an interpreter for their parents.

SP1 Do you think that's very common?

SP2 It is really, really common.

SP1 Just for general life administration?

SP2 Parents will take the child who has the best English to go to the shop with if they have anything to ask the cashier or that kind of thing.

SP1 Growing up as a child, I was aware of the different sects of Christianity because of the Troubles. Do you think it poses a problem when the children from the different Muslim sects are put into schools together? Does that cause any awkwardness?

SP2 I haven't come across it yet. As far as I know, most of the Syrian refugees are Sunni, and that that is the most common one. Other than that, I haven't come across it as a problem. You only have to say you are Muslim and then welcome in their circle. You wouldn't question what part of it or which one you follow, as long as you do the prayers, and you do the fasting and Ramadan. I haven't personally come across it (any problems) in the school yet from most of the ones I see. I have come across students in secondary

school who refused to attend religious classes. Even though the religious classes are actually mixed religion, like they teach the different religions, they would not attend because the convent is Catholic....they will not attend religious classes, just in case they will try to convert them.

665 SP1 So, there is a mistrust from the parents as well, even though it's taught ecumenically. Of course, it is a Catholic ethos, but they are concerned because it is normal within a Catholic school to say a prayer in the morning, to say your Grace Before Meals... do they partake in those simple things?

670 SP2 Nothing. No, absolutely not. You know that Loreto in Letterkenny is part of the Cathedral Grounds and frequently, we've seen the girls childishly playing in the cathedral, like just chasing each other and playing. They were not told that it is a holy ground that people don't do that. That is one of the things they have had to come and explain to the Syrian girls and say 'Look, you don't jump over the wall... you can't go there.'

675 SP1 They need to give the same respect as if it was a mosque.

SP2 Exactly, but they didn't take it because they thought, 'This is a convent, it is a nun's place, we are free, we can do whatever we like so the same goes for the church or the cathedral.' When we sat them down and set the boundaries, this created an opportunity to educate them on their role in becoming integrated into the community and the importance of showing humility to their hosts and recognise that they should show respect to Christianity even if they wanted no part in their practice. It was fine, but at the same time, for the Muslim refugee, Christianity and the Christian church, there's no branches, so just don't teach me anything to do with religion with Christianity. At the start when we said to the girls 'Look, open the book. They even have Islam in it...and you could even gain the bonus marks because you are already aware of that,' but not a hope.

680 SP1 So, religion as a subject, they will not engage with it because it touches on other religions?

690 SP2 Exactly.

SP1 They're not open to just being informed?

SP2 No.

SP1 Do you think the parents are supportive of that?

695 SP2 Yes. The first thing the parents will say when they come in is we wouldn't like to do religion. That is the first thing the parents will say... 'We're going to do all subjects but not religion.'

SP1 During Ramadan, do the school accommodate children who are fasting or who need to pray? Are there any accommodations made for that?

700 SP2 No, no, no. I had a group of girls, not just Syrian girls; I ended up being the foreign support worker for the students, so we had a few Egyptian, some from Jordan,

and even the Polish of different nationalities. A few of the Muslim girls approached us to ask if they could have a room for prayers. There is a chapel in the school for Catholics and the principal said it 'Okay we can cut half of the chapel and give you section.' The girls said 'No because it is a chapel. We can't go pray in the chapel; we want an individual room'.

SP1 They're not willing to meet her half-way even though the vast majority are Catholic – and it's a convent.

SP2 The principal was amazingly to accommodate. She understands that prayer is very important; it's a spiritual thing but of course for any kind of prayer you need a very clean relaxing and calm place. She said 'Okay I will have this sectioned into a prayer room. It is lovely, there are chairs everywhere we can move part of it and section it for the six of them who are actively practicing their prayers,' and they said No. I sat down with the girls and explained to them the percentage of them – there were 6 girls in 900 students.

SP1 So, percentage wise six out of 900 are practicing Muslims?

SP2 There would be a lot more Muslims in there but most of them wouldn't practice because with the five times prayer, you'd lose half of your class to go to everything.

SP1 But the principal was willing to accommodate 6 out of 900 people and they refused – that's interesting.

SP2 The reality is it's not just one sided; it is the two-sided.

SP1 Would the Sunni, Kurds and Shia Muslims all have attended separate schools in Syria, or would they have been in integrated schools?

SP2 I'm not too sure to be honest. I know that the Arabs and the Kurds don't get along. From my experience I deal with two Kurdish family out of the seven, and the Arab Muslims would not have anything to deal with those people at all.

SP1 Even in Donegal?

SP2 Even in Donegal.

SP1 Let's say for example the Integration Office for Donegal were having some event for refugees where all the Syrians refugees were invited, would the Arabs and the Kurds attend?

SP2 Both of them will attend, but they are not going to talk.

SP1 They actually wouldn't speak?

SP2 No

SP1 What about their children?

SP2 The children are actually innocent enough. If they are at school, they will be friendly and happy but as soon as they get out of the school, they should not and they can't show that they are actually friendly with the other families.

SP1 This very much resonates with the Catholic Protestant issue in Ireland way back, which isn't an issue now, but it definitely was. Obviously, we're still in lockdown, have you had any involvement, or can you comment on how Lockdown and Quarantine have been in terms of education for the refugee kids?

SP2 I would say they missed out quite a lot to be honest because all the teachers sent homework but the parents have a lack of English. Students will read what is in there, but they are not going to self-educate themselves because of their age. Even the one I worked with in secondary school had difficulty understanding all the tasks they were asked to do at home. I worked in the Convent, my contract was over in April, but I was still fully working with those students through Zoom or WhatsApp because they would send me pictures like 'The history teacher sent me that's what I am supposed to do?'

SP1 So, it was only English instruction that came back.

SP2 There was no other thing; they would use Google Translate and you know how accurate or reliable Google Translate even though it's foreign language principle. Even the Irish translated is horrendous. No, I would say it actually set them back big time. Being in a family of only Arabic speakers, there's no interaction in English. If they could have been moved like couple months on in speaking and interacting, but they didn't have that. They got homework but if you ask any of the teachers, some of them didn't even show up to the virtual classes, because they felt they would be put on the spot, they would have to talk. They would think like that. I did personally arrange some English classes for them through zoom through Firóige and we had a teacher who would teach them language through songs through drama and stuff. Even at that we found deadlock sometimes, when they felt they were being put on the spot that they had to do it and feeling they were weak, they wouldn't even show up to classes either.

SP1 This is the online stuff?

SP2 Yes, through the lockdown a lot of them just let go to the whole English thing. They stayed at home, they were safe at home speaking in their own home language, but there was no English.

SP1 Do you think that was down to the students or the parents or a bit of both?

SP2 I would say it's a bit of both, the parents didn't have English. I would say the parents asked if they did their homework, but they wouldn't do it. Most of them had no laptop at home; you're not going to do homework to your phone.

SP1 I actually met with a Syrian family, and they were doing homework on their phone. The majority of the families that you work with, what access did they have to technology?

SP2 They have no laptops or iPads. We did source a laptop for the Leaving Cert students as we were told she would have to do exams. That was the only one we got through Firóige; one of the workers was happy to give her the laptop. It was formatted for the student to use while she was working from home. I was aware that there were loads of laptops at school that were not assigned to the students; like give some to the kids... they are your students in your school; why wouldn't that happen?

780 SP1 There are no extra resources from what you know; technology, laptops, translators, nothing like that given from any of the schools?

SP2 Absolutely not. Even my contract wasn't extended in the Lockdown to support the students. It was your due to finish in April and that was it.

SP1 When actually, it would have been even more valuable to have you then during Lockdown.

785 SP2 I was at work, and they said, 'Okay, we probably need to have you during the exam time, not as a reader and because they were not entitled to readers, but even as a support for the teachers or for the SNAs or the floating staff, but because of the lockdowns, there was no work at all. I did continue to work because I felt that the students needed me; if a student sent me a message and said, 'Can you read that for me? What does that mean?' - I'm not going to say 'Sorry, I'm not getting paid for that.'

SP1 So, you felt obliged?

795 SP2 I was in an SNA group with the schools, and they said, 'We're at home, we cannot help the students.' They didn't do any extra. I said 'Why not- Zoom is just a basic thing. We all have a school email, we can do it through school email, even checking up on your special needs students would have make a huge difference to their progress or how they are getting on in the Lockdown.'

SP1 Were you able to identify children who had special needs that are separate to language difficulties and separate to trauma, but who actually had learning difficulties?

800 SP2 Yes, absolutely. That's why I could not approach a school, they all have their different systems on how to do things. Even I said, 'That is more than a language barrier' but it's like, 'I'm just an interpreter', or just having to go practice with an SNA - sometimes I would not be taken seriously. But when I was speaking to Firóige, when we had a close session with those students, and I said, 'Look, there is a problem with that person, what do you think?' Then the parents will sit down and discuss different things that you have done.

SP1 You're qualified in Special Needs, would be able to identify that 'this looks like autism...this looks like ADHD?'

810 SP2 And that looks like anxiety like that. Students will go in there and sit in the very back row with the sweat coming out of their forehead because they're worried that the teacher will ask them a question. Some of them would literally walk out of the classroom if they thought that the teacher would ask them questions; that is anxiety - how can I not identify that.

SP1 You can see that, and you've suggested that to the staff before on several occasions.

815 SP2 Absolutely.

SP1 Is anything done about that?

SP2 'Oh, we'll sort that out...we'll try to apply for that...' but nothing happens. Sometimes I feel you're talking to the teacher, and the teacher will talk to the SNA coordinator, but the SNA co-ordinator has loads of on her plate, trying to organize all
820 different things...who is going who's coming, like the new class backgrounds... who she's going to apply for? That message will be put in there and get lost. It is just the percentage. It is very important for them to meet the needs of every student but when you're dealing with a massive school of 900 students, it's tough.

SP1 And there are so many complex needs with the refugees.

825 SP2 There is definitely post trauma in there. I would say there's more than just a slow learner; there is a problem with processing information. The person you are talking to can't process the information you are telling them. So, it is really difficult. It is not language. He knew exactly what you're saying but he actually doesn't understand what you want him to do. I've seen that on several occasions, but not all the time. Sometimes
830 you say it, and nothing happens, so you say it again...and it's like, 'Oh, here we go again.' I feel the need to mention it. I feel they think 'she's just looking for a job isn't she, she's in a contract here....and she's saying that that student has special needs because she needs the job.' That's how I felt personally. It may not be exactly like that, but I was aware of the amount of work that the ethnic groups needed in that particular school,
835 because it's large. In Educate Together, I really rarely speak to the principal, because she's a busy lady. She was happy for me to be there, I was Garda vetted to be there, but I was never approached or showed anything. I mainly dealt with the teachers who actually were crying out for help to understand what the child wanted. Educate Together is one of the DEIS schools so basically, they provide meals. They couldn't
840 understand why this child was coming in and he wouldn't eat his meals. It's ham and the Muslim can't eat ham. There is a system in the school, a computerized system that the students are able to pick what food he wants to eat every day and alternate it. So, first thing I did was to take him with me to the office and asked what food he would like to eat...and it was fine. For them to do that it was slightly more complicated because
845 obviously the language or the lack of understanding of the culture.

SP1 What is the most rewarding part of your job?

SP2 Seeing the progress is wonderful. One of the main things was a student I worked with who was doing the Leaving Cert, and she had no English. She doesn't want to do it and she was probably having an arranged marriage and she thought she had no other
850 future but by the end of this year, she signed for college to go to LYIT. That was my best thing ever. I told her to go for an access course and after that she can; it's just that that person understood that she can be different.

SP1 She was on one life path?

SP2 Yes, she was completely programmed 'What will you do with that education?
855 How are you going to be a doctor?' That was what her father said, but she doesn't have to be a doctor; she can be whatever she wants to be.

SP1 In Syria, they would have gone for the arranged marriage; that would have been their path. Is that unlikely now due to the lack of suitors?

SP2 They're still a lot of arranged marriages coming from all the European countries.
860 They're still doing arranged marriage from cousins who are in Germany or somebody in
France or whatever. There was a bachelor coming in, who was 34 years old for an 18-
year-old girl and that was ridiculous....for her to see that she actually could have a
future. I said, I'm not telling you to go against your parents, I'm just telling you to stand
up for yourself because you're the future.' I then took the mother aside and said,
865 'Imagine your daughter being a nurse, imagine the income she's going to have. If she had
a husband who didn't treat her well, how can you deal with that? The main reward is
that those women can see an alternative outside of being a housewife and production of
life - having babies. If you choose to be a housewife and have babies that is your choice,
but I want you to know that there are other things out there for you, and if you decide to
870 go to college, there is a lot of support. Your parents can't pressure you because you are a
child, and the state will protect you and after 18 you're an adult. All of those things
these women and those little ladies don't know, they need a little bit of empowerment
and a little bit of education in terms of the rules and regulations in the country, the
cultural things. They think if girls want to drink on a night out, that is horrible and they
875 are bad ladies and they have all these labels...and I said no, come here- what those
ladies did was nothing wrong...a man drinks, a woman drinks - it is their choice. You see
them in offices, and you respect them...would you disrespect a teacher if you know that
she's drinks? Do you disrespect her because she goes to a nightclub? No, she's regarded
as a high grade because she has knowledge and is passing it on to the students. Would
880 you disrespect your doctor because he drinks? No ...it's the same thing, so you just have
to give them the balance. I lived here for long enough and it took me approximately
three years to understand the culture and the right balance, but those ones are just
thrown in there in the schools.

SP1 Do you think the parents are afraid, particularly of their daughters, getting a
885 further education?

SP2 Yes, absolutely because the girls are looked at as girls who get married and have
babies and then their job is done. But if my daughter goes to college and gets a high
degree to have a stronger voice, she might not get married, and the father thinks 'my job
is never done.' He feels like he's always going to be the protector when she is not
890 married until another man takes over.

SP1 That is fantastic; we'll wrap it up there. Thank you so much

Appendix 20: Aoibheann Interview

SP1: Interviewer **SP2 (Direct Provision Staff member: EROC)**

SP1 Can you tell me a little bit about your job and what your post is?

5 SP2 I'm going to tell you about three jobs. A few years ago, I was working with the
ETB teaching art in an organisation called Spirasi. Spirasi is a centre for people who
have suffered torture. It's run by the Spirit of Ireland who are a religious collection of
priests and they run it in Dublin. They do amazing work. Besides teaching art there two
years ago, that's where I think I would have first started working directly with people
10 who have been seeking asylum in Ireland as an art teacher. I worked in other places as
well as an adult educator. I really enjoyed working with the people I met there. As my
life moved on, I decided I wanted to keep working with asylum seekers teaching English
as a second language. I worked on the Syrian Resettlement Project there for a few years
and really loved working with the Syrians. I continued teaching English in various
15 places working with mixed classes, including immigrants from Eastern Europe.
Refugees, asylum seekers, all sorts of people who need to upskill in English. Later I was
approached by Mosney management. There have a community room there. The
Community Room coordinator with retiring so I took over.

20 SP1 What do you mean a community room... is it like a space where they can come
together?

SP2 Yes, a Community Room was established with an open-ended remit in operation
for about 9 months before Covid hit. It was really wide open in a way, but it was there to
respond to the community. The job title I was given was Community Amenities
Coordinator. I'd only been doing it for about a month before lockdown. I didn't get a
25 year in before Covid happened. I've been working in this strange situation where I have
a room, but I have had to close it since last March.

SP1 To clarify, you started it a month before lockdown?

30 SP2 Probably about nine months and then lockdown. I decided to accept the offer and
in 2019 I started working there. The job is really mine to create around what I could,
there's so much you could do. There's a lot of people there with a lot of different needs.
I've been heavily focused on education, and I did a lot of social stuff, but I was finding
my feet for the first time. That's kind of just a description of the eight or nine years of
my work for working with people that have come through the asylum process in some
way.

35 SP1 Most of your work is with immigrants and a lot of it is specifically with refugees?

SP2 Now, specifically with refugees and asylum seekers since I've taken up this post.

SP1 Before I get into the nitty gritty, do you like your job?

SP2 Parts of it I really like. I want to help people. I'm not sure if I can do much good at
the moment. It's such a frustrating time.

- 40 SP1 First of all, you're working as a teacher?
- SP2 No, I run a community room. While I have a lot of education of my remit, what I would do is far more informal and on the edges. The format is informal education, socialisation and filling in the gaps.
- SP1 How many refugees are there in Mosney now?
- 45 SP2 I don't know exactly; maybe like 300 refugees and 500 Asylum seekers.
- SP1 Just for the purposes of this, I'll put them all under the one umbrella, although obviously I recognise the nuances.
- SP2 There's a big difference for people and I'll explain that later as we go, but it is important. So, the LMETB (Louth & Meath Educational Training Board) has partnered
- 50 with Mosney, and they have seven classes there. They run the whole adult education literacy service centre in Mosney which I was involved with. The LMETB has two different funding strands. The funding from Europe can only be used for the Syrians so you can't mix the nationalities in the classrooms. We would have a load of people at the same level, but the funding structures dictate that it's for Syrians only. If it's not
- 55 attributed to Syrians, it's gone. They all speak Arabic to each other...it would be better if they were mixed. Then they have another strand, which is just their general fund for adult education and adult literacy, under which they would teach everyone else who isn't on that resettlement programme. I think of Syrian retirement funding streams is related to the EU, but European money is specifically for the Syrian programme. It's
- 60 people who've been brought in and immediately granted refugee status because of the Syrian war.
- SP1 So that's a fund from the Syrian Resettlement Programme .
- SP2 It's part it's connected with that. They provide funds to run English language programmes, but they're low level, like absolute beginners who have just arrived in
- 65 Ireland and don't even know the alphabet.
- SP1 Are the kids in Mosney going to local mainstream stores?
- SP2 Yes
- SP1 Are they coming in with any English?
- SP2 They vary from completely fluent, to absolutely illiterate in their own language.
- 70 They come in with widely varying levels of English. Many children have never been to school before coming to Ireland. They have no concept of how to hold a pencil at 8/9 years old.
- SP1 Would that reflect their socio-economic background? For example, one family who came to Donegal, the kids are completely fluent in English. The father is working.
- 75 They're very advanced; they haven't just become like that, because they've come to Ireland, they obviously have skills that have enabled them to fend for themselves.
- SP2 There's a huge variety coming into Ireland. They come with varying socio-economic backgrounds. They're refugees but they don't have much else in common,

80 except that they are very resilient. There are people who are really highly educated and value education and there are people who have literacy problems in their own language. Anecdotally, there would have been lots of child labour. In places where you might have young teenage boys doing something to try and earn a penny, so you could have those range of backgrounds. There will be also quite varied. There are children starting at age 8, who's never been to school in Syria. They may have come from a camp for seven or
85 eight years and they're only starting when they get to Ireland. You would have socio-economic divisions among refugees coming in, so that they may not like to associate with each other, feel certain families don't reflect their social status. They try to distance themselves; just because they were thrown together in this situation doesn't mean they necessarily gel together.

90 SP1 Several people I've interviewed have equated it the Catholic Protestant situation in Northern Ireland: putting Kurds, Shia and Sunni Muslims all in together.

SP2 There were a lot of Kurds when I started working. The tension was really, really evident.

SP1 How would that present itself?

95 SP2 You're teaching them English class, so you'll be pairing people off in a practical level for teaching English to adults. They really resented the pair work. You couldn't pair certain people together because it just wouldn't work.

SP1 As it is in Donegal, would they know by somebody's surname (what sect they're from).

100 SP2 The Suni and Shia. The Yazidi tribe, there was a lot of resentment there by everybody. More than that you've people with physical disabilities who are marginalised by their society here. Single Muslim women are marginalised. There's a lot of kind of 1950s feeling around anybody a bit different. You could see that in the class because you're treating everyone as equal in a class and trying to gain rapport, but once
105 somebody's not in the class, everyone starts telling me all the stuff about them. I remember one Muslim woman, she'd left her husband, and she was very independent. She had a strong energy and was very driven. I heard from another teacher that her husband used to keep her locked up. She had two daughters, and she actually traded her freedom for another woman, or something really dark. Made it to Ireland. She was
110 amazing but was a single divorcee. When she wasn't in the class, they would be talking about her negatively. You treat them as a homogeneous group and then you start realising they're very different groups of people. The financial background would be a huge thing. People have different socio-economic backgrounds. Then you have the women are so reserved when the men are around, they're so closed. They open up so
115 much when they're not there, so much fun and freedom. We had married couples come into English classes. The women would be much better than the men at times, and they just couldn't show us. If their partner was weaker than them at English, they wouldn't speak; they would never show the partner up and a lot of time. Actually, not just the Syrians. Most couples, they are in the same class together when the man is weaker than

120 the woman. When you're talking to her on your own and you realise, she knows everything.

SP1 Can you comment on cultural differences?

SP2 I'd really work hard to get a good rapport with everybody, and then I bring in a translator. Translators would come in and explain the system; the County Council,
125 Brexit, the history of Ireland, Leo Varadkar (Taoiseach) being gay, social norms, unmarried mothers being acceptable etc. I always made a point to talk about my family because I'm not married, I co-habit with my two kids. I would always make sure I had very good rapport with people before they could start undermining or challenging values in that way. I would say, I'm not a Catholic, I was born Catholic, but I left the
130 church, so they might think 'she's human.' There was not always a chance to actually engage with people about language, values and stuff because you're trying to keep boundaries.

SP1 So why are some people getting refugee status and others not getting it?

SP2 The asylum seekers are in the process of applying but the Irish government
135 made a pledge with Europe to take on part of the burden sharing by taking 4000 refugees. They went over and they processed the application in Greece. The last cohort come in from Lebanon.

They assume just because you're ended up in a refugee camp in Greece, it kind of is the proof, you don't have to go through the process. So, they process everyone in those
140 camps, and they bring them over as refugees and get them started. There are people there who will never get the status because they don't have the background to get them through.

SP1 Can you comment on the education?

SP2 I've done a lot of adult education. My gripe would be that it's very tough for
145 people who, if you're at the very bottom, and you need to learn your alphabet, you're off especially you need to learn good and bad, they have the right facilities, but once people are a bit better than that, and they have higher needs, they find it's much tougher to get easy access to higher level education for adults.

SP1 My research specifically is to look at the provision of education for Syrian
150 refugees. I'm focusing specifically on Donegal which has never hosted refugees before. Of course, there have been immigrants during the boom and Celtic Tiger but that's a totally different ballgame. In our schools now our teachers have, for the first time, refugees, which is very different to immigrants. While they have the same language challenges that maybe somebody from South Africa or Poland have, but what I'm
155 looking at specifically is what the government are doing for refugees now? Therefore, what I'm looking at is, where do they start? So, they start in Mosney? Ballaghadreen? What happens after that?

SP2 Okay so I can speak freely then with a frame. I've explained a lot about what I did
160 in my role as an English language teacher with LMETB about two or three years ago now. I was exclusively teaching Syrians under that funding from Europe, and the

downside of that was they couldn't mix with other nationalities in class, which as you know, is a great way to learn English if you are learning with others because there's different funding streams.

SP1 Why couldn't they?

165 SP2 This is important because it's a killer, but the funding for Europe has to be used for the Syrians and you can't mix with the Africans, Eritrea, Georgia etc. We would have a whole load of people who would be at the same level where they all need the same education but the funding structures state that the people who have Syrian Resettlement programme run by IPAS - that funding scheme is for Syrians only and if
170 it's not attributed for those people, it's gone, so you have resources that you can't use. All these people who speak the same language, Arabic, the same culture, sitting in the same class trying to learn English.

SP1 Do they have a better resource because they have more hours?

175 SP2 Yes, they have more hours, they have 12 hours a week – the adults. It's changed because of Coronavirus. They're probably getting 4 x 1.5 hours plus some work to do online. For the adults during March and April the teachers did their best with the online teaching, but everyone was reinventing the wheel. Now they're a bit more prepared and they're in class but the time is reduced. I'm not teaching there now but I think the classes are 1.5 hours.

180 SP1 Are they obliged to attend those classes?

SP2 No

SP1 Does it affect their payment from the government if they don't attend?

SP2 No

SP1 Do they take a roll call?

185 SP2 Yes, there's a register kept

SP1 But essentially, it's irrelevant?

SP2 It is relevant because it keeps the funding coming in from Europe

SP1 But let's say you have 100 Syrians and 50 of them attend the classes, do you have to present your roll and say only 50 attended; will Europe cut your funding?

190 SP2 We say how many are registered, otherwise they'll cut the funding

SP1 Are there any incentives? Does Mosney provide any incentives?

SP2 Learning English is the incentive. My experience is everyone comes motivated, then they start to get demotivated.

SP1 Why?

195 SP2 When they start, they are all high and they're all excited, then a low feeling sets in. There are other reasons. Women with babies – you can't take a baby to class so

there's a lot of stuff around women with 1-2-year-olds. The creche only takes children who are 3-4 years old.

SP1 But they're not taking the babies?

200 SP2 No

SP1 I don't know of anywhere in Ireland where childcare is free so they can attend.

SP2 It just looks harder in this situation, but every woman faces this, so they're not doing anything that's contrary to what they government does on a national level. One of the things I decided to do was to teach women with babies.

205 SP1 You're the first person in all my research who is doing this. The refugee programme is for one year, she couldn't attend the lessons.

210 SP2 She needs to look at Failte Isteach who are doing online lessons -they're really worthwhile. I swear this year is going to change all of this. The whole thing has been rewritten and I've started to have conversations with the tutors....if you're doing everything online, why can't women with new-borns attend these classes. I've started and it's a bit haphazard... but I've always targeted the people with the lowest level of English.

215 SP2 I had certain rules; I couldn't take women whose babies were crawling. I always said your baby has to be smaller. I'd be very cautious about who I took in. I'm not discriminating but it was more a social thing for these women as much as anything else. I was offering that and then I got locked down.

SP1 Have you a free enough reign in your job to say, 'I have an idea...can I run with it?'

220 SP2 When I started working, I had two young Syrian boys aged 7 and 8. They were brothers; beautiful, sweet children but wild - they would drink out of puddles. They had to start school that September. I was taking them for half an hour every day to introduce them to the system, then there were a few teenagers who had missed school and were due to start secondary school; they're the ones who need most support. What I did was approach Dublin ETB who have a service for unaccompanied minors. They had tried before to get a bus to take kids into Dublin to learn English. I was trying to give them 2 hours every day but couldn't keep it up as I had too much other stuff on my remit. They agreed to send an English tutor to Mosney for a cohort of 10-12 kids. These were teenagers. She was doing a summer programme of English language in preparation for secondary school. One of them went to Donegal. Then in September, all of them started school, so I was working with women with babies who weren't allowed attend the classes. I'm strict about who I take in as dads look after the toddlers. Then last Christmas, 30 Syrian teenagers came in, about 250/300 Syrians came with 30 teenagers in that group. I took them all in one cohort and taught them 2 hours each day; they all got placed in schools one by one except for six of them.

235 SP1 Why - what happened the remaining six?

SP2 There was no room, the schools were full. The pressure it puts on local secondary schools to have that amount of people come in is enormous. One girl was accepted into a school, but she wasn't allowed to wear her hijab, so her father refused to let her go, but other kids go in and don't wear their hijab.

240 SP1 I'm surprised that the school wouldn't let her wear it.

SP2 It's just the school uniform policy, it's a convent school. Mosney maintain a really good relationship with the local schools. There's a lot of pressure that Mosney puts on the local school. The co-ordinator is brilliant and works hard to maintain the relationship; it's really important.

245 SP1 So when in Rome....

SP2 It's not like... 'Take these 10 kids and please change your uniform policy...' - No, they're not going to do that. They're just really grateful they're taking them because it's a huge pressure. There's huge pressure on the commuter belts of Dublin, so if they feel those in Mosney are giving us a hard time, the school might change over time. Most of
250 the girls just go in and don't wear their hijab.

SP1 It's strange that here in Donegal where it's much more homogenous, some of the students asked for a place to pray and the nuns granted a place for them to pray, an annex off the chapel, but they refused to go there because there was too much Christian iconology which is controversial.

255 SP2 It's very hard; it's difficult for those who have no experience to get it right.

SP1 What kind of resources and training do you and the staff in Mosney get in terms of trauma, diversity etc.?

SP2 I got diversity training, but it seems more for the staff who were diverse. It seemed to be more for the security guys who would need to be culturally sensitive. I
260 didn't feel it was relevant to me even though it is always helpful, how to deescalate confrontation. We have a medical centre so if I feel anyone is traumatised or in need, I will link in with them, but there's very little structure here.

SP1 Do you think in you and all the different staff here are sufficiently trained?

SP2 Yes, I do - there have been instances - first of all in Mosney people aren't
265 refugees, they're people. I think the cultural exposure is important. In the cases of trauma, I know one of the schools have two little boys. One kept running out of school; he was a flight risk, most likely separation anxiety. He needed a social worker, translator, and teacher. They all had a zoom and decided to bring him in just for one hour, I worked with him for half an hour a day, so I think there was a good structure.
270 Mosney is pretty experienced at this stage. I think the medical centre onsite is pretty good at dealing with psychotic trauma. Also, Spirazi (for torture) and loads of other organisations who come into the centre to work with residents, SVDP for housing etc.

SP1 How long are people there on average?

SP2 The refugees could be in for a few weeks, others stay for 2-3 years.

275 SP1 Why is that?

SP2 Because of complications with mobility, disability, size of families and housing shortages.

SP1 Are there many with disabilities? Are those disabilities related to the war?

280 SP2 No – a few polio sufferers, blindness...they're not delayed because of the war. Also, the size of families is a factor. Big families might end up somewhere like Donegal because there is space. Also, there might be a complex family need and they need to be near a hospital etc. Others I don't know why they need to be there for so long

SP1 Are the majority there for more than 12 weeks?

SP2 More like 6 months

285 SP1 Do you need a lot of translators?

SP2 We have one.

SP1 One for how many?

SP2 300, but not everyone needs one. She works very closely with the medical centre. After Covid 19, I stopped working with people face to face. Now I'm working more on getting people digital access. There was a homework club in Mosney run by volunteer women 4 days a week for two hours after school. That was running for 20 years with 80 children a week.

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SP1 I assume that wasn't just refugees if it's going 20 years?

SP2 That's for everyone. There's no discrimination between anyone with regards to the refugees except that funding stream for adults, mentioned earlier. That shut down with Covid 19, so I started getting in touch with schools and printing out stuff for kids who maybe only had a phone at home so I'd see if mum needed a hand and print out their work and take it to their house during the really harsh Lockdown – whatever the teacher had set for them this week so they wouldn't have to do it on the phone. Another thing, there was a cohort of about 6 x 17-year-olds who came to Ireland in 2019 who didn't get a school placement because they were 17 when they arrived at Christmas, and they turned 18 and were aged out of the system before they were ever placed in education because all the Leaving Cert classes were full, plus they had very little English, so they simply missed out.

300

305 I worked mainly with those 17-year-olds. Their education is the hardest. They are on the pinnacle of failure, it's so hard. I had three due to start YouthReach and the day they were due to begin YouthReach, two of them were sent off to live in different counties. I had a 16-year-old who didn't get placed for a year. Now he's in 5th year but only has basic English because of Lockdown. Through different sources, I've obtained 30 laptops on loan, but they have to give it back. That's tough for Syrians but they'll definitely have to move. I set up a study group in a huge hall for that cohort. I've got Wi-Fi in there, working on digital access. For primary school we're working on getting laptops for

310

them, but that's the place now where the biggest deficit is and what we need is for the government to fund Wi-Fi

315 SP1 Wi-Fi into Mosney or into the houses?

Mosney. It's never unattended; there's always a Monsey staff member attending. It has to be turned off at certain times. There are all sorts of crazy stuff/ heavy usage going on, so they have to turn it off, but for my cohort they can come down three days a week and have the Wi-Fi and use their laptops. The government probably needs to do this all over
320 the country.

SP1 To be specific – what would you say the government is getting right and what do they need to step up on?

SP2 They need to put broadband in all the centres. In Mosney, it's isolated; the setup is good, but they're isolated. For education, I believe that having broadband in the
325 houses would hugely benefit people.

SP1 During Lockdown what did the kids in Mosney do for broadband?

SP2 I was emailing and printing things for people who couldn't get their stuff. Phones were used a lot. Some people work and got their own modem/ Wi-Fi, but they may not have laptops. We did have a computer room which we kept open during the strictest of
330 Lockdowns, which was open 4-5 hours a day (30 hours a week) so people could come in and print out important documents. That's what I think needs to be done. In terms of education, I think the government is getting primary school right. I get the feeling primary school is pretty good for the kids, secondary school not so much. I feel for anyone between 16 and 18 years; it's really tough.

335 SP1 In what way -because of the language?

SP2 Because they have very little time. It's like carting someone off to China and expecting them to sit a state exam in 9 months in that language. I think YouthReach is a great avenue for people but the language barrier for those people... they have a very short timeframe to do an awful lot. For young people that is an impossible task for them
340 to actually do that. Another thing I think is that the government should include Arabic as a modern European language in universities because they could fly through an Arabic Leaving Cert exam but I'm not sure the university could accept it.

SP1 Okay we'll leave it there -thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Appendix 21: Interview with Sinead

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Volunteer / Befriender)**

SP1 How do you think the government could assist the refugees in your community?

5 SP2 I think the government could set up some kind of conversation groups.

SP1 You're a befriender so everything that you do is voluntary?

SP2 Yes, and our conversation group is obviously voluntary.

SP1 How often do you do that?

10 SP2 Obviously with Lockdown (we stopped) but it was always on a Friday morning
from 9:30-11:30am and we have people there from Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland and
three from Spain. We have different people at different levels. In the group, we've got
about seven volunteers involved, so what happens is sometimes a volunteer can do one-
to-one and then they would move around. It's in the canteen at the school. We meet and
they might have 10-15 minutes with me, and then they might move over to someone
15 else and have 10-15 minutes with them. Each of the different volunteers have got
different things that they do. It's good

SP1 That's great.

20 SP2 Asmaas' English is really coming along; both their English is amazing, but Fatima
has been coming really regularly and you can see the difference, plus she's befriended
us. It's a kind of befriending thing as well.

SP1 What else has Inishowen done off their own initiative to help welcome the
refugees?

25 SP2 First there was an Eid thing that Sarah organised, then there was the Middle
Eastern Festival with all different things. She also organized a little thing just before
Lockdown in a cafe and it was just music and poetry and stuff like that.

SP1 Arabic music?

SP2 Well, it was just anything, you know accepting everything. These ones were
there, and Farooq was telling us about and showing slides of the of the beehives in
Syria...the beehives he makes with Feras.

30 SP1 Who is Abdul?

SP2 Abdul is from another Syrian family, and he has two children.

SP1 You make beehives in the men's shed?

35 SP2 Yes, here in Carndonagh, we have a very good community, and you can you make
you can make everything easily in the Men's Shed. It is a great opportunity for men to
use their skills, get out of the house, mix with the locals and practice a bit of
English. First find the tools that you want....

SP1 (to Farooq) So you work in the Men's Shed as well?

SP2 Sometimes yes, but now I'm working in Malin, in Carndonagh but I also make beehives in the Men's Shed. There's a Men's Shed here, and it has all the tools that you use in carpentry. It has everything you need.

SP1 Same as the one in Letterkenny? There's a Men's Shed in Letterkenny as well.

SP2 Yes, and there used to be one in Buncrana. He can go there anytime, and nobody will ask you 'What are you doing here?' For six months he is making upholstery for hotels in Dublin.

Appendix 22: Interview with Hamid

SP1: Interviewer SP2 (Male Secondary School Refugee)

SP1 Tell me what you have been up to since finishing school.

5 SP2 I applied for Irish I'd like to join it. They sent me email and said when registration is open, they will call me. I don't if I can now because in the Irish Army, I need very good English.

SP1 Your English is very good though. When did you start learning?

SP2 15 months ago

10 SP2 Also, I am a barber. I will work in the summer. I have to go to Dublin or around there, because the work here, it's not same as around Dublin.

SP1 That's great. Where are you from in Syria?

SP2 I'm from Damascus.

SP1 How many is in your family?

15 SP2 I have two sisters, but not here. One is in Syria and one in Lebanon. I am with my brother with my parents here.

SP1 How old is your brother?

SP2 He's 13.

SP1 So, he's at school as well.

20 SP2 Yeah.

SP1 What age are you?

SP2 I'm 19

SP1 When did you leave Syria?

SP2 In 2012

25 SP1 After the war started?

SP2 Yes. After.

SP1 When you were there, did you go through like the regular primary school, or did you get to secondary school?

30 SP2 Yes, I got to school, but just to learn. They didn't give me a certificate...just learning.

SP1 What age were you when you left Syria?

SP2 Not sure, about 10 or 11.

- SP1 So, you were in primary school?
- SP2 Yes.
- 35 SP1 Where did you go from there? Did you go directly from Syria to Ireland, or did you go to Lebanon or Turkey?
- SP2 No, I lived in Lebanon for seven years, then from Lebanon to here.
- SP1 How did you get from Lebanon to Ireland? Did the Irish government take you or did you come across in the boat?
- 40 SP2 The Irish government - UNICEF
- SP1 When you arrive at when you were in Lebanon, did you go to school there?
- SP2 Yes, I have a cert. In Syria we have we have a cert like the Leaving Cert, and before Leaving Cert I did fifth year when I got here. I got 250 (points) and I have a Cert now.
- 45 SP1 So, the education was like a normal system in Lebanon?
- SP2 Yes.
- SP1 When UNICEF took you to Ireland, did you come to Dublin or where did you go?
- SP2 I went to Roscommon, to Ballaghaderreen.
- SP1 How long were you there for?
- 50 SP2 Just three months.
- SP1 How was that?
- SP2 Good. Very good. When I arrived to Donegal, things started to look down, and I didn't go with Irish community.
- SP1 In Ballaghaderreen or in Donegal?
- 55 SP2 In Donegal. In Ballaghaderreen I was in the Syrian community because a lot of the families are Syrian.
- SP1 Did you live in a house or Direct Provision? Where did you live?
- SP2 It was like a small hotel with only room for me and my brother and mother.
- SP1 Were the conditions good or bad? How was it?
- 60 SP2 It's not too bad....not very big.
- SP1 When you were there for three months, did you have any kind of schooling or education?
- SP2 I went to school only for 3 weeks.
- SP1 What kind of schooling was thatjust people your age or bigger classes?

- 65 SP2 No, it's from 15 to 18 years, I think.
- SP1 Did you do all the subjects or were they just concentrating on English?
- SP2 When I went to school there, it was just for learning English, but when I arrived to Donegal, I did all the seven subjects like English, Construction, DCG, Music....
- SP1 Are you a musician?
- 70 SP2 I like it, but I am not.
- SP1 Do you have to sing or play an instrument?
- SP2 No. No.
- SP1 What's the school that you're in?
- SP2 Abbey Vocational School.
- 75 SP1 What's the good bits and what's the bad bits about the Irish education system?
- SP2 It's not too bad, but when I arrived to school, everything was different to things in Syria, everything. I don't know what is H1, H2 H3 and I don't know what is higher level and ordinary level but I learned slowly.
- 80 SP1 How did you find the teachers and you can speak honestly, because it's good for me to know kind of what it's really like?
- SP2 Everyone in the school is very, very good. It's only me from Syria in the school and everyone likes me, and I like them.
- SP1 What about the pupils?
- 85 SP2 I joined with some people in the school. I was sitting in the chair lonely, and one guy, he came to me to say, 'Can you join my team?' I told him Yes. Every day at lunchtime and break time and I go with them.
- SP1 Do you have good friends now?
- SP2 Yes
- SP1 Do you have friends that you can hang out with after school?
- 90 SP2 Only in the school, I have no friends outside.
- SP1 Is that because of COVID or just that's the way it is?
- SP2 I really don't know.
- SP1 Who do you hang out with otherwise? Are there other Syrians in the community?
- SP2 No, I have friends from Syria, but not in Donegal.... Co. Cavan, Co. Meath.
- 95 SP1 When did you come to Donegal Town?
- SP2 December 2019.

- SP1 That was just before the pandemic, so it must be difficult for you to make friends. Did you feel that you were made welcome here or did you have other Syrians to hang out with?
- 100 SP2 In Donegal Town, there are only 4 families from Syria.
- SP1 Are they your age?
- SP2 No, only me and my brother and from another family a boy who is very, very young. I really have plans for the future to change my house because it's very boring.
- 105 SP1 The people in school, you don't hang out with them afterwards, or play football or go to a party or something?
- SP2 No, just one time in July last year, I went to a birthday party for someone; I enjoyed it there.
- SP1 You said that's it's so different here to Syria in school, what do you find different about it? In Syria, if you were doing similar to the Leaving Cert, would you be doing
110 seven subjects or what exam would you do?
- SP2 I did 13 subjects. It's very different in Syria. Here, it's easy, but because my language it's not very good, it is difficult, but if I if I was speaking English well, it would be very easy.
- SP1 I take it you don't have to do Irish?
- 115 SP2 No, no.
- SP1 When you are in school, what happens when they're doing religion classes? Do you go to them? Are you allowed to go somewhere else? Are you allowed to pray.... do they have Halal food? Does the school accommodate you?
- SP2 In school I don't eat anything.
- 120 SP1 The food's so different.
- SP2 I guess but good. Everything is different.
- SP1 Do you have to go to the religion class? Most of the schools here are Christian, do you sit in those classes?
- SP2 No.
- 125 SP1 Do they give you a place to go or study?
- SP2 Just study
- SP1 During Ramadan, if you wanted to are you allowed to go and pray 5 times a day while you're in school? Are you allowed to practice the Islamic religion?
- SP2 No, I don't pray.
- 130 SP1 When you came to the school, you came in fifth year, so you only have 1.5 years to do the Leaving Certificate?

- SP2 In the fifth year, I just went to school for two months, because I arrived to Donegal in December and the Lockdown started in February.
- 135 SP1 How did you manage; did you get a lot of support, or did you have to try and study on your own? Did the school provide any extra support for you?
- SP2 Yes. I have four classes per week for English and I have some mentor just for learning English.
- SP1 So, the school helped you all through Lockdown with your study, did a teacher help you?
- 140 SP2 They helped me, but just in the school.
- SP1 When the school was in Lockdown because you because you are learning English, did the teacher give you extra support?
- SP2 No, nothing.
- SP1 Nothing extra?
- 145 SP2 Nothing.
- SP1 So, you had to do all these subjects on your own without extra help with the English... to help you with the subjects? You got nothing extra?
- SP2 I got nothing, no extra support during Lockdown.
- SP1 How did you manage?
- 150 SP2 I only had support for four English classes anyway, like anyone else.
- SP1 Did you find all the other subjects difficult because of the language?
- SP2 Every subject is difficult - like Mathematics. It's not very difficult because I don't need the language as much, but music is too hard.....computers science, too hard just because I don't speak English very well.
- 155 SP1 They didn't give you a tutor or somebody to help you?
- SP2 Nothing.
- SP1 Do you think this has affected your learning? Do you think this has been difficult for your learning because of the pandemic?
- SP2 Yes, but I am now looking for a job.
- 160 SP1 What job would you like to do?
- SP2 Any job, anything just to get some money.
- SP1 Are you doing the Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert applied now in June?
- SP2 Predicted grades **
- SP1 What are you hoping to get like from the Leaving Cert?

- 165 SP2 After Leaving Cert, I really don't know because I don't know how many points will be in my score. I want to ask you if I get 400 points in my Leaving Cert., what university course can I do? Can you just give me an example?
- SP1 You can do three things; first level is certificate, next level diploma, next level degree. I think there's a lot of courses you can do with 400 points. Is there some area
- 170 that you're interested in for work... law, engineering, mechanics, cars?
- SP2 I can do it in January.
- SP1 You want to do it in January?
- SP2 I like but I don't think I can because my points will be too low.
- SP1 If you if your points are still low, you can go in at a lower course and get credit, do you understand? If you do a diploma, then you can go to a degree. If you start at
- 175 university, you can start on a course with lower points. From the universities and the colleges, you can get a prospectus. This is like a book which they will send it to you for free, and it tells you the names of all the courses they have. What's your dream? What's your ambition?
- 180 SP2 I'd like to do engineering but if I don't get engineering, I have to go to the Irish Army or be a barber. I don't know what I have to do because I don't know what my points outcome will be.
- SP1 Even if you don't get into engineering, you might be able to do an introduction course, a lower course, which then helps you to get into the higher course in third level.
- 185 SP2 Yes, I understand what you mean.
- SP1 Let me speak with my friend in the LYIT to get an idea of points. Do you want to go to Letterkenny, or do you want to move down the country?
- SP2 I don't know. I am really don't like Donegal because it is very quiet.
- SP1 I understand.
- 190 SP2 I'd like to go to Dublin because there, the life is very good. Here the life is too quiet.
- SP1 Donegal is very beautiful and it's a great place for holidays, but if you're young, and you don't know lots of people here, it's difficult. Also, because you came in the pandemic, you haven't seen Donegal at its best. Is there anything that I can help you
- 195 with for your language or I'm wondering how I can help you as you are studying for the Leaving Cert?
- SP2 Not too much, because won't do exams? (Leaving Cert)
- SP1 Of course, because of the predictive grades. Okay.
- SP2 No, I just want to learn English, to get better at English.
- 200 SP1 Good idea. Do you have any programmes online? You can get free ones online.

SP2 No.

SP1 Duolingo. I think that programme is free.

SP2 Yes, I know Duolingo, but I go to groups on Facebook to learn English.

205 SP1 That's the best way. It's best to be speaking to people. That's the best way to learn.

SP2 But here in Ireland the accents wow.

SP1 Especially in Donegal, they have a very strong accent.

SP2 Actually, when I arrived to Donegal and I went to school, if someone came to just say 'Hello, how are you?', I didn't understand what they said.

210 SP1 It's difficult. Have you taken up anything to do with the Irish culture like Gaelic football or music or anything like that?

SP2 I went to train for football but now it's over.

SP1 It's such a bad time. (Lockdown)

SP2 Now, I have an appointment for my full driving licence next week.

215 SP1 Oh, fantastic.

SP2 If I get a licence, it'll be very good for me to move around.

SP1 I always said the best exam I ever passed was my driving licence because it gives you so much freedom.

SP2 Yes of course

220 SP1 Is there anything you think the school or like the government could do better for the Syrian refugees? Your experience since you've come to Ireland, what can the school or the government do to make it better for Syrians coming here? How can they make it better for you? How can they make it your life easier?

225 SP2 Life here is too easy because they give you money for living and you can start with any job, and you can open any work. No problem. You can do anything but the difference between Ireland and Syria is freedom. Here there no problem. Here there is no killing. The life it's very, very nice compared to Syria. You can do anything without problems.

SP1 If the war finishes, would you or your family like to go back to Syria?

230 SP2 No, never. No. No, we have to bring my sisters here.

SP1 Why did they not come with you?

SP2 Because they can't because when we came to Ireland, UNICEF gave money for a board, for the visa and for everything. We didn't have to give any money, but my sisters they can't because first one she needs money to get to bring here. They can't get the

235 visa.

SP1 How old is how old are your sisters?

SP2 One is 25 and one is 23.

SP1 Are they married?

SP2 Yes.

240 SP1 Okay, so they can't come under your parents. They come under their husband's name. Do they have children?

SP2 First one has one daughter and last one, they have two daughters.

SP1 So, you have no idea when you'll see them again?

SP2 No.

245 SP1 When you lived in Lebanon, did you see them?

SP2 Yes. I have to get my nationality, then I have to go to Egypt maybe and bring them there.

SP1 To visit them - I understand. Are you waiting to get Irish citizenship?

SP2 Yes, I'll wait.

250 SP1 And your parents, do they have work here? Are they able to get any work?

SP2 No, nothing.

SP1 Did they work in Syria or in Lebanon?

SP2 He (father) was working there...driving. I don't know if in the future he can apply for any job for driving. I have an idea for when I get my nationality - I think I can bring my sister here on my visa for three months.

255 SP1 That would be amazing.

SP2 Yes, if I bring her, it would be very good.

SP1 One in Lebanon and one in Syria. The one in Lebanon, can she come now even for visit?

260 SP2 If someone has nationality and has work, yes. I can bring her, but first I will look into nationality and then look for a job.

SP1 How long do you think it will take to become an Irish national?

SP2 I think after 3 years, I have to apply for nationality. If you don't have any problem in Ireland was Garda or anyone, it's good but if we had any problem with any one in Ireland, it's a very big problem.

265 SP1 Apart from the English, how do you find the culture here? Obviously, the weather is very different, how do you find the way people act, the way people are here? Is different to Syria?

SP2 Yeah, everything is different.

270 SP1 Is the school mixed boys and girls?

SP2 Yes.

SP1 You don't have this in Syria?

SP2 No, no.

SP1 Do you think that's a good thing or a bad thing?

275 SP2 It's a good thing – what is the difference between girls and boys

SP1 I'm trying to think if there's something I can help you with. Do you want me to look into points for courses - what can I do to help you?

SP2 If you can just find out if I score 400 points, what options do I have for university? If I don't get the points and have to go to the PLC next year, I can't get the

280 Suzi Grant because you have to be three years in Ireland.

SP1 So, you have to pay for it?

SP2 Yeah.

SP1 So next year, you want to go maybe to the PLC (Post Leaving Cert) in Stranorlar, but you don't think you can get a grant- is that correct?

285 SP2 Yeah, I won't because I'm not here for three years, but someone said when you do a course, they give you e200 per week. Someone else said it's just e37 per week and if it's e37 per week, I can't do registration in PLC because I need money to move from here to Ballybofey every day.

SP1 What course do you want to do in the PLC?

290 SP2 Sport

SP1 And you do that in Ballybofey?

SP2 Yes

SP1 Is that through the ETB?

SP2 I am not sure.

295 SP1 Do you know how many points you need for that course?

SP2 Not that course, but for the university course.

SP1 I will find out for you. Still if you don't get into university you would like to go to the PLC in Ballybofey, although you're still not sure about the grant.

SP2 Yes, or the Irish Army – there are 3 tests; I have a fitness test and medical test

300 and interview. I am very nervous about the interview. They will ask me everything about my life and why I want to join the Irish Army. If I get an interview, it's very good

for me. After the interview, I would train for 6 months. After 6 months I will be in the Irish Army.

SP1 And you will get paid as well?

305 SP2 Yes.

SP1 If you get through to the interview stage, I can help you with the interview questions. In the meantime, I'll find out about the courses. Is there a liaison officer to help with the refugees?

SP2 We did have someone to help us, but now it's finished.

310 SP1 Is that because of Covid or because you've only been here for a year?

SP2 So, after one year, you don't get help with these things?

SP1 No. How is your brother doing in school – is he in your school as well?

SP2 Next year he will be, now he is in primary school.

SP1 And how does he find school, does he find it difficult?

315 SP2 No

SP1 Is he happy enough at school?

SP2 Yes

SP1 I guess because he is younger it's easier

SP2 Yes, he can speak English very well, and he can write

320 SP1 Your English is amazing – are there any English courses that you could do?

SP2 I have to look into English courses in the Summertime.

SP1 It was lovely to talk to you, thank you so much.

Appendix 23: Interview with Nadia

SP1: Interviewer **SP2: (Female Secondary School Refugee)**

- SP1 We'll just start off - How long have you been living in in Donegal?
- 5 SP2 Three years, in two months it will be three years.
- SP1 Three years. Okay. And do you like living here?
- SP2 Yeah, of course. I love it.
- SP1 Can I ask you what age you are first of all?
- SP2 I am 19.
- 10 SP1 So, you came here when you're around 16
- SP2 Yes, about that.
- SP1 Can you tell me a little bit about your journey from Syria to Donegal?
- SP2 When it started war, we lived in Lebanon. We lived in Lebanon for maybe three or eight years and then we came here from Lebanon.
- 15 SP1 So, you left Syria before the war started in 2011?
- SP2 Yeah 2011, at the beginning of the war.
- SP1 What age were you when you left Syria?
- SP2 I guess I was too small. I was eight or nine.
- SP1 Why did you move to Lebanon?
- 20 SP2 Because we ran away from the war because it was really dangerous for us. We used to be, the children, would get crazy and scared. So that's why – for our safety, we ran away.
- SP1 What part of Syria are you from?
- SP2 Idlib
- 25 SP1 So, you left when you were about eight, that's 11 years ago and then you went to Lebanon. How long did you spend there?
- SP2 I lived in Lebanon between eight and nine years.
- SP1 Did your parents go there to get work or were you living in refugee camps?
- SP2 My daddy, he already used to work before he got married. He was in the army and all his work was in Lebanon. Before the war started, my dad used to work in Lebanon, and he used to visit us every month in Syria. Sometimes when we missed him, we would go to Lebanon to see him, or he would come to us to Syria. That's what happened, but my dad used to have jobs in Lebanon in building and construction.
- 30

SP1 Did you go to school in Lebanon?

35 SP2 So, what happened was the people in the schools asked for our papers from our old schools to put us in their schools, but because Syria was at war, my school was destroyed so we didn't have any papers, so we didn't go. After maybe one year UNICEF people said that they would help to put us in school. So, we went to the school for the first time for 2 months, but the people used to bully us because I'm not from Lebanon,
40 I'm from Syria. My brother and my sister, because they were not used to be alone in school, so they left after me too.

SP1 And there's three children in your family?

SP2 Yeah, and we stayed in Lebanon for approximately eight years. We didn't study for seven or eight years. So, my mind now when I study...it's like I have nothing in my
45 mind. It's super hard to learn.

SP1 I can imagine that. What do your brother and sister do now?

SP2 My brother now is 17 and my sisters she's 13.

SP1 Are they at school in Letterkenny?

SP2 Yeah. My brother didn't study at all in Lebanon or in Syria. When we went from
50 Syria, he was studying in primary school, and maybe in 2nd, then he left the school, so he didn't study at all. That's why now that he's here, he has a really hard time, and he doesn't want to study, because he doesn't understand anything. For me, I learned English, because like I have some idea about Arabic. I know Arabic so I try to translate from English to Arabic, but he doesn't have even Arabic so it's hard. For my sister,
55 because she was small, we put her in a creche in Lebanon. She studied there so her English is better than us, and when we come here, she's studying again and she's so good.

SP1 What language did they use in the school in Lebanon?

SP2 They have languages like French, English, but they use Arabic. For my sister she
60 picked English and Arabic.

SP1 What year group are they in now?

SP2 Sorry?

SP1 What class are they in now in Letterkenny?

SP2 My brother is the secondary school. He's in 5th Year and my sister is in secondary
65 school too and she's in 1st year.

SP1 The school that you went to in Lebanon, was that a general school or was it a school for refugees?

SP2 Yeah, it was a general school, but the Lebanese would go in morning until maybe
70 four o'clock. Then we, the refugees would go from around 2 o'clock until seven o'clock. The refugees did not go with the Lebanese, but it was all in the same school.

- SP1 What are the benefits for you living in Donegal?
- SP2 It's a big benefit. It will save my future. Now I know what my future can be. I'm studying now and the important thing it is safe and that's enough for me.
- SP1 What are the challenges? What's difficult about living in Ireland?
- 75 SP2 It's really hard when you leave your country and your language, and you have to learn another language. You have to speak with people when I don't understand them, and they don't understand you. It's hard when you go out and you have no idea about here and you don't know where you are going. Socialising is not the same in your country so that's really been a bad benefit here.
- 80 SP1 Do you have friends here?
- SP2 Yes, but I don't have friends from Ireland. They are maybe Pakistani, Afghani, Spanish and Arabic.
- SP1 But not Irish friends. Do you think it's difficult to make friends with local people here?
- 85 SP2 Yeah, I tried. I tried at the school but maybe because I don't understand them really well or something like this. It was really hard, and they tried to be my friend. They tried to help me and speak with me, but when we didn't understand each other. They just don't care about speaking to me and when I sit with them, I just feel bored because they speak to each other and I don't understand, so it was hard to have friends here.
- 90 SP1 When you left Lebanon, how did you get to Ireland? How did you come to be in Donegal?
- SP2 Like by airport or something?
- SP1 Yes, was it the Irish government took you here or did you come across the Med?
- SP2 Yeah, they took us here.
- 95 SP1 Did you go straight to Donegal or were you put in Ballaghaderreen or Direct Provision or somewhere else?
- SP2 No, we didn't come here straight. We lived in a hotel. I don't really remember the name of the place there, but we lived in a hotel for a month until they fixed the houses, then they called us. After that they brought us here to Donegal.
- 100 SP1 Was your first place in Dublin?
- SP2 Well, we didn't live in Dublin. It was a place in a hotel, I guess.
- SP1 When you were there was there any schooling for you or your brother and sister?
- 105 SP2 It was schools for the language only. My sister was in school, but for me, I didn't go it wasn't like that school like we used to go to. I don't remember but they told me 'I don't have no days or something there', but when we came here, I came straight to school.

110 SP1 So, you didn't have any schooling when you came for the first month. Then you came to Donegal, and you were here for three years. What school did you go to first in Donegal?

SP2 Loreto School

SP1 What year did you go into?

SP2 I went into 5th, so I studied for 2 years.

SP1 Did you do the Leaving Certificate?

115 SP2 Yeah, I did it.

SP1 How did you find that?

SP2 It was super hard. I studied really hard. It wasn't fun because it was in Ramadan, and I was fasting, and my brain was not working because of no water or food. Nothing – It was really hard. Thanks God I passed.

120 SP1 You did?

SP2 Yeah, I worked really hard.

SP1 So, you did your Leaving Cert during Ramadan, that's amazing! What subjects did you do and how did you get on in the subjects?

SP2 I did Social, ETP and Maths, Art, English and Spanish is last year for maybe 2

125 months.

SP1 Is this the Leaving Cert or the Applied Leaving Cert?

SP2 I guess it's Applied Leaving Cert because the girls they said it was really super hard. Even the one that I did it was really super hard too.

SP1 Of course, that's amazing that you passed it. That's incredible. What was your

130 experience in school; how did you find the teachers?

SP2 The teachers there were so sweet. They used to love me so much because I was a really calm girl and they used to help me and push me a lot to learn. Sometimes I'd give up. I'd start to cry, and they just pushed me, and they would tell me 'We're here to help you', and it was amazing. I used to have a teacher and she was like my mother. When I

135 was sad, she would get really sad and she helped me so much, so yeah, I loved the teachers there. I love the school so much. Everyone is so kind there.

SP1 Being Muslim in a convent, how did you find that?

SP2 Thank God I didn't find any hard time because I'm Muslim. It's funny when I walked around in cities people just look me like they're shocked and, in the school

140 sometimes it happened with me, but I don't care really. I just walk and I'm confident, I know myself, I trust myself. I love myself the way I am, so I don't really care.

SP1 Fantastic - when you went to Loretto, I assume that you didn't have to do Irish, and you didn't have to do religion. Is that correct?

145 SP2 I went to religion class maybe once, but then I told them that I didn't want to do it because I am a Muslim. I tried to learn Irish but my English wasn't even beginner so I told them I will leave Irish, that's what happened.

SP1 What did you do instead? What did you do during the times when religion and Irish were going on?

SP2 I used to sit in the canteen, and just catch up with other study.

150 SP1 Okay

SP2 I know that Ramadan and prayer times are important. Were you given any accommodation for that? Were you able to observe that and pray when you wanted to?

SP2 Yes, I asked my teacher, and they had no problem at all. They told me you can break in at the church, but I prayed at my break.

155 SP1 Were you comfortable with it? Did you think that was a good compromise?

SP2 Yes, not bad because even I know if you go in the path? in Islam, Christian people come and pray in the mosque and Muslim people pray in the church. It's about the prophet and like this.

SP1 So, you're comfortable with that?

160 SP2 Yeah.

SP1 In the school, was there anything that you find difficult -was the food halal? Was there anything that they could have improved on?

SP2 The food was not halal; I just got vegetarian, or sometimes I got my food from my house, and I just bought chocolate; I didn't buy food from the canteen.

165 SP1 You didn't have much of a school experience in Lebanon, but what do you think of the school experience in Ireland?

170 SP2 It was amazing. I had really beautiful friends and beautiful teachers who always supported me. If I wasn't there and they hadn't supported me, I don't think I would be here now. I had really good experience in school. Sometimes, I cried so much because I didn't understand them. When I was at a class, I just worried so much at first, from beginning of the school. I would just go to the bathroom, and I would cry so much, but then after time, I got used to it, so I started to understand more.

175 SP1 That's an amazing achievement. I'm just wondering what your experiences of how the schools are set up for integration. Donegal is not a big city like Dublin. Most people are white. Most people are Christian, even if they don't practice religion - by identity they are. Do you feel the school accommodated you enough with this or do you feel there was racism or difficulties with integration?

SP2 Do you mean they didn't give me the rights because I'm not Irish or something?

180 SP1 Just from being a different race, for not being Irish - was it difficult? Did anybody make you feel bad for that?

SP2 Maybe some of the girls at the school, but the teachers, no. No one made me feel that I'm not welcome at school. For me, school was like my second home because they were very kind to me, but I used to have a really hard time with the girls.

SP1 With some of them, or all of them?

185 SP2 Not all of them. Some of them really kind and they tried to help me. They tried to speak with me, but some of them used to look at me from down to up like I'm not welcome here, and some of them asked me, 'Why are you here?', and I said because of the war. I don't want to live there because it's like it's a war, so it was really hard. Sometimes they asked me, SP1 'When will you go back to your country?' I'm like, 'I don't know when the war will finish'. They asked a lot of questions, like it was really
190 bothering you.

SP2 Do you feel they were asking that because they were interested or in a way that wasn't nice, like you don't belong here?

195 SP1 Some of them they asked to be interesting, but some of them, they really don't like me, and they really don't like me, I feel they don't want me with them. I tried my best to learn and when I passed the exams, one of them she looked at me and she told me 'How did you pass they exam – did you cheat?'

SP2 I'm like, 'No, I worked hard.' They just make you drop all your confidence drop down.

200 SP1 That's awful. You've been here for three years now. Are you settled in Ireland, or do you think you still want to go back to Syria?

205 SP2 I'm really happy in Ireland, but in Syria, if the war finished, I would love to go back and see my country and see my people. In Syria, it's beautiful when you hear people speaking your language and you can speak with them. Of course, I miss Syria because I was a child when I lived there. I miss my school. I miss my home, even if it's all down now and it's all destroyed, but I miss there. I miss going back.

SP1 Did you ever have to live in a refugee camp or Direct Provision on your journey from Syria to here?

SP2 No, thank God.

210 SP1 I know that particularly when the war was on it was difficult to trust people in authority because there were so many different factions and different groups fighting. Do you feel you can trust authority figures here, like teachers, the guards, social welfare - what do you think of people in authority now?

215 SP2 My teachers – I really trust them because they love me from the heart. If they don't love me, they don't need to show me that they love me, they can just annoy me and not like look after me. They used to be very kind, and I really trust them, and I say Hi to them with my sister because she's in the school now.

SP1 That's so nice.

SP2 I don't really know about society and things, so I can't comment on it.

- 220 SP1 Some of the refugees, particularly those who had to come across the Mediterranean on boats they felt quite traumatised when they came here. You had a much safer crossing because you came on a plane here from the government. Do you feel that you able to move quite quickly? Did you feel traumatised when you came here or did you just feel this was a safe haven, a safe place?
- 225 SP2 No, for me it was a really safe place, and felt like I'm going on a trip. I really feel so sorry for these people who had to come on the boat and the sea and a lot of them died and it was super hard. We know everything about the news and it's really sad about this people, but we can do nothing.
- 230 SP1 Can you tell me what's happened in terms of your education since you left the convent?
- SP2 Really, it's getting worse. I study English at house but before, it was really getting worse because I'm not practicing.
- SP1 When you finished your Leaving Cert, you applied for the course in fashion?
- 235 SP2 No, the access course to improve my English. I found it very hard because I didn't study for a long time in Lebanon – 7 years, so my Maths is really bad, my science is really bad. I feel my brain is like a child now. I am starting from the beginning, like a child not an adult, so it was super hard.
- SP1 Okay, you did the access course, but did they give you any extra help because you're Arabic and you have little English - were you given any extra support?
- 240 SP2 From the beginning, I went and after a month, I was asking for help, but they told me they have second language for us like English support, but because of COVID they can't give it to me in the college. Lockdown affected me badly because I had to sit in the house. I couldn't practice English with anyone. They said they would give it to me on the internet, so I started to take it on the internet, but it was too hard. I went to the meeting
- 245 once, but I didn't know how to join the meeting. Then the second time, I tried my best to go in this meeting, but it was not working, because there was so much English and so many things to fill (write) that I didn't know how to go again. Then I stopped the course because it was really hard.
- SP1 You stopped the course because it was hard, but also Social Welfare were cutting your benefits by 20 euros a week - Is that correct?
- 250 SP2 Yeah.
- SP1 Within the access course you do English, Maths and what else?
- SP2 Computers, communication skills and Maths
- SP1 When did you start the ETB course?
- 255 SP2 I started maybe a month ago, so in March
- SP1 What is involved in that course - What do you have to do?

SP2 Just English, they just gave me the grammar, they give it to me from the beginning, so it really helped me so much.

SP1 Are you doing all of that online?

260 SP2 Yeah, but I think when the Lockdown is over they will come back to the college, to the ETB.

SP1 Do you have to pay for it?

SP2 No.

SP1 How often do you do it? How often do they engage with you?

265 SP2 We have a class on one day and we have on Tuesdays and Thursdays just two classes which is like support. It's support classes.

SP1 How long is it for?

SP2 It's for one year; I was at Level 2, now I'm at Level 3. The last is Level 5, then you will be finished.

270 SP1 When you get to Level 5, what do you want to do with your education? What would you like to study?

SP2 I don't see myself getting a really good education, so I think I'll do just course for like a job as a hairdresser or something just for work.

SP1 You'll do a course just so you can get work but what would your dream job be?

275 SP2 My dream job was fashion design like this. I was thinking that I would love to be a big fashion designer, but I don't think that will happen.

SP1 Because of your education or because of the cost of it?

280 SP2 I think more because of the education because I told you my education is not good. If you want to be a fashion designer, you need to know Math like this because when you draw the things, you will draw an inch like this... so it's really hard. I tried to learn it by myself but when your Maths is not good. It's not easy, so it's about my education more than cause the cost of it.

285 SP1 With your younger brother and sister, do you think that they will be able to get a good enough education because they have longer in school than you have had? Will they manage to get a good enough education to do whatever jobs or training they want, or do you think it's still too difficult for them to achieve that?

290 SP2 It's difficult for us because their English is not full, but my sister - I believe that she can do it because she dreams to do company for fashion. My brother, I don't think he can do anything at all because he has no idea about any education, about Arabic education or about English education so it's super hard for him

SP1 So, you or your brother did not go to primary school before you left Syria?

SP2 Yeah, we went to primary school just for four years.

- SP1 Then you went to Lebanon and there was no school in Lebanon?
- SP2 No school at all - yeah, we were so small. We studied just for four years.
- 295 SP1 Can you tell me how many years of education you have you missed from Syria until you started in Donegal?
- SP2 You can say maybe eight or nine years.
- SP1 Your English, and the way you speak to me is incredible for somebody who hasn't been; it's amazing
- 300 SP2 I really find it difficult when I speak to people and I don't understand them so I told myself that when some of them make fun of me because I don't understand them.....I told myself I will be strong and I will learn it by myself, so I started to learn on YouTube Arabic. There's an Arabic man who teaches English YouTube English. I learned from him more than I learned from the school and when I practice with people my
- 305 English gets good.
- SP1 Your brother, has he got good English?
- SP2 My brother is not like me. He is too shy, and he doesn't speak with people. He is shy to ask the teachers if he doesn't understand. He is shy so much, so his English is really bad? You can say he's like a beginner in English; he can say 'Hello, hi, how are you?' and that's it.
- 310
- SP1 Does he find it difficult to make friends because of his lack of English?
- SP2 Yeah, he finds it difficult to find a friend. I don't know why but maybe he's too shy because there's something that happened with him. Some Polish people gave him and then he didn't try to be friends with anyone again in the school. He always wants to be in his room, he doesn't want to go out, he doesn't want to study, he doesn't want to do anything. It's really a super hard time with him. My daddy always speaks with him, we always speak with him, but he just doesn't listen because he really finds it hard.
- 315
- SP1 What about your younger sister? I think the younger you are when you come here the more chance you have.
- 320 SP2 Yeah, my sister, because she used to study in Lebanon from creche, her English was good and now she understands everything. She's very good with people and she loves to study. She always studies without anyone having to push her. She has a dream, so she studies really well.
- SP1 Do your parents speak English?
- 325 SP2 No they don't, no.
- SP1 Did your parents manage to get any work in Ireland?
- SP2 They're looking at work but because they're English is zero, they can't find work. The Social Welfare asked my dad if he wanted to work but my dad has heart sickness, and he gets really sick and tired. When he goes to cut the grass outside, I help him

330 because he can't do it all, he ends up getting tired, so I don't think my daddy can work anymore.

SP1 Do you feel that the Pandemic – Lockdown and Quarantine, has had any impact on your education?

335 SP2 Yeah, it affected me really badly because I had to sit in the house. I had no practice with anyone and studying on the internet was not helpful at all. It's really affected so bad.

SP1 I can understand that. Thank you so much for your time.