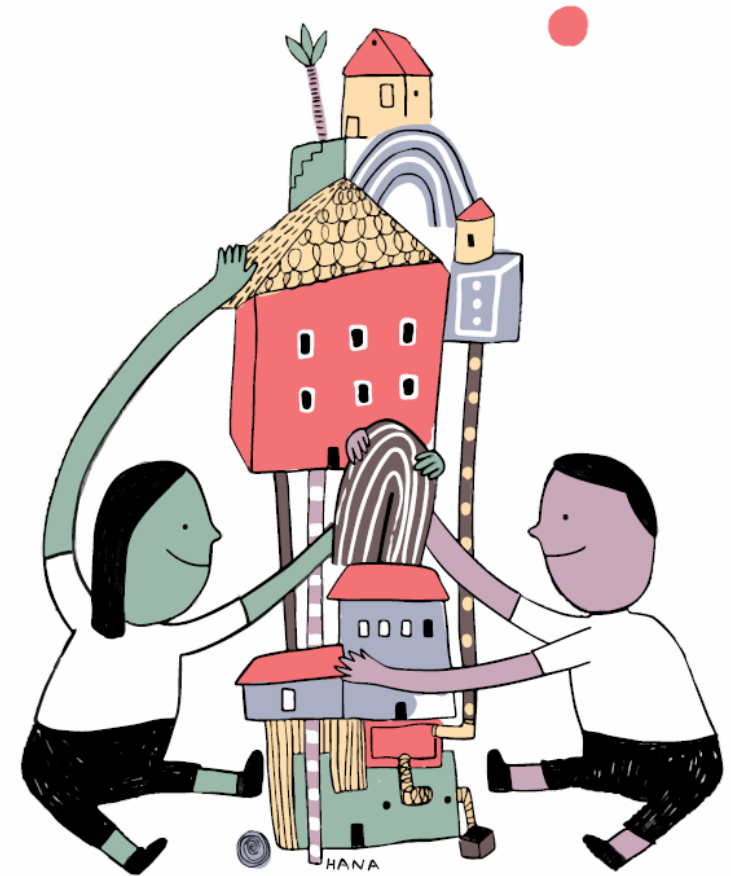


School as a space for social integration of refugee children: project IRCiS



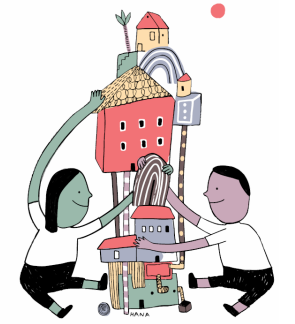
Refugee children and schooling

- According to UNHCR data about 7.9 million are refugee children of school age (data for 2020).
- In spite of the fact that many international declarations and documents identify education as a „critical element of the international refugee response”, for many refugee children the access to education is limited, and for almost half of them it is not possible to attend school at all.
- A recent joint report of UNESCO and UNHCR concludes that „education is often not a priority intervention in refugee response”.

Why schools?

1. Education is a basic human right
2. School is not only about gaining information, it is also where children learn how to interact with others
3. School is a place where children make friends and build their social networks, and most friends in late childhood and adolescents are formed precisely in classrooms
4. School is a place for learning about social norms, including norms of solidarity, social inclusion and about contacts with members of other groups
5. Teachers are important role models who can encourage and support children in their social interactions
6. For refugee children who often experience multiple traumas before arriving to safety, school provides secure and stable environment, giving the children a break from adversities and a chance to recover and rebuild their lives.

Project IRCiS



- *Integrating refugee children in schools: a mixed-method study on the efficacy of contact-in-school interventions for building positive intergroup relations among refugee and host-society children (IRCiS)*
- Main goal: To promote and facilitate the integration of refugee children in schools in Croatia - by overcoming the challenges of integration and encouraging understanding and tolerance through positive intergroup contact

Bottom-up approach

- Exploring the needs and challenges in the school integration process
- Qualitative study with refugee children, their parents, domicile peers, teachers, school pedagogues and psychologists
 - Vrdoljak, A., Stanković, N., Čorkalo Biruški, D., Jelić, M., Fasel, R. & Butera, F. (2022). "We would love to, but..." — needs in school integration from the perspective of refugee children, their parents, peers, and school staff. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2061732>

Development of the integration programs

- Two major challenges identified depending on the integration experience:

Integration program for schools with refugee children already enrolled

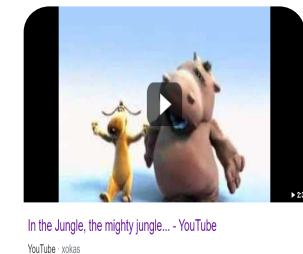
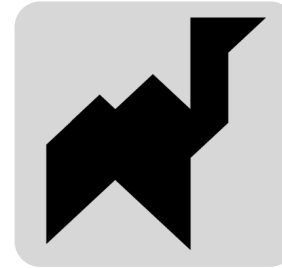
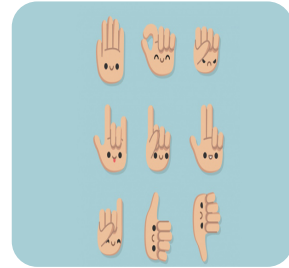


Children do not have a clear concept of who refugees are, what challenges to expect, which causes anxiety



Imagined contact

Integration program based on cooperative learning



Criteria for activities:

Duration: one school hour (40-45 min)

Implementation in classrooms by teachers

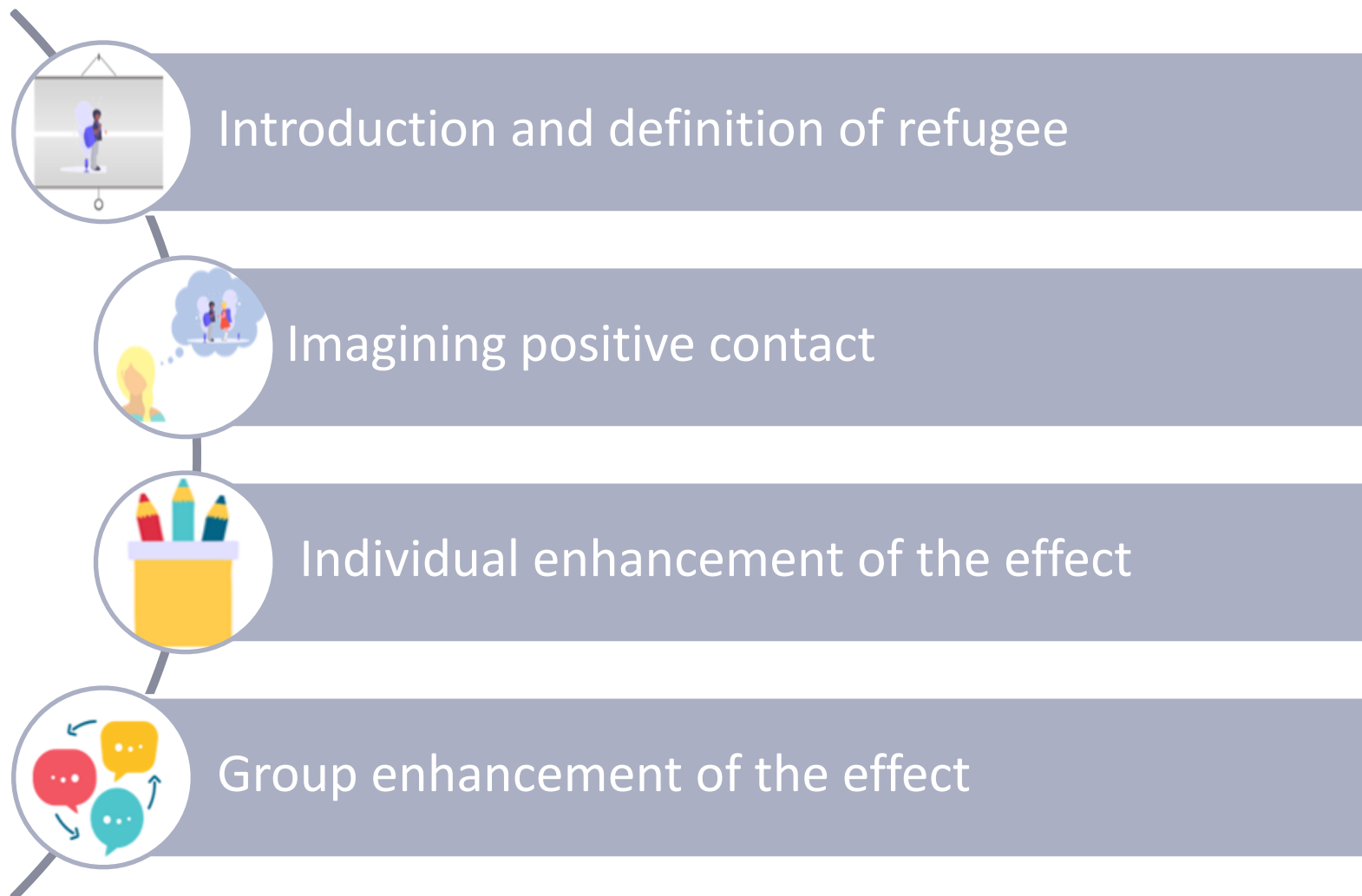
Appropriate for younger and older pupils

Non-verbal activities (as little verbal instructions as possible)

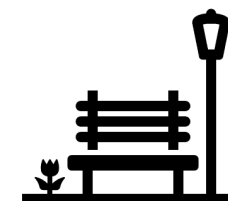
Conditions for cooperative learning

- Mutual goal
- Every group member important and necessary to complete the task
- Cooperation and not competition
- Awareness of mutual attainment/success
- Guidance and support from teachers

Imagined contact activities



Various scenarios



Intergroup outcomes

- The activities are fun, enjoyable and the students (and teachers) participate with great pleasure
- Both types of activities proved successful in improving various intergroup outcomes
- Imagined contact activities work slightly better with younger children, i. e. in lower grades of elementary school
- Cooperative learning activities are particularly effective in improving children's perceptions of the teacher's norms regarding intergroup contact, proving again importance of teachers in developing a positive classroom climate and friendly intergroup relations among children

Guidelines with detailed instructions

<https://doi.org/10.17234/9789533790640>

Contacts:

project.ircis@gmail.com

mjelic@ffzg.hr

dcorkalo@ffzg.hr



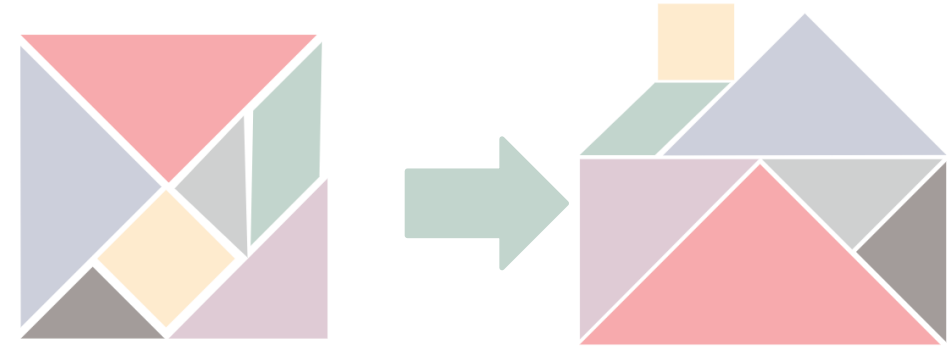
Intervention programs promoting the
integration of refugee students into
elementary schools

Handbook for the implementation
of cooperative learning and imagined
contact workshops

How does school integration relate to prevention of multigenerational transmission of trauma?

1. By providing a welcoming, supportive, and thriving environment, schools send the message that it is possible to make the world a safer place for all
2. By receiving supports, encouragement and understanding in their new school refugee children learn the a message that even in most difficult circumstances there is a human hand ready to protect and help them and others
3. Teachers, as warm and responsible role models, can serve as safe zones to which a child can turn when challenges and difficulties of adjustment seem too harsh and overwhelming
4. Schools can serve as a support mechanism not only for children but also for parents when their own adjustment difficulties prevent them from ensuring that all of their children's needs are met
5. All these elements can help refugee children integrate their experiences, find their balance and regain their power, in order to recover and rebuild their inner self and their image of the world around them.

Example of activities



Why schools?

1. Education is a basic human right
2. Children spend great deal of their time in school
3. School is not only about gaining information, it is also where children learn how to interact with others
4. School is a place where children make friends and build their social networks, and most friends in late childhood and adolescents are formed precisely in classrooms
5. School is a place for learning about social norms, including norms of solidarity, social inclusion and about contacts with members of other groups
6. Teachers are important role models who can encourage and support children in their social interactions
7. For refugee children who often experience multiple traumas before arriving to safety, school provides secure and stable environment, giving the children a break from adversities and a chance to recover and rebuild their lives.

Some contextual facts

- Croatia is a relatively new receiving country
- Before 2015 when Europe experienced an extensive immigration influx, Croatian integration policies were not well developed
- Croatia was not a target country for very many people, most of migrants/refugees stayed only temporary, and proceed to more desirable countries of Western Europe.
 - E. g. from 2008 till March 2023 asylum was granted to only 904 persons, mainly to people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey
- Since February 2022 Croatia has been provided temporary protection for about 22.000 refugees from Ukraine, and in different stages of the crisis between 10 to 30 % of those were children