

H.Helping children arriving from Ukraine to adjust to the language in which school subjects are taught

Aim: To provide guidelines for teachers helping children from Ukraine to adjust to the language used in the teaching of school subjects

Refugee children entering the school system in their host country will be taught school subjects in the language used in the school in question. This language is more or less identical to the language used in social communication, but it has specific features that are used to transmit knowledge and develop competences related to the various subjects. These features are not often found in everyday communication, so it is important to ensure that they are fully understood and used by all students, including those who are refugees.

Here are some points to bear in mind when teaching subjects such as maths, science, history, art etc.:

- Be aware that students' difficulties in learning may be to do with language rather than with cognition.
- It is useful to find out about the subjects taught and ways of teaching in Ukraine; this can be done, for example, by looking at textbooks that the students may have brought with them.
- Do not limit learning to vocabulary which is specific to the subject (e.g. angle, cell, bulb etc.): take opportunities to go beyond the more specialised terms.
- Be very clear when presenting and explaining factual knowledge and instructions about tasks etc., for example using PowerPoint slides or a similar aid, using both Ukrainian and the host country language if possible.
- Make frequent use of pictures, diagrams, graphics, maps, signs, symbols, icons, real objects etc. as aids to students' understanding of explanations.
- Take advantage of similarities between certain abstract terms, particularly, words of Greek or Latin origin.
- Organise practical classroom activities in pairs or groups where one member of the group can be a long-term 'language companion' for a recently arrived refugee student.
- Find an effective way of enabling refugee students to use the relevant textbooks, for example with the support of their parents or other family members.
- Give refugee students opportunities to describe things, talk about experiences, demonstrate things etc.
- Apart from their personal notetaking, limit the amount of writing refugee students need to do.

Specific steps that can be taken to simplify oral explanations and make them easier for refugee children to understand include the following:

- Make sure that students understand what topic, process or phenomenon etc. is being explained or discussed.
- Speak slowly and clearly, and use pauses between each sentence, question, answer and change of topic.



- Repeat or paraphrase what you say whenever necessary, especially your questions and frequently used key terms, common expressions and new vocabulary.
- Use gestures and other body language such as facial expression and actions to help convey meaning.
- Include concrete examples in your explanations, especially examples related to students' daily life and experience.
- Avoid digression or sudden changes of topic.
- Limit the need for students to make inferences or deductions, and use questions such as 'who can tell me why/what...?' or 'why do you think... happens/happened?' etc.
- Use simple, short sentences and questions and common connectors, such as 'then', 'after that', 'so', 'because' etc.
- Avoid too much use of passive voice: for example, 'we heated the liquid to 100 degrees' may be easier to understand than 'the liquid was heated to 100 degrees'.
- When using pronouns such as 'it', 'they', 'we', 'she', make sure that students understand who or what they refer to.

This kind of approach to teaching and learning needs to be ongoing and long-term.

Teachers of the various school subjects should also encourage activities and resources that aid learning but are not specifically to do with language, such as singing, drawing, physical activities, video games, the internet, mobile phones, apps etc.