

G. Helping children arriving from Ukraine to adjust to their new situation

Aim: To suggest ways of helping children arriving from Ukraine to make sense of their first reactions to their new circumstances and surroundings and move on from them

It is normal for children who suddenly arrive in a new country from Ukraine to feel various sorts of anxiety and apprehension about their unfamiliar surroundings. From an educational point of view, this 'culture shock' needs to be managed by the school and by the other institutions or people involved in the children's welfare.

Managing the unexpected reactions and curiosity that they may experience when encountering new and different circumstances should be an integral part of intercultural education. The 'shock' children experience may be a reaction to new discoveries about the host community and their living conditions. These may include:

- the different educational culture: the way time at school is organised, the layout of the school premises, the way the teachers behave, the content of lessons, the methods of evaluation used, playground games and activities, the dress code at school etc.
- food, the organisation of meals, mealtimes etc.
- the clothes people wear
- the favourite kinds of games or pastimes
- the media, such as local or national TV
- the organisation of leisure time, including national holidays
- and so on.

Some general guidelines

Children's reactions to these kinds of discoveries are normally immediate and spontaneous. They often take the form of a judgement such as 'that's good' or a comparison ('it's better than where I live'). To prevent these discoveries being rejected as 'foreign' or accepted uncritically, they need to be dealt with as an integral part of schooling including with reference to the range of school subjects. This is best done in a language the children know well. The following are some suggestions about how to do this:

- Identify children's reactions to their new circumstances and/or organise some lesson time to enable them to talk about their feelings.
- Try to get them to express their views verbally in their own language (although there are likely to be problems understanding them) or in the language of the host community, although their knowledge of the language may be too limited.
- Gather some reliable information about the subject in question or ask the students to do some basic research on it.
- Be careful not to over-generalise, not to talk about 'national characteristics' or to under-estimate the diversity that exists within the host community.



- Avoid direct comparisons between the characteristics of the host community and those of the country of origin as these could be misleading. Bring in at least one other point of comparison.
- Organise classroom discussion so as to bring the students' various different points of view to the fore.
- When leading the discussion, avoid trying to change students' reactions; try instead to make students aware of the complexity of the phenomena being discussed and why more thoughtful reactions are therefore required.
- Give examples of the ways in which such reactions can affect the harmony of democratic life, including in a classroom or school.