

# Meeting the language needs of displaced people



## What role does language play for people displaced by conflict or other crises?

There are an increasing number of displaced people globally due to crises including conflict, persecution, natural disasters and climate-related changes to the environment: over 180 million in 2022 according to the UNHCR Global Trends report.

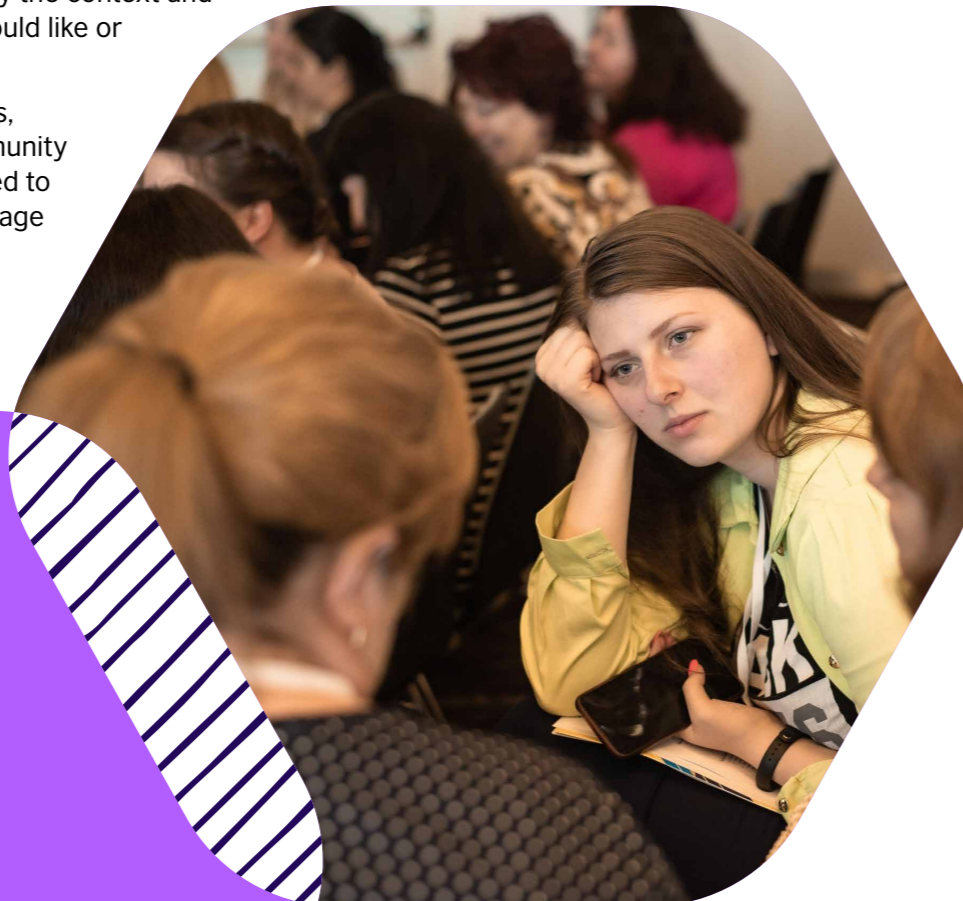
Displaced people face multiple challenges, all of which will require communication to resolve. This communication will often need to be done in a language other than the one most familiar to the individual.

Language skills in this context are fundamental for:

- access to resources, services, employment, education and personal and community agency
- social connection
- conflict reduction

The required language skills are determined by the context and the communities that the displaced person would like or needs to engage in.

In addition to the displaced people themselves, teachers, trainers, government officials, community workers and host community members all need to be considered when determining where language support is required.



## What happens if language needs are not met?

If language needs are not adequately addressed it can lead to:

- displaced girls and boys being disadvantaged in education having moved to a context with a different language of instruction. They become less able to engage in class, or to learn, which can lead to drop out
- reduced life chances and prosperity, especially for young adults who may be unable to access higher education or employment equivalent to their skills and experience
- reduced access to resources, including food, housing and healthcare
- displaced adults being less able to support girls and boys under their care with school.

## How does our work address these language needs?

While schools and other institutions may be able to provide language teachers and language learning resources, they often lack training and resources to specifically support learners affected by crisis, conflict displacement, and trauma.

Through our projects, we partner with government ministries, international organisations, funders and local groups.

Together, we support teachers and community workers to build the resilience of displaced people in formal and non-formal education settings in the following ways.

- Recognising and address trauma
- Creating safe spaces
- Using multilingual approaches to learning
- Learning (about) students' most familiar languages
- Supporting home language early education to build foundational skills
- Supporting home language adult literacy to establish social identity
- Introducing relevant new language(s) to enable community involvement and recovery
- Being aware of their own safety and mental health needs.



**Having the right language skills is fundamental for access to resources, services, employment and learning as well as personal and community agency and social connection.**





“

‘So many possibilities have come out of this project. I’ve started volunteering for many organisations and going to conferences where I met the LASER staff. I did a course and got an EU certificate in leadership, and I even met the Minister of Education. When I think about it, I used to be a factory worker, but this course has changed my entire life.’

**LASER student**

## Case study 1: Supporting displaced people to access higher education opportunities

**The Language, Academic Skills and E-Learning Resources (LASER) project in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria taught English language and academic skills to refugees and young people in host communities, preparing them for higher education.**

### Background

In 2015 there was an urgent need for young Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon to gain greater access to higher education (HE). However there were significant barriers due to levels of language and academic skills as well as policies which prevented enrolment by displaced people.

Working with education authorities and HE institutions within the EU-funded LASER project (2015–20), we contributed to the removal of these barriers, which enabled Syrian refugee students and disadvantaged young people in host communities in Jordan to enter local HE institutions.

### Approach

Through provision of language training, academic readiness skills, coaching and distance education programmes, the project’s innovative design was developed in response to the specific Jordanian context and focused on blended delivery to address the refugees’ skills gaps and enable them to acquire locally-accredited HE diplomas.

To reach and mobilise students, this work required building a wide network of partners throughout Jordan to deliver across a range of locations – both inside and outside refugee camps.

### Evaluation

593 students enrolled in HE and further education courses under LASER – significantly exceeding the original target. A total of 4,827 young Syrians and Jordanians engaged with LASER courses and a tracer study indicated that 47 per cent of those sampled had progressed into higher or further education. 82 per cent (36 per cent female / 46 per cent male) of surveyed participants from LASER’s English language and academic skills courses were in work or further education within six months of finishing their course. Learning from LASER underlined the importance of establishing or building on peer support networks for online higher and further education, the critical relevance of local certification for online education, and the need for the co-creation of solutions with learners.



**Funded by  
the European Union**



“

‘This project has improved performance, retention of learners in school and learners’ confidence. I have seen a wonderful transformation in me and other school leaders, teachers, learners, parents and the school.’

**Headteacher,  
Northern Uganda**



## Case study 2: Developing teachers’ skills for working with refugee children in multilingual contexts

Our Language for Resilience work in Uganda has trained teachers of refugee children in the supportive strategies necessary to maximise learning in a classroom with multiple languages. It has also engaged closely with head teachers and community leaders to encourage sustainability.

### Background

As part of the language taskforce team of the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG), we are implementing our Language for Resilience programme (2018–present) in Uganda. This project focuses on the role language plays to create opportunities for and connections between migrants and refugee communities and the countries which host them, helping to build resilience and the capacity to respond to crises. Working with our partners, Windle International and the Refugee Response task team, we address language barriers to learning in early grade years of refugee hosting schools.

Our initial research showed that 19 languages were in common use during lessons in the 30 schools visited in the districts of Arua, Isingiro and Yumbe. While English is officially the language of instruction from Grade 4, the study found that there is considerable confusion over which language should be used given that so

few children understand English and so many had previously been learning in a different language in their home countries. Overall, 15 per cent of lessons observed were conducted in a local language while two thirds were using English with no use of any other supporting language, even though at least a third of the class did not understand the lesson.

Differences in language proficiency among newly arrived refugees often leads to misplacement in classes, with refugees on average being 3.4 years older than their peers in host communities. This leads to challenges for the teacher, poor learning outcomes, poor integration into the school and high dropout rates.



## Approach

We have produced three research pieces to better understand language needs, including how this relates to dropout. This informed two practical handbooks to support teachers in multilingual classrooms. These are being used in five locations: Kampala, Rhino Camp (Arua), Imvepi (Arua), Kakivaale (Isingiro) and Kyangwali.

Teachers using these approaches also benefit from training in psychosocial support and ways that they can ensure their classroom practice is gender sensitive. We have also strengthened implementation by offering school leadership skills training so that head teachers can play a key role in driving and sustaining change in their schools, and community leadership development for the advocacy and support of language learning.

## Evaluation

We have engaged with 69 schools, 145 school leaders, 181 teachers and 161 community leaders. Evaluation showed that trained teachers made significantly more use of the refugees' familiar language in lessons in 2021 than in the 2018 baseline (79 per cent of lessons vs. 35 per cent). Training of school leaders and teachers has led to a more inclusive approach to placement of refugee learners, while teachers feel better equipped to identify the social and emotional needs of children. Community leaders are now encouraging girls to stay in school longer. We have identified a need to further scale the programme with training for more teachers and school leaders, including providing additional support for teachers' own English proficiency and their use of appropriate classroom language.



Scan QR code to read our research relating to this project



## Case study 3: Supporting learners and teachers during the Ukrainian conflict

**Teachers have a vital but often unrecognised role to play in supporting children experiencing trauma as a result of conflict or other crises. This is a huge challenge for teachers in Ukraine and neighbouring countries where hundreds of thousands of learners have been displaced in local schools, or are learning online while the war continues.**

### Background

On top of years of Covid-19-related disruption, the impact of the Ukrainian war is enormous for both teachers and learners. Teachers from Ukraine and other European countries such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania are facing challenges in creating safer spaces for internally and internationally displaced Ukrainian learners who have joined their classrooms, as well as students whose lives are affected by air raids, missile strikes, or the conscription, injury or death of people in their community. At the same time, teachers who remain in Ukraine demonstrate a high

commitment to maintaining links with their learners both within the country and outside, though they themselves may be internally displaced and suffering trauma caused by the war. Supported by Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science and several in-service teacher training institutes, the British Council launched an initiative to support refugee teachers and those who work with refugee and internally displaced learners. This programme explores the many issues they face and the new skills they require.





‘This course helped me recognise my learners’ difficulties. I have learned some useful techniques for creating physical and emotional safety in my classroom, different ways of managing challenging behaviour as well as helping my students recover from trauma.’

### Teacher of displaced Ukrainian learners

#### Approach

In response to the ongoing conflict, we have been delivering the **Teaching and Learning in Difficult Times** project since 2022. Training has focused on how teachers can most effectively support young people experiencing trauma, displacement and other effects of conflict while continuing to help them achieve their education goals. We are working with Ukrainian teachers – both those who remain in Ukraine and those who are displaced – as well as Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian and Lithuanian teachers working with Ukrainian refugee children in their classes, supporting host communities.

The course consists of two parts: pre-course activities involving online resources and three days of face-to-face training delivered by a cadre of 20 expert Ukrainian teacher trainers.

The objectives for the course are for participating teachers to develop:

- increased self-awareness, self-efficacy and personal resilience
- increased confidence, knowledge and understanding of dealing with trauma, challenging behaviour and creating a safe space for learners
- increased understanding of learner needs and ways in which to support learners during challenging times.



MINISTRY  
OF EDUCATION AND  
SCIENCE OF UKRAINE



#### Evaluation

As of September 2023, we have delivered training at nine large-scale workshops to 1585 teachers in Poland and Romania. Initial evidence shows that the majority of participants believe that there was a need for the training, it was important, and it was relevant to their context and circumstances. There are also clear indirect benefits in terms of offering a safe space, an opportunity to share thoughts and difficult experiences and provide some respite from the challenges presented by the conflict. The programme is currently being further developed with plans to connect English teachers in Ukraine to communities of practice, where they can learn how to support the wellbeing of their students and each other, and continue to support student success through trauma and disruption.



Scan the QR to find out more about this project



# About us

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Working together we make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

© 2023 British Council

The United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.