

Practical issues of integration of refugee children in Slovenian education system

Asja Pehar Senekovič, asja.pehar@zrc-sazu.si

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU)

dr. Jure Gombáč, jure.gombac@zrc-sazu.si

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), University of Nova Gorica

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Abstract

Currently there are around 680 refugees with recognized status of international protection living in Slovenia (UOIM, 2019). About half of them have been accepted within the quota system (relocation and resettlement schemes), established by the European Commission after the so called migration crisis, starting in 2015. While most children came to Slovenia with their families (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia), there are also around 20 unaccompanied minors currently accommodated in dormitories or private apartments in Slovenia (mostly from Afghanistan and Syria). They are particularly vulnerable group of migrants (Sedmak, Lenarčič, Medarič & Žakelj, 2015).

Main aim of the paper is to portray the process of inclusion of refugee children in the Slovenian education system. Along with that the paper also introduces a good practice case of additional language and integration aid for six refugee children, organized by EU project PandPAS, in two elementary schools in Maribor, Slovenia. The focus will be on children who have already been granted status of international protection.

Literature and legislation overview is the first method that will be used in the paper along with extracts from the focus groups we have conducted with refugees and professionals, working in the field of refugee integration (government employees, NGO professionals, volunteer mentors...). By including them in the focus groups and giving them the voice, we have gathered their opinions and perceptions which are indispensable for overview and evaluation of integration in education system in Slovenia. Further on, the method of case study shows an example and the results of pilot action-additional learning aid to six refugee children in afterschool hours but in cooperation with the school, performed by the pedagogical student.

While there are some minor systemic solutions and measures for refugee children, provided by the state, in most cases the actual integration still depends on an education institution (school, kindergarten) how they decide to include them. A large burden also lays on volunteers and project solutions that are usually implemented by NGOs which are mostly understaffed and lack funding, disabling quality and wholesome execution of activities.

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Since project work is currently one of the most widespread mean of additional integration activities, paper also provides some of the best practises and measures, implemented in order to facilitate integration in education system for refugee children.

While basic needs and requirements are covered regarding integration of refugees in Slovenia (free access to the labor market, health care and education system, full social benefits, beginner's language course of Slovenian language, 3-year government financial support for accommodation...) (Ladić, Bajt, Jalušič & Kogovšek Šalomon, 2018), there is a large gap of additional integration and education activities that would provide further support in order to achieve complete economic and social independence and satisfaction.

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