**Title:**

# An Exploration of Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Working with Children and Young People from Refugee Backgrounds in Ireland

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*A thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECPsy)*

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## Abstract

Children and Young People (CYP) from refugee backgrounds are likely to have been exposed to traumatic events, have been required to adjust to a new environment, while also learning an additional language, and adjusting to a new culture. Since February 2022, there has been a rapid increase in CYP from refugee backgrounds enrolled in Irish schools. Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a crucial role in supporting CYP who are vulnerable within the school context.

The objective of this research was to identify and explore EPs' experiences of supporting the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland, highlighting what has worked well, the challenges faced by EPs, and whether this work has changed for EPs over the last two years. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the methodology used for this study. Four participants engaged in individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited through criterion-based, purposeful methods, consisting of EPs working in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) who had experience working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. Four key themes were identified: adapting current approaches to support CYP from refugee backgrounds, supports for EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, supporting the school environment, and acknowledging the impact of culture, policies and accessing support.

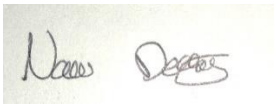
This research also highlights and explores areas that need to be addressed in professional training programmes for psychologists as well as implications for educational psychology practice and policy.

## Declaration

This research is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECPsy) at Mary Immaculate College. I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. Where the use has been made of other people, it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.

The author of this research also received funding from the Department of Education for the final year of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme.

Name: Naoise Delaney

Signed: 

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## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| COS | Continuum of Support |
| CDNT | Child Disability Network Team |
| CPD | Continued Professional Development |
| CYP | Children and Young People |
| EP | Educational Psychologist |
| GET | Group Experiential Theme |
| HEA | Higher Educational Authority |
| HSE | Health Service Executive |
| IPA | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis |
| NEPS | National Educational Psychological Service |
| PET | Personal Experiential Theme |
| PSI | Psychological Society of Ireland |
| REALT | Regional Educational And Language Team |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| TEC | Temporary Education Centre |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| WOE | Weight of Evidence |

# 1 Introduction

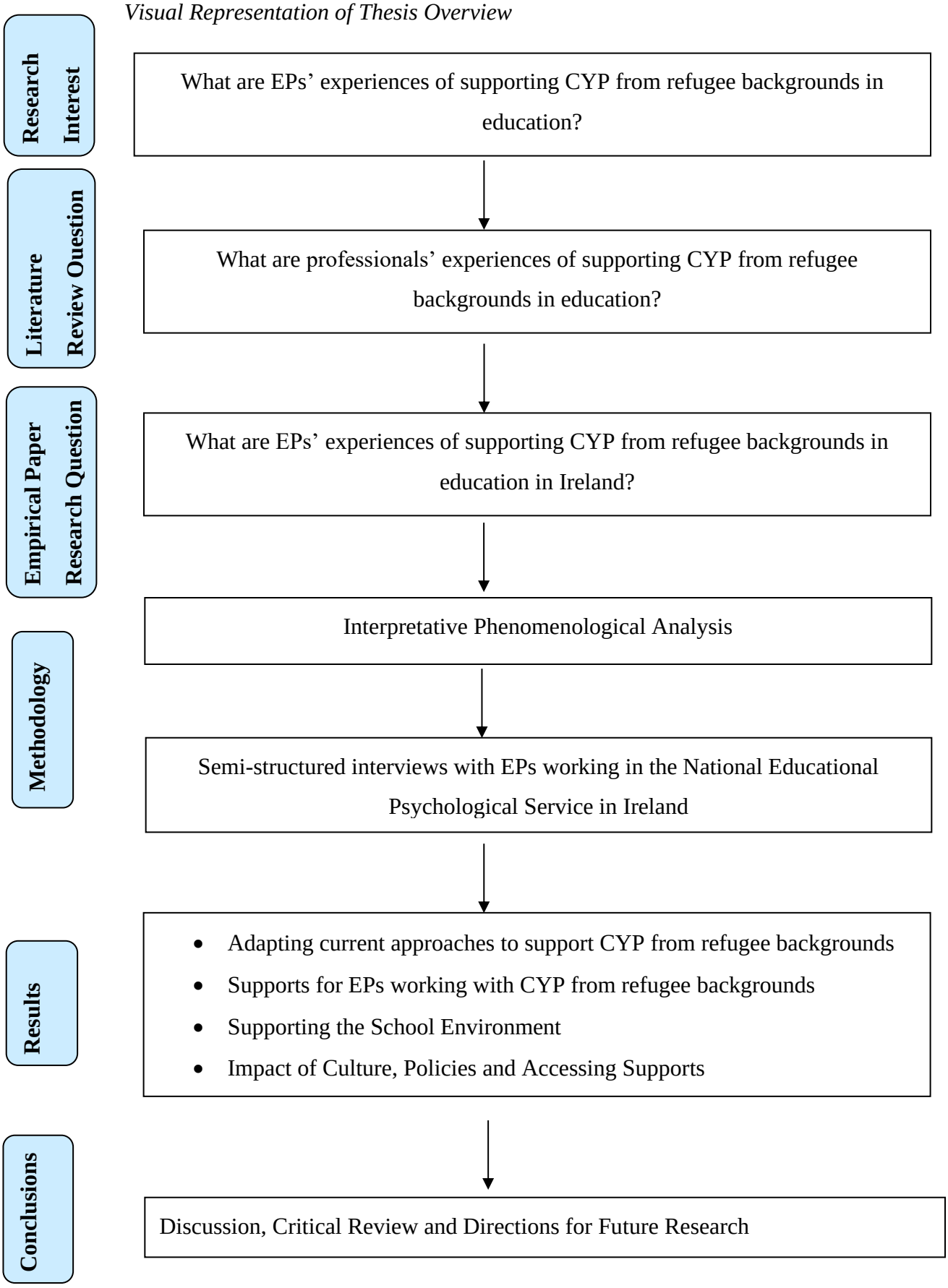
## 1.1 Overview of Thesis Structure

The aim of this thesis is to explore Educational Psychologists' (EPs') experiences of working with and supporting Children and Young People (CYP) from refugee backgrounds. Within this introductory chapter, an overview of the theoretical context and the research paradigm will be described. This chapter will conclude by highlighting the aims of this research project as well as the research question. The following chapters will consist of a systematic review of research literature and work published in this area, followed by the empirical paper. The thesis will conclude with a critical review and impact statement of the overall study. See Figure 1 for visual overview of thesis structure.

Throughout this thesis, it is worth noting that the author is based in Ireland. In Ireland psychologists who work in schools are referred to as educational psychologists; however, the term "school psychologists" is used in many other countries. Throughout this thesis, the term "EPs" refers to both school psychologists and EPs.

***Figure 1***

*Visual Representation of Thesis Overview*



## 1.2 Irish Context of the Role of EPs in supporting CYP From Refugee backgrounds

Education is one of the most important areas that needs to be considered when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds (Schachner et al., 2018). Newly arrived students with a refugee background may have complex needs as a result of their experiences pre-migration and post-migration, and western democratic countries often find it hard to meet these needs (McMullen et al., 2020; Uptin et al., 2016). Due to pre-migration experiences, CYP from a refugee background may face additional social and academic challenges (Fazel & Berancourt, 2018).

EPs play a crucial role in supporting CYP who are vulnerable within the educational context. The broad role of an EP may involve conducting assessments to identify educational, social and emotional needs, carrying out psychological interventions and supporting the school and family to meet the needs of these CYP (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Nastasi & Naser, 2020). In Ireland, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) plays a key role in supporting CYP and has been involved in developing many supports for CYP from refugee backgrounds. The importance and demand of this role rapidly increased in February 2022 following the arrival of Ukrainian CYP in Irish schools (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). NEPS has developed guidance for schools, such as "Supporting the Wellbeing of Children from Ukraine in your School" (Department of Education, 2022a; Department of Education, 2022b), to help EPs and schools respond to this demand.

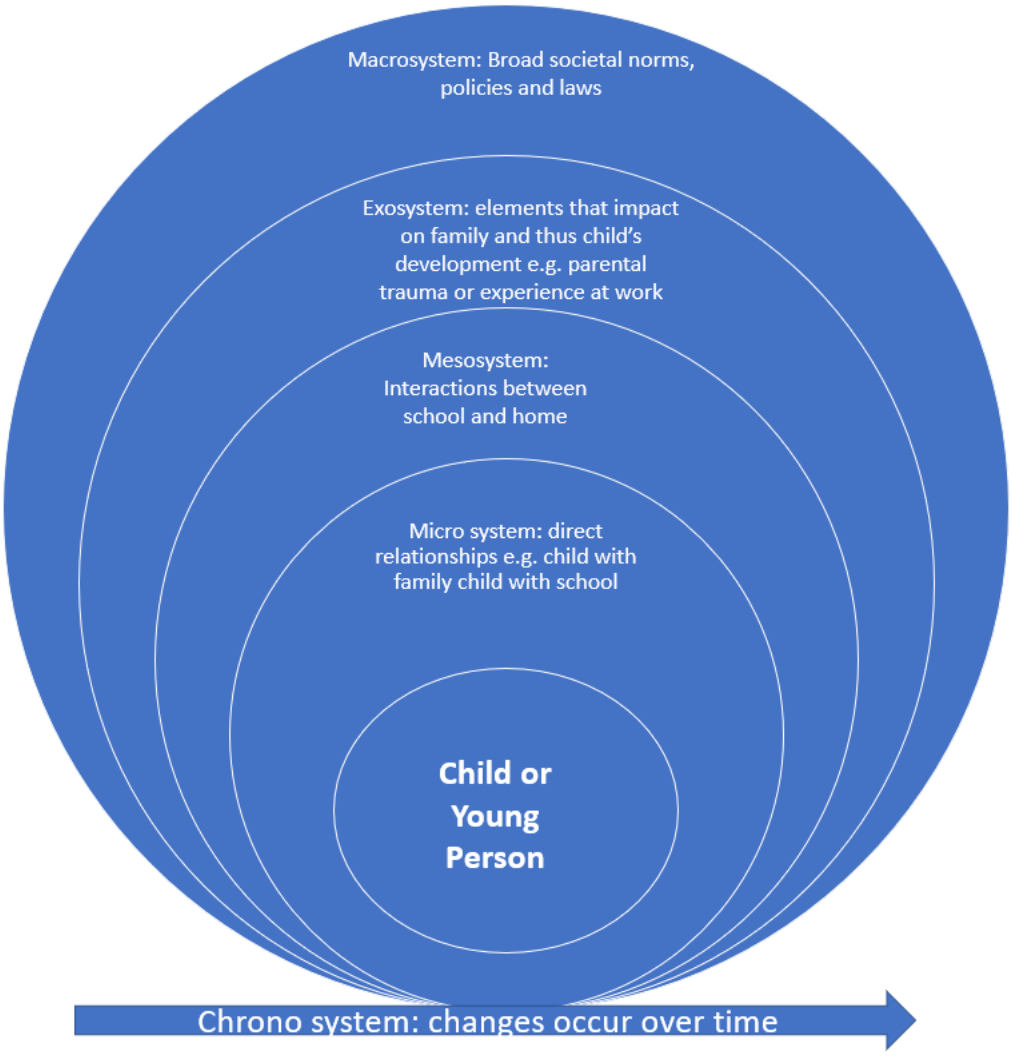
The war in Ukraine has led to a rapid increase in people being displaced by war arriving in Ireland. Those fleeing the Ukraine war do not meet the definition of refugee or asylum seekers but fall under the category of "Temporary Protection" in Ireland and are recognised as being forcibly displaced people (Department of Justice, 2022a). There are inconsistencies in definitions of refugees and asylum seekers, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, however, for the purpose of this thesis the term "refugee backgrounds" will be used to include those recently arrived from Ukraine and those who have been forcibly displaced from other countries. The use of the term "refugee backgrounds" also acknowledges that individuals from refugee backgrounds are a heterogenous group, with diverse needs and experiences (Sengoelge et al., 2019). This further supports the implementation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory for this research.

## 1.3 Theoretical Context

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this research project (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory acknowledges that understanding individuals is a complex process, a key role of EPs (Burns et al., 2015). In order to understand CYP, there is a need to understand and examine their environment and systems. Research has highlighted the importance of EPs applying an ecological model when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2022). The model (see Figure 2) acknowledges how individuals act with, in, and on systems, which change over time (Miller et al., 2022), contributing to "differentiated developmental outcomes" (Kelly et al., 2016, p. 23).

***Figure 2***

*Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).*



These systems include the microsystem, which refers to the child's relationships with teachers, peers and family. Within the context of individuals from refugee backgrounds, the microsystem includes how parents' coping strategies directly impact the child's emotions and experiences (d'Abreu et al., 2019). The mesosystem refers to the interactions between individuals from the child's microsystem such as home with school personnel. Such interactions impact on CYP through both protective and risk processes. The exosystem refers to the wider social environment and policies that impact them as coming from refugee backgrounds, in education and in the home, both in their host country and country of origin. The macrosystem considers the interaction of cultural values and institutional structures that includes interactions between religious systems, government policies and social norms (Miller et al., 2022). Finally, the chronosystem acknowledges how these systems and interactions all change over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006); this refers to changes that occur that influence development throughout the course of a lifetime such as historical events or major life transitions.

CYP from refugee backgrounds are faced with having to navigate each of these systems, with the added challenge of possible acculturative stress. Acculturative stress refers to a specific form of stress experienced by individuals who have experienced migration and can be defined as "cultural conflict between the native and host culture" where individuals may experience difficulty in bringing together their own identity with the culture in their new communities (d'Abreu et al., 2019, p. 108).

### 1.4 Paradigm and Assumptions

This study aimed to gain an insight into the professional experiences of EPs in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. As the study aimed to explore this under-researched area it was not hypothesis driven, and an interpretivist paradigm was considered the best fit to explore individuals' experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). An interpretivist paradigm holds the view that reality is indirectly constructed based on the interpretation of the individual, acknowledging the "double hermeneutic" or the researcher's interpretation of the participant's interpretation of reality (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). An interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that multiple realities and perspectives support our access to knowledge and understanding, and that individual meanings are created through social experiences, and are subjective (Edmonds, 2021; Klein & Meyers, 1998; Morehouse, 2011). This also references and acknowledges the importance of reflexivity, where the researcher engages in reflections on their own role in the analysis process.

Interpretivism was found to sit best with the researcher's stance and values relating to the importance of reflexivity. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the methodology that best fitted with the research question and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection. The use of semi-structured interviews framed by IPA allows for broad and flexible exploration of participants' experiences with the aim of understanding how participants have made sense of these experiences (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023).

### 1.5 Research Aim and Question

The aim of the study is to explore EPs' experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The overall research question is "What are EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland?" When exploring experiences, the researcher hoped to investigate: how EPs made sense of the various systemic levels where EPs have worked to support CYP from refugee backgrounds; any facilitators or challenges faced in the work overall; how they have supported schools and family relationships; and their approach to cultural differences and trauma within this context.

# 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews the relevant literature and research relating to EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The topic is first introduced by providing an overview of the historical and global context of people from refugee backgrounds, the current Irish context, and what is known about CYP from refugee backgrounds. The chapter then highlights the role of EPs in a broader context and working in this area. The final section of this chapter includes a systematic and quality appraisal of the literature and research that has been carried out in this area, which provides the rationale for the current study.

### *2.1.1 Definitions of Forced Migration, Displaced People, Refugee and Asylum Seekers*

Migration refers to the movement of people and can include across or within country movements (Douglas et al., 2019). When migration is forced or involuntary, it is usually related to the safety of the people moving (Tösten et al., 2017). Moving home from one country to another involves substantial changes such as a disruption of well-established relationships and adapting to a new culture and has been described as a stressful experience for CYP (McMullen et al., 2020). Forced migration can be a result of moving to escape the impact of natural disasters, systematic persecution, war, violence or other factors (Tösten et al., 2017). Various terms are used to describe individuals displaced from their country or home of origin; Table 1 provides an overview of some of these key definitions.

***Table 1***

*Definitions Relating to the Various Classifications of Forced Migrants (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 2):*

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Asylum seekers | "A person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments" |
| Displaced person | "A person who flees his or her State or community due to fear or dangers for reasons other than those which would make him or her a refugee" |
| Refugee | "A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country" |

What is common with each of these definitions is that the individuals are motivated by fear. Although the definition given for "displaced person" states a difference between their reason to migrate and that of a refugee, there is still an emphasis on the element of fear and thus these individuals and their families are psychologically vulnerable and under additional stress as migrants. Other authors have included refugees in the category of "displaced people" described as heterogenous and including stateless people, internally displaced people and asylum seekers (Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022). However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020) defines asylum seekers as individuals who are waiting for their asylum claim to be processed while refugees have received official asylum status (Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022). Research is commonly inconsistent in defining refugees and often describes people who have been forcibly displaced as refugees without acknowledging other categories or definitions (Sheikh & Anderson, 2018). In Ireland, the Department of Justice recognises asylum seekers and international protection applicants as individuals who meet the definition of a convention refugee in line with the Geneva Convention 1951 (Department of

Justice, 2022b). The Department of Justice states that individuals who meet the criteria for this definition do not need an employment permit to work in Ireland. Furthermore, people fleeing the Ukraine war do not meet the formal definition of refugee or asylum seekers and fall under the category of "Temporary Protection" in Ireland; rather, they are recognised as being forcibly displaced people (Department of Justice, 2022a). In Ireland, the 2001 European Union Temporary Protection Directive was activated for the first time in 2022 and provides specific benefits to those who arrived after the 24th of February 2022 including "immediate access to the labour market, along with access to social welfare, accommodation and other State supports including healthcare and education" (Department of Justice, 2022a, para. 1). This is a similar description to Syrians in Turkey being formally granted the status of "Temporary Protection" (Karsli-Calamak et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of consistency in how the definition of "Temporary Protection" differs from other terminology for people who have been forcibly displaced. Acknowledging the differences and overlaps in definitions, for the purpose of this thesis and inclusivity, the term "refugee backgrounds" will be used to include those recently arrived from Ukraine and those who may fall into the categories of asylum seekers, refugees or displaced persons.

While many people from a refugee background share common, and sometimes traumatic experiences such as loss of loved ones, witnessing violence as a result of war, and exposure to war (Hastings, 2012), the experience can be very different for each individual. The main condition that people from each of the groups described having in common is that of a loss of home (Papadopoulos, 2018).

### *2.1.2 Historical and Global Context of Refugees/Forcibly Displaced People*

There has been a consistent increase in refugees over the last 50 years. In 1970 there was an estimated 2.4 million refugees globally, increasing to 12.1 million in 2000 (Sangalang & Vang, 2017) and in 2020, to 26 million refugees (Fransen & De Haas, 2022). In 2020, refugees living in Europe accounted for 17% (4.4 million) of the global refugee population, with a higher percentage reported in Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa (Yang et al., 2020). The majority of research carried out between 2015 and 2021 focused on refugees from Syria (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022). Linked to the war in Syria, the European "refugee crisis" in 2015 led to an increase in perceptions in many host countries of refugees as a threat

rather than a vulnerable group, connected to beliefs that refugees may intensify cultural conflicts, increase the burden on social welfare, and create further competition in job markets (Lee, 2021).

In 2016 the United Nations (UN) launched a document to develop a two-year plan, Global Compact on Refugees. Recommendations included the responsibility to be shared across countries for the protection of refugees, the development of an early warning system to identify and respond to countries in crisis, implementing protection solutions to support refugee resettlement, building refugee self-sufficiency, establishment of a refugee "matching system" between refugees and potential host countries, and the need to involve all sectors (including education) in the implementation of coherent strategies to address large movements of refugees (Appleby, 2017).

Features of the EU response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine appear to align with the recommendations from the Global Compact on Refugees such as the development of an early warning system, for example the development of guidance documents and committees (European Commission, 2022). Within the first six days of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the number of refugees from Ukraine alone was over four million, which is more than twice the number of people who arrived in Europe during the Syrian migration in 2015 (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022). The European Commission (2022) developed a guidance working document, "Supporting the Inclusion of Displaced Children from Ukraine in Education". Although the title references "Displaced Children from Ukraine", it discusses the importance of provision of school places for all displaced children, the need for schools and teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of newly arrived students, and the importance of engaging with newly arrived families and planning for long term measures and measures for early childhood care and education. The document also discusses interventions that can be carried out in schools to support the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds. There is ongoing discussion about the difference in supports received and offered to refugees from Ukraine, compared to those from Syria (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022). This is an ongoing and complex discussion, raising many questions in relation to equality and access to supports.

### *2.1.3 CYP from Refugee Backgrounds and Education*

Due to pre-migration experiences, CYP from refugee backgrounds may face additional challenges with social and academic implications (Fazel & Berancourt, 2018). Research has

highlighted that CYP from refugee backgrounds often exhibit significant resilience and strength in navigating changes and challenges (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Tösten et al., 2017). However, a systematic review and meta-analysis of eight studies highlighted that CYP from a refugee background have a higher prevalence rate of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance and post-traumatic stress disorder than their non-refugee peers (Blackmore et al., 2020).

Education is viewed as one of the most important areas that needs to be considered when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds (Schachner et al., 2018). CYP have a universal right of access to education and adequate education is essential for overcoming disadvantages in societies (United Nations, 1948). CYP from refugee backgrounds have particular social and emotional needs that time in school can mitigate (Koehler & Schneider, 2019; Lynnebakke & Pastoor, 2020). The structure and consistency of school attendance has the potential to engender a healing process after trauma (Hayward, 2017).

McMullen and colleagues (2021) discuss the adversities faced by students from refugee backgrounds in schools. These include learning a new language, difficulties in establishing friendships and a sense of belonging, racism, unrealistic expectations to do well in school, and a lack of support from home and parentification, where CYP act in adult roles within the family (McMullen et al., 2020). Parentification within this context may consist of the child translating forms or bills for parents and communicating with other professionals on behalf of the parent figure. These difficulties have been reported in previous studies carried out in the United States (Kim et al., 2018), Northern Ireland (Murphy & Vieten, 2017), and the Republic of Ireland (Harmon, 2018; Skokauskas & Clarke, 2009). Due to likely exposure to trauma and the stress often experienced by CYP with refugee backgrounds, it is common for academic and developmental tasks to be additionally challenging for this population of students (Lynnebakke & Pastoor, 2020). Compared to their peers, CYP from refugee backgrounds are five times less likely to access basic education (McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). This may be due to the increased likelihood of experiencing interrupted education as a result of war in their country of origin or time migrating to a new country (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). It is important that CYP from refugee backgrounds experience a sense of safety and belonging in their school, however CYP often face challenges to safety and belonging such as bullying and marginalisation (Due et al., 2016). If they have been exposed to trauma before migration, such experiences may result in a secondary type of trauma (Myeong et al., 2021).

Many EU countries have faced challenges in supporting newly arrived CYP into mainstream education and these challenges were reported to have increased in 2015 with the growth in CYP from refugee backgrounds (Koehler et al., 2018). The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (2022) in Ireland developed guidelines that state that CYP should have an opportunity to attend a mainstream school as soon as possible after arrival, that is local to their new "home" and to be able to be educated alongside their siblings as well as others who share their language of origin. During their settling in period, the Joint Committee has advised schools to observe and respond to children's needs while gathering information on how the child is responding to the support offered from school. Harmon (2018) advocates for a whole school approach to support the inclusion of CYP from refugee backgrounds in school, including the involvement of wider communities to celebrate diversity and school policies that encourage a sense of belonging as well as parental involvement, facilitated by schools that nurture positive engagement with home. Research has highlighted the need for school stakeholders to recognise cultural and linguistic backgrounds and implement inclusive education practices in consideration of CYP from refugee backgrounds. Schools are encouraged to implement creative and interactive ways to facilitate language proficiency in order to support students being included in mainstream activities (d'Abreu et al., 2019).

Teachers and parents from refugee backgrounds have reported challenges in integrating children from refugee backgrounds in schools. Two studies in Turkey found that classroom teachers expressed reluctance to have students from refugee backgrounds in their class (Levent & Cavak, 2017; Ozen, 2019), and psychologists have provided school staff training in trauma informed approaches and the process of acculturation to assist teachers (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Teachers have also suggested that better communication with families would help with the process of including students from refugee backgrounds in their class (Simsir & Dilmac, 2018). Similarly, parents from refugee backgrounds have highlighted their need for support in helping their children with schooling. Obstacles reported include the communication barrier and the challenge of being involved in their children's learning in the new country (Cun, 2020). Many families of children with additional needs experience difficulties accessing services for their children. Families from refugee backgrounds face further obstacles in accessing support given their unique situation (Adams & Santos, 2022). Hurley et al. (2017) discuss the role of

cultural liaisons in working with families, a role similar to the role of an interpreter with a focus on communicating cultural differences and translating language and cultural differences between professionals and families. Families from refugee backgrounds with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) also face additional challenges. Hurley and colleagues highlight how in addition to the need for increased awareness of the cultural differences and history of refugee families, teachers also need to understand how disability is perceived in their culture. They discussed the need to prepare before meeting with families, such as meeting interpreters and having all forms translated.

It is also important to acknowledge the stress families from refugee backgrounds face in relation to housing and accommodation security (Brown et al., 2024). Temporary accommodation centres in Ireland and elsewhere are often overcrowded and stressful environments, particularly for parents and CYP in education (Brown et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2017). CYP from refugee backgrounds faced additional issues in accessing education during the school closures associated with COVID-19. These included access to online schooling, access to technology, having appropriate space to avail of remote learning opportunities (Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Mupenzi et al., 2020). School closures led to CYP from refugee backgrounds becoming independent learners, as adults at home may not have had the language proficiency to support the curriculum for the CYP (Magan et al., 2022). It has also been suggested that there is a lack of understanding of CYP who migrate with someone with parental authority, specifically around their rights and specific challenges they have faced in a forced migration situation (Brittle & Desmet, 2020).

### *2.1.4 Current Irish Context*

Between 2017 and 2022, Ireland had resettled a total of 1,646 refugee and asylum seekers (36 people from Iraq and 1,610 from Syria; UNHCR, 2022), with 585 people being granted refugee status in 2019, the highest out of the five years (Sheridan, 2020). This number does not include Ukrainian forcibly displaced individuals and does not specify the number of people under the age of 18. The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in a rapid increase in people from Ukraine arriving in Ireland. As of January 2023, it was reported that there were over 70,000 people from refugee backgrounds in Ireland, the majority from Ukraine (European Council of Refugees and Exile, 2023). Most recent statistics available have stated that as of February 2024 there are over 104,000 people from Ukraine in Ireland under the Temporary

Protection Directive (Central Statistics office, 2024). Furthermore, as of January 2024, it was reported that there are over 18,003 Ukrainian children from refugee background enrolled in Irish schools (Department of Education, 2024).

Research has highlighted that social and educational policies in English speaking countries are often in conflict with best practice (McBrien, 2019). Regulations in Europe state that children need to be included in education within three months of arriving (Crul et al., 2017); however, practice varies greatly in relation to this. Due to the rapid increase of CYP from refugee backgrounds in school systems worldwide since 2015, policy development is often described as "ad hoc" (Koehler & Schneider, 2019), or "unfriendly" towards CYP from refugee backgrounds (Ndibalema, 2023). In many countries in Europe, these policies often focus on goals to support teachers in meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. In Ireland, educational policies advised the implementation of an intercultural approach, where diversity is the norm in society (Fischer, 2016). Key relevant policies developed in Ireland in recent years targeting children in general and those from minority groups are highlighted in Table 2.

***Table 2***

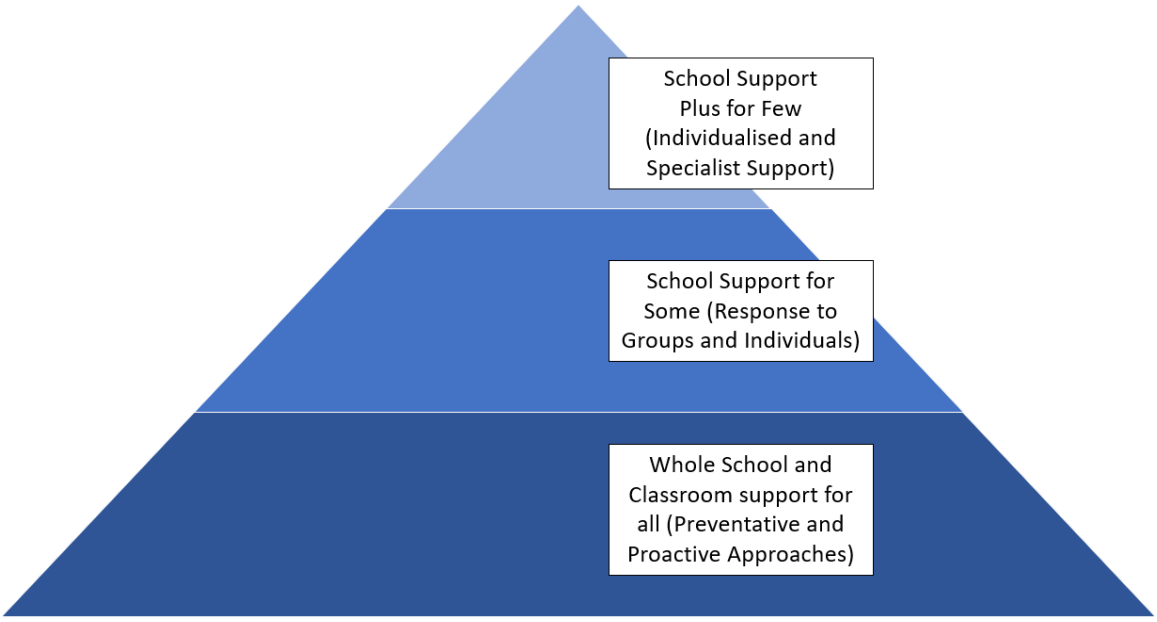
*Overview of Key Irish Policies Impacting CYP from Refugee Backgrounds*

| Name of Policy | Author | Relevance |
|---|---|---|
| The Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 | Department of Education and Skills, 2010 | Both identify approaches that aim for all students to experience their time in education as respectful of diversity of beliefs, values, languages and traditions. |
| The Migrant Integration Strategy: A blueprint for the future | Department of Justice, 2017 | |
| Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy | Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014 | Promotes a universal and targeted approach, focusing on the situation of all CYP while also identifying marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as CYP from refugee backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard, and CYP are supported to reach their full potential. |

Support and response to individuals from refugee backgrounds changed greatly within Europe and Ireland with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In response to the significant influx of CYP from Ukraine in 2022, a joint committee was developed, consisting of the Department of Education and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). The main purpose of this committee is to identify key challenges regarding the education provision for students arriving to Ireland from Ukraine. To further support CYP arriving from Ukraine's transitions into Irish schools, the Department of Education has developed sixteen Regional Educational and Language Teams (REALT) (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science 2022). These consist of professionals from the Irish statutory child protection and welfare agency, Tusla (The Child and Family Agency), educational psychological services (NEPS), specialists in Special Educational Needs (SEN) and school management bodies (Donnelly, 2022). The key roles of the REALTs are to support families in finding school places, assist schools in meeting the needs of CYP as they arise and to advise and support the Department in increasing capacity where needed, and finally to co-ordinate the provision of education services to CYP and their families. NEPS also developed guidance documents for primary (Department of Education, 2022a) and post primary schools (Department of Education, 2022b), "Supporting the Wellbeing of Children from Ukraine in your School". These documents acknowledge how EPs from NEPS can provide support at a whole school system level to enhance the wellbeing of CYP newly arriving to Ireland. They also highlight that some CYP may need additional support in adjusting to a new school in Ireland depending on their needs. The documents discuss how this can be implemented with the Continuum of Support (CoS) (See Figure 3).

***Figure 3***

*Visual representation of CoS Framework (adapted from Lynch et al., 2021)*




The CoS is the framework implemented in schools in Ireland to identify and support CYP who have additional needs in school (NEPS, 2007; NEPS, 2010). NEPS psychologists support schools in applying this framework with their students. The CoS encompasses a graduated level of support depending on the needs of the student. The support is broken into three levels: classroom support, where intervention can be carried out within the classroom by the main class teacher; school support, where interventions or assessments are carried out by a special education teacher working alongside the main class teacher; and school support plus, where the student requires additional or external support if they have complex or enduring needs (NEPS, 2007).

### *2.1.5 The Role of EPs*

The Currie Report (Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), 2002) describes five core functions of EPs as consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research. These functions are recommended to be viewed holistically; for example, assessment informs intervention and research is needed when undertaking assessment, intervention or training (National Scottish Steering Group for Educational Psychologists; NSSGEP, 2019). Viewing these functions holistically also supports how assessment, consultation, training and research can also be viewed as an educational psychological intervention (Ferreira, 2004). This highlights the

importance of viewing the work of EPs at an individual, group and organisation level of the ecological systems (Fallon et al., 2010; NSSGEP, 2019). A key role of EPs is advocating for the best interests of CYP and supporting them in having their needs met in a range of settings (Nastasi & Naser, 2020; Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), 2022). In order to qualify as an EP in Ireland, trainees are required to complete professional placements in health, social care, and educational settings (PSI, 2022). The PSI further describes how EPs' work involves supporting parents, carers, families, teachers, or other support professionals who work with CYP (PSI, 2022).

EPs provide support by identifying learning, social, emotional, and behavioural needs and exploring how individuals experience life within their school, home, and community environments. This is done by gathering information on interactions between psychological, affective, behavioural, environmental, and biological factors, and further acknowledges how EPs examine and work across the various ecological systems to support and understand the CYP they work with (Burns et al., 2015). EPs' role therefore involves prevention, assessment, intervention, and collaborative support to improve outcomes for the people they support, and to "understand the possible impact of disability, culture, gender, ethnicity, poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and inequality on educational, health and psychological well-being" (PSI, 2022, p.5). Linked to this core competency for EPs, research has emphasised that there is a lack of culturally appropriate and validated assessment tools and evidence-based interventions for working with CYP from refugee backgrounds (Due et al., 2014; Due & Currie, 2022; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018).

Research in Ireland and the UK has explored facilitators and barriers to EPs' implementation of interventions. Some aspects were reported as both facilitators and barriers such as supervision and training (Atkinson et al., 2014; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019). Common barriers reported were lack of time, government policy, the expectations of the role of the EP and lack of practice or experience in the area. Facilitators of the work included service-level support and positive intervention outcomes for the young people (Atkinson et al., 2014; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019). There was also evidence of EPs being expected to implement an "assessment focused" role.

### *2.1.6 EPs Working with Individuals from Refugee Backgrounds*

Some of the core professional competencies for EPs in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds include: knowledge of the complexity of the needs, cultural competence, the ability to build a therapeutic relationship, use of holistic approaches, ability to work with other networks/ individuals who support the CYP and seeking feedback (Due & Currie, 2022). Cultural competence is viewed as an evolving process and emphasises the importance of understanding, appreciating, and respecting "cultural differences and similarities within, among and between groups" (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020, p. 1). EPs are well positioned to support the socio-cultural, emotional, and academic development of CYP from refugee backgrounds (d'Abreu et al., 2019). However, these CYP constitute a diverse population with individual needs and cultural differences and may experience various ecological systems and how they interact with each other differently from other children (Burns et al., 2015; d'Abreu et al., 2019). Research in the UK has previously explored how EPs can support the resilience and wellbeing of parents from a refugee background (German, 2008); however, up to date research in the Irish context on this is limited.

EPs play a key role in assessing educational needs of CYP. Measures that EPs typically use to assess educational needs may not be valid for these students due to cultural and linguistic differences (Khawaja & Howard, 2020). As noted, the interruption of schooling caused by war or migration can disrupt typical developmental processes for these CYP. CYP from refugee backgrounds frequently need to learn a new language, learn how to navigate a new educational system, and often experience acculturative stress in adjusting to a new society, adding further stress to their experience (Graham et al., 2020; Khawaja & Howard, 2020). The assessment process for educational needs typically involves consulting with all stakeholders, such as parents, teachers and the CYP; observations of the student and, on occasion, an assessment of the student's cognitive ability and adaptive functioning (McDonough et al., 2018). The assessment can be impacted by the student's culture, language, and previous experiences (Khawaja & Howard, 2020). For example, cultural beliefs such as answering an adult in authority may impact results. Norms for standardised tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children - Fifth Edition (WISC-V) (Padilla & Borsato, 2008; Scheiber, 2016) have not been developed with CYP from refugee backgrounds, therefore, the validity and reliability of such tests may not be strong with this population (Khawaja & Howard, 2020). Furthermore, these CYP come from different

cultural backgrounds with different experiences, further suggesting a difficulty in standardising assessment tools with this population (Sengoelge et al., 2019). When carrying out assessments with CYP from refugee backgrounds, an ecological systemic approach is recommended, acknowledging how the various systems interact for the CYP, and results need to be interpreted with caution when using standardised tools (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2022). Assessment techniques may need to be adapted to ensure needs are identified. Kaplan et al. (2016) note the need for assessments to be comprehensive to avoid inappropriate diagnosis or school placement. Techniques can include gathering information on language proficiency, exposure to trauma and current school environment and climate (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2016). It has been recommended that a psychological assessment should not be carried out while a young person is still settling into their new environment (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022).

Interventions carried out in schools have shown promising outcomes for CYP from refugee backgrounds. It has been suggested that best practice is to focus on evidence-based and trauma-informed interventions, followed by cultural modifications specific to the CYP (Franco, 2018). Cultural modifications may include targeting the unique needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds such as language, housing, emotional and physical health, and including specific rituals or customs from the CYP native culture (Franco, 2018; Isaakson et al., 2015; Ngo et al., 2008). Interventions need to focus on increasing protective factors such as self-efficacy, ethnic identity, pride and language proficiency, while decreasing risk factors such as familial acculturation gaps, acculturative stress and parenting practices (d'Abreu et al., 2019). Culturally adapted interventions can also be implemented for parents which can focus on some areas such as communication skills, problem solving and limit or boundary setting (d'Abreu et al., 2019). Ira et al. (2021) suggest that programmes and interventions to support CYP from refugee backgrounds need to be flexible and individualised and multiple systems need to be engaged in order to meet their needs.

The use of interpreters may also be necessary when carrying out work with individuals from refugee backgrounds; this can impact both the assessment and intervention process. Gartley and Due (2017) note the necessity and importance of using interpreters but also note the challenges. Psychologists need to have specific training in order to work with interpreters, such

as knowing the importance of meeting the interpreter in advance to discuss guidelines, confidentiality and test standardisation (Vega et al., 2016).

As noted, NEPS has published guidance documents for both primary and post primary schools on supporting CYP in times of war and supporting the wellbeing of Ukrainian CYP, as well as guidance on psychological first aid for CYP from Ukraine at primary and post primary level (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). The Joint Committee (2022) has noted that although positive supports have been provided in schools for CYP from Ukraine, there are insufficient EPs in Ireland to provide support to schools in "normal circumstances." The Joint Committee recommends that NEPS needs to expand its service and include therapeutic supports for teachers who support these newly arrived students as well as existing students.

It is evident that, due to their professional competencies and expertise, EPs are well positioned to provide training for schools on how to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds. A review identified areas in which teachers may need further support when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds or living in emergency accommodation (Department of Education and Skills & National Educational Psychological Service, 2018). These include best practice when working with minorities, trauma informed approaches, understanding the learning of English as a second language and the implementation of the CoS in Irish schools.

Barrett and Berger (2021) explored teachers' experiences supporting students from refugee backgrounds exposed to trauma. They found that schools require further support in many aspects of this area such as how to present classroom lessons in a sensitive and trauma informed way for students from refugee backgrounds, when to refer students for specialised interventions and how best to support CYP from refugee backgrounds when external factors create continued challenges. Although limited research is available, recommendations have been made for EPs when working with this population. One important consideration is that of the social context of individuals from refugee backgrounds, and how this can impact wellbeing (Balaghi et al., 2017). This relates to the family context and their cultural beliefs such as whether they feel comfortable asking for help or engaging with support services such as a psychologist. Psychologists also need to consider and recognise whether the family have experienced discrimination or racism; this

will influence CYP's relationships with teachers as well as academic performance and engagement (Balaghi et al., 2017).

### *2.1.7 Experiences of Psychologists*

Research on psychologists' experiences in supporting people from refugee backgrounds has primarily focused on, highlighting the importance of implementing flexible and transparent approaches, such as engaging with the community and working with groups (Duden et al., 2020; Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022). Duden & Martins-Borges (2022) highlight psychologists' feelings of frustration and helplessness in relation to the experiences their clients reported of racism and xenophobia, demanding that they move past their "classical psychological work" (p. 625) due to structural, systemic or cultural barriers, leading to more work within the community and groups. These authors note that many psychiatric diagnostic manuals are based on western culture which can lead to a misinterpretation of suffering when used with clients outside of the population the manuals were developed with.

Vicarious trauma has been reported as quite common for psychologists and other professionals working with individuals from refugee backgrounds (Babiker & Abdalla, 2021; Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022; Ebren et al., 2022). Vicarious trauma occurs after or while working with individuals who have directly experienced trauma. It refers to adverse changes in the professionals' cognitive processes and self, specifically relating to disruptions of the professional's identity, belief system and memory (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Simms et al., 2021). This can result in cognitive distress as well as impaired cognitive functioning. Post traumatic growth, on the other hand, refers to the more positive professional experiences when working with clients who have experienced trauma. Professionals have reported personal growth as well as changes in perspectives in this area and amazement at the strength of refugees following trauma, which encourages hope in themselves (Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022; Long, 2020). No research to date has focused on psychologists' experiences of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds.

### *2.1.8 Conclusion and Rationale for Systematic Review*

There has been a significant global increase in CYP from refugee backgrounds in recent years (Fransen & De Haas, 2022; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). CYP from refugee backgrounds are not a homogenous group and how they experience and develop within the various interactions of their ecological systems is different for each individual (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Douglas et al.,

2019). Various issues need to be considered when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. These considerations include that the individual may be communicating in a language that is not their first language, they are likely to have experienced trauma and may be exposed to racism while starting in a new school and trying to establish friendships and a new sense of belonging (McMullen et al., 2021). These challenges are in addition to everyday challenges that CYP may face such as difficulties with learning, social interactions, and additional needs in the educational environment, as well as family stressors relating to accommodation and adjusting a new cultural environment (Brown et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2017).

This chapter has provided an overview of the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds in education and the role of EPs in meeting these needs. The recent growth of research in this area and the need for guidance for EPs in conducting this work suggests the potential benefit of conducting a systematic review of literature, in order to synthesise the findings from the range of research literature available in this area. Such a review will highlight gaps in current research and may also help policy makers and practitioners identify the key learnings from the existing research and guide service development, ensuring that best practice is implemented in this area.

## 2.2 Systematic Review of the Literature

There is some literature on psychologists' experiences in supporting refugees, however, research carried out in this area primarily focuses on work with adults from refugee backgrounds, which does not address the context of the educational setting. A preliminary review of the literature indicated that there was limited research specifically examining psychologists' experiences of working with refugee CYP, therefore the use of a broader review question was implemented to examine research available on professionals' experiences, to encompass the range of educational professionals that work with this population. A systematic search of the literature was conducted to answer the review question: "What is known about the experiences and perspectives of *professionals* in supporting children and young people from refugee backgrounds in education?" The aim of this review is to highlight key findings in professionals' experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in primary and secondary school settings, while also evaluating the quality of the research to date. The review examines the type of studies carried out, the focus and settings of the studies, to inform the design of an empirical study in this field.

### *2.2.1 Search Strategy and Screening*

A comprehensive search was carried out in July 2023 and updated and broadened in January 2024 to ensure all relevant, recent research studies were gathered. An extensive search was conducted on the following databases: APA Psych Articles, APA Psych info, ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) and Academic Search Complete. Search terms used in the literature search are highlighted in Table 3; relating to the participants, phenomena of interest and the context.

***Table 3***

*Search Terms Utilised for Systematic Review*

| Search Term Area | Search Term |
|---|---|
| **Participants** | ("Psycholog*" OR “Educat*” OR “Teach*” OR “Principal*”) |
| | AND |
| **Phenomena of Interest** | ("Displaced" OR "Refugee*" OR "Asylum seek*”) |
| | AND |
| **Context** | ("School*" OR "Education*") |

### *2.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria*

The systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) approach which provides guidance for investigating qualitative research and synthesising the findings reported from multiple studies (Lockwood et al., 2015). As highlighted in Table 3, the focus was on participants, area of interest, and context. The participants were defined as professionals, the phenomena of interest were their experience in working with/supporting children and young people from refugee backgrounds of school age and the context was educational settings. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are described in more detail in Table 4. Records were systematically selected using the inclusion and exclusion criteria highlighted.

***Table 4***

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

| | Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria | Rationale |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Year Of Publication** | Studies published from the year 2014 onwards | Studies published before 2014 | To ensure the research being reviewed is up-to-date and relevant. |
| **2. Language** | English | Not English | Due to limitations of being unable to translate. |
| **3. Type of Publication** | In a peer-reviewed journal | Study not in a peer-reviewed journal | To focus on empirical research studies that have undergone a peer assessment/ review ensuring high quality. |
| **4. Study Type / Methodology** | Qualitative<br>Empirical | Quantitative or mixed methods<br>Non empirical<br>Conceptual frameworks<br>Analysis of policy documents | Study methodology relevance to research question on focusing on professionals' experiences of working with/supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. |
| **5. Focus of Study** | Professionals' experiences of directly supporting / working with CYP from refugee backgrounds in primary or secondary education. | Refugee/ displacement or asylum seeker not referenced or acknowledged in focus of study.<br>Supporting (im)migrant students / newcomers/ does not specify backgrounds.<br>Supporting adult refugees in education<br>Evaluation of intervention/ curriculum.<br>Professionals' observations of refugees rather than direct experience of supporting / working with refugees. | Study relevance to research question focusing on professionals' experiences of supporting and working with asylum seekers/ refugees/ forcibly displaced young people. |
| **6. Participants** | Psychologists / School / educational professionals with CYP from refugee | Non-professionals, e.g. family perspectives, student perspectives, volunteer perspectives student teacher or other student professional perspectives. | Study relevance to research question, focusing on the experience of professionals supporting and working with refugees. |

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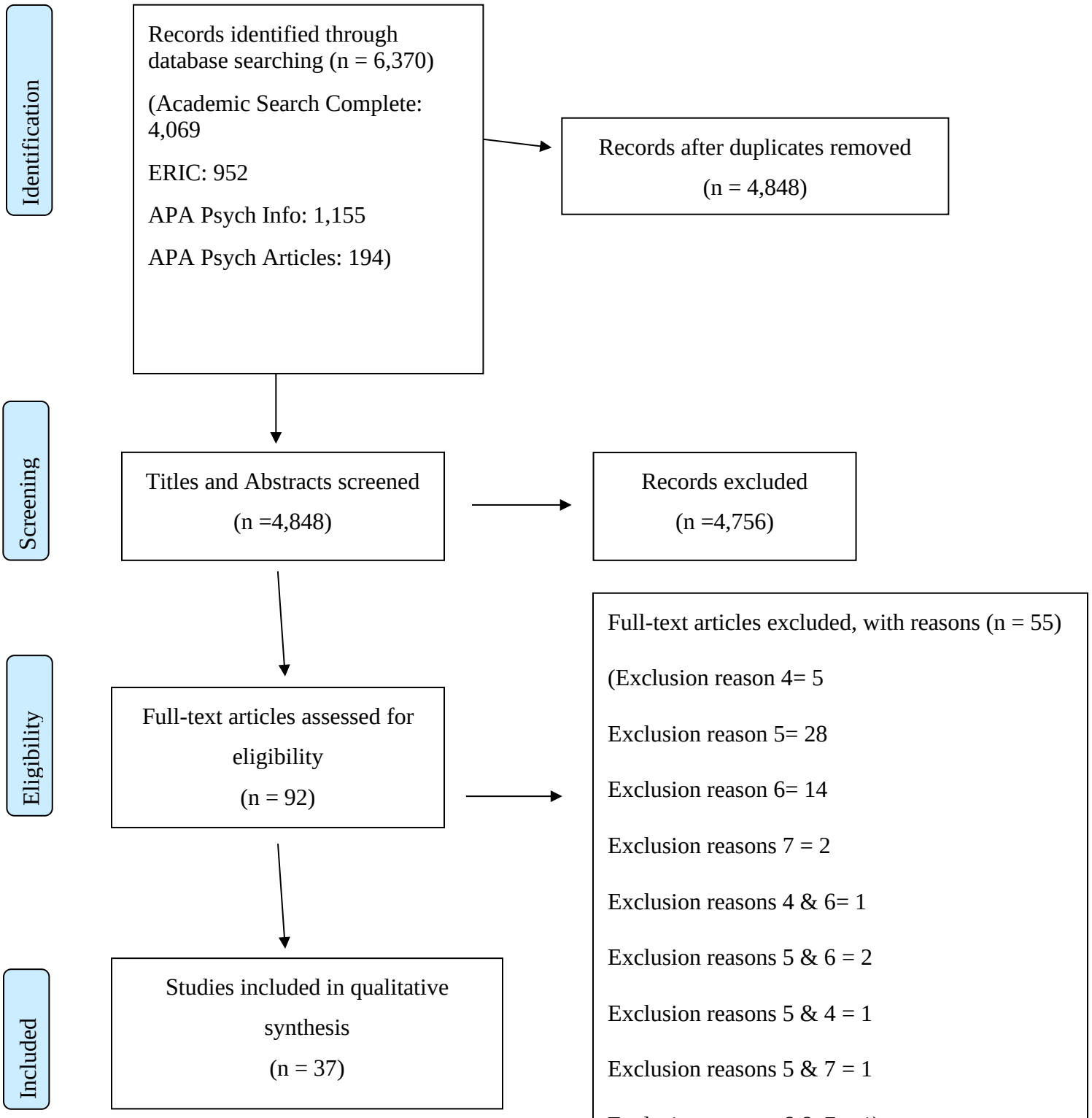
|---|---|---|---|
| | backgrounds in primary or secondary educational settings | Participants not specified. | |
| **7. Setting** | Primary or Secondary Educational Settings/ Schools | Pre-school setting<br>Non education setting<br>Higher education setting<br>Setting not specified | Related to aim of the review to explore experiences of professionals in school settings. |
| **8. Availability of Article** | Full text available | Full text not available | Due to limited resources and time constraints only full text articles available through the researcher's institution and online were included |

### *2.2.3 Search Outcome*

The search identified a total of 6,370 publications. Initial search results were collated in Microsoft Excel and duplications were removed, resulting in 4,848 studies. Potentially relevant studies were identified via screening titles and abstracts. Abstracts were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria resulting in 4,756 studies being excluded at this stage, and 92 articles included for full text analysis. 55 studies were excluded based on specific exclusion criteria. Examples of reasons for exclusion included that if the study focused on experiences of working with adults or if participants were students and non-professionals. See Figure 4 for description of this process.

***Figure 4***

*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review (PRISMA) Flow chart of included studies, with exclusion criteria numbers referenced from Table 4*



### *2.2.4 Quality Appraisal*

Gough (2007)'s Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework was implemented to evaluate the studies that met the inclusion criteria for this review. The framework provides a structure to evaluate studies by investigating three areas: methodological quality (WoE A), methodological relevance (WoE B) and relevance to the review question (WoE C). An overall WoE is then provided, based on the scores obtained in the three areas (WoE D).

To ensure a reliable appraisal, the WoE A, the methodological quality, of the 37 studies, was assessed using The Johanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tool (Lockwood et al., 2015), while the WoE B and WoE C criteria were determined by the author as assessing specific areas in the studies that are relevant to the current review question. These criteria are used to evaluate the studies' level of applicability and help establish their level of strength as a source of information based on the current review question (Gough, 2007). Finally, WoE D was calculated, based on finding the average WoE. Appendix A represents a summary of all three of the WoE, and the overall WoE scores for each study. Each WoE was inputted and calculated within an excel sheet. Of the 37 included studies, ten received a high-quality appraisal, 18 medium and nine were low. These overall WoE scores impacted the emphasis each study received in the synthesis of findings, meaning the higher WoE studies received more emphasis or weight in the synthesis, while the studies that received a low WoE were not included in the synthesis of findings.

### *2.2.5 Mapping the Field*

The following subheadings provide summary information on the studies included for quality appraisal. Information on the focus of the studies, participants and settings, data collection and analysis are provided here to further inform the interpretation of the results. See Table 5 for summary of included studies.

***Table 5***

*Summary of Included Studies*

| **Citation** | **Focus of Study** | **Country** | **Participants** | **Setting** | **Methodology** | **Data Collection** | **Data Analysis** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Akkaya & Tabancali (2023) | Teachers' perceptions of social justice leadership in refugee students' education | Turkey | N=11 secondary school teachers | Secondary schools in four different locations | Phenomenological design | Semi-structured interviews and focus groups | Content analysis |
| Aydin & Kaya (2019) | Teachers' and principals' perceptions of needs and challenges of Syrian refugee children and the need for cultural integration | Turkey | N=9 (7 Teachers, 2 Principals) | Inner city elementary schools | Case study approach | Semi-structured interviews | Systematic inductive approach |
| Barrett & Berger (2021) | Experiences of teachers in supporting students from refugee backgrounds who have experienced trauma | Australia | N=6 teachers | Primary schools and English language school | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | Thematic analysis |
| Bozdağ & Ergün (2022) | Psychological Counsellors and Guidance (PCG) experts' experiences of working with refugee children within mental health services in schools | Turkey | N=38 PCG experts | Mixed school levels | Phenomenological pattern | Individual interviews | Inductive thematic analysis |
| Brar-Josan & Yohani (2019) | To understand how Educational Cultural Brokers (ECBs) facilitate access to mental health care for refugee youth in school | Canada | N=4 ECBs | ECBs providing services to refugee youth in school settings | Qualitative case study | Semi-structured interviews | Thematic analysis |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Çelik & Kodan (2020) | Experiences of primary school teachers in teaching Turkish to refugee students | Turkey | N=36 primary school teachers | Primary schools | Phenomenology pattern | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |
| Cho et al. (2019) | How teachers describe refugee English Language Learners' socio-emotional competencies and their pedagogical approaches used to support socio emotional development | United States | N=6 elementary school teachers | Elementary schools | Qualitative | In-depth interviews | Not specified, but described in four steps as being guided by the five domains if Social Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) |
| Duran (2021) | To understand the educational services conducted in Temporary Education Centre (TEC) and educators' perceptions on opportunities within TEC's relating to language, social, cultural and environmental needs of asylum seeker children. | Turkey | N=9 (6 participants working in a TEC, 2 coordinators, 1 educator) | TEC | Phenomenology design | Semi-structured interviews | Not specified, but described in three steps: coding, theming and visualisation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) |
| Gokce & Erdal (2018) | Identify the problems, the solutions and the suggestions of principals and teachers working with refugee students. | Turkey | N=10 (4 school principals, 6 teachers) | Primary schools | Phenomenology pattern | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gürel & Büyüksahin (2020) | Views of teachers working in TECs about the education process with refugee children | Turkey | N=19 primary school teachers | TEC | Case study qualitative approach | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |
| Henderson & Ambroso (2018) | How educational professionals are supporting refugee students' educational experiences | United States | N=6 (3 primary teachers, 1 secondary teacher, 1 primary principal, 1 secondary guidance counselor) | Primary and secondary schools | Interpretive, qualitative research design | Interviews | Grounded theory |
| Hos & Cinarbas (2018) | Experiences of teachers and administrators in a non-formal educational context for Syrian refugee children. | Turkey | "Teachers and an administrator" (n= not specified) | Non-formal education project | Case study approach | Participant observation and field-notes at school; semi-structured interviews; researcher journal and classroom artifacts | Content analysis |
| Ira et al. (2021) | Views of teachers of refugee students on their subjective wellbeing | Turkey | N=7 teachers | Primary schools | Qualitative descriptive | Semi-structured interviews | Not specified, but process described as grouping and matching to relevant research questions |

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| Jepson Wigg (2021) | Explore teachers' work with unaccompanied refugee students | Sweden | N= 3 teachers | Secondary schools | Qualitative design | Reflexive interviews | Not specified, but described as being informed by moral dimensions |
| Kardeş, & Akman (2022) | Investigate the educational problems of refugee students as perceived by educational professionals | Turkey | N=15 (2 administrators, 2 school counsellors, 11 teachers) | TEC | Phenomenological study | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |
| Karsli-Calamak et al. (2020) | Teachers' understandings and practices with refugee families and children within multilingual mathematics workshops | Turkey | N=14 (K-3rd grade teachers) | Elementary schools | Phenomenological | Semi-structured focus group interviews | Inductive approach |
| Kaya & Ok (2021) | Identify thoughts relating to problems and possible solutions faced by mathematics and science teachers in classrooms with Syrian students under temporary protection | Turkey | N= 30 teachers | State middle schools | Case study approach | Interviews | Content analysis |
| Konstantinos & Paida (2020) | To explore how Refugee Education Coordinators communicate and collaborate with refugee parents to empower them to engage with their children's child education. | Greece | N=14 Refugee Education Coordinators | Interviews conducted online. Participants worked in refugee camps and educational settings | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | Not specified by name but described as qualitative analysis as described by Creswell (2012a) |

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| Koubeissy et al. (2023) | Explore teachers' perceptions of their role with Syrian refugee students in the Lebanese crisis context | Lebanon | N=4 teachers | Private and public schools | Qualitative | Online interviews | Gradual qualitative data analysis |
| Lemke & Nickerson (2020) | Explore how educational policy and programmatic supports impact mental health needs of displaced student population and identify what are school and staffing needs related to these supports. | United States | N=25 (Individual interviews, n=6 principal, assistant principal, attendance officer, school security officer, and two counsellors) (3 focus groups, n=19 (English, Math, Science, Social Studies teachers and support teaching staff) | High schools | Qualitative case study | Observations, document collection, interviews, and focus groups | Comparative analyses |
| LeRoy & Boomgaard (2021) | Explore how teacher- student relationship influence the teachers' perception of experience and explore what teachers identify as improving connectedness for students with refugee status | United States | N=12 "co-researchers" | Online, participants not specified/ described but working in rural school district | Phenomenological | Survey | Phenomonological analysis |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mayor (2021) | Explore how teachers are affected by explicit trauma disclosures from refugee students in the classroom | Canada | Unclear, describes 7 teachers and states 11 narratives | Primary schools | Narrative study design | Semi-structured interviews, written materials relating to trauma trainings, school board policy, and classroom resources | Narrative data analysis |
| McDiarmid et al. (2022) | Explore teachers' beliefs about schools and teacher's roles in supporting mental wellbeing of refugee youth | Sweden | N=30 high school teachers/ educators | High schools | Exploratory design | Focus group discussions | Reflexive thematic analysis |
| McIntyre & Hall (2020) | Explore barriers head teachers face in the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children in English schools | England | N=4 head teachers | Secondary schools | Not specified | Interviews | Not specified or described |
| Nazli, & Culha (2023) | Identify problems faced by refugee students during the Covid-19 pandemic and teachers' examples of practices with open and distance learning to cope with these problems | Turkey | N=14 teachers | Elementary, middle and high schools | Phenomenological design | Interviews | Descriptive analysis method |

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| Newcomer et al., (2021) | Explore how two teachers meet the socio emotional, academic and language needs of their refugee backgrounds students | United States | N=2 (4th and 5th grade teachers) | Elementary school | Qualitative case study | Interviews | Not specified but described as inductive analysis using "open-coding and thematic delineation techniques |
| O'Neal et al. (2018) | To understand classroom management and refugee student emotions, attention and behaviour from the perspective of teachers | Malaysia | N=19 (2 focus groups, 1 group of 10 teachers and one of 9. Teachers experience with Burmese refugees) | Refugee school | Participatory culture-specific consultation approach, ethnographic approach | Focus group discussions | Not specified or described in sufficient detail, reference to negative case analysis. |
| Ott & O'Higgins (2019) | To explore how education opportunities are accessed by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England and how this provision interacts with their needs | England | N=12 key informants (school heads, teachers, social workers, and third sector providers) | Mixed school levels | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | Not specified or described |
| Ozen (2019) | Principals' perceptions of refugee students through the lenses of complex adaptive leadership | Turkey | N=19 school principals | Public schools | Phenomenological | Interviews | Descriptive analysis |

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| Özkan & Çakmak (2021) | Identify the administrative problems principals face with Syrian students under temporary protection, and suggested solutions to these problems | Turkey | N= 10 (3 secondary school principals,7 primary school principals) | Primary and secondary schools | Qualitative case study | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |
| Prentice (2022) | Explore educators' positive practices with refugee pupils | England | N=17 class teachers, specialist teachers and teaching assistants | Primary and secondary schools | Qualitative case study | Participant observation and semi-structured interviews | Thematic analysis |
| Sharif (2020) | Teachers of Syrian refugees' perceptions of quality education and experiences of pedagogical change | Turkey | N=15 Refugee Teachers | Syrian Refugee School, interviews conducted online | Qualitative case study | Online documents, and real-time online observations through semi-structured interviews | Thematic analysis |
| Svensson (2019) | Examines the challenges experienced by teachers of asylum-seeking pupils | Sweden | N=16 (14 teachers and 2 headmasters of nine schools) | Eight junior compulsory schools (grades 1–6) and one senior compulsory school (grades 7–9) | Part of larger Ethnographic fieldwork study | Informal and unstructured interviews with the 16 participants and two focus-group discussions with seven teachers | Not specified but described as data being coded systematically followed by categories and subcategory identification. Hermeneutic approach |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | guided the interpretation with the emergent of salient themes. |
| Tösten et al. (2017) | Identify Syrian refugee children's experiences in public schools as perceived by teachers | Turkey | N=28 primary school teachers | Primary School | Descriptive phenomenological | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |
| Wille et al. (2019) | The perceptions of school-based professionals in rural communities in including refugees | United States | N=11 (elementary school principal, district coordinator, school counsellor, school psychologist, school social worker, five English Language teachers, and one general education teacher) | Elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as the district office. | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | Qualitative analysis |
| Yavas (2022) | To explore problems faced by principals in areas of refugee student population and their suggestions to overcoming these problems. | Turkey | N=12 (secondary school principals) | Secondary Schools | Qualitative Case Study | Semi-structured interviews | Content analysis |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yenel (2022) | To explore professional development needs of teachers and principals working in TECs relating to the difficulties they face. | Turkey | N=10 (seven Turkish teachers, two vice principals, one principal) | TEC | Qualitative case study, phenomenological design. | Observations, field notes and interviews. | Content analysis |

**2.3.5.1 Study Design.** Studies included a range of foci and objectives, for example, student mental health or wellbeing (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022; Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Cho et al. 2019; Lemke & Nickerson, 2020; LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021; Newcomer et al. 2021; Newcomer et al. 2021), inclusion or integration (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; McIntyre & Hall, 2020 Wille et al., 2019), trauma disclosures (Barrett & Berger 2021; Mayor, 2021) and perceptions of professional roles and leadership (Akkaya & Tabancali, 2023; Ott, & O'Higgins, 2019; Ozen, 2019; McDiarmid et al., 2022; Koubeissy et al. 2023). Studies also explored professionals' experiences of working with students from refugee backgrounds (Jepson Wigg, 2021; Svensson, 2019; Sharif, 2020), and one study focused on the subjective wellbeing of teachers themselves (Ira et al., 2021). Thus, more studies focused on teachers' perspectives of the wellbeing of their students, as opposed to their own wellbeing.

Only one study focused on "positive practices" of professionals (Prentice, 2022). It was more common for the research aims to focus on problems, challenges or barriers experienced by professionals in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds (Gokce & Erdal, 2018; Gürel, & Büyüksahin, 2020; Kaya & Ok, 2021; Kardeş, & Akman, 2022; McIntyre & Hall, 2020; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; Svensson, 2019; Tösten et al., 2017; Yavaş, 2022), although four of these papers also discussed identifying suggestions to solving problems (Gokce & Erdal, 2018; Kaya & Ok, 2021; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; Yavaş, 2022) .

It is worth noting the variability in language used when referring to CYP from refugee backgrounds across studies. The most common terminology was the use of "refugee students." Two studies referred to the young people as students "under temporary protection" (Kaya & Ok, 2021; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021). While Karsli-Calamak et al. (2020) used the term "refugee students" throughout their study, they provided a definition of their choice for terminology and an explanation stating that Syrians in Turkey have been granted the status of "temporary protection."

Eleven of the studies described their design as implementing a case study approach (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Gürel, & Büyüksahin, 2020; Kaya & Ok, 2021; Lemke & Nickerson, 2020; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; Newcomer et al., 2021; Prentice, 2022; Sharif, 2020; Yavaş, 2022; Yenel, 2022). The majority of the studies did not describe their philosophical perspectives or acknowledge the impact of the researcher on the research, impacting on their WoE A score. Eleven studies stated that they held a phenomenological

perspective (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022; Çelik & Kodan, 2020; Duran, 2021; Gokce & Erdal, 2018; Kardeş, & Akman, 2022; Karsli-Calamak et al., 2020; LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021; Nazli & Culha, 2023; Ozen, 2019; Tösten et al., 2017; Yenel, 2022); two studies referred to the authors' philosophical perspective as interpretative (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Henderson & Ambroso, 2018); one study stated the perspective was social constructivism (Barrett & Berger, 2021) and finally, one study described the philosophical perspective in line with ethical theory, "stating that morality cannot build on gaining knowledge about the other, but rather is only possible through the face-to-face encounter" (Jepson Wigg, 2021, p. 310).

Six of the included studies acknowledged the influence of the researcher (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Henderson & Ambroso, 2018; Lemke & Nickerson, 2020; LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021; Prentice, 2022; Yavaş, 2022), describing the authors' positioning, while one paper stated that the researcher knew each of the participants but did not state how or whether this impacted the research findings (McIntyre & Hall, 2020).

**2.3.5.2 Participants and Settings.** The review consisted of 37 studies published between 2017 and 2023. Studies were carried out across nine different countries, with 19 conducted in Turkey and six in the United States. The majority of the studies were carried out in Turkey, this is likely due to the proximity of Turkey to Syria and the high number of CYP from refugee backgrounds arriving in Turkey as a result of the war in Syria. Turkey has also been reported as the country that has welcomed the largest numbers of refugees globally (UNHCR, 2020). Karsli-Calamak et al. (2020) noted that Turkey hosts the world's largest number of child refugees. All of the CYP in the studies carried out in Turkey were from Syria with the exception of one including refugee CYP from Afghanistan (Çelik & Kodan, 2020).

The studies encompassed a total of 504 participants, with sample sizes ranging from two to 38 participants. One paper did not specify the number of participants included in the study (Hos & Cinarbas, 2018) and another study described an inconsistency with the participants who completed the study, stating that they included eleven narratives from seven participants (Mayor, 2021). There was a range of participants described within the included studies. These included teachers, specialist teachers, vice principals, principals, headmasters, teaching assistants, social workers, counsellors, attendance officers, security officer refugee educational coordinators, staff working in Temporary Education Centres (TECs) and third sector workers.

School structures were described differently across cultures and countries, for example elementary and primary schools, and high school and secondary schools. Nine studies were carried out in primary school settings only; seven in secondary, high or middle school settings; nine studies included a mix across school level settings. Two papers did not state the school level but described the setting as private or public schools (Koubeissy et al., 2023; Ozen, 2019) and three study educational settings were unclear (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Hos & Cinarbas, 2018; LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021). Seven studies were carried out across TECs, two being in refugee schools and one in refugee camps.

Twelve papers described the geographical setting. Ten of the studies were described as being carried out in city or urban areas (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019; Henderson & Ambroso, 2018; Lemke & Nickerson, 2020; Mayor, 2021; McDiarmid et al., 2022; McIntyre & Hall, 2020; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; Prentice, 2022; Sharif, 2020), with one study being carried out in a rural area, which also highlighted the lack of research carried out in rural settings in this context (Willie et al., 2019). One study was carried out in schools both in urban areas and smaller communities (Svensson, 2019). The remainder included studies that did not specify whether the participants were working in rural or urban areas.

**2.3.5.3 Data Collection and Analysis.** Interviews were the most common form of data collection described in the majority of the studies. Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection in 20 studies. Four studies carried out focus groups for data collection (Akkaya & Tabancali, 2023; Lemke & Nickerson, 2020; McDiarmid et al., 2022; O'Neal et al., 2018) and one study used an online qualitative survey to collect data (LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021). A range of approaches to data analysis were used, with the most common approach being content analysis, reported in 11 of the studies, with various approaches to thematic analysis being implemented in six of the studies. Other analytic approaches described were gradual qualitive data analysis (Koubeissy et al., 2023), grounded theory (Henderson & Ambroso, 2018), descriptive analysis (Nazli & Culha, 2023; Ozen, 2019), narrative analysis (Mayor, 2021) and a systematic inductive approach (Aydin & Kaya, 2019). Ten studies did not specifically name their analysis approach but described it in terms similar to thematic analysis, while two of these ten studies did not specify or describe their process of analysis. 16 of the studies either provided the interview schedules used or gave in-depth descriptions of the interview schedules. Ten of the studies included details of a pilot study.

### *2.2.6 Synthesis of Findings*

For the purpose of this review, this synthesis draws on the quality appraisal conducted, thus focusing on the studies that held a higher overall WoE (WoE D), with studies that received a low WoE D not being included in this synthesis (see Appendix A for reference). Findings of each of the studies were synthesized using the Joanna Briggs Institute approach, meta-aggregation (Lockwood et al., 2015). This approach was considered best suited as it can be applied to reviews that include any number of studies, and the process does not involve re-interpreting the findings from the studies but aims to integrate and combine the findings together. The process of meta-aggregation focuses on summarising the original authors' findings and also corresponds well with the review question of focusing on the experiences of professionals (Lockwood et al., 2015).

The outcome of the synthesis process resulted in three key findings: language and communication barriers, a general lack of resources available in educational settings, and the relational approach used by professionals to foster relationships between CYP, schools and families. **Language or communication** was commonly identified as a perceived barrier or challenge to supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds (Aydin, & Kaya, 2019; Çelik & Kodan, 2020; Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020; Kardeş, & Akman, 2022; Kaya & Ok, 2021; Nazli & Culha, 2023; Newcomer et al., 2021; Yavaş, 2022). Building on the impact that language barriers have on educational engagement (Ozen, 2019), it was also reported that the language barrier widened as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic and online learning (Nazli & Culha, 2023). It was noted that CYP at primary school age tend to learn their host language at a quicker pace than CYP arriving during secondary school (Prentice, 2022). Yavaş (2022) referenced there being a distribution discrepancy of CYP from refugee backgrounds, with one school included in their study having CYP from refugee backgrounds making up their entire student population. The study noted that this contributes to the language barrier experienced outside the school setting, impacting CYP's motivation to learn the language of their new country (Turkey) as they are more likely to engage with peers who speak the same native language as them. This further impacts on the integration and inclusion of CYP from refugee backgrounds in schools. This may be impacted by teachers having also expressed a wish not to teach CYP from refugee backgrounds or include them in their class as they believed it would impact the progress of their existing students (Ozen, 2019).

Psychological Counsellors and Guidance (PCG) experts also noticed a difficulty for staff with language when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022). They noted trying to overcome this difficulty by accessing support from other staff or peers in the school who speak the same first language as the student. PCG experts also described adapting assessments to acknowledge the impact of language, such as providing more explanation than recommended, ensuring questions are precise and clear and can be answered with yes or no options. Moreover, participants were able to specifically name that they felt challenged in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds relating to potential trauma experiences and knowing what specific behaviours or emotions to focus on or support.

Relating to **a lack of resources,** teachers often felt ill-equipped in teaching their language to CYP from refugee backgrounds with different first languages (Çelik & Kodan, 2020; Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020), feeling inadequate in their teaching methods, specifically relating to the assessment and evaluation of CYP from refugee backgrounds in their class (Kaya & Ok, 2021). Some studies argued the need for specific teacher training in this area, while also highlighting the need for teachers to be supported with managing the stress of this role (Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020; Koubeissy et al., 2023; McDiarmid et al., 2022). It was common for educators to express a "general feeling of unpreparedness" (Henderson & Ambroso, 2018, p. 64). All participants within this study had achieved high levels of education and continued to seek further professional training to support them in meeting the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds. This related to "Structured English Immersion," a programme that teachers were making adaptations to in order to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds (Henderson & Ambroso, 2018). Teachers also noted significant issues with the use of standardised assessments with this population; impacting the supports and progress their students make. Teachers felt that they were qualified to teach English as a second language, but experienced significant self-doubt when this was in the context of CYP from refugee backgrounds. Furthermore, the stress of covering curriculum and supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds for exams was also highlighted as a stress that teachers faced (Prentice, 2022). Teachers in TECs often felt that they had a lack of experience or training to support CYP from refugee backgrounds, they identified specific training needs for managing cultural differences and trauma presentations that impact attitudes and behaviours in the classroom. Some of these differences were described as leading to sexism and violence in some classrooms, leading participants to express a need for support with

classroom management (Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020; Kardeş & Akman, 2022; Yenel, 2022; O'Neal et al., 2018).

Participants commonly referred to the CYP's experience of trauma. Teachers reported feeling a lack of confidence in how to present classroom content sensitively (Barrett & Berger, 2021), referring both to cultural differences and past experiences of trauma. Participants were aware that trauma experiences varied greatly and included witnessing serious violence and use of weapons, loss of family members, family separation and spending time in temporary accommodation centres. Teachers described what they believed to be trauma related behaviours from CYP with refugee backgrounds such as withdrawal, selective mutism, self-harm, challenging authority, disrupting lessons, violence, destroying school property and disengagement with learning (Barrett & Berger, 2021; Kardeş, & Akman, 2022; O'Neal et al., 2018; Yavaş, 2022). One barrier relating to trauma that was identified was poor information sharing with teachers about the CYP from refugee backgrounds in their class (Tösten et al., 2021; Barrett & Berger, 2021), which also impacted interactions and classroom dynamics. One paper noted that participants highlighted this as their main concern for CYP from refugee backgrounds (LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021). Teachers reported that they were unsure how to manage specific trauma related behaviours, or they were unsure when to refer for psychological support (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Barrett & Berger, 2021). While in one study, this was addressed by school having access to "cultural brokers" who support CYP and families from refugee backgrounds in understanding their mental health needs and accessing mental health services when needed (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2019). In relation to acknowledging the experiences of trauma, LeRoy & Boomgaard (2021) found that teachers were also motivated to ensure that CYP felt safe in their class, and that teachers also found establishing and reaching this goal of safety rewarding.

Lack of resources available to support CYP from refugee backgrounds was an evident theme, especially throughout the COVID 19 pandemic (Nazli & Culha, 2023). Nazli and Culha (2023) described how CYP from refugee backgrounds often did not have access to the technology resources or parental support to engage with remote learning during lockdowns. One study where participants reflected on the lack of resources available to schools and families noted the need to be flexible, adapting plans with what is available (Koubeissy et al., 2023). Lack of resources specifically in the classroom in TECs, included inappropriate teaching materials and

lack of a curriculum (Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020; Yenel, 2022). Principals noted wanting to meet CYP from refugee backgrounds' educational needs initially, but later learning that their physical needs were not being met, as some CYP from refugee backgrounds did not have enough food, water or appropriate shelter (Ozen, 2019). Financial barriers or small school budgets were a significant barrier in accessing resources needed to support CYP from refugee backgrounds (Ozen, 2019).

There were also reports of a lack of resources to meet the psychological needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021; McDiarmid et al., 2022). Resource limitations included lack of time and training for teachers and professionals, lack of services available and lack of appropriate structures. Teachers found it difficult to manage classroom dynamics with students who they (the teachers) felt had likely experienced trauma in the past (Kaya & Ok, 2021; Tösten et al., 2021). One paper reported how participants tried to communicate the difficulties that refugee families faced to other members of the school community in the hope that other parents and students would be understanding of the challenges they had faced (Ira et al., 2021). Participants also expressed wanting to learn more about how to work with CYP who had experienced trauma (Wille et al., 2019). To support the social and emotional wellbeing of CYP from refugee backgrounds, Çelik & Kodan (2020) recommended more social activities for CYP from refugee backgrounds as well as counselling services made accessible in schools. Studies also highlighted the need for more social activities to support further building of positive relationships within the educational context (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022; Nazli & Culha, 2023).

The **importance of relational approaches** was also commonly noted, with frequent communication and collaboration with CYP from refugee backgrounds and their parents being described as an example of best practice (Cho et al., 2019; Karsli-Calamak et al., 2020; Konstantinos & Paida, 2020; Nazli & Culha, 2023; Newcomer et al., 2021). However, it was acknowledged that this can be challenging to implement successfully (Özkan & Çakmak, 2021; Barrett & Berger, 2021), as some families may have certain values where they are not used to interacting with school staff or may not have the language to do so (Kardeş, & Akman, 2022). Cho et al. (2019) noted that teachers found focusing on developing relationships were essential to support CYP from refugee backgrounds in developing their language, but also in developing their social and emotional learning. Teachers expressed a preference for relational approaches,

reporting that it supported classroom management, and this was supported when the classroom was a smaller size (O'Neal et al., 2018). PCG participants noted that they strongly value the importance of relationships and treating everyone they work with in a supportive and fair manner, with some participants noting the importance of compassion when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022). It was reported that teachers were empathetic (LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021; Wille et al., 2019), and found it beneficial to use relational approaches when developing relationships with the CYP's family or parents (Ira et al., 2021; Wille et al., 2019; Gokce & Erdal, 2018). Furthermore, acknowledging the challenge in developing these relationships, a number of teachers reported that some parents contact them regularly and described how this felt exhausting (Ira et al., 2021). Many teachers valued the development of trusting relationships with CYP, while also acknowledging that the language barrier and cultural differences can impact the relationship between school and families (Barrett & Berger, 2021). Ira et al. (2021) reported that teachers' good relationships with the CYP from refugee backgrounds' family members and parents were important for working well with CYP from refugee backgrounds, while also highlighting a need for a supportive school environment to help develop this.

In summary, this systematic review has highlighted three key areas arising within recent research. Firstly, professionals working in education settings noted language and communication barriers when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds, this was noted between professionals and the CYP as well as between professionals and parents of the CYP. The second key theme that arose was a general lack of resources available in educational settings. This related to a lack of training for teachers, a lack of psychological supports for the CYP, and also physical resources available to families and CYP from refugee backgrounds such as access to appropriate technology supports and space to engage with learning from home or their accommodation they were living in. Finally, the relational approach used by professionals to foster relationships between CYP, schools and families was noted as essential in supporting to CYP from refugee backgrounds, also highlighting a link to trauma informed approaches.

### *2.2.7 Critical Reflection and Limitations of Systematic Literature Review*

The systematic review included 37 studies, ten of which were of high quality. With studies that received a high overall WoE receiving more weight in the synthesis and the nine studies that received a low overall WoE not being included in the synthesis of findings. Included

studies highlighted the experiences and perspectives of professionals working with CYP from refugee backgrounds in educational settings. It is worth noting that only one study included school psychologists among the range of professionals who participated (Wille et al., 2019), while one included PCG experts (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022). The studies highlight the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds and the challenges experienced by professionals working with these CYP in educational settings. Given the role that psychologists play in supporting CYP and professionals in the school setting, more needs to be known about how psychologists work to support CYP from refugee backgrounds, and whether they experience similar or different facilitators or barriers in their work. This highlights a gap in knowledge and a need for research to be carried out in this field. The need for research in an Irish context is also apparent as none of the studies identified in the systematic review were conducted in Ireland.

The systematic review highlighted the range of research being carried out in this area. To further support the quality appraisal method implemented as described by Gough (2007), more transparency is needed when conducting studies in this area to enable the audience to evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of the research studies. It is important to acknowledge that the studies where researchers did not identify ethical considerations or their philosophical perspectives when conducting empirical research did receive a lower WoE A. Providing information on the settings, as well as detailed information about data collection and analysis, will help others build on the increasing knowledge base in this area. While studies were included within the last ten years, the oldest study that met the inclusion criteria in the review was carried out in 2017, indicating that the interest in this area is recent and growing.

The synthesis of the studies highlighted three key areas: language and communication barriers, a general lack of resources available in educational settings, and the relational approach used by professionals to foster relationships between CYP, schools and families. These themes highlight the need for training for professionals in how to address language and communication barriers, how to respond to the emotional needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds in a trauma informed way, and identifying ways of enhancing relationships between professionals, parents and CYP from refugee backgrounds in the school system. EPs are well suited to respond to many of these needs, such as providing training for school staff in understanding trauma or cultural diversity. EPs can also help facilitate relationships between families and schools through joint meetings.

A number of limitations were identified in the systematic review that may have impacted the overall synthesis of findings and conclusions. The researcher used specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as the focus of the study and methodology used in the included studies. These criteria were to enable comparisons and facilitate scoring across the WoE appraisal process but may have resulted in other studies being excluded. It is possible that studies that were not published in peer review journals would have scored well on the appraisal tools. Another limitation may be that the review was conducted and appraised by a single researcher, and it has been recommended that a minimum of two researchers are involved in this process (Lockwood et al., 2015). However, due to time constraints and the number of studies included, this was not possible to implement. Furthermore, the review question was intended to be broad due to investigating an under researched area. The researcher considered a range of inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as excluding methodologies that were described as ethnographic approaches or using focus groups as they may take away from the voices and experiences of the participants (Hollis et al., 2002) or excluding studies conducted in TECs or education settings within refugee camps. Given the paucity of research in this area, it was decided that using broad inclusion criteria may capture a better understanding of this evolving field of study. However, it may be that including these methodologies and contexts masked some of the individual professionals' experiences, and that challenges identified are not transferable to school settings in Ireland.

A further limitation of the breadth of the inclusion criteria was the focus of professionals' experiences working with CYP from refugee backgrounds within the educational context rather than focusing specifically on EPs' experiences. This included teachers who are directly working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and considerations needed at policy levels. Teachers' and other professionals' experiences are relevant for EPs working in schools, as well as for supporting school staff in their work and policy development within schools. Understanding the interactions within and across the micro and mesosystems is important in this context. However, the majority of the studies identified were carried out in Turkey and countries outside of Europe, and these micro and mesosystems may have limited application to those systems in Ireland. This adds another level of heterogeneity across studies as ecological systems differ internationally, particularly relating to the exo and macrosystems. Finally, the focus of the review question could have taken account of experiences of migrant children, not just refugee children. EPs and other

professionals' experiences working with such children are relevant to the question of how EPs support school professionals in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. Research that discusses implications for educational psychology practice often includes participants from UK and Ireland, as it has been stated that the training process to qualify as an EP and the role of an EP is similar across both countries (Robinson et al., 2018; Sadreddini et al., 2019). This suggests an overlap between populations, both of EPs and the populations EPs work with, as well as the likely similarity in systems that EPs are navigating to support these groups of CYP and their schools in responding to their needs. While acknowledging the specificity of the Irish and British educational systems, and differing histories of immigration, it seems likely that there is sufficient transferability across EP practice in both contexts, that including this literature could strengthen the findings of the systematic review.

Based on the limitations highlighted above, it was decided that a return to the literature was warranted to ensure inclusion of relevant research to the proposed study.

### *2.2.8 Summary of Further Literature Identified*

Following on from the limitations discussed, the researcher carried out a further search on Google Scholar, the Journal for Educational Psychology in Practice and the British Journal of Educational Psychology. This search was limited to research conducted within the same time frame as the systematic literature review. The aim of this was to build on from the findings from the systematic review, with a stronger focus on the role of EPs with more ecosystemic relevance. The review question here focused on "what are current implications for educational psychology practice in Ireland when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds." This additional search therefore focused on including studies within the UK for ecological relevance, as the UK would be most similar to the systemic context that EPs are working in in Ireland (Robinson et al., 2018; Sadreddini et al., 2019), due to the lack of research from the Irish context. These studies would not have been included in the systematic review due to differing inclusion and exclusion criteria, mainly relating to participants and focus of study. The studies included here, moved away from the focus of preofessional's experiences, focusing on perspectives of parents and CYP, which means they would not have been included in the systematic literature review. However, further analysis of these studies will aid in understanding the multi systemic role of EPs when working to support CYP from refugee backgrounds and the complex nature of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds.

Eight studies were identified for full text screening through this process with three being excluded due to limited ecological systemic relevance (See Appendix A, Table 4 for full references and brief overview of the included studies here and Appendix A, Table 5 for excluded studies). The review of these five studies further builds on the synthesis of findings from the systematic literature review.

Firstly, one key finding that arose was that of EP's specialist knowledge and supporting integration of CYP within the school system. This further contributes to the themes from the synthesis process highlighted in 2.2.6, referring to language and communication barriers and some of the lack of resources noted. The studies included in this further review highlight that EPs' specialist knowledge mean they are well suited in supporting schools in overcoming some of these. EP's consultative skills and in-depth knowledge of child development can further support how schools and families are best meeting the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds with consideration to the various systems impacting the CYP's development (Bishop, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas 2017). EP's ability to apply psychological theory can also support in understanding these CYP and how best to support them in school. Examples of such theories noted include attachment theory and the Bio-Psycho-Social-Ecological Model (Mohamed & Thomas; 2017; Sobitan, 2022). EP's specialist knowledge also supports them in carrying out direct work with CYP, which can involve assessment and/or intervention (Mohamed & Thomas; 2017; Sobitan, 2022). Sobitan (2022) and Mohamed and Thomas (2017) both referenced the Tree of Life as a useful tool for intervention to be considered with CYP from refugee backgrounds in understanding their experiences and perspectives. EPs are well suited to support with bullying, whether this is direct therapeutic work with CYP (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017) or supporting school staff (Samara et al., 2020). EP's specialist knowledge of psychological models and theories can also support policy and curriculum development in consideration of CYP's developmental needs.

Furthermore, relating to language and communication barriers and lack of resources, the importance of integration for CYP from refugee backgrounds into the school environment was also highlighted in the additional review of the literature. EPs can support integration within the school environment for CYP from refugee backgrounds. For integration to be successful it is important that practice is child centred with CYP's wellbeing also considered central to decisions made (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017; Samara et al., 2020). EPs have expert knowledge in relation

to wellbeing such as considering the various areas to assess relating to wellbeing for CYP. One key area relating to this is helping these CYP establish a sense of belonging (Sobitan, 2022). Sobitan (2022) also noted the predominance of white EPs from middle class backgrounds in UK schools, emphasising the importance of EPs being reflexive in their practice and considering their own understanding and experience of race and culture.

As noted in the synthesis, some school staff reported feeling unsure when to refer for psychological support (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Barrett & Berger, 2021). EP's consultation skills and knowledge of systems further highlights a key role of EPs and that they are well positioned in identifying and supporting CYP in accessing mental health services (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). Fazel et al. (2016) noted the advantage of having mental health services within schools, to improve accessibility. EPs can also support CYP's and their families' understanding of mental health services, further supporting accessibility. Such mental health support can also support teachers' understanding of CYP from refugee backgrounds and identify appropriate supports for them within the school environment.

Finally, further building on the synthesis of the findings from the systematic review, the benefits of relational approaches and importance of developing positive relationships between families and schools was highlighted in these papers. EPs are well suited to facilitate conversations between schools and CYP from refugee backgrounds' families (Bishop, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). EPs can support these collaborative conversations to further build positive relationships and trust to enhance CYP's learning within the school environment, further emphasising the importance of relational approaches in this area.

### *2.2.9 Conclusion*

The findings from the systematic literature review and the additional review highlight the many systemic interactions and dynamics that need to be considered when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The review question was "what is known about the experiences and perspectives of *professionals* in supporting children and young people from refugee backgrounds in education?" There were three key findings from the systematic review. This review found that professionals are experiencing some challenges in overcoming language and communication barriers, experiencing a lack of resources in many areas of their work and noted the benefits of implementing relational approaches in their work (Ira et al., 2021; Wille et al., 2019; Gokce & Erdal, 2018). A further review emphasised how EPs are well suited in supporting CYP from

refugee backgrounds within the school environment, further noting the importance of developing positive relationships between families and schools. The systematic review discussed how educational professionals often face challenges in overcoming language and communication barriers as well as a lack of resources. EPs specialist knowledge and skills can support information sharing between home and school, which was noted as important by educational professionals when working with families from refugee backgrounds (Tösten et al., 2021; Barrett & Berger, 2021). EPs' specialist knowledge and working within ecosystemic frameworks can support professionals in developing skills and implementing problem solving approaches when faced with such challenges. EPs have also been described as well suited in supporting CYP and families in accessing mental health services, the literature discussed referenced the benefits of mental health services being accessible such as within the school (Çelik & Kodan, 2020; Fazel et al., 2016). This further highlights the need for EPs to provide support in this area and systemic roles of EPs in supporting educational professionals, as another area noted in the systematic literature review was regarding teachers feeling uncertain of when to refer to mental health services.

Overall, the review synthesises the findings of research conducted in this area, while also highlighting areas that future research can improve on with the need for more detail on the process of the empirical research conducted. Relating to the key findings, future research should explore how professionals in educational settings are overcoming language and communication barriers, working with relational approaches and possible suggestions to address the lack of resources within the education sector. The review also highlights the lack of research conducted with psychologists in educational settings and in particular, how psychologists within the Irish context are supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds.

## 2.3 Rationale for Current Study

This chapter has introduced the needs and experiences of CYP from refugee backgrounds, specifically relating to the broader global context and then focusing on the current Irish context. The literature review focuses on CYP from refugee backgrounds, their support needs in education and some of the challenges they may face, while the systematic review highlighted key themes of educational professionals' experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds, such as language and communication barriers, lack of resources and the need for relational approaches. These findings highlight the need for professionals in educational settings to be able

to respond and support CYP from refugee backgrounds, and that EPs are well suited to support CYP, their family and professionals in this area. However, there is a gap in our knowledge of how psychologists who work with CYP in schools are doing this. It was noted that only one study in the current review included an EP as a participant. In the context of EPs' work, policy documents recommend adapting psychological assessments and interventions to meet the needs of refugee CYP. Research is needed to explore how this is being done. EPs are already facing many barriers and challenges in their work in Ireland, and it is acknowledged at governmental level that the sector is under resourced. It is therefore important to explore how these more recent challenges are experienced in this specific area.

As mentioned earlier and highlighted within the systematic review, the majority of the research carried out focused on refugees from Syria, however, there have been other countries that people from refugee backgrounds have migrated from, including, most recently, Ukraine (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022). Additional research is needed to explore supporting CYP from different refugee backgrounds (LeRoy & Boomgaard, 2021).

Overall, while a small body of research on clinical and counselling psychologists' work with adult refugees exists, only one study was identified in the systematic review describing the experiences of EPs in supporting CYP from a refugee background. This highlights and emphasises the need for research to be conducted in this area. The review identifies a range of challenges experienced by educational professionals. As EPs support both CYP from refugee backgrounds and educational professionals supporting these CYP in their schools, it is essential that we have a better understanding of EPs' experiences in working with these CYP and supporting professionals.

# 3 Empirical Paper

## 3.1 Overview

Following on from the literature review, it is evident that there is a gap in research knowledge in how Educational Psychologists (EPs) are supporting Children and Young People (CYP) from refugee backgrounds. Furthermore, EPs play a key role in supporting educational professionals to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds, yet there is a lack of research in this area. EPs in Ireland working in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) have played a key role in developing guidance documents to support professionals working with these CYP (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). Exploring EPs' experiences in NEPS can help understand and identify what has supported them in carrying out such work and any challenges they may have faced in this area. This chapter describes the current research project, highlighting the need for research relating to practice and experience within the area. The introduction of this chapter describes the current context of the study, highlighting the need for research to inform current practice for EPs in their work with CYP from refugee backgrounds. The research aims and questions in this study are informed by the findings from the systematic literature review in the previous chapter. The methodology section describes the research design, recruitment, data collection, ethical considerations and the approach to data analysis as carried out by the researcher. The results section describes the findings of the study. The final section consists of the discussion of the study findings, the current study's strengths and limitations, implications of the study, and directions for future research.

## 3.2 Introduction

In 2022, 13,651 asylum seekers entered Ireland (UNHCR, 2023), an increase of 415% compared to 2021. Ireland resettled 201 Syrian refugees in 2022 and granted 70,493 Temporary Protection Status in 2022 to people who fled the war in Ukraine. This highlights the recent rapid increase in people from refugee backgrounds arriving in Ireland. Prior to the war in Ukraine, there was no information on how many CYP from refugee backgrounds were enrolled in Irish schools, however, in January 2024, the Department of Education reported that there were 18,003 Ukrainians enrolled in Irish primary and post primary schools (Department of Education, 2024).

### *3.2.1 Supporting CYP from Refugee Backgrounds in Education*

The changes in migration patterns and numbers of CYP from refugee backgrounds have highlighted the need for school environments in host countries to adapt to these changes in student population. Schools have reported feeling ill prepared to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds due to insufficient knowledge or training in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Çelik & Kodan, 2020; Cooc & Kim, 2023; Gürel & Büyüksahin, 2020). Cooc and Kim (2023) concluded that policies relating to individuals from refugee backgrounds need to foster a sense of belonging, inclusion and wellbeing to ensure all CYP have their needs met, and to prevent potential discrimination. Many CYP from refugee backgrounds engage well during their time in education in their new country. While some face educational difficulties, their success has been found to be supported when they have a sense of school belonging (Khawaja & Howard, 2020).

Research has focused on the educational rights of refugees with recent doctoral dissertations highlighting the importance of eliciting the voices of CYP from refugee backgrounds to understand their experiences of education (Cooc & Kim, 2023; Gallagher, 2023; McFadden, 2023). EPs can support systemic changes such as developing whole setting approaches to welcoming CYP from refugee backgrounds and the need to apply a "responsive, integrated and multifaceted approach" (Gallagher, 2023, p. 85) when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. Furthermore, McFadden (2023) discussed the need to better understand EP's work in this domain, which is an area that this research hopes to address.

As mentioned, EPs play a key role in supporting CYP through their time in education; particularly focusing on enhancing academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes for CYP (NEPS, n.d.). In order to achieve this, EP's work with teachers, parents and children. The process of understanding CYP's needs when they are from a refugee background can be complex, with the need to understand how the different ecological systems interact for CYP (Burns et al., 2015), and acknowledging that the systemic interactions often being more complex for CYP from refugee backgrounds. EPs likely need to consider cultural and linguistic differences and also possible trauma experiences when working with CYP and families from refugee backgrounds or who have been displaced by war (Khawaja & Howard, 2020). EPs need to adapt some of their work with these differences in mind. Gartley and Due (2017) suggest that

some of these adaptations may involve working with interpreters and considering the validity of assessment tools with such adaptations and diverse populations.

### *3.2.2 Educational Psychology in Ireland*

EPs in Ireland engage in an average of 10 years of training before qualifying as an EP (HSE, 2021). These ten years tend to consist of a bachelor's degree, a master's degree and a minimum of two years gaining relevant practice based experience before completing the professional doctorate programme. NEPS is funded by the Department of Education and consists of EPs working with primary, post-primary and special schools. EPs in NEPS work with school staff, families and CYP in these schools to support learning, behaviour, social and emotional outcomes of CYP (Department of Education, 2023). Each NEPS psychologist is assigned a group of schools and receive referrals for case work from the schools they are assigned. In September 2023, it was reported that there were 222 NEPS psychologists employed within the service across the eight NEPS regions in Ireland (Oireachtas, 2023).

NEPS has played a key role in supporting the response to welcoming CYP from Ukraine to Irish schools. EPs in NEPS have developed policy and guidance documents to support schools in welcoming students from Ukraine, as well as providing online training for school staff (Department of Education 2022a; Department of Education 2022b). These documents provide specific "tips" for schools, such as allowing time for CYP to settle and adjust to their new environment and to adapt the academic demands as needed. NEPS psychologists have also been involved in Regional Educational and Language Teams (REALTs) supporting schools to access supports to meet the needs of CYP arriving from Ukraine (Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). The Joint Committee acknowledged that NEPS has provided positive support in this area. The current shortage of EPs within the service and the existing challenging workloads of NEPS psychologists was also highlighted in this report, describing how NEPS psychologists are already quite "stretched." This is likely for many reasons such as staffing shortages; the Minister of Education reported 56 vacancies across the NEPS service in September 2023 (Oireachtas, 2023). NEPS' model of service focuses on a consultative approach aimed at empowering teachers to support the needs of students in their class (Department of Education, 2023).

### *3.2.3 Present study*

In the context of increased numbers of CYP from refugee backgrounds enrolled in Irish schools, NEPS EPs play a key role in supporting schools in meeting the needs of these students, despite staff shortages. The present study aims to explore NEPS EPs' experiences of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and identify how they have made sense of this work, specifically answering the research question: "What are EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland?" In order to achieve this aim, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2022) was used to guide data collection and analysis through semi-structured interviews with a small sample of NEPS psychologists, focusing on their experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The semi-structured interview schedule was also informed by Bronfenbrenner & Morris' (2006) Ecological Systems Theory, acknowledging the different systems within which EPs offer support to CYP from refugee backgrounds. IPA was used to facilitate a focus on the individual lived experience of EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, how they make sense of their experience working in this area, while acknowledging the researcher's influence in interpreting the data.

## 3.3 Methodology

### *3.3.1 Research Design*

This study was qualitative in nature and implemented an emergent design using semi-structured interviews to collect data that were analysed using IPA. As highlighted in the review paper, EPs' experiences of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds is an under researched area. It is also possible that not many EPs have experience in this area. Emergent design welcomes "unanticipated information," allowing for the researcher to adapt the research process as different perceptions, experiences and new concepts arose (Pailthorpe, 2017). Ongoing reflection is central to emergent design as well as the process of IPA. Furthermore, IPA is an effective approach when carrying out research in an under-researched area, allowing for more in-depth analysis with smaller sample sizes (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Osburn, 2008). To understand individuals' perceptions of personal and social worlds, IPA is underpinned by three philosophies: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology refers to the subjective nature of the human experience and how the personal and individual perception of an experience is applied (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation, acknowledging how humans make sense of their experience. The research process involves the participant making sense of their own experience and the researcher making sense of the participant's experience, referred to as the "double hermeneutic" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The interpretative role of the researcher also places the participant's account in a broader cultural, social and theoretical context (Harper, 2011). Finally, IPA's focus is on the idiographic, the "particular". IPA values understanding and exploring "particular" experiences from individual people rather than making universal assumptions (Kieran, 2016; Smith et al., 2009).

IPA and semi-structured interviews allow for broader exploration, descriptions, and interpretations to be offered, as well as interpreting participants' perceptions of barriers and facilitators (Noon, 2019; Smith, 2015), which is in line with the research aims of this project.

### *3.3.2 Recruitment*

Before recruitment commenced, ethical approval for this study was provided by Mary Immaculate College and NEPS. The sample consisted of EPs working in NEPS, given their key role in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Criterion sampling, specifically purposeful sampling methods, was used for the recruitment of participants for the study. Participants were

recruited through NEPS. Once NEPS confirmed ethical approval via an email with the researcher, an information sheet describing the study (Appendix D) was shared with all psychologists working in NEPS via an email from the research committee in NEPS. As part of the inclusion criteria, participants were required to be working as an EP in NEPS and have experience in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Participants completed and read the consent form (Appendix E) before consenting to participate and engage in the interview.

### *3.3.3 Pilot study*

A preliminary pilot of the interview guide was conducted with two trainee EPs to test suitability of content, phrasing and flow of questions. A subsequent pilot study was carried out with a NEPS psychologist who was known to the researcher and had experience working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. In line with previous IPA studies that explored professionals' experiences, the process of the pilot phase aimed to gather feedback on flow and to ensure that the interview schedule was accessible for potential participants while also achieving the aim of the research question (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Ismail et al., 2018). A second pilot interview was carried out where the participant also consented to their data being used in the full write up of the study. This pilot interview was included for full analysis, which has been reported as a beneficial approach, particularly in qualitative studies with small sample sizes and when the interview schedule did not undergo any changes following the interview (Ismail et al., 2018).

### *3.3.4 Participants*

A total of four EPs took part in the study. For the purpose of writing up the results and analysis of the interviews, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Participants were working in three regions across NEPS. Two EPs in different regions expressed a preference for their interviews to be held online. Only two participants disclosed their years of experience in NEPS, and these ranged from eleven to sixteen years. Participants' number of schools in their caseloads also varied from three to fifteen schools. See Table 6 for Summary of Participants.

***Table 6***

*Summary of Participants*

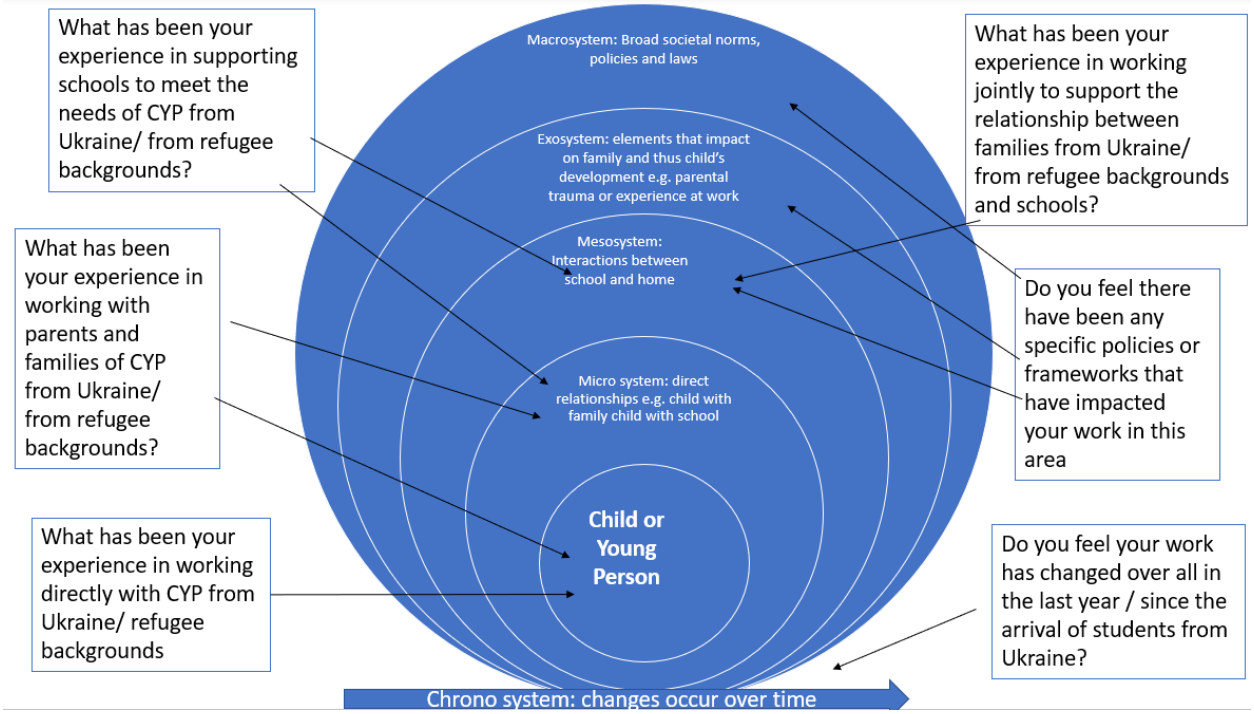
| Participant | Role | Location of NEPS office |
|---|---|---|
| **Aoife** | Main Grade Psychologist | Region A |
| **Liam** | Main Grade Psychologist | Region A |
| **Ciara** | Senior Psychologist | Region B |
| **Fiona** | Senior Psychologist | Region C |

### *3.3.5 Data Collection Procedure*

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection for this study. Interviews for the purpose of research data collection have the specific goal of gaining further information on a specific area, relating to the research question (Castillo-Monoya, 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in exploring the area of concern in-depth and also provide agency to the participant and researcher allowing them to provide their interpretation of the experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). They allow participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and their own description of the experience being explored (Edmonds, 2021). Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed participants in this study to describe in their own words their experiences of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds. The interview schedule included a number of open questions, based on topics highlighted by previous research in the area (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The schedule was informed by IPA guidelines (Smith & Osburn, 2008; see Appendix B for Interview Schedule) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), exploring the different systems that impact CYP's development while also addressing specific areas relevant for CYP from refugee backgrounds such as trauma and cultural or linguistic differences (See Figure 5 for visual representation).

***Figure 5***

*Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) as Mapped to the Interview Schedule*




In line with emergent design, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility to accommodate different levels of participants' experience in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, allowing for the interview to flow more naturally during the data collection process and focusing more on the participants' individual lived experiences (Castillo-Monoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Data were collected between November and December 2023. Two interviews were carried out in person in the participants' office in NEPS and two interviews were carried out online from the participants' home. Interviews were recorded through Microsoft Teams. The second participant requested to view the interview schedule in advance of the interview and in line with emergent design, it was considered as supporting the data collection process of focusing on the lived experience (Castillo-Monoya, 2016). The interview guide was then shared with all participants that followed. Haukås and Tishakov (2024) have discussed how sharing

interview schedules respects the rights of participants and also enhances reflexivity of the research process. Research guidelines have suggested that sharing interview guides in advance can be helpful as the participants are aware of the questions and can think of their responses in advance of participating in the interview (Central University Research Ethics Committee, 2020). In line with this and the evolving process of emergent design, it was considered beneficial to share the interview schedule with participants to allow them to be familiar with the flow of the interview.

### *3.3.6 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval was first sought from Mary Immaculate College (See Appendix C), followed by external ethical approval from NEPS. As a member of the PSI this research study also adhered to the Psychological Society of Ireland's (2019) Professional Code of Ethics. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent, including after data collection, up until December 2023. Participants were provided with an information sheet where they were fully informed of the nature of the study (Appendix D) and signed a consent form (Appendix E) before participating. All data were stored securely on a password protected and encrypted computer. Transcriptions were all anonymised with any possible identifying information removed. Participants were also provided with debriefing information via a debriefing sheet to allow them to seek further information in the area if they so wished (See Appendix F).

### *3.3.7 Data Analysis*

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. This process was supported by the recording function in Microsoft Teams. The researcher completed the 7-step process of IPA data analysis procedures as described by Smith et al. (2022). See Table 7 for the description of the stages.

***Table 7***

*Overview of the Process of IPA (Smith et al., 2022)*

| Step | Step Description |
|---|---|
| Step 1 Familiarisation with data | Immersion of the interview transcripts, listening to the recordings and reading and rereading the printed hard copy transcripts. |
| Step 2 Exploratory noting | Initial coding or noting of the first interview, examining the language and semantic content in an exploratory manner. Initial notes were made on the right margin of the transcripts, noting anything of interest while keeping an open mind, using different coloured pens for the "exploratory notes;" red for describing what was being said, blue for the linguistic nature of the narrative and green for conceptual aspects of the transcript (Smith & Nizza, 2022). |
| Step 3 Development of experiential statements | Engaging in a deeper level of analysis, analysing initial notes as well as the transcripts, while developing initial notes into more concise phrases on the left-hand margin of the transcript, applying psychological concepts and alternative interpretive lenses to the data. Notes were then imported into a table in Microsoft Word with the exploratory notes from Step 2 (See Appendix G for reference). |
| Step 4 Clustering the experiential statements | Printing all the experiential statements, cutting them up so that each statement was on its own piece of paper and physically organising them into clusters, searching for connections across experiential statements (Smith & Nizza, 2022; See Appendix G for further visual reference of this process). Identifying Personal Experiential Themes (PETs), illustrated in brief statements that captured key aspects of the text in relation to each piece of transcript. |
| Step 5 Naming the PETs | Naming the PETs (clusters) and organising them onto a table in Microsoft Word. |
| Step 6 Moving to the next case | Moving to the next interview and repeating steps 1-5 for each interview separately, emphasising the idiographic nature of IPA. |
| Step 7 Searching for patterns across cases | Searching for connections and patterns within and across cases, further exploring the PETs and merging all PETs into a table in Microsoft Excel and organising them into Group Experiential Themes (GETs). (See Appendix G). |

The researcher engaged with supervision and peer debriefing to support the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis process (Creswell, 2012b; Schwandt et al., 2007). Peer debriefing consisted of reflective discussions with a doctoral researcher peer relating to preconceptions and assumptions that arose during process of data collection and analysis (McGlinchey et al., 2021). The peer was familiar with the process of IPA and both the researcher

and peer engaged in regular meetings throughout the process of analysis and writing of results. The researcher briefed the peer on how they arrived at each theme and this process was supported with feedback from the peer. Following the first draft of the results section, the researcher met a supervisor to discuss the presentation and how they arrived at the themes identified.

### *3.3.8 Researcher Reflexivity*

IPA emphasises the importance of acknowledging the role of the researcher in collecting and interpreting data (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher kept a reflexive diary (See Appendix H), reflecting on initial thoughts, assumptions and feelings throughout the research project to acknowledge the impact of the research on the researcher and vice versa. This process also increases the researcher's self-awareness and acknowledges for any potential biases that may arise or impact throughout the interpretation process (Hassett, 2023). The use of a reflexive diary encouraged the researcher to document any changes in the research process while also enhancing the researcher's own reflections during data collection (Smith et al., 2022). The below provides a reflexivity statement to further acknowledge the researcher's own background:

*The researcher and author of this dissertation, Naoise, was a white Irish woman in her twenties. She was in her third year of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology Programme. At the time of carrying out interviews with NEPS psychologists, Naoise was coming up to the end of her placement in NEPS. She had received funding from the Department of Education to work with NEPS when she finishes the Doctorate programme for which this thesis was conducted. As a trainee, Naoise acknowledged the wealth of knowledge and experience those she interviewed had. Naoise was also aware of how busy the service was, emphasising that she was very appreciative of those who agreed to participate in her study. Naoise did not have any direct experience in working with or supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds since starting the Doctorate programme, although she had experience in this area before starting the Doctorate. Naoise's prior experience had related to running Theraplay groups in reception centres, where her research interest was sparked, hoping to understand more about the evidence basis of such approaches and how other professionals are supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds and their families. Naoise was interested in trauma informed practice and working with culturally and linguistically diverse people before she started the course, and it was an area she was looking forward to learning more about through this research project.*

## 3.4 Results

Participants' experiences of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds varied. The two main grade psychologists (Aoife & Liam) identified two pieces of casework they had carried out, Aoife's being two students from Ukraine, while Liam's experiences were with students from different refugee backgrounds. The two senior psychologists (Ciara & Fiona) noted that they had a significant amount of experience in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The data analysis developed four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) (see Table 8 for further breakdown):

- Adapting current approaches to support CYP from refugee backgrounds
- Supports for EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds
- Supporting the school environment
- The impact of culture, policies and accessing support

***Table 8***

*Experiential Themes & Sub Themes*

| Experiential Themes<br>*Sub themes* | Aoife[1] | Liam | Ciara | Fiona |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adapting Current Approaches to Support CYP from Refugee Backgrounds "[you] can't use the usual tools" | | | | |
| *Reflecting on Assessment and Formulation* | x[2] | x | x | x |
| *Importance of Sensitive Approaches in Consultation* | x | x | x | x |
| Supports for EPs Working with CYP from Refugee Backgrounds "We're just so busy" | | | | |
| *Importance of Supervision and Reflecting on your Emotions* | x | x | x | |
| *Need for Time and Training* | x | | x | x |
| Supporting the School Environment "Most people in the aftermath of a trauma, they just need to feel safe" | | | | |
| *Considering difference in CYP's experiences* | x | | x | x |
| *Balancing Act of Supporting Schools' Stress and Understandings* | x | x | x | x |
| *Navigating Schools' Relationships with Families* | x | | x | x |
| Acknowledging the Impact of Culture, Policies and Accessing Support "The supports for children from some of the other countries haven't been as good" | | | | |
| *Working with Cultural and Language Differences* | x | x | x | x |
| *Addressing Policy Needs* | | x | x | x |
| *Differences in Accessing Support* | x | x | x | x |

Throughout the results section, verbal fillers were removed unless they were considered relevant to the interpretation, for example, if they indicated hesitation or uncertainty. Changes were also made, such as names of locations, to ensure participant anonymity throughout.

[1] Pseudonyms were used for all participants
[2] X denotes where this theme was identified in this transcript

### *3.4.1 Theme 1: Adapting Current Approaches to Support CYP from refugee backgrounds "[you] can't use the usual tools"*

Participants spoke about their experiences in carrying out assessments and consultations, how they adapted this work for individuals from refugee backgrounds and the complexities of formulating their cases. They also reflected on the need to be sensitive during consultations and intakes as some families may have experienced adversity.

**Reflecting on Assessment and Formulation.** Ciara emphasised that work in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds is not typical for EPs and there is a need to be culturally competent "[you] can't use the usual tools, can't just lash out a WISC or WIAT or anything like that." Ciara emphasised her belief that "no test is culture-free." She criticised an assessment tool that claims to be culturally fair but heavily relies on numbers and letters "we have children with the Cyrillic script and the Arabic script, so they do not have access to that, as a nonverbal *[sic]* actually hasn't got meaning for them." Ciara and Fiona also acknowledged specific subtests in the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children - Fifth Edition (WISC-V) that they felt may not be fair when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, such as Picture Span, given the reliance of verbal skills in performing this subtest and Block Design as children growing up in a time of war may not have had access to blocks;

> They actually had no experience of even playing with blocks because the war is running on 10 plus years. So, unless mom was, or dad was able to grab the box of blocks when they ran out of the house. (Ciara)

Ciara has adapted her work in this area, focusing primarily on observations and interviews to gather information. Fiona also noted the importance of "dynamic" assessments in this work and emphasised that interviews with parents are sometimes more important than formal assessments. Such interviews allow for accessing information about the child's language and development within the family context.

Both Ciara and Fiona noted feeling more confident in reporting areas of strength identified through assessments. Fiona noted finding it helpful when a child's scores exceeded teachers' expectations. However, interpreting low scores presented challenges for Ciara, raising more questions about cultural fairness and potential standardisation issues:

> If I get a low score, I don't know. Does it tell me they have no experience, that it's not culturally fair for them? Or that they are scoring really functioning *[sic]* really lowly, but

> it's not standardised or developed on them, their population, their cultural experience. So, the ones that do well is just a *[sic]* random, isn't it?

Aoife and Fiona emphasised the importance of ensuring that CYP understood as much as possible throughout the assessment process. Despite the assessment being "nonverbal," Aoife emphasised the interpreter's role in supporting the child's engagement with the assessment process: "just to have somebody there who can translate all of that in Ukrainian to him like that, 'This is why this person is taking you to another room'", acknowledging how the child may recall previous experiences of not being aware of where they were going and why. This further emphasised the value of the interpreter to ensure a sense of safety; "So I do think it's important for that rapport building piece to keep the child feeling kind of safe and relaxed."

Although Liam did not reference carrying out assessments with CYP from refugee backgrounds, he reflected on the challenge of formulating the needs of two cases he worked with from refugee backgrounds. He described feeling unsure of the explanation for one young person's needs:

> There was unusual behaviour for which there might have been a number of explanations. One of them which could have been a psychiatric concern, another possibility, and I'm not evaluating them right now. The possibility could have been a neurological concern, or it might have been that there was also, yeah, as I mentioned, their trauma.

Aoife and Ciara also discussed the complexities of formulation, considering whether observed behaviours stemmed from trauma or pre-existing needs. They acknowledged cases where pre-existing needs were present, emphasising that trauma, while a factor, was not always the primary focus of their formulation: "*(he)* more than likely had pre-existing needs and you know it wasn't trauma related. Obviously, trauma has not helped. The war has not helped any of these children" (Ciara). Reflecting on these complexities, Ciara also discussed the need to be aware that EPs are constantly learning in this area.

The EPs' experiences highlighted the differences in conducting assessments and formulations with CYP from refugee backgrounds, emphasising the need for cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and a comprehensive understanding of each child's unique circumstances.

**Importance of Sensitive Approaches in Consultation.** Participants reflected on the importance of approaching consultations with families from refugee backgrounds sensitively. Fiona discussed how it is important to be sensitive about how EPs in NEPS may have been

presented to families. Being an EP in NEPS, there is the possibility of having been described as "government officials" which can have some trauma implications for families from refugee backgrounds. She emphasised the need to take this work slowly and gently,

> We don't know how we've been presented to them either. No, I think sometimes parents can think they have to come in or I don't know. I think that we don't know what they're coming in with, I suppose so, it's just again taking the time to explain who we are, what we're about and taking it slowly.

This was similarly acknowledged by Ciara as she described how it is possible that some people from refugee backgrounds may have been interrogated by officials in the past and the importance of ensuring that feeling of safety when working with families from refugee backgrounds:

> The most important thing is to develop that rapport with them, to start that conversation in a kind of a friendly and a warm and a compassionate and respectful way so that they don't feel interrogated, you know, cause like some of the families would have seen torture that, *[sic]* especially the male members of the family, you know. So, an official coming at them hard and heavy with: 'and at what age did he walk at?' You know what *[sic]* has to be conversational.

Aoife and Ciara advocated for a cautious approach, avoiding actively seeking information about trauma but allowing families to share their stories if they chose to. Ciara further emphasised the importance of being sensitive when working with people from refugee backgrounds, especially when gathering information regarding the child's developmental history "children were born in war situations, they haven't had developmental checks." Liam also emphasised the importance of approaching this work with families in a slow and gentle manner. While he expressed reservations about the broad use of the term "trauma," he noted the importance of focusing on attachment theory "being sensitive to this person's situation and realising that the attachment for the child you know might be ruptured".

Participants emphasised the importance of trying to approach various topics in a sensitive manner with families from refugee backgrounds and how they tried to achieve such approaches.

### *3.4.2 Theme 2: Supports for EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds "We're just so busy"*

This theme highlights the needs EPs highlighted when working in this area. Participants spoke about the need for more time to carry out their work, the need for specific training as well

as the importance of supervision and reflecting on the complex feelings that may arise when working with families from refugee backgrounds.

**Importance of Supervision Reflecting on your Emotions.** Aoife, Liam and Ciara discussed the benefits of engaging in supervision while working in this area as an EP. Aoife described how some elements of this work have been "frustrating" for her. Reflecting on a piece of casework mostly focusing on supporting school staff's understanding of trauma, she discussed the barriers to changing their perspective to being more trauma informed, describing it as a "clash". What further added to this experience for Aoife was that she wasn't expecting this piece of work to be as challenging as it was. She discussed how engaging in ongoing supervision has helped:

I've discussed him at my one to one in professional supervision and I am also involved in a group supervision. I would envisage that he'll come up there at some point, but definitely having those outlets back within the team to discuss it is really, really helpful.

Liam reflected on how it is important to engage in reflection and supervision to manage one's own feelings:

> You might reflect with that, with your colleagues, and you are trying to find the best way to help them. You might do it within supervision if you need to. And you know the feelings that you might have at the start are something which, you know, you have to govern.

Relating to supervision, different feelings came up for participants in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Ciara acknowledged that one can feel sad at times with this work: "stories do stay with you, and you know it's just desperate what people are exposed to and what they have to suffer." Liam discussed feelings of heartbreak, worry and anger regarding two cases he worked with where there were concerns of child protection. Both participants used the pronouns "you" or "one" when talking about these specific feelings in this work, which may reflect an attempt to distance themselves from the possibly difficult feelings that arise. Further acknowledging the sensitivity of this work, Ciara also discussed the importance of the EPs being able to hear the story as well: "If you're able to hear the story then as well. You know, the psychologist should be careful about all that kind of stuff." This emphasises the importance of EPs being emotionally prepared to hear these narratives, stressing the need for self-awareness in such situations.

Liam discussed the importance of knowing the limits of the role of an EP. He reflected that although as EPs, they want to help but they are only part of the response, and this can bring up some additional feelings:

> From a psychological perspective, in education you're only part of the response. So, there is a little bit of heartbreak in hearing that somebody has had such an experience as a child, or as a young person, and a wish or desire to *[sic]*, if you can help set it right, but also recognising that you're limited.

In summary, participants noted the range of feelings that came up when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds and emphasised the importance of engaging in supervision.

**Need for Time and Training.** This subtheme illustrates the need to be able to take the time to do the work with CYP from refugee backgrounds and how this competes with the time pressures in NEPS, which can act as a barrier. Participants also discussed specific training needs both for trainee EPs and qualified EPs, another area that competes with time demands. Ciara and Fiona acknowledged the demanding nature of being an EP in NEPS. Ciara reflected that working with CYP from refugee backgrounds is only "one piece" of EPs' in NEPS responsibilities, emphasising the need for more time to carry out work in this area.

Fiona described time as being the "only barrier" she has faced in working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and that one can feel "under pressure". This related to the importance of taking case work slowly when working with people from refugee backgrounds. Fiona stressed the importance of building trust, acknowledging that working with families from refugee backgrounds tends to require more time for parents to feel comfortable to engage fully. This emphasised the need for a compassionate approach: "I think it can take a little while to build trust, and again I think that can be because the world hasn't been a trustworthy place." This may entail additional meetings or "repeat visits" compared to other cases.

Aoife also noted that time can be hard to balance and there is a need for allowing more time, especially when schools are stressed,

> We have lots of information and we have lots of training, but it's how we have the time to support, some of the situations are so high stress that it actually just takes more than one consultation because everybody is so heightened and it's a long game… especially for a child who you know is as distressed as this little fella is and as unsettled as this little fella is, it's not going to be one consultation.

Time was also a competing obstacle for supporting schools in understanding the importance of allowing sufficient time for children to settle. Relating to this, Fiona discussed that she has not worked directly with CYP from refugee backgrounds until they have had a least one year in Ireland:

> By the time I would have met students individually, they would have been in school at least a year. I haven't met any students who've been in school less than a year. I've met parents of children who've been in school less than a year, but in terms of direct work with students, they've all been in the school that *[sic]* that I've worked with them for at least a year or a year and a half, probably in a sense. So, they've had some settling in time and again some would have a certain amount of English and some not at all.

Ciara also discussed the importance of allowing settling time, referring to this as "watchful waiting." She encouraged continued contact with school during this period, offering them reassurance throughout. She noted that sometimes after the settling in period has passed the initial reason for concern may have gone away: "Over that year and a half, I might have lost the need for the referral because the child settled or, you know, we did enough to make them feel comfortable and relaxed and removed threat and all that stuff."

Only one participant (Ciara) discussed accessing specific training as an EP for work in this area. For the participants who didn't reference this, this may be due to competing time demands of the role of being an EP in NEPS. Ciara discussed accessing CPD through NEPS support, emphasising her awareness of the ongoing learning needed when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds: "Allowing you to access CPD, allowing us to, you know have our peer consultation groups and our supervisions and all the kind of structures, they're all really helpful."

Ciara discussed that there is more training needed for trainee EPs in this area, "I don't know how much you get on cultural diversity and stuff, but I think we need a lot more." She discussed the benefits of receiving training in cultural humility; "cultural competence is one thing, but cultural humility is the understanding that you really have to reflect on and know your own biases. And your own prejudices and your own culture. And how they all influence you." Aoife held a different view, "I think there's enough for EPs my thing would be I guess is there enough for the schools?" However, when asked if she had received training on how to work with

interpreters, Aoife's response revealed a potential contradiction to this stance, indicating a specific training need for EPs:

> [It] probably would be a good idea, I mean. Really, silly things like I don't always know who to look at and you know, you're kind of looking at *[sic]* parent when they're speaking to you, but then you're kind of looking at the interpreter …do you act like they're in the room, or do you act like they're not in the room?

Overall, participants spoke about benefits of continued professional development in this area, and the need for specific trainings. Some of the experiences also highlighted the time pressures within NEPS and the need for more time when working in this specific area.

### *3.4.3 Theme 3: Supporting the School Environment "Most people in the aftermath of a trauma, they just need to feel safe"*

All participants spoke about their experiences of working with school staff in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. These sub themes reflect considerations that needed to be made when working to support CYP from refugee backgrounds in school environments, such as considering the CYP's experiences, the stress of schools, and trauma awareness.

**Considering the difference in experiences of the CYP.** Fiona highlighted that some CYP from refugee backgrounds may not fully comprehend their new environment: "They were there and then they went on an airplane and now they're here. And then on Monday, they're going to school." She noted possible cultural differences in parents having such conversations, particularly for those arriving from Ukraine, where urgency may have impacted the depth of these discussions. Both Aoife and Fiona spoke of working with parents from refugee backgrounds who described their child as appearing happier in their school in Ireland than in their country of origin. Fiona also reflected on supporting a young person in attending school, where the young person may have been experiencing a difficulty with their sense of belonging in his school in Ireland. Relating to a young person who was observed to have good attendance at a summer camp with children from similar cultural backgrounds, while needing more support in attending school when there were CYP from more backgrounds:

> He liked that when he was seeing the English and the Arabic, but he likes that because he was with his group, and I thought it was a group of … Middle Eastern students who were part of that project. And whereas in school he isn't in that same group.

Fiona spoke about how different experiences can impact individuals in different ways, offering an example of a family where one child found it hard to separate from his parents and sibling in school, while the sibling did not experience the same difficulty. Both Aoife and Fiona referred to the need to consider a child's pre-Ireland school experiences, including whether they were happy in school, possible experiences of bullying, and overall adjustment. Ciara described how certain situations that arise in schools could be perceived by children from refugee backgrounds, offering an example of a bus journey for a school trip where it had been assumed the children would be excited:

> These children were so distressed and upset and it was an obvious one really. You know that they had been on lots of bus journeys, and it had usually meant a transition to something more difficult. We hadn't explained to them that they'd *[sic]* coming back.

Another situation that Ciara described causing children distress was being near an airport: "They were running indoors because it was like they were being reminded of the missiles and the bombs and stuff like that."

Ciara and Fiona stressed the importance of being aware of the heterogeneity within the group of individuals from refugee backgrounds:

The only thing they have in common is that they're fleeing adverse circumstances. Other than that, they have all the dimensions of intersection that we were talking about, like geographically, where they're from in the country economically, their levels of education (Ciara).

This subtheme highlights the diversity in presentation of CYP and how EPs learned to consider possible triggers of trauma experiences within the school context.

**Balancing Act of Supporting Schools' Stress and Understandings.** Acknowledging the complexity of working with schools to support CYP from refugee backgrounds, Aoife emphasised the necessity of providing regular, ongoing support and described it as "drip drip support" involving continuous engagement with schools for supporting the "doing and reviewing" process. Referring to the need for regular support for schools and the complexity of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, Ciara discussed her specific experience of supporting a Temporary Education Centre (TEC) as a NEPS EP: "'Every day was like September' was how the teachers reported it to me, because there was a constant movement of children into it."

Aoife, Ciara, and Fiona all described delivering trauma awareness training in their schools, while Aoife and Fiona emphasised the universal benefits that implementing trauma informed approaches has for all children. Aoife detailed the challenges of reframing staff perceptions in trauma informed practice, particularly in supporting a child from refugee background. She focused on depersonalising some of the behaviours: "Trying to get them to see him as a distressed child, not a bold child. And that he's not giving them a hard time. He's having a really hard time." She noted the school staff having difficulty in accessing this "shift in thinking" by the language they used in consultations. She expressed having a difficulty in overcoming this as a lot of her work required significant repetition on what she had said in previous meetings. Fiona similarly discussed the need to reframe perspectives for staff, "a large part of the role is just allowing people to just see things slightly differently."

While both Aoife and Fiona implemented trauma informed training in their schools, they also acknowledged how stressed the school staff were and how this impacted on how the staff engaged with the training the EPs were providing: "Having like a webinar with them dealing with maybe very high needs children when they're in a stage of kind of high stress themselves" (Aoife). Aoife, Ciara and Fiona emphasised the importance of schools allowing a period of time for children to settle, understanding the potential stress in providing this time. This was heightened if a school's expectations were not met. Managing these expectations was reflected by Aoife noting the fluctuating emotions within the school environment; how school staff would be "immediately really happy" followed by "a huge deflation", mirroring how these stress levels affected the child's emotional regulation and his "up and down presentation." Despite finding the work stressful, Aoife highlighted the EP's role in providing crucial support to stressed teachers who do not have access to the same supports that EPs do, such as supervision: "Sometimes it's holding her. She's so stressed and it's giving her a space to talk about that."

Aoife identified the curriculum as a stress-inducing factor for school staff, emphasising the struggle to prioritise emotional wellbeing over academics, reassuring teachers that the child "will learn, but we just need to take care of *this* first." The "department document" empowered her in advocating for emotional wellbeing over academic needs, perceiving this as the teachers feeling a need to be given permission to prioritise emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Fiona also described the challenge of persuading teachers to prioritise other aspects over academics:

"Allowing the teachers to see that there's a lot else going on and that maybe the reading isn't such a big deal at the moment."

Acknowledging the stress that schools are under, Liam emphasised the importance of the EP's role "to calm" and not further overwhelm teachers,

> Our job also was to help teachers and not to *[sic]* if you were to disempower them and make them feel they had to do something absolutely new and unusual and to go into 60 hours training in something like that, you'll probably raise their anxiety level a lot.

He also discussed the importance of reassuring teachers that they are well-equipped: "They're the right people for the job and continue doing things in a way that they always do. Just applying it to a little bit *[sic]* different context." Aoife similarly acknowledged that it is hard to balance these training needs with school staff, expressing that sometimes too much is asked or expected of teachers. Aoife noted the challenges in bridging the gap between training and classroom implementation, she hoped that when she provides training that it is accessible and manageable for teachers.

Fiona referred to the Psychological First Aid document and acknowledged it provided reassurance for teachers, also reflecting on the need to reassure teachers working in this area: "It's reassuring for teachers because I think they can feel a bit overwhelmed and *[sic]* 'we're not, we're not counsellors, we're not therapists,' but in reality, most people in the aftermath of a trauma, they just need to feel safe."

Overall, the participants collectively stressed the EP's role in supporting teachers, providing accessible training, managing expectations, and recognising the emotional toll on school staff.

**Navigating Schools' Relationships with Families.** In fostering positive relationships between school staff and parents of CYP from refugee backgrounds, Fiona emphasised the importance of considering possible trauma experienced by parents. Encouraging a gentle approach, she stressed the need for school staff to build relationships first and consider parents' possible experiences of education as well as trauma before delving into discussions about learning needs.

Aoife highlighted the positive relationships she observed between families and schools, noting these relationships were supported by the diversity of the school population. She emphasised the collaborative effort, with parents appreciating the school's dedication while also

acknowledging the child's struggles: "Mum has come into the school, and she knows everybody's working really hard for him and she knows he's not getting on too well at the moment, that he's finding it very difficult to manage." Aoife's use of language here, referring to the child finding it difficult to manage rather than the school staff or teacher, suggests the absence of blame between home and school, emphasising a collective commitment to providing support *for* the child.

Effective communication emerged as a crucial element in this context. Fiona recommended schools explore various methods of sharing information with parents from different cultural backgrounds, referencing the importance of information evenings and the value of interpreters. She shared a case where a parent was uncertain about the Irish school system's structure, where the parents were unsure of how many years the young person had left in school. This highlighted the potential oversight in assuming parents possess such knowledge upon arrival in Ireland.

Acknowledging the significance of interpretative services, Fiona emphasised her role in bridging communication gaps between schools and families, particularly for parents unfamiliar with engaging with their child's education or school: "Some parents are coming from environments where you didn't do that." Ciara also discussed the importance of recognising diverse parental experiences, especially considering that some parents may place high academic expectations on their children, potentially unaware of the impact of war or trauma. She acknowledged how this can vary, emphasising the EP's role in navigating these diverse perspectives:

> I've had the full range where people are excessively focused on things and ignoring the circumstances that the child is coming from …and the other where they're not focused at all on the education. And it's a new thing for them to be brought in by the teacher and engaged in conversations about their children's needs.

Fiona discussed the importance of the EPs' role in facilitating these positive relationships, while acknowledging that this can also take time: "We need to be facilitating the relationships with somebody in school because with the best will in the world, we can't continue to see them very frequently." Recognising the EP's inability to continue support, she emphasised the need to lay the foundation for these positive relationships, ensuring families perceive the school as a safe and supportive environment.

Ciara emphasised the significance of understanding the family context, particularly if both parents are in Ireland, stressing the importance of identifying social supports for families. Overall, Fiona felt strongly about the family and one good adult being a strong protective factor for children from refugee backgrounds, especially if and when the child has additional needs: "So the children who are with the family unit, their sense of safety, has been shook and but *[sic]* they still got some of it and then and that's not always the case."

In summary, Ciara, Fiona and Aoife reflected on how their experiences have stressed the need for sensitivity, effective communication strategies, and understanding diverse parental experiences to build positive relationships between schools and families of CYP from refugee backgrounds. The emphasis on collaboration and empathy emerged as key themes in fostering a supportive educational environment.

### *3.4.4 Theme 4: Acknowledging the Impact of Culture, Policies and Accessing Support "The supports for children from some of the other countries haven't been as good"*

This theme highlighted EPs' experience of supporting CYP and how this was impacted by the interactions and dynamics across the exosystem and macrosystem.

**Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations.** Working with cultural and language differences came up for each participant, however only Ciara acknowledged that her work with CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland is likely impacted by her not having a similar cultural background or experience to those she works with in this context. Aoife and Ciara shared their experiences regarding the reliance on interpreters in their work with CYP from refugee backgrounds. They expressed concerns about potential limitations on the depth and quality of their work, with Aoife noting that at times, she received a "summary, but maybe not an interpretation." Aoife also acknowledged that working with interpreters can negatively impact the rapport building with clients: "It can be hard because the flow of the conversation is not as natural." Aoife reflected on what it might be like for parents to meet with an interpreter and EP and how it is a vulnerable experience talking about your child's experiences with a stranger and through a different language: "I always wonder about how comfortable the parents you know might be."

Ciara discussed important considerations to make when working with interpreters, such as where they are from or what the family's first or preferred language is: "I know with the Ukrainians I've tried not to use Russian interpreters, but sometimes they're Russian speakers

themselves." Ciara reflected on a negative experience with an interpreter who had demonstrated negative attitudes towards a specific ethnic group of people and acknowledged how this impacted her work "The families I think, must have experienced that hostility and they certainly weren't that open with me." Aoife and Ciara also acknowledged positive experiences with interpreters. Aoife discussed working with a family who were familiar with the interpreter, observing this as supporting the family to feel at ease. Ciara noted how it is helpful when an interpreter has important key qualities "like a warm, kind of compassionate person".

Ciara discussed how, relating to language, culture itself can be a barrier, noting instances where families' English proficiency after several years in Ireland signalled potential difficulties in engaging with Irish culture. She highlighted the bidirectional nature of cultural understanding:

> If you're going to succeed, it's great to be maintaining and promoting and embracing your own culture. But it has to be a hybrid. You have to understand our culture to be able to work with us and get the most out of country and systems in the education and so on.

Ciara discussed how some cultural attitudes toward additional needs may hinder engagement, stating "the parents can be barriers as well. Cultural attitudes towards, additional needs and special educational needs." Similarly, Liam discussed that in working with families and CYP from refugee backgrounds that it is important to also consider possible similarities with Irish culture that may remind the EP to approach sensitive topics, such as a child's disability, at a slower pace. Fiona acknowledged that cultural differences in communication exist, noting, "Some parents are coming from environments where you didn't do that, and in Ireland, some families don't communicate with teachers. We have different cultural ways of engaging with schools in Ireland too."

Aoife and Ciara also discussed the consideration of English as an Additional Language (EAL) training and awareness for teachers. Aoife gave examples of recommendations she gave to a teacher, suggesting the use of a headset for a child to receive instructions in Ukrainian, promoting inclusive practices, as another child in the class also required similar support.

Participants highlighted the complexities of working with interpreters and addressing cultural differences, working in a compassionate and culturally sensitive manner. Potential similarities with Irish culture were also acknowledged.

**Addressing Policy Needs.** Liam, Ciara, and Fiona identified several policy areas that require improvement. Emphasising the need for greater diversity among educational

professionals, Fiona acknowledged that the student population in Ireland is culturally diverse, and that the education sector needs to reflect this. Fiona and Ciara pointed out the overemphasis on the Irish language in education impacting on teacher diversity, calling for policy changes to foster cultural diversity among teachers and EPs, "I suppose from a policy point of view, that's probably one of the ones that needs the biggest change, and all of us. I suppose teachers, psychologists you know, we all need to be diversified." (Fiona)

Liam wondered if people do always disclose if they have a background or experience of being an asylum seeker or refugee. Highlighting the need to gather such data, Ciara discussed the need for policies to monitor success and exclusion in relation to cultural backgrounds. She urged the need for better tracking:

> We need to see if there is a disproportionate number of them being unsuccessful or a disproportionate number of them being disciplined or excluded or on reduced days. Or, you know, I don't think we're doing the level of monitoring that we need to do now. Sometimes people don't disclose what their background is.

Ciara further highlighted the significance of policies focusing on inclusion and student wellbeing: "to make sure that the children are well looked after and present and participating and succeeding in our schools... And if they're doing that, they have a sense of belonging and they've wellbeing." She also advocated the need for a curriculum that embraces diversity that goes beyond some current practices she has observed in schools; "Not just tokenistically on celebrate different cultures day."

Stating that "we have huge problems with racism and discrimination," Ciara discussed the need for supporting teachers to address this problem and that policies also need to be improved in this area. Liam and Ciara emphasised the need for anti-bullying and anti-racism policies to be in line with best practice guidelines. Liam reflected on how it is important when addressing anti-racism within policies that they "fit" correctly, Liam expressed from his own research, that addressing anti-racism best fits within anti-bullying policies in schools:

> Anti-bullying policies do naturally have to include *[sic]* are applicable to things like racist bullying. But after having researched, the conclusion I came to from the research that I had read was that it was best to have one anti-bullying policy, and *[sic]* which applied to everybody.

While Ciara specifically highlighted the importance of naming identity-based bullying:

> It needs to be named within the anti-bullying policy. It needs to be named within it and it needs to be addressed, in a particular way and in a strong and well highlighted way. You know, identity-based bullying is different.

Ciara discussed that she feels *it* or identity-based bullying might be referred to as racial equality in some policies. Similarly, Liam emphasised that anti-racism should be explicitly named within anti-bullying policies rather than having separate policies.

Fiona discussed that there is a need for an updated policy on EAL provision as the current policy in this area is dated and supports are lacking. She also discussed an "agreement" that has been developed for students from Ukraine, exempting them from reassessment if parents have disclosed the child has additional needs. Fiona advocated for extending this to include other children arriving into the Irish educational system and implementing it at a broader policy level. This would support EPs' work in reducing demands to carry out additional assessments with CYP who may have already received a psychological assessment in a previous country.

Overall key policies discussed related to cultural diversity, wellbeing, and anti-bullying; improving these policy areas would support EPs' work in addressing schools training and support needs.

**Differences in Accessing Supports.** Ciara and Fiona noted concerns about the differences in support for individuals arriving from Ukraine compared to those from other refugee backgrounds in Ireland. Noting the worry among Syrian individuals about potential disparities in attention and support, Ciara stated, "I know some of the Syrian people were worried that they might be kicked out of their hotels … and all of that when the same level of attention wasn't given to their experiences." Fiona acknowledged the risk of an "us and them" dynamic due to the differences in support offered to those arriving from Ukraine but commended schools for managing this effectively: "There's a little bit of an us and them, which is never what we want and but *[sic]* as again, I think schools manage that quite well. They noticed it quite quickly and would have sought to balance it."

Fiona's involvement with the REALT, a support initiative for Ukrainian students, specifically highlighted the disparities in support for different refugee groups. While the REALT provided various supports for Ukrainian students, Fiona noted the lack of similar considerations for other individuals and groups from refugee backgrounds:

> The supports for children from some of the other countries haven't been as good, and I think it was sort of noticeable in some of the schools where and suddenly there was a flood of support in and that hadn't been there before.

Reflecting on how challenging Aoife found a specific piece of casework she noted "the one positive" with this case was that the child was "fortunate" in the school he was in as it has access to more supports than most schools in Ireland. She discussed the benefits of collaborative meetings between professionals, including a play therapist and clinical psychologist: "We're able to avoid overlapping and make sure that the kind of the right supports are going in at the right time." However, she also acknowledged the added complexity to setting clear goals when there are multiple voices in meetings. Ciara and Fiona discussed that they have observed some positive supports for Syrian and Ukrainian students, such as a Special Need Assistant from Ukraine and an interpreter from Palestine. These two individuals have supported families in engaging with psychologists and navigating the school system.

Aoife and Liam discussed the difficulty in securing appropriate external support for CYP from refugee backgrounds. Aoife mentioned the struggle to access speech and language therapy for a child from Ukraine, emphasising the ongoing discussions "the CDNT *(Children's Disability Network Team)* and Primary Care are in let's call it 'discussion' as to which of their services best meet his needs." Liam noted the frustration of schools unable to access services for a young person's needs: "The school also were frustrated by not being able to access other services such as child and adolescent mental health services."

The difference in accessibility to support services and the pathways to supports for CYP from refugee backgrounds has impacted EP's experiences when working in this area. Overall, this subtheme highlights how there has been different support pathways for CYP from refugee backgrounds and Ukraine and that this needs to be acknowledged; there is also a need for external services to be more accessible for schools and students.

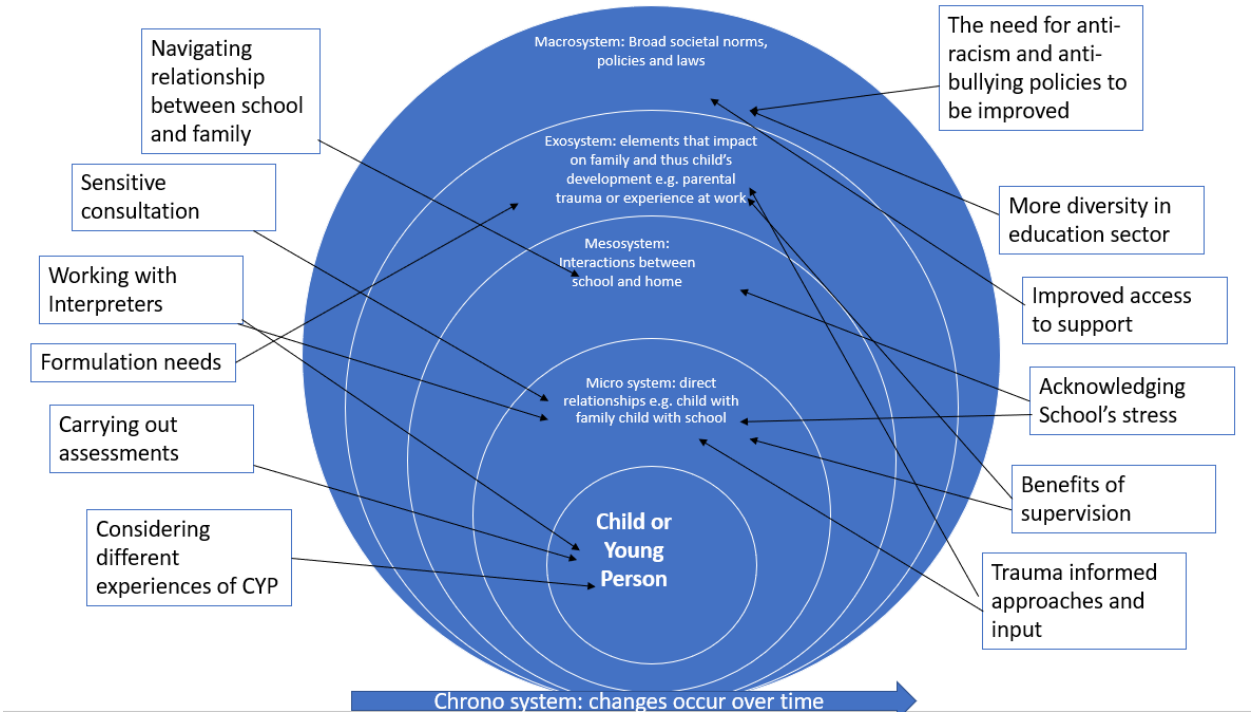
## 3.5 Discussion

The current study aimed to explore EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Four key themes were identified: adapting current approaches to support CYP from refugee backgrounds, supports for EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, supporting the school environment, and acknowledging the impact of culture, policies and accessing support. These themes reflect how EPs and schools might adapt to the needs of CYP

and their families while also highlighting some of the challenges of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Overall, these findings highlight how EPs in NEPS are working across ecological systems to support CYP from refugee backgrounds (Figure 6).

***Figure 6***

*Current Findings Mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)*




This research has provided an insight into the various experiences of EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds, further highlighting the need to consider the various ecological systems impacting the CYP they work with. The first theme of "adapting current approaches" focused on the considerations and reflections EPs made when working directly with CYP from refugee backgrounds as well as their families. Relating to the micro system, and their direct work with CYP, EPs spoke of adapting assessment processes, their professional need for support with formulation and the importance of being sensitive in consultation. Previous research has also

highlighted the importance of adapting assessment approaches for CYP from refugee backgrounds with specific consideration of CYP's first language and pre migration experiences (Bozdağ & Ergün, 2022; Gartley & Due, 2017; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2022).

The importance of sensitive approaches in consultation also related to considering the CYP's possible history of trauma or adversity. Although I felt this related to EPs using a trauma informed framework, I gave this subtheme the title of "the importance of sensitive approaches" as one participant had expressed their preference for implementing an attachment focused lens rather than a trauma informed approach and I felt that this title encompassed and respected all participants descriptions of approaches relating to adversity or trauma. This highlights how EPs were aware of the likelihood of adversity experienced by CYP from refugee backgrounds as well as the heterogeneity of such experiences (Barrett & Berger, 2021). EPs' skills such as formulation, consultation and application of various psychological theories further emphasises how they can support CYP from refugee backgrounds in education (Bishop, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). EPs also discussed their own needs for support when working in this area. These included the need for training, supervision and the need for more time. This further highlights the complexity of their work across various systemic levels, as well as how these supports also enhance their work at the broader level relating to policies, and social and cultural values (exo and macrosystem). For me, as a trainee EP conducting this research, this further highlighted the continued learning involved in the role of EPs and the importance of accessing regular supervision and CPD.

One of the key findings of this study was that EPs' work were largely impacted by the stress that school staff were experiencing. EPs noted that teachers were often already stressed about classroom management and trying to meet curriculum expectations (Henderson & Ambroso, 2018; Prentice, 2022). EPs thus emphasised the importance of working collaboratively with school staff to support CYP from refugee backgrounds and their families with engaging with education. This highlights EPs' experiences of working both at micro and the meso systemic levels, and also the importance of EPs acknowledging how the various systems interact with each other. For example, EPs often facilitated meeting with parents and teachers which allowed for sharing of information that the school might not have been aware of relating to current family circumstances or experiences, further emphasising the benefits of parental involvement within the school environment (Cranston et al., 2021). Acknowledging the stress

school staff are experiencing emphasises the support that some school staff require, and further highlights the importance of EPs' role in supporting school staff in their work with CYP from refugee backgrounds (Samara et al., 2020; Sobitan, 2022).

Finally, findings related to the macro systemic level related to specific policy needs and access to supports for people from refugee backgrounds. EPs in this study spoke of inclusion, anti-bullying, anti-racism and wellbeing policies. One participant discussed the importance of wellbeing policies in fostering a sense of belonging for CYP, which has also been described as an important area to be considered when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in education (Sobitan, 2022). Research has reported how EPs can provide a range of supports such as supporting policy development, curriculum implementation (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017), access and referrals to mental health services (Fazel et al., 2016) and supporting an ethos of wellbeing within the school environment (Samara et al., 2020). Sobitan (2022) noted the importance of EPs continuing to be reflexive, reflecting regularly on their own cultural identity and experiences in informing their work with these CYP. With this in mind, it has been important for me to continue to reflect on various cultural differences that arise for me as an Irish trainee EP and how my own culture and experiences impact my practice through my professional journey.

Overall, it is important to acknowledge the various ecological systemic levels impacting one another, thus highlighting the importance of EPs implementing an ecological systemic framework when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. This emphasises the importance of EPs' core competencies including implementing holistic approaches, building therapeutic and collaborative relationships and cultural competence (Due & Currie, 2022).

### *3.5.1 Adapting Current Practice*

Participants spoke of how they had to adapt their typical work practices, for example, acknowledging that standardised assessment tools, were not a good fit with CYP who spoke different languages and came from different cultural contexts than those in which these tools were validated.

Participants discussed adapting assessments, being aware that "standardised" assessments were not "standardised" on refugee populations and the need to interpret results with caution, relying on qualitative interpretations, such as observations and meetings with parents and teachers, in line with findings from other studies (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Khawaja & Howard,

2020; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2022). Participants recommended the use of dynamic assessment with this population which is an evolving area in educational psychology practice (Özturan & Uysal, 2022). This is in line with the importance of working with the ecological systems framework in this area, as recommended by d'Abreu et al. (2019), and the importance of gaining information on language proficiency and current school environment (Kaplan et al., 2016). Similarly, participants spoke of the challenges of formulating presentations of CYP given their possible histories of trauma. Formulating and reformulating has been discussed as a potentially "daunting task" for practitioners who have little experience in working with individuals from refugee backgrounds (Tay & Silove, 2021).

Participants highlighted how working in this area is not typical for EPs in Ireland, and participants' experiences did vary, with a range of different feelings being expressed. Participants acknowledged the value of supervision, accessing support as needed, as well as training on cultural competence and cultural humility. Cultural humility acknowledges the importance of being aware of differences of race, culture, and identity and how these may impact on many areas of the work of EPs including supervision dynamics (Patallo, 2019), highlighting the need to be further aware of power dynamics, aspects of privilege and prejudice.

It is worth noting that participants did not make explicit reference to carrying out interventions with families or CYP from refugee backgrounds. However, they referenced assessment and consultation which are often viewed as intervention (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). In line with the NEPS model of service being described as a consultative approach (Department of Education, 2023), various consultation approaches also support the implementation of culturally sensitive practice such as intellectual humility (Truscott et al., 2017) and humble inquiry (Schein, 2013). EPs' use of psychological consultation has been reported as a common method of assessment and early intervention to support parents and teachers to meet the needs of CYP, emphasising some of EPs' key work being implemented at the mesosystem level (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020).

### *3.5.2 Relational Work with School Staff and Parents*

Effective communication and building relationships were seen as central to the work of EPs. In direct work with children, reference was made to the importance of helping children feel safe and the need to build relationships on trust and respect with parents in schools. This has been discussed in research that has highlighted the need to reframe "parental involvement as

social engagement" (Cranston et al., 2021, p. 372). By building these relationships, professionals can learn and understand parents' prior experiences and perceptions of engaging with their child's formal education and areas that they may require further support in, such as understanding the different school system in Ireland.

Supporting relationships between schools and family was also observed as being an important part of casework to enhance engagement, with an emphasis on building trust (Hummel et al., 2023). The importance of positive relationships between families and schools was identified by participants as supporting their work, having observed positive relationships between home and school. Smith et al. (2020) put forward that interventions that focus on developing positive family-school partnership have positive outcomes for all CYP and do not need to be adapted for cultural differences.

The need for a trauma informed approach to the work, both by school staff and by EPs themselves was highlighted, with participants offering several examples of how typical school activities could be interpreted by children as psychologically threatening. One example was of going on a school trip without a clear understanding of the temporary nature of the trip, when and how they would be returning. The possibility of families perceiving an EP from NEPS as a "government official" highlights a potential challenge for families who may have experienced interrogation or torture from government officials before arriving in Ireland (Shuman & Bohmer, 2019) and another area for EPs to be sensitive of when working with families from refugee backgrounds.

EPs also noted the difficulty in shifting the perspective of teachers to prioritise the emotional wellbeing of CYP over academic performance. Although an uncommon challenge (Willis, 2024), research has reported that teachers have expressed their relationships with students can support both academic development and their student's wellbeing. Willis (2024) also reported that teachers feel a lack of sufficient time to fully develop these relationships in achieving the potential that is needed. "Supporting the Wellbeing of Children from Ukraine in your School" (Department of Education, 2022a; Department of Education, 2022b) references that schools can adjust learning demands as needed, but it is evident that further support is needed for school staff in how to implement this.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of their role in empowering teachers who were experiencing considerable stress and not further overwhelming them with offerings of

training that they may not be able to benefit from. This is an important reflection as this can relate to burnout. Research has found that burnout or stress in teachers impacts their self-efficacy in the profession and it is important for EPs to hold this in mind (Kim & Burić, 2020). The teaching profession has been recognised as stressful, and this stress has increased in recent years due to the pandemic and a perceived increased in accountability in the role (Glickman & Burns, 2021). Overall, EPs play a key role in supporting teachers' coping with this stress. Teachers often need support in meeting the demands in their classroom with the resources they have access to, often feeling they do not have access to sufficient resources (McCarthy, 2019).

Teacher stress may relate to vicarious trauma, referring to the impact on teachers of listening to children's stories of what they have experienced and teachers holding this in mind (Lawson et al., 2019), while also acknowledging how it impacts professionals working in this area (Babiker & Abdalla, 2021; Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022; Ebren et al., 2022). The findings of this study further support the need for more trauma informed training in schools (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). EPs described the value of teachers approaching meetings in a sensitive and gentle manner and being in tune with potential situations that could elicit a trauma response. This was also discussed by Brunzell and colleagues (2019) who highlighted the benefits of teachers being trained in a trauma informed model, supporting teachers' shifts in thinking and perspectives of behaviours that may challenge in the classroom. Brunzell et al. (2019) also identified the use of more positive language following such training. The wellbeing documents developed by NEPS acknowledges the importance of being trauma informed in welcoming CYP from refugee backgrounds (Department of Education, 2022a; Department of Education, 2022b). Both documents reference the Hobfoll principles (Hobfoll et al., 2007), emphasising the need to prioritise a sense of safety, calm, hope, connectedness, self and community efficacy within the school environment. Although school staff's wellbeing is acknowledged on the final page of the documents, it is evident that there is more support needed for teachers in this area.

### *3.5.3 Need for Policy Developments*

Highlighting how EPs are adopting scientist practitioner advocate models in their roles (Miles & Fassinger, 2021), EPs discussed advocacy as part of their role across many of the ecological systems impacting CYP. Such examples included advocating for how teachers interacted with CYP and families, advocating for services for CYP and advocating for areas that

need to be addressed within policy. There were many challenges highlighted within the broader context of policy, specifically relating to inconsistencies in accessing support, highlighting the need for a more accessible referral process for necessary services. EPs acknowledged the differences in supports received by forcibly displaced people arriving from Ukraine compared to other people who had arrived prior to the war in Ukraine. This has been highlighted and discussed in a recent study which describes "overwhelmingly positive" reactions to supporting those being displaced from Ukraine in Europe, compared to "negative reactions" towards individuals displaced from Afghanistan (De Coninck, 2023). This may relate to the possible perception held in Europe of different "types" of migrants and how this has led to some migrants being perceived as "more deserving" of supports than others. It has been further argued that policy makers need to be aware of and consider these differences in supports and the need for equality in access supports for migrants (De Coninck, 2023).

Participants also acknowledged key areas that need to be considered relating to anti-racism and anti-bullying policies. The need for monitoring and tracking of inclusion and exclusion highlighted in this study, was similarly discussed by Duden and Martin-Borges (2022) as well as the importance of anti-discrimination policies. Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that such monitoring could further enhance equity, curriculum standards and inclusivity. One ongoing debate is where anti-racism policies best "fit". Some argue it is best within anti-bullying policy, while others argue it is best within the policy for inclusion in schools (Fu et al., 2023; Miller, 2021). Race based bullying is a form of identity-based bullying which was named by participants as a specific need to be addressed.

Participants reflected on potential similarities across cultures by identifying potential assumptions people may have with respect to certain cultures. This reflects participants' skills in cultural humility and their awareness of how culture shapes all individuals' experiences and perspectives (Fisher, 2020). Furthermore, it highlights participants' awareness of the dynamics of the Irish culture, the culture they are working in, and possible assumptions commonly made about other cultures, such as religious or other countries.

### *3.5.4 Implications for Educational Psychology*

This research has highlighted four main implications within the field of educational psychology. Overall, the themes that arose from the analysis highlight that EPs have been

working within various systems to support CYP from refugee backgrounds (d'Abreu et al., 2019).

Relating to EP's direct work with CYP, one key implication is for EPs to adapt current assessment and intervention approaches. EPs need to acknowledge the limitations of standardised assessments when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and consider more dynamic approaches to assessments (d'Abreu et al., 2019; Khawaja & Howard, 2020; Khawaja & Wotherspoon, 2022). Furthermore, EPs implementing training at the school system level such as trauma informed training can be viewed in line with the Continuum of Support (CoS; NEPS, 2007; NEPS, 2010), this training may need to be adapted within the context or level of support in consideration of the experiences of families from refugee backgrounds.

The second implication relates to the importance of supervision. Supervision has been highlighted as essential in EPs' work, relating to support around the complex feelings that may arise in this work and support with formulation. Related to this, supervision may support EPs' practice when working in an unfamiliar area, and support building of confidence (Tay & Silove, 2021). While supervision is available to EPs in managing the stress of their role, access to supervision is a support that is lacking for teachers. Engaging in supervision is not common practice for teachers in Ireland, but it is a support that has been found to help teachers' wellbeing in the role (Glickman & Burns, 2021). Supervision will likely benefit teachers to support them in managing their stressful roles . This could be a further area for EP practice to evolve in providing more regular supervision to teachers.

The final two implications relate to training and policy implications. Relating to EPs' training on assessment approaches, there is an ongoing debate around the use of standardised assessments within the profession (Rear, 2019), with an argument for more dynamic assessments to be conducted so that the results of assessments are fair, interpretable and valid for all; EPs may benefit from more training on dynamic assessment approaches (Atkinson et al., 2022). With this in mind, EPs may also require training in cultural humility. There is a need for training for EPs to further understand cultural humility and how this can benefit their work, this would complement training in dynamic assessment as will also help EPs in understanding the considerations needed when carrying out standardised assessments. It has been argued that cultural humility can support EPs in better meeting the needs of CYP and families from culturally diverse backgrounds and is, therefore, a key skill when working in this area (Fisher,

2020) that requires ongoing development. Cultural humility training should, therefore, be enhanced in EPs' professional training to support trainees when working with culturally diverse CYP and their families. Research has also highlighted this need for trainee psychologists, with one study reporting on the benefits trainees experienced from receiving training in multicultural consultation (Newman & Ingraham, 2020). EPs may also require further training on best practice for working with interpreters.

EPs may often support schools in their policy development. There is a need for several policies to be addressed which can be supported by educational psychology. Firstly, schools need to have anti-racism and identity-based bullying named within their policies (Stickl Haugen et al., 2020). Furthermore, in schools and the education sector, there is a strong argument for policies to encourage, support and be more welcoming of culturally diverse staff. The emphasis on the requirement for proficiency in the Irish language to work in this sector is still quite strong in Ireland. Interestingly, the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2015) had a policy focus to diversify the teaching profession in Ireland. Recent research in this area highlighted further barriers that student teachers have faced in completing their teacher training when from "underrepresented groups". Barriers reported related to students' identity and feelings of belonging, financial stress and engaging in part-time work while training to qualify as a teacher (Keane et al., 2023), highlighting this as an area that needs to be addressed.

### *3.5.5 Strengths*

This research project employed a qualitative method to explore EPs' experiences of working in a specific area. Qualitative research is getting more positive recognition in its contribution to policy, informing practice and further contributing to knowledge within the field of psychology (Todd et al., 2022). The use of Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) Ecological Systems Theory is another strength of this research as it explores the various systems EPs have to work within, allowing for the research to encapsulate the broad nature of the role of being an EP and highlighting the various systems EP have to navigate as part of their roles. The use of IPA for this study provided an in-depth analysis of the experiences of EPs in Ireland supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. This research was the first to focus on and specifically explore psychologists' experiences in working with CYP internationally and provides a good starting point for further development of this research area.

### *3.5.6 Limitations*

Two of the interviews were carried out online and two in person, due to participant preferences. It can be argued that this is a limitation of the methodology of the study as it impacts on the standardisation of the data collection process. Gray et al. (2020) acknowledge the potential differences of conducting interviews online such as how nuances or interpersonal cues are interpreted and potentially impact on building rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Participants who did engage in their interviews online had expressed this as a preferred means of participation, and thus this method likely supported their engagement through the process as it addressed other barriers such as transport and additional time needed (Gray et al., 2020).

One other limitation is that there are gaps in the demographic characteristics of the participants, making it difficult for readers to contextualise the data. Within the semi-structured interview, participants chose what demographic details to share, with not all participants disclosing their level of training to qualify as an EP, experience of training or years within the service. Only one participant disclosed their cultural background. It would be beneficial for future research to gather such data, given the relevance of this to cultural awareness and cultural humility among participants (Pham et al., 2022). Finally, this study focused on a small sample of EPs in order to capture the phenomenological experience of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. Given the heterogeneity of this population, it would be helpful to capture the experiences of larger samples to better understand how to support EPs in this work.

### *3.5.7 Directions for Future Research*

This research has provided an insight into how EPs in a specific service in Ireland are supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. With the ongoing increase of CYP from refugee backgrounds arriving to Ireland, future research can broaden these findings and potentially explore how EPs from other services are supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. This would be valuable as EPs discussed difficulties in accessing other psychological services for CYP from refugee backgrounds. Research exploring these other services can provide directions on potential referral pathways and service needs.

EPs spoke about implementing trauma informed training in schools, with a common difficulty noted in supporting teachers to prioritise emotional wellbeing over academics (Willis, 2024). Future research should explore feedback from teachers on the trauma informed training

they received, and barriers faced in prioritising emotional wellbeing over academics. This would enhance EPs' work and understanding in this area. Given the manner in which EPs work, often through their interactions with school personnel, it would be helpful to capture teachers', parents' and CYPs' perspectives of the role of the EP in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds and their families.

Finally, a key part of the role of EPs is advocating for CYP who they work with. Although two participants spoke about their direct work with CYP; eliciting CYP's voice in this area may require attention. Further research should explore how and whether EPs are eliciting the voice of CYP from refugee backgrounds in their work.

### *3.5.8 Conclusion*

This research aimed to address the question, "What are EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland?" From the participants in this study, it is evident that EPs' experiences in this area are broad, ranging from experiences with assessments with CYP, work with parents, families, schools and other support systems. Understanding these experiences provides valuable insights and recommendations for the educational psychology profession, which is particularly needed at present with the ongoing increase of CYP from refugee backgrounds. The four themes that arose from this research emphasise the need for continued professional development for EPs in various areas.

The first theme relating to assessment, formulation and consultation provides a key start to understanding how EPs have made sense of some of their direct work in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds, while also understanding EPs work at the microsystemic level. This provides an insight into how EPs are adapting standardised assessments, while also noting the difficulty EPs experienced in formulating CYP's needs. EPs overall valued working with families from refugee backgrounds to support CYP, consistent with the literature (Bishop, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017), highlighting the need for further work at the micro and mesosystem. Further work at the mesosystem will support positive relationships to develop between families and school staff. Participants in this study were conscious of the need to approach this work in a sensitive manner. The second theme further informs the needs of EPs when working with CYP and families from refugee backgrounds. This highlights how essential supervision is for EPs in their role and how EPs cope with limited amount of time in working in busy roles (Bishop, 2022; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019). The emphasis on supporting the school

environment, the third theme, highlights EPs working in collaborative relationships with school staff and families while considering CYP's experiences, linking, again, to both the microsystem and mesosystem. EPs also felt the need to acknowledge the stress that school staff are experiencing, which significantly impacts their work in this area. Acknowledging the stress that schools, families and CYP are presenting with is important to consider when looking at how these systems interact, and thus impact on CYP's development, providing an understanding of the exosystem on how stress can impact these dynamics across the systems and how this is presented in the educational context. The importance of policies to reference an anti-racism stance, as well a culture of wellbeing to support a sense of belonging demonstrates the broader systemic considerations needed to support CYP from refugee backgrounds. This further highlights the complex process of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds and how EPs' specialist knowledge and expertise make them well suited to support school professionals in meeting the needs of CYP within the school context (Bishop, 2022; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017; Sobitan, 2022).

Overall, the themes emerging from the exploration of EPs' experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds can be understood within Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) Ecological Systems Theory and the interactions between the various systems for CYP from refugee backgrounds. EPs discussed their experiences of assessment, formulation and consultation at various ecological systemic levels. This work was often impacted by the stress experienced by school staff, families and supports available. EPs noted that supervision and accessing CPD enhanced their work in this area.

Finally, EPs' core competencies cover the importance of acknowledging differences relating to culture and access to support (British Psychological Society, 2022). Specifically, these include the knowledge of the complexity of CYP's needs, cultural competence, use of holistic approaches, ability to work with others who support CYP and ability to build therapeutic relationships (Due & Currie, 2022). The importance of being a reflexive practitioner was also noted as central to cultural competence (Sobitan, 2022). EPs also discussed policy areas that need to be addressed to promote inclusion and positive educational environments for CYP from refugee backgrounds. This emphasises EPs' role within the macrosystem and the benefits of EPs working across various systems and as Scientist Practitioner Advocates (Miles & Fassinger, 2021), when supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds.

# 4 Critical Review and Impact Statement

## 4.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to critically reflect on the process of undertaking this research project at doctoral level. In this chapter, the researcher will critically appraise the overall project, consisting of critiques and reflections on specific areas, including the paradigm, theoretical framework, methodology, data collection, and analysis and further discuss the implications of the project for practice, policy, and future research. The chapter will conclude with an impact statement, providing an overall conclusion to the thesis.

## 4.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

A research paradigm can be considered in the context of axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Axiology acknowledges the nature of ethics and values within research (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). The researcher sought ethical approval through Mary Immaculate College and NEPS, while also adhering to Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI, 2019) ethical guidelines. The reflexivity statement also provides insight into ethical values, in line with the interpretivism paradigm, acknowledging the researcher is a trainee EP interviewing qualified EPs who are in a busy role. Keeping a reflexive journal (see sample: Appendix H) throughout the process also aligns with the interpretivist paradigm in axiology, highlighting how the researcher's own experiences impact the interpretation and presentation of the research project (Mertens, 2015).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality. An interpretivist paradigm recognises the attempts made to understand the subjective meanings of interactions communicated from the perspective of both the participants and the researcher (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). Interpretivist researchers believe that reality is discovered through the participants' views and the researchers' backgrounds and experiences, acknowledging the "double hermeneutic." Interpretivism, therefore, "allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 440). Interpretivists believe it is essential to understand the context in which the research is conducted (Willis, 2007). This is further in line with the researcher's stance as they reflected on the potential impact on the research process of having recently completed a placement in NEPS and also being in the process of training to qualify as an EP. It is important to acknowledge how these reflections related interpretation of the research data in line with the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the

aim to understand participants' lived experiences of working in a particular context (Willis, 2007).

Epistemology relates to the nature of which knowledge is known and its relationship with the researcher and researched (Mertens, 2015). Within interpretivism, this acknowledges how reality is socially constructed through interpretations and is further supported by the use of language throughout the thesis and the interview schedule's structure, fluidity and flexibility. Interpretivism also acknowledges that we create meaning and realities in different ways depending on our own experiences, highlighting that there is "no particular right or correct path to knowledge" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p.25). This was supported by ensuring validity when the researcher engaged with peer debriefing and credibility checking with her supervisor during the analysis process. Finally, methodology refers to the research process, in line with the paradigm, deciding how best to obtain data to answer the research aim or question (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). IPA was considered best in line with this project's research question, aims and paradigm. IPA aims to offer insights into how a "given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon" (Cuthbertson et al., 2020, p. 97). The research aimed to gain insight into how EPs are making sense of their work with Children and Young People (CYP) from refugee backgrounds in Ireland. IPA will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### *4.2.1 Alternative Positions*

Critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008) was considered as an alternative paradigm for this project. Critical realism holds the ontological position of believing that reality is "out there" and embedded in social and cultural experiences. Also, it acknowledges that realities and meanings are fluid between the researcher's interpretation and the participants' experiences (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). Critical realism recognises the subjective nature of EPs' contributions through the research process while making sense of their own experiences (Fletcher, 2017; Howells, 2021). Critical realism can be viewed between the two poles of multiple realities that cannot be fully known. For example, EP's experiences (constructionist) and acknowledging that there is one fixed reality, participant's work realities (realist) (Duden & Martins-Borges, 2022). The "double hermeneutic" in IPA refers to the process of interpreting other people's interpretations and aligns more closely with interpretivism than critical realism as it acknowledges the subjective role of the interpreter and participant, and that reality is observed and interpreted in different ways (Hood, 2016). Critical realism assumes one fixed reality with multiple interpretations, while the

interpretive approach acknowledges the multiple realities created by individual interpretations. An interpretive paradigm also assumes that knowledge is individually or socially constructed. In contrast, the critical realist paradigm holds that knowledge is dependent on building models of understanding structures and mechanisms that account for the phenomena studied (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). The interpretivist belief that knowledge is created through interpretations further aligns with the researcher's stance.

### 4.3 Theoretical Perspective: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this research project (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As mentioned, applying an ecological model in EPs' work with CYP from refugee backgrounds can enhance EPs understanding of the CYP's needs (d'Abreu et al., 2019 Miller et al., 2022). This means acknowledging the different systems that interact in the lives of CYP while EPs are carrying out their work in this area. The use of this theory is common in psychology research in general (Kelly et al., 2016; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Perron, 2017) and has been used to better understand EP's work with CYP from refugee backgrounds (d'Abreu et al., 2019). In this study, the interview schedule was designed through mapping questions onto the theoretical model, with each system highlighted next to the relative question explored (See Appendix B for reference). Using this theoretical framework enabled a focus on the different systems impacting EPs' work and the different levels at which EPs work. Furthermore, the findings highlight the complexity of understanding the interactions across the systems that families from refugee backgrounds experience. For example, the theory acknowledges that the child's individual characteristics, processes, values and beliefs reciprocally influence and are influenced by their interactions with home, school and the community (Kelly et al., 2016). CYP and families from refugee backgrounds have different experiences of home, school and community, when compared to their peers from non–refugee backgrounds. It is, therefore, important for EPs to examine these interactions across and within these systems experienced by the CYP (Douglas et al., 2019; Tösten et al., 2017). Figure 5 in Chapter Three provides visual representation of how some of the questions in the interview schedule mapped to this theory.

Some authors argue that this theoretical framework may not fit with understanding the role of the EP or how this role is experienced (Hassett, 2023) as it was initially developed with

the focus of examining human development in general (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, understanding and supporting human development is central to the role of EPs, and the theory has been applied within various research contexts relating to understanding professional development and experiences (Kiilo & Kutsar, 2013; Smith et al., 2017).

### 4.3.1 *Alternative Theoretical Perspectives Considered*

Two alternative theories were considered when determining the theoretical underpinnings of the current project: Second Generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001) and Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Activity Theory has been implemented in research that explores individuals' work in a service or organisation within educational psychology (Kelly et al., 2016). It consists of the subject (whose perspective), the object (what they are working on), outcome (result they are working for), rules (aspects that help or hinder the work), community (others who are involved), division of labour (the distribution of the work), and the artefact (what is being used to carry out the work) (Engeström, 2001; Hassett, 2023). Although there are elements of this theory that would have suited the research question, the focus would need to have been on the broader context of the EPs' work rather than exploring in depth their experiences working in this area, supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds as an EP. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was considered best fit for focusing on how EPs work across the various systems that impact the CYP from refugee backgrounds.

Identity Theory proposes that human action and interaction are shaped by definitions or interpretations of specific situations, further based upon shared meanings developed by interactions with others (Stryker, 2007). Similar to Activity Theory, this theory would have also placed a stronger emphasis on the identity of being an EP, rather than the focus of how EPs are experiencing their work in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds.

## 4.4 Reflection on Literature Review

The researcher carried out a thorough literature review, including a systematic review of the literature, guided by the review question. This review provided significant learning for the researcher in exploring their stance on the language to use and ensuring all relevant research and literature was included in this study.

Although there has been research in the field of education in this area, there was an evident gap relating to educational psychology. The researcher was unable to find research or literature about EPs', or other psychology professionals' work with CYP from refugee

backgrounds. This was emphasised through the process of carrying out the systematic review. The researcher, therefore, decided to keep a broad review question, ensuring that no relevant literature was missed. This led to a large volume of literature being identified in the search. The researcher decided to keep the search terms and inclusion and exclusion criteria terms broad in line with this, including data from Temporary Education Centres (TECs), refugee camps and ethnographic studies. The researcher trialled various search terms and strategies, initially focusing on the specific question of "psychologist's experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds." This yielded no relevant papers. Following this, the researcher broadened the research question to "professionals experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds" which yielded too broad a collection of papers, as it included studies that also focused on medical professionals. This led to the final review question exploring "experiences and perspectives of professionals in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in education." When the researcher first identified this as the most appropriate review question, the initial search terms identified 2,253 potentially relevant studies in June 2023, leading to a total of 33 papers included for full text screening and 11 included in this initial review. The researcher then reviewed their search terms to broaden their search, (to the search discussed in Chapter Two) and ensure that no potentially relevant studies were absent from the synthesis of the review. This did add to the time demands of the researcher but supported the researcher's confidence in knowing that there is a significant gap in research and literature not only relating to how EPs support CYP from refugee backgrounds, but psychologists in other fields working with CYP from refugee backgrounds.

An added challenge in the systematic review process was the inconsistency of language related to the population of interest throughout the research. Research included language such as "refugee and immigrants", "refugee and migrants" and "refugee and asylum-seeking children" or students. Definitions also varied based on CYP's nationality and the country in which the research was conducted. Although individuals from refugee backgrounds are not a homogenous group, migrants and immigrants (by definition) further add to the heterogeneity and have very different experiences of the migration process than individuals from refugee backgrounds (Douglas et al., 2019). For this reason, the researcher excluded studies that focused on immigrant or migrant populations.

A significant body of research in this domain was conducted in Turkey, likely due to its proximity to Syria. As noted, Turkey has also been reported as the country that has welcomed the

largest numbers of refugees globally (UNHCR, 2020). The majority of the studies in Turkey referred to students from Syria as "refugees" although it has been stated they were under the status of "Temporary Protection" (Kaya & Ok, 2021; Özkan & Çakmak, 2021). This is similar to the current status of those arriving from Ukraine in Ireland (Department of Justice, 2022a) and also further highlights the nuances of the language used in this area and care needed when screening the papers identified.

The use of the Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework was implemented as guided and structured the process of the systematic review. This was a framework that the researcher had received training in and was familiar with. However, the implementation of this approach also has its limitations. The Johanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tool (Lockwood et al., 2015) was implemented to assess the WoE A, measuring specific areas of qualitative research without taking the context of the research into consideration. For example, studies received a lower WoE A when researchers did not state their philosophical perspective or identify ethical considerations when conducting empirical research. These areas may not have been included in the published articles, due to the assumed readership of the journals or style in which they were published.

Overall, the literature review provided an in-depth understanding of the context of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds and highlighted the need for the current research project.

### 4.5 Qualitative Design, IPA and the Use of Semi-Structured Interviews

The project implemented a qualitative design informed by IPA (Smith et al., 2022). This was chosen as it allowed the participants to describe their experience of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds in their own words and did not limit them to providing specific or structured responses. This allows for in depth exploration, descriptions, and interpretations to be given, which is in line with the research aims of this project (Smith, 2015).

Guided by IPA and the aim of exploring "experiences," the qualitative data collection method also needed to be flexible and elicit possible thoughts, feelings and perspectives that arise from participants. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews are a common means of data collection to achieve this (Smith et al., 2022). The use of semi-structured interviews also allowed for a flexible approach to data collection and for the researcher to use probes as necessary to gain more in-depth insights into participants' experiences (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews

fit well with IPA's value on idiography or the "particular," as their flexibility allows the researcher to probe and explore specific areas in detail depending on the participants' reported experiences (Smith et al., 2022). IPA will be discussed in more detail in the following reflection. However, it is important to acknowledge that the language of interpretative phenomenologists was used throughout the semi-structured interviews, such as exploring feelings and thoughts about working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and how EPs made sense of the work in this area.

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe in their own words their experience of working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and do not limit them to providing specific, limited, or structured responses (Smith et al., 2009). This may have impacted on some demographic details gathered, as not all participants shared their cultural backgrounds, level of training or years of experience within the service. The researcher reflected that it may have been beneficial to include such questions that covered these areas within the opening questions of the interview schedule, as may have provided further understanding of the participants own culture and how this relates to their experience of working in this area.

The research employed a sampling recruitment method of purposeful criterion sampling. The research focused on a homogenous group of EPs working within the same service (National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS), acknowledging the role of EPs in this area and how it likely differs for EPs working in other services. The use of a homogenous sample also supports the process of IPA (Smith et al., 2022). The researcher considered recruiting participants outside of NEPS, but this would have led to more diversity in the professional identities of participants. Participants' depth or quantity of casework did vary in this area, and it may be argued that this is a potential limitation for this research. However, this is an area that only a few EPs working in NEPS have experience in and setting more stringent inclusion criteria with regard to EP experience may have further impacted the access to participants.

### *4.5.1 Alternative Designs and Data Collection*

A mixed methods approach was considered to explore EPs' experiences working in this area. However, due to the lack of research and knowledge available in this area, it was unclear if there would have been a sample size available to support the research aims. This factor was supported by an early feasibility process involving consultation with practicing EPs which highlighted the likelihood that a limited number of EPs in Ireland have experience in supporting

CYP from refugee backgrounds (Tay & Silove, 2021). The process of IPA allowed for this possibility, as IPA is an in-depth process of analysis that is suitably applied with small sample sizes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Online qualitative surveys were considered as a method of data collection (Braun et al., 2021). This would have been less time consuming for participants and possibly more accessible. However, again, the possibility of a limited number of EPs having sufficient experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds may have created a barrier. In addition, the use of surveys would not have allowed for the flexibility to probe further areas that arose for participants.

### 4.6 Reflection on IPA and Data Analysis

IPA was considered the best approach for analysis. The aim was to explore EPs' individual, personal experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. This an under researched, and niche area; with no driving hypothesis to explore. IPA supports in-depth analysis of individuals' experiences, making it suitable for research in areas that are niche, under researched or experienced by a small number of individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA was also embedded throughout the research project in the language used throughout the interview schedule and data collection but is most predominant in the analysis. The researcher was guided by the key tenets of IPA throughout the analysis process, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is less concerned with the factual accuracy of a participant's responses, focusing more on understanding the experience from the participant's perspective. Phenomenology also acknowledges some correspondence between what an individual says, their subjective experience, and the relationship with the researcher (Harper, 2011). Interpretative phenomenologists aim to go beyond the text and interpret the experience to make it more meaningful. Specifically, in IPA research, the "double hermeneutic" approach is involved. This acknowledges how the participant attempts to interpret their experience, and then the researcher attempts to interpret what and how the participant makes sense of their experience (Kieran, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Through IPA, it is acknowledged that the researcher does not have access to the participant's "inner world" and is merely attempting to access and explore their perceptions (Kieran, 2016). Idiography, or the focus on the "particular", was considered throughout the analysis process, such as how participants had very different experiences working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and in NEPS. One participant previously had a TEC on her

caseload, which was relevant to the research question and her experience, while other participants with less experience working with CYP from refugee backgrounds spoke in more detail about specific cases. Following the idiographic nature of IPA, the researcher analysed each interview separately, following the steps recommended by Smith et al. (2022). Identifying higher level themes, the Group Experiential Themes was more of a challenge and a process requiring regular revisions. The write up of the analysis was also challenging as IPA, given the in-depth nature of the data and the analysis; the original results draft consisted of 12,000 words, leading to numerous revisions. With the significant amount of editing required, it is hoped that, through this iterative process, the experiences of the participants are represented faithfully.

### *4.6.1 Alternative Analysis Methods*

Alternative qualitative analysis methods were considered, including Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough et al., 2011). Thematic Analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns of behaviours (Aronson, 1994) and tends to be more descriptive (Efstathiou, 2017), while IPA focuses on the idiographic nature of how each experience is likely to be different. Discourse Analysis focuses on the role language plays in creating a reality (Fairclough et al., 2011). Although language is important within the paradigm, the research question, and IPA, Discourse Analysis was not considered in line with the research question the researcher aimed to answer. The use of Discourse Analysis would have been more appropriate if the research question aimed to focus on discourses shared by EPs and how CYP from refugee backgrounds are positioned within this (Gill, 2000), which again would have moved away from acknowledging the different and individual experiences of EP's work in this area.

## 4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and provided by both Mary Immaculate College, followed by NEPS. The PSI also puts forward ethical guidelines to support members to work ethically in their professional roles (PSI, 2019). As a graduate member of the PSI, these guidelines were adhered to throughout this project, particularly during the data collection process. The PSI guidelines hold four principles relating to ethical practice: respect for the rights and dignity of the person, competence, responsibility, and integrity. The research reflects the first principle by ensuring anonymity through the use of pseudonyms throughout, removing any identifiable data, and respecting participants' right to informed consent. All participants received an information

sheet prior to participation that informed them of the nature and structure of the research. Participants indicated consent to participate by completing consent forms that advised them of their right to withdraw up until December 2023.

The second participant requested the interview schedule in advance, in line with informed consent, respecting the rights of the participants and following discussion with the researcher's supervisors, it was decided this was in line with ethical considerations (Central University Research Ethics Committee, 2020; Haukås & Tishakov, 2024). The interview schedule was shared with the two following participants to ensure consistency in data collection methods. However, both participants that followed expressed their apologies that they did not have sufficient time to read the interview schedule. This may have been a possible ethical dilemma, as it might be perceived as disregarding the participants' time and putting further expectations on them to allocate additional time for participation. The researcher communicated the reason for sharing the interview schedule in that it was to allow for consistency and equal access to information for all participants.

The researcher engaged in preliminary pilot interviews with classmates from the doctorate programme to ensure her competence in carrying out interviews while also engaging in peer debriefing throughout the process of analysis and write-up of the results from the interviews. Overall, the researcher feels a key responsibility to do justice to the profession of educational psychology and ensure that the participants' experiences have been interpreted and reported in a fair and professional manner.

## 4.8 Critical Appraisal - Strengths and Limitations of the Research

Implementing qualitative research requires a specific set of skills and knowledge in how to appraise qualitative investigations (Todd et al., 2022). It is, therefore, essential to be aware of how qualitative research varies in its methodological rigour and credibility. There are many areas to assess for the quality of qualitative research, and the specific areas vary, depending on the research question and aim (Mandal, 2018).

The research paradigm informed the design and methodology. Following the process of IPA as guided by Smith et al. (2022), the researcher also reflected on the phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic nature of IPA. The following section critically appraises the research in line with the four pillars of quality: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance (Yardley, 2017).

### *4.8.1 Sensitivity to context*

Sensitivity to context refers to the importance of not imposing pre-conceived categories on the data and the need to carefully consider meanings given and produced by participants (Yardley, 2017). Sensitivity was demonstrated as the researcher engaged with peer and supervisor debriefing. The researcher was also sensitive to the limited research available in this area, and the use of a semi-structured interview provided a guide for various areas that could be explored while acknowledging that EPs were likely to have a range of experience supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds focusing on different systemic levels. This allowed for flexibility with the process and connection to an emergent design for data collection (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) to being sensitive to EP's professional experiences. The researcher tried to ensure sensitivity to context with the use of a reflexive journal, reflecting on their own assumptions, values and prior experiences throughout the data collection and analysis process. Interpretations were also open, in line with this, allowing for differences and similarities in views and experiences. Emphasising sensitivity to context, it is important to acknowledge that the research included four participants, and although IPA does not aim for generalisation, the in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon can access universal truths (Smith et al.., 2022).

### *4.8.2 Commitment and Rigour*

Commitment and rigour can be demonstrated in research by in-depth engagement with the topic, including the data collection, demonstration of expertise and skills as a researcher (Yardley, 2017). This was supported by the researcher carrying out a thorough literature review of the topic before data collection. The researcher also attended relevant research training and completed methodological reading to support the implementation of IPA with fidelity. The researcher was aware of how social discussions support the interpretation process of IPA (Smith et al., 2009) and thus engaged with peer debriefing following data collection to support the credibility of the research (Mertens, 2015) while also engaging in regular peer discussions and peer supervision throughout the analysis stages, as well as consulting with her supervisors following data collection and then following initial analysis and write up.

This research is only a starting point within EP practice with CYP from refugee backgrounds, and more research is evidently needed to further explore this area. Adhering to the word count within the results section and empirical paper chapter, the researcher revised and reviewed the quotes included from participants. While the researcher was concerned that this

may have impacted on the depth of the experiences presented, the researcher felt they edited these appropriately to retain the key findings from the research, recognising the importance of acknowledging this process in line with commitment and rigour.

### *4.8.3 Coherence and Transparency*

Transparency refers to the reader being able to clearly see the process of how the interpretation was derived from the data (Yardley, 2017). The researcher attempted to ensure transparency throughout the research process by providing detailed documentation of the entire research process, from interview schedules, data collection process to examples of the various stages of IPA with additional detail in the Appendices. The researcher highlighted how Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was mapped to the interview schedule for example: "What has been your experience in working jointly to support the relationship between families from Ukraine/ from refugee backgrounds and schools? (Mesosystem)." See Figure 5 and Appendix B for further examples. Transparency was also addressed by providing an example of the reflexive journal entry (Appendix H). This example was the researcher's entry following the second pilot interview, where the researcher reflected on their initial thoughts from the interview. Engaging in peer debriefing also supported coherence and transparency as the researcher went deeper in discussing the research process and findings regularly with a peer. The researcher also attempted to achieve coherence by ensuring consistent use of language throughout. This reflected a challenge as the inconsistency of language and definitions for CYP from refugee backgrounds was highlighted in the literature review.

### *4.8.4 Impact and Importance*

Impact and importance refers to whether the topic explored and the findings from the study are useful (Yardley, 2017). Acknowledging positionality, the researcher's appraisal of the study is inevitably biased, having been motivated by an interest in the field and having conducted and designed the project themselves. Nevertheless, the dramatic increase of people from refugee backgrounds arriving in Ireland (UNHCR, 2023) demands that this issue is explored. The change in student population represents a challenge and need for EPs to adapt their work to support CYP from refugee backgrounds. The findings have highlighted the need for EPs to adapt their work in terms of both cultural and trauma sensitivity, as well as in terms of supporting the school environment, policy development and advocacy for school staff, families and CYP.

## 4.9 Implications for Practice and Policy

The current dissertation has synthesised the current state of research regarding educational professionals' experiences in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The empirical paper has provided an insight into specific EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds. The literature review and empirical paper together have potential implications for practice and policy.

One key area addressed is the importance of cultural humility within EP practice. Cultural humility is an invaluable asset for EPs when working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and other areas EPs work in. It acknowledges the need for EPs to be aware of potential power dynamics and biases in ensuring good quality psychological work (Pham et al., 2022). The benefits of EPs having this skill through training and awareness in cultural humility is evident. More training would be beneficial for future EPs in Ireland as it is likely their work will increase with families and CYP from other cultures (Haynes-Mendez & Engelsmeier, 2020; Patallo, 2019). Such training can cover culturally sensitive approaches to consultation such as intellectual humility (Truscott et al., 2017) and humble inquiry (Schein, 2013).

As highlighted, working as an EP is a busy profession and can be stressful at times, the benefit of supervision for psychologists was viewed as a key support with managing stress and difficult emotions as they arise within the role. However, it was also acknowledged that teachers and other professionals working within the education sector are experiencing stress and do not have access to similar supports, yet research has found supervision to be a positive support for the wellbeing of teachers (Glickman & Burns, 2021). If EPs were less busy and appropriately trained, they could be in a suitable position to provide this supportive role.

A common theme that emerged both in the literature review and the empirical paper was the importance of being sensitive and compassionate to the likely adverse or traumatic experiences that people from refugee backgrounds have experienced. Participants also discussed that implementing a trauma informed approach is beneficial for all children (Luthar & Mendes, 2020), emphasising the benefits for all educational professionals, not just EPs, to be trained in trauma awareness. Furthermore, this highlights the importance of integrating trauma informed approaches into policies within education settings. Luthar and Mendes (2020) described integrating trauma informed approaches into policies as meaning that knowledge of trauma is reflected in procedures and practices, while actively resisting "re-traumatisation."

Another area highlighted in this research project is the difference in supports available to schools and individuals. This needs to be approached in a sensitive and compassionate manner, while also highlighting the need for more work to be done on addressing equity in access to support. The differences in terminology used to describe forcibly displaced people depending on where they are coming from is evident in the Irish context and also across Europe. This has been discussed by participants in this study and has been highlighted as leading to the risk of creating further divide (De Coninck, 2023). When discussing supports for migrants, not just those from refugee backgrounds, there is a need for language to be consistent and inclusive, rather than using language that separates and categorises migrants. The risk of inconsistent language in policies further suggests different access to supports creating further barriers to inclusion and a sense of belonging while also implying a "hierarchy" of migrants (De Coninck, 2023).

There are indications that diversity needs to be addressed within the educational psychology profession. Only one participant acknowledged that her work with CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland is likely impacted by her not having a similar cultural background or experience to those she works with in this context. The need for the qualification journey for EPs to be more accessible to individuals of all backgrounds in Ireland is essential, and policy in this area needs to reflect that diversity is valued (Miller, 2021). This may further relate to human resource policies within education, highlighting the need for such policies to be more culturally inclusive and acknowledge the value of staff from different cultures and backgrounds within education working within the sector (Miller, 2021). At the present time, the need for the Irish language is a constant barrier that people from cultures outside Ireland face in accessing or applying to jobs within the education sector in Ireland. Changes need to be made within policy to further support the diversification of those working within the educational sector and support children in seeing representation of other cultures within their education setting. Another area that can support this, and needs to be improved, is diversity being referenced in the school curriculum. For this to be implemented effectively it is important that it is done respectfully, not merely to acknowledge representation but CYP's right to be seen and heard in their everyday educational discourses and have their cultures, ethnicities and histories acknowledged in doing so (Miller, 2021).

Finally, participants discussed the need for racism to be addressed within policies. Racism continues to be a problem in Irish society (Micheal et al., 2022). A recent report

identified that Ireland was identified as the third highest country in the EU where people of African descent had experienced racial discrimination (Fundamental Rights agency, 2023). As racism can occur in many contexts, this research has highlighted the need for it to be addressed within school policies, but also in workplaces (Fu et al., 2023). The experience of any form of bullying impacts CYP's engagement and experience of their education. To address this within policy, it may be best to state that racist language and behaviours are not tolerated (Fu et al., 2023). While acknowledging there is not a need for a specific anti-racism policy, research is inconsistent on whether anti-racism fits best within a policy for inclusion or within anti bullying policies (Fu et al., 2023; Miller, 2021).

### 4.10 Implications for Future Research

This is the first research conducted that explored EP's experiences and work in supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland. This research consisted of a homogenous sample, focusing on EPs who work in NEPS, a school based psychological service. As has been highlighted, there has been a rapid increase in people from refugee backgrounds arriving in Ireland in recent years (UNHCR, 2023); this means that it is likely that more EPs will gain more experience working with CYP and their families from refugee backgrounds, meaning that there will be more EPs that will meet the criteria to participate in future research in this area; this will allow for both more qualitative and quantitative research which could provide a deeper understanding of the best approaches for working with CYPs from refugee backgrounds. EPs in Ireland also work in health care settings such as Primary Care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Health Service Executive, 2021). Future research can explore EP's experiences in working in other services, which may highlight further need for support across services in Ireland. Furthermore, as the arrival of refugees is not limited to the Irish context, research could be carried out that explores EPs working in different countries. Research across cultures and countries may help inform international policy and practice in this area.

A common area that arose is working with CYP from refugee backgrounds' families. One participant specifically wondered how the parents experienced working with a psychologist through an interpreter, suggesting how this adds to the vulnerability experienced by parents when meeting with a psychologist. It would be beneficial for future research to explore these experiences and gain insights into what parents and families identify as supportive when engaging with a psychologist through an interpreter. Research has explored how EPs can elicit

the voice of CYP, as well as CYP from refugee backgrounds (Bohan, 2023; Gallagher, 2023) and it is recommended that research and practice in this area continues. Research with EPs should explore how and if they are eliciting the voices of CYP from refugee backgrounds and what tools have supported them in doing so.

### 4.11 Impact statement

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of EPs working with and supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds in Ireland. By gaining this in-depth understanding through the use of interviews analysed by IPA, the study has identified some key areas which EPs perceived as supporting and challenging to their work, how they have approached working in this area as well as areas that need to be addressed for those working in this area.

As highlighted by the gap in research in this area, exploring EPs' experiences of supporting CYP from refugee backgrounds, was identified as a key area for the study to focus on. This led to IPA being the most suitable methodology to investigate this area, identifying a starting point and direction for further research and training for the field of educational psychology. As the role of the EP is ever developing, reflecting how CYP's needs and presentations are changing, EPs need to stay up to date with research, best practice guidelines and current events relevant to their roles.

With the student population in Ireland constantly changing with the fluctuation of migration patterns, there is a need for EPs to be aware of how best to work in this area. One such area that has been highlighted from this research is the need for EPs to be aware of how to develop skills relating to cultural competence and cultural humility. It is expected that the work of EPs in Ireland will begin to change, with more work being done to support individuals from various cultural backgrounds. This emphasises the importance of EPs valuing skills in cultural competence and also the need for EPs to receive more training in cultural humility. This will not only benefit EPs but also all staff within the education sector as EPs can support teachers in their development of cultural competence and cultural humility, while being aware of the stress that teachers are experiencing with the increased demands in their roles.

School staff require emotional support to manage the stress of their role. Some of this stress experienced by school staff may relate to how they acknowledge and process the traumatic experiences of CYP in their classroom. EPs can play a key role in supporting schools in this area.

Acknowledging the stress that school staff may experience in working in this area and the benefits of adopting a trauma informed lens was referenced in the documents developed by NEPS psychologists (Department of Education, 2022a; Department of Education, 2022b). These were referenced by two participants as useful resources to have in supporting their work in this area, highlighting the importance of other EPs to be aware of such resources.

Focusing on the professional lived experiences of four EPs within NEPS highlighted how experiences in this area varied greatly both in depth and quantity of casework. Participants did note some common experiences such as adapting assessments, interpreting assessments with caution, working with interpreters, and also adopting a trauma informed lens to their work with families from refugee backgrounds. This research is beneficial for current and future EPs to be aware of and can support them in how they approach their work to support CYP and families from refugee backgrounds. Participants also discussed their perceptions of their role and how a key role of the EP is to empower teachers and not further add to teacher or school staff's stress. Reflecting on the stressful role of the EP and the benefits of supervision as a support were highlighted, which led to an acknowledgement that school staff do not have access to such support in coping in their stressful role. This suggests a need for more to be done to support school staff with the stress of their roles, highlighting that currently enough attention is not given to the wellbeing of school staff in Ireland. Having more attention to the wellbeing of education staff will likely have a knock-on effect in increase how school staff feel valued within the system. Furthermore, as there is a current shortage of teachers (O'Brien, 2023), such support in managing stress can enhance the retention of school staff in Ireland.

The current staffing shortage in schools in Ireland also links to another area that needs to be addressed being the diversity of school staff. Although the HEA (2015) tried to address this with specific policy goals to support those from minority backgrounds in accessing teacher training, it is evident that more still needs to be done in this area. The study has identified other policy areas that need attention including ensuring inclusion and diversity and addressing bullying within school contexts.

Future research needs to explore whether progress has been made in making the educational sector more accessible to work in for those from other culture backgrounds, as well as more focus on how EP's and school staff's experiences in their roles as they continue to change, what support they feel has helped in coping with the ongoing changes of the role and any

specific areas where further support is required. Overall, this research project has many implications for policy, practice, and future research. The findings from this have initially been disseminated with the researcher having presented the findings at the Irish Refugee Integration Network conference in March 2024.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Appendix for Literature Review

### Weight of Evidence A: Appraisal of Methodological Quality of the Included studies

The WoE A, the methodological quality, of the 13 studies, was assessed using The Johanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tool (Lockwood et al., 2015). The authors of this tool recommend that the critical appraisal is conducted by two critical appraisers, however due to the nature of the project/ dissertation this was conducted by the sole researcher. The Tool consists of ten questions. Studies received a WoE A score of three (high) if they achieved a score of seven or higher on the tool, studies received a WoE A of two (medium) if they achieved a score between four and six and finally, studies received a WoE A score of one (low) if they received a score of three or below.

The below are the 10 questions from The Johanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tools for methodological quality assessment (Lockwood et al., 2015). Each question was answered for each of the included studies, which lead to the studies receiving a score out of 10 which was then translated into a high, medium, or low WoE A.

1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?
7.Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice- versa, addressed?
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?

See Table 1 for scores for each study relating to the above question numbers

**Table 1**

*Included studies citations and WOE A scores and totals corresponding with the 10 questions from The Johanna Briggs Critical Appraisal Tools for methodological quality assessment (Lockwood et al., 2015).*

| **Citation** | Q1. | Q 2. | Q3. | Q 4. | Q5. | Q6. | Q7. | Q 8. | Q9. | Q10. | Score out of 10 | Total WOE A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Akkaya & Tabancali (2023) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Aydin & Kaya (2019) | Yes | ?[3] | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | 9 | 3 |
| Barrett & Berger (2021) | Yes | yes | yes | Yes | Yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | 9 | 3 |
| Bozdağ & Ergün (2022) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | yes | 7 | 3 |
| Brar-Josan & Yohani (2019) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | yes | 7 | 3 |
| Çelik, & Kodan (2020) | yes | no | yes | ? | yes | ? | no | yes | no | yes | 5 | 2 |
| Cho et al. (2019) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | yes | 7 | 3 |
| Duran (2021) | no | yes | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | no | yes | 4 | 2 |
| Gokce, & Erdal (2018) | yes | yes | ? | yes | yes | ? | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Gürel & Büyüksahin (2020) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | yes | 5 | 2 |
| Henderson & Ambroso (2018) | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes- | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Hos & Cinarbas (2018) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | ? | 4 | 1 |

[3] ? denotes where it was unclear or not specified

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ira et al. (2021) | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Jepson Wigg (2021) | yes | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Kardeş, & Akman (2022) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Karsli-Calamak et al. (2020) | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | ? | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Kaya & Ok (2021) | ? | ? | yes | no | no | no | no | yes | no | yes | 3 | 1 |
| Konstantinos & Paida (2020) | no | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | yes | 5 | 2 |
| Koubeissy et al. (2023) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Lemke & Nickerson (2020) | no | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | 6 | 2 |
| LeRoy & Boomgaard (2021) | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | 10 | 3 |
| Mayor (2021) | ? | ? | ? | no | yes | no | no | no | no | yes | 2 | 1 |
| McDiarmid et al. (2022) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | 7 | 3 |
| McIntyre & Hall (2020) | ? | ? | ? | yes | yes | yes | ? | yes | ? | yes | 5 | 2 |
| Nazli, & Culha (2023) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Newcomer et al., (2021) | ? | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| O'Neal et al. (2018) | no | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | no | no | no | yes | 5 | 2 |
| Ott & O'Higgins (2019) | no | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | no | yes | no | 3 | 1 |
| Ozen (2019) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | yes | 7 | 3 |
| Özkan & Çakmak (2021) | ? | ? | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | yes | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Prentice (2022) | no | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | 7 | 3 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sharif (2020) | ? | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Svensson (2019) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | yes | 6 | 2 |
| Tösten et al. (2017 | ? | ? | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | ? | yes | 4 | 2 |
| Wille et al. (2019) | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Yavas (2022) | ? | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | ? | yes | 8 | 3 |
| Yenel (2022) | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | no | yes | no | yes | 6 | 2 |

**Assessment of methodological relevance: (WoE B)**

WoE B criteria was assessed with three specific criteria. The first was whether the interview schedule was provided or described; providing the interview schedule allows for the reader to have more insight into the data collection method and how this might influence the data reported. The second was whether the study described the participants' settings sufficiently (in this case, the education setting the participants are working) and the setting of data collection. This strengthens the quality of the study as it provides further context and understanding to the participants' experiences and will impact the results obtained, for example if a study is carried out online (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). Finally, the third area assessed within the WoE B was whether the study was piloted. This means the study can be adapted based on feedback and potential participants are given the opportunity to problem solve any potential barriers that may arise in the data collection process. See Table 2 below for WoE B total scores

**Table 2**.

*Included Studies Citations and WOE B scores*

| **Citation** | Interview schedule provided/ data collection method described in sufficient detail | Setting of participants described | Study piloted | Total WoE B |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Akkaya & Tabancali (2023) | no | 0.5 | yes | 1.5 |
| Aydin & Kaya (2019) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Barrett & Berger (2021) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Bozdağ & Ergün (2022) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Brar-Josan & Yohani (2019) | yes | no | no | 1 |
| Çelik, & Kodan (2020) | no | yes | yes | 2 |
| Cho et al. (2019) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Duran (2021) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Gokce, & Erdal (2018) | no | yes | yes | 2 |
| Gürel & Büyüksahin (2020) | yes | no | yes | 2 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Henderson & Ambroso (2018) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Hos & Cinarbas (2018) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Ira et al. (2021) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Jepson Wigg (2021) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Kardeş, & Akman (2022) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Karsli-Calamak et al. (2020) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Kaya & Ok (2021) | yes | yes | yes | 3 |
| Konstantinos & Paida (2020) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Koubeissy et al. (2023) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Lemke & Nickerson (2020) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| LeRoy & Boomgaard (2021) | yes | no | no | 1 |
| Mayor (2021) | no | unclear | no | 0.5 |
| McDiarmid et al. (2022) | yes | 0.5 | no | 1.5 |
| McIntyre & Hall (2020) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Nazli, & Culha (2023) | yes | no | yes | 2 |
| Newcomer et al., (2021) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| O'Neal et al. (2018) | yes | yes | 0.5 | 2.5 |
| Ott & O'Higgins (2019) | no | no | no | 0 |
| Ozen (2019) | yes | no | yes | 2 |
| Özkan & Çakmak (2021) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Prentice (2022) | yes | yes | no | 2 |
| Sharif (2020) | no | yes | no | 1 |
| Svensson (2019) | yes | no | no | 1 |
| Tösten et al. (2017) | yes | yes | no | 2.5 |
| Wille et al. (2019) | yes | yes | no | 2.5 |
| Yavas (2022) | no | yes | yes | 2 |
| Yenel (2022) | yes | yes | yes | 3 |

**Assessment of topic relevance to review question: (WoE C)**

WoE C looked at topic relevance, such as whether the methodology, research questions and data collection procedures, are relevant to the review questions. Studies received a high score here if they focused on participants' experiences working with CYP from refugee backgrounds and a medium score if the study focused on experiences of the participants, but the analysis did not reflect this. Finally, studies received a low score if they focused on views or perspectives of participants rather than experiences.

| | |
|---|---|
| High | Research question/ objectives and data collection method relevant to experience, feelings, challenges and facilitators, phenomenological approach |
| Medium | Research question/ objectives and data collection method related to experiences but analysis not in-depth |
| Low | Research question/ objectives and data collection method more focused on perspectives / views rather than experiences. Data collection method taking away from individual experiences e.g. ethnographic or focus group |

**Overall Weight of Evidence: (WoE D)**

A high WoE D is when the calculation was above 2.3, medium was between 1.5 to 2.3 and low was a score equal to or below 1.4. The overall WoE D impacts the extent to which each of the included studies contributed to the synthesis of findings.

Table 3.

*Study citation and WoE A, B, C and D*

| **Study Citation** | WoE A | WoE B | WoE C | WoE D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Akkaya, A., & Tabancali, E. (2023). Social justice leadership in the refugees' education: Insights of teachers in Turkish secondary schools. *European Journal of Educational Management, 6*(3), 167-177. | 2 | 1.5 | 1 | 1.5 (Low) |
| Aydin, H., & Kaya, Y. (2019). Education for Syrian refugees: The new global issue facing teachers and principals in Turkey. *Educational Studies*, *55*(1), 46-71. | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1.66 (Medium) |
| Barrett, N., & Berger, E. (2021). Teachers' experiences and recommendations to support refugee students exposed to trauma. *Social Psychology of Education, 24*, 1259-1280. | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2.33 (High) |
| Bozdağ, F., & Ergün, N. (2022). Refugee children in the scope of mental health services at school. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar, 14*(Ek 1), 157-170. | 3 | 1.5 | 2 | 2.33 (High) |
| Brar-Josan, N., & Yohani, S. C. (2019). Cultural brokers' role in facilitating informal and formal mental health supports for refugee youth in school and community context: a Canadian case study. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 47*(4), 512-523. | 3 | 1 | 1.5 | 1.83 (Medium) |
| Çelik, Ö. Y., & Kodan, H. (2020). Experiences of primary school teachers regarding to teaching Turkish to students who are not native Turkish speakers: A phenomenology. *International Journal of Progressive Education, 16*(6), 215-230. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 (Medium) |
| Cho, H., Wang, X. C., & Christ, T. (2019). Social-emotional learning of refugee English language learners in early elementary grades: Teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 33*(1), 40-55. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 (Medium) |
| Duran, M. A. V. I. (2021). Disadvantages and solutions of a model in asylum seeker education: Temporary education centers (TECs). *Participatory Educational Research, 9*(3), 428-444. | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1.3 (Low) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gokce, A. T., & Erdal, A. C. A. R. (2018). School principals' and teachers' problems related to the education of refugee students in Turkey. *European Journal of Educational Research, 7*(3), 473-484. | 2 | 2 | 2.5 | 2.16 (Medium) |
| Gürel, D., & Büyüksahin, Y. (2020). Education of Syrian refugee children in Turkey: Reflections from the application. *International Journal of Progressive Education, 16*(5), 426-442. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 (Medium) |
| Henderson, J., & Ambroso, E. P. (2018). Teaching refugee students in Arizona: Examining the implementation of structured English immersion. *Global Education Review, 5*(4), 55-73. | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2.33 (High) |
| Hos, R., & Cinarbas, H. I. (2018). Learning to teach in a global crisis: teachers' insights from a temporary non-formal refugee education project in Gaziantep. *Global Education Review, 5*(4), 182-193. | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 (Low) |
| Ira, N., Yalçinkaya-Önder, E., & Çetin, T. G. (2021). An investigation into the views of refugee students' teachers on their subjective well-being: A qualitative descriptive study. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research, 16*(2), 354-365. | 3 | 2 | 2.5 | 2.5 (High) |
| Jepson Wigg, U. (2021). 'I see it as a privilege to get to know them'. Moral dimensions in teachers' work with unaccompanied refugee students in Swedish upper secondary school. *Ethics and Education, 16*(3), 307-320. | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 (Medium) |
| Kardeş, S., & Akman, B. (2022). Problems encountered in the education of refugees in Turkey. International Journal of Psychology and *Educational Studies, 9*(1), 153-164. | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 (Medium) |
| Karsli-Calamak, E., Tuna, M. E., & Allexsaht-Snider, M. (2020). Transformation of teachers' understandings of refugee families' engagement: Multilingual family mathematics spaces. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 28*(2), 189-205. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 (Medium) |
| Kaya, D., & Ok, G. (2021). Problems encountered by mathematics and science teachers in classrooms where Syrian students under temporary protection status are educated and suggestions for solution. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research. 8(1),* 111-127. | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 (Medium) |
| Konstantinos, T., & Paida, S. (2020). Refugee education coordinators in the Greek educational system: Their role as mediators in refugee camps. *International Journal of Modern Education Studies, 4*(2), 81-109. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1.66 (Medium) |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Koubeissy, R., Audet, G., Papazian-Zohrabian, G., & Arvisais, O. (2023). “Making a difference” with Syrian refugee students in Lebanon: Reconstruction and theorization of teachers’ stories of practice in emergencies. *Prospects, 53*(1-2), 73-89. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1.6 (Medium) |
| Lemke, M., & Nickerson, A. (2020). Educating refugee and Hurricane displaced youth in troubled times: countering the politics of fear through culturally responsive and trauma-informed schooling. *Children's geographies*, *18*(5), 529-543. | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1.33 (Low) |
| LeRoy, A. S., & Boomgaard, S. L. (2021). Empathy in isolation: lived experiences of teachers of refugee children. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, *55*, 430-443. | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2.33 (High) |
| Mayor, C. (2021). Teacher reactions to trauma disclosures from Syrian refugee students. *Children & Schools, 43*(3), 131-140. | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.83 (Low) |
| McDiarmid, S., Durbeej, N., Sarkadi, A., & Osman, F. (2022). Schools’ and teachers’ roles and challenges in supporting the mental wellbeing of refugee youths: a qualitative study with Swedish teachers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, *17*(1), 2007568. | 3 | 1.5 | 1 | 1.83 (Medium) |
| McIntyre, J., & Hall, C. (2020). Barriers to the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children in schools in England. *Educational Review*, *72*(5), 583-600. | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1.33 (Low) |
| Nazli, K., & Culha, A. (2023). Refugee students in open and distance learning during the pandemic through the eyes of Turkish teachers. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 24*(3), 209-223. | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.33 (High) |
| Newcomer, S. N., Ardasheva, Y., Morrison, J. A., Ernst-Slavit, G., Morrison, S. J., Carbonneau, K. J., & Lightner, L. K. (2021). “Whoa… welcome to America!”: Supporting refugee background students’ socioemotional well-being, English language development, and content area learning. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *35*(3), 417-437. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1.66 (Medium) |
| O’Neal, C., Atapattu, R., Jegathesan, A., Clement, J., Ong, E., & Ganesan, A. (2018). Classroom management and socioemotional functioning of Burmese refugee students in Malaysia. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *28*(1), 6-42. | 2 | 2.5 | 1 | 1.83 (Medium) |
| Ott, E., & O’Higgins, A. (2019). Conceptualising educational provision for unaccompanied asylum- | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.66 (Low) |

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| seeking children in England. *Oxford Review of Education, 45*(4), 556-572. | | | | |
| Ozen, H. (2019). Educational challenges of Syrian refugees in Turkey: Through the lenses of complex adaptive leadership theory. *Educational Planning, 26*(4), 41-56. | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.33 (High) |
| Özkan, M., & Çakmak, Ö. (2021). School principals views on Syrian refugee students' education in Turkey: challenges and recommendations. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 9*(2), 125-135. | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1.66 (Medium) |
| Prentice, C. M. (2022). Educators' positive practices with refugee pupils at two schools in England. *British Educational Research Journal, 48*(6), 1125-1144. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 (Medium) |
| Sharif, I. (2020). The Applicability of learner-centered education in refugee settings: The Syrian refugee teachers' case study. *Global Education Review, 7*(4), 74-92. | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1.33 (Low) |
| Svensson, M. (2019). Compensating for conflicting policy goals: Dilemmas of teachers' work with Asylum-seeking pupils in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 63*(1), 1-16. | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1.33 (Low) |
| Tösten, R., Toprak, M., & Kayan, M. S. (2017). An Investigation of forcibly migrated Syrian refugee students at Turkish public schools. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 5*(7), 1149-1160. | 2 | 2.5 | 1 | 1.83 (Medium) |
| Wille, A. M., Maher, M. K., Cornell, S. R., Kim, A. C., Reimers, B., & Hess, R. S. (2019). It starts with us: Including refugees in rural schools and communities. *The Rural Educator, 40*(2), 33-42. | 3 | 2.5 | 2 | 2.5 (High) |
| Yavaş, T. (2022). What do school principals think about refugee students? Experienced problems and possible solutions. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 10*(4), 107-118. | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.33 (High) |
| Yenel, K. (2022). Problems confronted by Turkish teachers and principals working at Temporary Education Centers (TECs): Problems confronted in Temporary Education Centers. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 14*(1), 37-55. | 3 | 3 | 2.5 | 2.83 (High) |

**Full References for Studies Included from Further Literature Review**

The table below provides a brief summary of the studies retrieved and included from further review of literature.

Table 4.

*Summary of Studies included from further Literature Review*

| **Full Citation** | **Country** | **Participants** | **Focus of Study** | **Findings** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bishop, E. (2020). Using a cross-cultural conception of play to explore the perspectives of parents of Somali heritage and primary school practitioners in an English primary school. *Educational & Child Psychology, 37*(4), 53-68. | England | N=13 (2 focus groups. First focus group consisted of Somali parents *n=8.* Second focus group consisting of practitioners *n= 5* (special educational needs co-ordinator, a teacher, a higher level teaching assistant, a teaching assistant, and a school counsellor | Explored perspectives of play according to parents of Somali heritage and primary school practitioners, in an English primary school. | Highlights the importance of EPs in facilitating communication between school and families. EPs can support collaborative relationships with their professional skills relating to consultation, supervision and child development knowledge. |
| Fazel, M., Garcia, J., & Stein, A. (2016). The right location? Experiences of refugee adolescents seen by school-based mental health services. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 21*(3), 368-380. | UK | N=40 refugee adolescents | Examined young refugees' perspectives and experience of mental health services integrated within the school system. | One key finding was the accessibility of mental health services, specifically the location of the service; being school based, is an important factor to consider as so many of the young people welcomed being seen at school. This was reported to be supportive as aided with a sense of familiarity, predictability and safety within the school environment. The study also discussed how mental health |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | services can support the role of teachers in the school setting, such as working collaboratively to better understand the needs of the children of concern in the classroom. |
| Mohamed, S., & Thomas, M. (2017). The mental health and psychological well-being of refugee children and young people: An exploration of risk, resilience and protective factors. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 33*(3), 249-263. | England | N=87: (Refugee CYP *n=21* (aged 9–19 years), refugee parents *n=3* and school staff *n=63*) | Explored the perceptions of refugee children, refugee parents and school staff regarding the positive adaptation of refugee children in a new social context and the effects on mental health and psychological well-being. | CYP and families require support in many areas and EPs are well suited in identifying support that is needed. EPs can apply psychological theory to support and understand such needs which can help the CYP, families, school, curriculum, policy and research. EPs can support the inclusion of CYP with decision making processes as well as identifying support needed for bullying and mental health. EPs can also facilitate CYP and families in accessing mental health services and support work with families and the community. The use of positive psychology approaches by EPs can also support CYP and their families within the educational environment. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Samara, M., El Asam, A., Khadaroo, A., & Hammuda, S. (2020). Examining the psychological well-being of refugee children and the role of friendship and bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*(2), 301-329. | England | N= 269 children (*n =149* refugee children between age 6 to 16; *n=120* non-refugee children aged 6 to 10 years) | Investigated the psychological wellbeing and behaviour of refugee children compared to British born children. | Refugee children are a vulnerable group; however refugee children did not score significantly in terms of "PTSD, a decline in life satisfaction and peer bullying, which may have been due to the role of the afterschool clubs." This was found to highlight he potential the protective roles played by after-school clubs in promoting the wellbeing of refugee children. |
| Sobitan, T. (2022). Understanding the experiences of school belonging amongst secondary school students with refugee backgrounds (UK). *Educational Psychology in Practice, 38*(3), 259-278. | England | N=7 (refugee students) | An exploration of how secondary school refugee students experience school belonging in the North East of England | Findings suggested that young people desire to participate and be included in decisions and conversations relating to their education. EPs could support the school belonging of refugee students through their capacity to work across school systems. EPs can apply an ecological and interactionist approach to school belonging to support this group. |

Table 5.

*Studies excluded with reason*

| **Full citation** | **Reason for exclusion** |
|---|---|
| Aral, T., Schachner, M. K., Juang, L., & Schwarzenthal, M. (2022). Cultural diversity approaches in schools and adolescents' willingness to support refugee youth. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 92(2), 772-799. | Ecological relevance – study carried out in Germany |
| Bajo Marcos, E., Fernández, M., & Serrano, I. (2023). Happy to belong: Exploring the embeddedness of well-being in the integration | Ecological relevance – study carried out in Spain |

| | |
|---|---|
| of migrant and refugee minors. *Current Psychology, 42(*26), 22576-22588. | |
| Baak, M., Miller, E., Ziersch, A., Due, C., Masocha, S., & Ziaian, T. (2020). The role of schools in identifying and referring refugee background young people who are experiencing mental health issues. *Journal of School Health*, *90*(3), 172-181. | Ecological relevance – study carried out in Australia |

## Appendix B

### Interview Schedule

**Introduction**:

My name is Naoise Delaney, and I am a Trainee Educational and Child Psychologist on the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

I first want to thank you for taking the time to take part in this piece of research.

My research is interested in exploring Educational Psychologist's experience in supporting the needs of Children and Young People from Ukraine and from Refugee Backgrounds.

Specifically, I hope to explore the experience and type of work that has been carried out to support CYP from Ukraine and from refugee backgrounds, any challenges faced in carrying out this work and what has been supportive in carrying out this work. I also hope to explore if you have had experience in supporting CYP with similar backgrounds before the arrival of students from Ukraine and how you feel this may have impacted your work in this area. The first stage of the interview will explore on your direct work with CYP, followed by work with parents/carers and families from Ukraine or Refugee Backgrounds, then your work with schools in meeting the needs of CYP from Ukraine or Refugee Backgrounds. There may be some areas that you'll have more experience in working with than others. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Interview Schedule

1. Can you describe your current role as an EP? *(Demographic and brief background information)*

    *Prompts:*

        How many years have you been in this role?

        Are you involved in any working groups? Please describe if so.

        Can you describe your case work/ case load? E.g. number of schools, level of need

        What kind of areas do you work in? e.g. level of need in the area, ***rural/ urban..***

2. Can you give me a brief background to your work in supporting CYP from Ukraine/ from refugee backgrounds?

    *Prompts:*

        What has this work focused on? E.g. intervention, assessment consultation

        Has this mostly been direct work or some support and development work/ mostly work with parents/ families/ teachers?

3. What has been your experience in working directly with CYP from refugee backgrounds? *(Microsystem)*

    *Prompts:*

        Has this work focused on assessment/ intervention or consultation?

        How did you adapt interventions, assessments, or consultations for this population?

        What helped you facilitate this work?

        What barriers did you face in this work?

        How did you overcome these?

        How did you feel carrying out this work?

4. What has been your experience in working with parents and families of CYP from Ukraine/ from refugee backgrounds? *(Microsystem and Mesosystem)*

    *Prompts:*

        Has this work focused on assessment/ intervention or consultation?

        What helped you facilitate this work?

        What barriers did you face in this work?

        How did you overcome these?

        How did you feel carrying out this work?

5. What has been your experience in supporting schools to meet the needs of CYP from Ukraine/ from refugee backgrounds? (*Microsystem and Mesosystem*)

    *Prompts:*

        Has this work focused on assessment/ intervention or consultation?

Have you carried out training to support schools to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds? Please describe.

Have you carried out consultation to support schools to meet the needs of CYP from refugee backgrounds? Please describe.

What facilitators helped in this work/ what worked well?

What barriers did you face in this work? How did you overcome these?

How did you feel carrying out this work?

6. What has been your experience in working jointly to support the relationship between families from Ukraine/ from refugee backgrounds and schools? (*Mesosystem*)

*Prompts:*

Can you describe what this work has been like?

What have these relationships been like?

What has worked well in this work?

What challenges have you faced in this work?

How did you feel carrying out this work?

7. Do you feel there have been any specific policies or frameworks that have impacted your work in this area e.g. policies from school and your own professional policies such as: wellbeing policies, safeguarding policies, strength based frameworks, trauma informed framework... (*Exo system*)

*Prompts:*

How have they impacted your work?

Do you feel these policies have supported or caused barriers in your work? How so?

Do you feel there are any changes needed to these policies? Please describe.

8. Did you work with an interpreter for any of your work in this area? *(Macrosystem)*

*Prompts:*

How do you feel this impacted your work?

Do you feel there were any challenges in working with an interpreter for the nature of this work?

Do you feel you were able to overcome these challenges?

What did you find beneficial in working with an interpreter? E.g. training in this area/ meeting interpreter before…

9. Do you feel that you adapted your practice to acknowledge for cultural differences in your work in this area? *(Macrosystem)*

*Prompts:*

How did you adapt your practice in this way?

How did you feel about this/these adaptation(s)?

How do you feel these changes impacted your work?

10. Did you implement a trauma informed approach for working with this population? *(Macrosystem)*

*Prompts:*

How did you implement trauma informed approaches in this work?

How did you feel working in this way?

11. Do you feel your work has changed over all in the last year / since the arrival of students from Ukraine? (*Chronosystem*)

*Prompts:*

Is there a difference in the support being sought now? Please describe.

Is there a difference in the support being provided now? Please describe.

Are you facing any different barriers in this area of work?

Are you finding different facilitators in supporting this area of work?

12. What training or resources do you feel has helped you in carrying out this work? *(Macrosystem)*

*Prompts:*

Did you face any barriers in accessing training or resources for your work

with this population?
What training do you feel is needed for those working in this area?
Do you feel there are enough training and resources for EPs working in this area?

13. Is there anything else that you wish to add that hasn't been spoken about?

**Follow up questions as necessary to clarify use of language / meaning or encourage expansion, e.g., tell me more about that/ what do you mean by "XXX"

## Appendix C

Ethical Approval from Mary Immaculate College

# MIREC-5

## Research Ethics Committee

### MIREC Final Decision Form

| APPLICATION NUMBER: | A22-062 Amendment 3 |
|---|---|

1. PROJECT TITLE

"An Exploration of Educational Psychologist's work with Children and Young People from Refugee Backgrounds."

2. APPLICANT

| | |
|---|---|
| Name: | Naoise Delaney PGR |
| Department / Centre / Other: | Psychology |
| Position: | Postgraduate Researcher |

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR (✓)

| | |
|---|---|
| | Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the applicant need take no further action in this regard. |
| ✓ | Ethical clearance is required and is hereby granted by the Chair without need for referral to the MIREC committee. |
| | Ethical clearance for a funding application or a similar purpose is granted by the Chair ***pro tem*** without need for referral to the MIREC committee. However, the applicant must subsequently seek ethical clearance from MIREC prior to embarking on any related project work involving human participants or their data. |
| | Ethical clearance is granted following review of the application by the MIREC committee. |
| | Ethical clearance is not granted following review of the application by the MIREC committee. |

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

**Proposed amendments:**

2. Research Design: The study will now consist of interviews that will be carried out by the Principal Investigator. Interviews will be audio recorded using a password protected device and uploaded to an encrypted password protected folder.
The interviews will be transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).
The participants will be Educational Psychologists recruited through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).
3. The data collection method will now only consist of interviews from NEPS participants; with the aim of having 3-5 participants (including a pilot interview). There will no longer be a survey.
4. Participant Number & Selection Procedure. The study will consist of 3-5 participants and ethical approval will also be sought externally through NEPS in order to recruit participants. An information sheet will be shared with NEPS to recruit participants.
Changes to supporting documentation: The information sheet, consent form and interview schedule have since had changes. Please see attached portfolio of Appendices.

I have reviewed the proposed amendments and I am satisfied they meet with MIREC requirements. The application is therefore approved.

5. SIGNATURE OF MIREC CHAIR

| | |
|---|---|
| Name (Print): | Dr Marie Griffin |
| Signature: |  |
| Date: | 13th June 2023. |

**Appendix D**

**Information Letter for National Educational Psychological Service for Interview Recruitment**

**An Exploration of Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Supporting Children and Young People from Ukraine and from Refugee backgrounds**

My name is Naoise Delaney, and I am a student on the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

**What is this study about?**

This research project aims to explore how Educational Psychologists (EPs), from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), are working with children and young people (CYP) displaced by war and from refugee backgrounds. This is an area that more information is needed especially amongst professionals to support best practice implementation, and guide future educational psychology training. NEPS psychologists have played a key role in providing support in this area. This research is important at the moment to support educational psychology practice in working with the increase of refugees due to the war in Ukraine.

**Why have I been provided with information about this research?**

I am looking to recruit participants (EPs) to complete interviews for my study. In order to participate in this study, it is *essential* that you have experience working with/ supporting CYP from Ukraine who have been displaced by war, and/or from other refugee backgrounds. The interview aims to identify and explore EPs' perspectives on this area of work as well as the type of work that has been carried out to support CYP who have been displaced by war and from refugee backgrounds, any challenges faced in carrying out this work and what is supportive in carrying out this work. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the Lead Researcher.

**What do I need to do to take part?**

This study will consist of an ***in-depth 1-1 in person qualitative interview***. This interview will require **an estimated 1 hour** of your time. If you are interested in participating, please contact the Lead Researcher (***Naoise Delaney at 21282935@micstudent.mic.ul.ie) and we can schedule the interview at a time and location that suits you best.***

**What are the risks?**

It is worth noting that the topic explored in this research project may be of sensitive nature as will involve reflecting on previous work completed with CYP displaced by war and from refugee backgrounds. Participants are allowed to withdraw at any time. Participants are

encouraged to link in with their professional supervisors if they feel this topic is upsetting for them.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

All interviews will be audio recorded and will be kept anonymous and confidential for the write up of the research project. All information that is gathered will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer. All participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time prior to November 2023.

The anonymised data may be presented at relevant conferences and published in relevant journals for the purpose of disseminating research.

**How will my information be stored?**

The interviews will be transcribed by the Lead Researcher. To ensure anonymity, during the transcription process, participants will be given a pseudonym and all identifiable information will be removed. Recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a password protected folder. Once the interviews are transcribed and any identifying information removed the audio recordings will be deleted. In line with the MIC Record Retention Schedule, anonymised interview transcripts may be held indefinitely or as required by the Lead Researcher.

If you would like more information before participating, please contact the Lead Researcher (**Naoise Delaney at 21282935@micstudent.mic.ul.ie**) or one of her supervisors (Therese Brophy at Therese.Brophy@mic.ul.ie or Marc Scully at Marc.scully@mic.ul.ie).

This research study has received Ethical approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (Reference number: A22-062). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Telephone: 061-204980 E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Kind regards,

Naoise Delaney

## Appendix E

### Consent form

**"An Exploration of Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Supporting Children and Young People from Ukraine and from Refugee backgrounds."**

**Participant Consent form**

This interview is part of a research project for a doctoral dissertation conducted by Naoise Delaney in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Marc Scully and Dr. Therese Brophy.

The study is exploring the current experience of Educational Psychologists in working with Children and Young People from Refugee Backgrounds. The dissertation title is "An Exploration of Educational Psychologists' Experiences in working with Children and Young People from Refugee Backgrounds."

By signing below, I am agreeing to participate in Naoise Delaney's research study and indicating the following:

- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.
- I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
- I am participating voluntarily.
- I am fully aware of the procedures, and of any risks associated with the study.
- I give permission for my answers in the interview to be used by Naoise Delaney for the purpose of her research dissertation.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time by December 2023, whether before it starts or while I am participating.
- I have read and understand the information sheet.
- I consent to the interview being audio recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

Name of participant (PRINTED): _____

Signature of participant: _____

## Appendix F

## Debriefing Information

**An Exploration of Educational Psychologists' Experiences of Supporting Children and Young People from Ukraine and From Refugee Backgrounds.**

**Thank you** for taking the time to participate in this research, your time and effort is greatly appreciated.
This interview is the data collection for a project that is exploring Educational Psychologist's Experiences with Children and Young People from Refugee Backgrounds in Ireland.

The aim of this project is to highlight Educational Psychologists' experiences of working with children and young people from refugee backgrounds; what works well in practice and any training needs to help support recommendations for best practice.

If you have any further questions regarding this research project or wish to hear more please contact Naoise at the same email of 21282935@micstudent.mic.ul.ie.

If you would like further information on working with children and young people from refugee backgrounds here are some helpful websites:

Schools of Sanctuary Ireland offers resources for supporting schools and some online training around understanding the rights of refugees.
https://schools-ireland.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/training

The Euroguidance Network has delivered webinars to support guidance professionals from all over Europe in supporting refugees, with a particular focus on Ukraine.
(https://www.euroguidance.eu/)

The Irish Research Council has a range of publications and policies as well as other supports for refugees on their website (https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/)

# Appendix G

## Examples of IPA Process

## Visual Examples of Steps 2 & 3 of IPA Process:

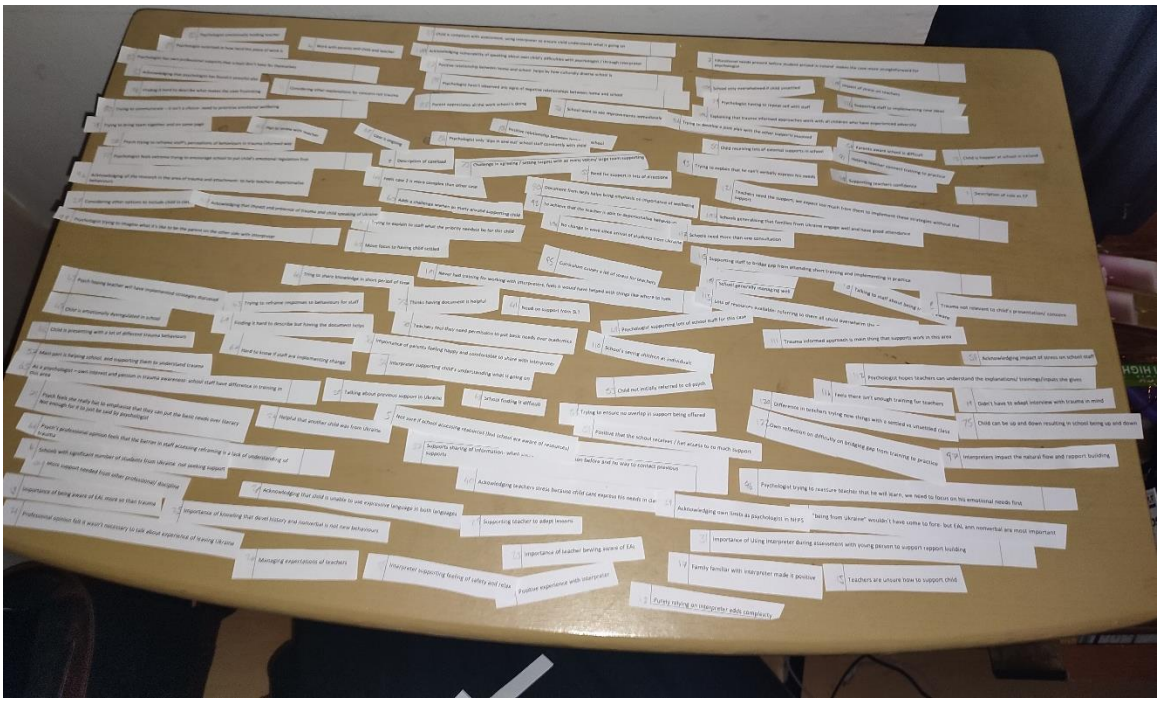
Sample of IPA Process Interview 2

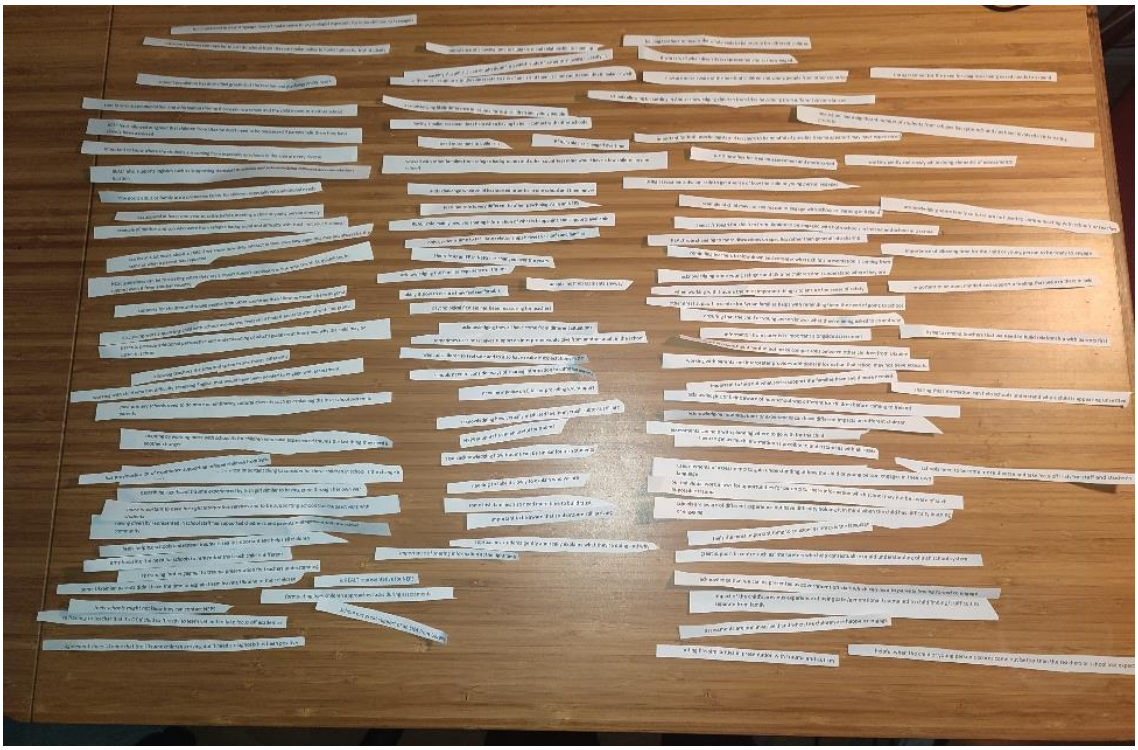
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Psychologists school has significant EAL students but believes they do not come from refugee backgrounds | Not newly right. But just I think from abroad is that yeah. But they have a large number from abroad. Let's just put that way. They're very large number from abroad and they have a large number of EAL out in the school and that wouldn't necessarily be of refugee status. Yes, no answer that question about refugee. No, they wouldn't necessarily be. I don't. Yeah, I know I have asked them that question. Are there children who are from refugee migrants or asylum seekers in your school? And. The answer I've received is there's been a large portion from abroad, but I don't think they consider them to be refugee or asylum seeker. Migrants might be the words that might describe them best from what I understood from the conversation. | One school has a significant number of EAL students but not refugees<br><br>Psychologist has specifically asked if the school has refugee students<br><br>Uncertain if some EAL students are refugees or asylum seekers<br><br>Psychologists' own understanding |

Sample of IPA Process in Interview 4

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| impact of the child's previous experience of being safe /generational trauma led to child finding it difficult to separate from family | people and the separation from Mam and Dad so he wouldn't his his parents would have said he wouldn't. I mean, obviously there's an impact because the family have experienced trauma, but he himself wouldn't have lived in it and would have lived in quite a protected space and and then found it sort of. He had come from a very small world. Now you would have in the camp. They would have had other families around, but he would always have had his parents or his brother. So when they come to school, he just wouldn't separate wouldn't come or wouldn't separate from his brother. And and he he did. As time went on, and I suppose when with the families living in in XXcentreXX there and there are some good supports there, there's very good Syrian interpreters and they as well as, and they're often people who lived in Ireland for a long time. So as well as interpreting, they're also able to contextualize the school system for families because I think that that's a big challenge. And I | false start 'he wouldn't'<br><br>acknowledging generational trauma or a second hand trauma<br><br>child had difficulty separating from family<br><br>good supports in centre such as interpreters<br><br>do more than interpret |
| great support in centre such as interpreters who help contextualise or aid understanding of Irish school system | | |

**Visual Samples of the Process of Clustering Interviews (Step 4):**





## Example of Step 5 (Aoife's interview):

| Personal Experiential Theme | Experiential Statement Interview 0- Aoife | Quote and page number |
|---|---|---|
| Positive connections/ interactions (Positive relationships and rapport building) | Interpreter supporting feeling of safety and relax | p11 "able to tell him then that I'd met mum and Dad, and they were telling Mum and dad told me that you really like you know, X&Y. Interpreter was able to kind of translate all of that for me. So I do think it's important for that rapport building piece to keep the child feeling kind of safe and relaxed" |
| | Interpreters impact the natural flow and rapport building | p 25 "It can be hard because the flow of the conversation is not as natural" |
| | Interpreter supporting child's understanding what is going on | p10 "It was important for me to Have somebody who could explain everything to him in Ukrainian right through the whole process." |
| | Child is compliant with assessment, using interpreter to ensure child understands what is going on | P10 "So he is following blind like he's just like, OK and he's, you know, he he does come where he's asked to come, but just to have somebody there who can translate all of that in Ukrainian to him like that, "This is why this person is taking you to Another room." |

## Step 7 Visual Example:

| Adapting Current Approaches to Support CYP from refugee backgrounds | Supports for EPs working with CYP from refugee backgrounds | Supporting the School Environment | Acknowledging the Impact of Culture, Policies and Accessing Support |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aoife= Professional opinions in formulation | Liam=Expectations/ needs in the role as a psychologist | Aoife=Working with school staff<br>Working as a team / with others<br>Hoping that staff listened and understood | Aoife=Comparing work/ cases- cultural similarities and differences |
| Liam= Experience as an EP in NEPS | Ciara=Gaps/ motivation and things that need to be addressed | Ciara=considerations to make when working with schools | Liam=Acknowledging possible cultural similarities and differences |
| Ciara= Being an Ed psych/ Being an EP in NEPS | Fiona=Time and the Role<br>Allowing time and needing time, time in NEPS, role changing over time | Fiona= supports that schools have and need | Fiona=Supports, differences and specific case work experience |
| Ciara=Feels the work is not typical/ different | Aoife= Professional identity role limits and feelings | Fiona= Working with Family and parents | Ciara=Acknowledging cultural differences and interpreters |
| Ciara=Working with and doing Assessments | | Liam= Acknowledging vulnerability of working with this pop | Fiona=Cultural and Language diversity and other differences in general |
| Fiona= Doing Assessments | | Ciara= Acknowledging and awareness of Trauma vulnerability/ disadvantage | Aoife= Talking about support (needed, received and not sought) |
| Liam=Challenges in formulation/ feelings of frustration | | Fiona=Acknowledging Trauma and trauma awareness | Liam=Language used and policies need to be the right fit / assumptions and generalisations |
| | | Aoife=Positive connections/ interactions (Positive relationships and rapport building) | |

## Appendix H

Reflexive Journal Example

This was originally handwritten in a notebook, due to the researchers' illegible hand writing it was transferred and typed below.

Reflection following 2nd Pilot interview.

*What are my initial thoughts?*

*I was surprised how much the participant was able to speak having only two cases from refugee backgrounds. Her passion and frustration with some of the lack of trauma awareness really resonated with me. Specifically, when she said "who cares" regarding how much the teachers were so focused on a child learning to read and write when he was clearly in a state of emotional distress.*

*I was also interested as she mentioned the curriculum being a source of stress regarding when asked if policy impacted her work. Does curriculum count as a policy?*

*It is also interesting to note the stress of school staff and the conceptual differences of the role of EPs. She stated how EPs "dip in and out" of different case work and have access to supervision and other supports while teachers are with their students for full days and weeks, without the option to dip in and out and even to lack of supports such as supervision. I can really see the benefits of teachers being offered supervision, but it would just add more to their time demands…*

*I really related to her interest in trauma informed approaches and admired her passion in this area, great to have some data in this area and what needs to be addressed.*