

What Support is Needed to Engage Refugees in Education?

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Objectives of the study

- What impact does education have on refugees?
- What struggles do they face daily in class?
- What effect does trauma have on their education?
- What is the most effective way to support refugees?

Introduction & Method

As a society, we are increasingly aware of the difficult situations people endure to make the journey to the United Kingdom, but we are less aware of the struggles and challenges they face after they have settled in a new country. However, despite the ever-increasing need to understand this, it is still an undeveloped research topic in the United Kingdom, and unless we address it and learn how to fully support these learners, we are not fulfilling our duty as teachers to give them the best possible chance at an education.

One student, a 17 year old unaccompanied refugee, was interviewed in depth for the study and three main issues arose which he identified. For the purposes of anonymity, his name has been changed.

Conclusion

As this migration crisis is an ever-increasing situation, it is important that we understand what strategies we need to put in place to offer them a successful and worthwhile education. In order to do this, a wider study needs to take place involving students:

- from different countries
- who have been in the country for varying amounts of time and;
- from different family circumstances (e.g., students here alone, or with family)

By having a wider understanding of the problem, we will be better equipped to support these students and give them the best possible start to their new lives.

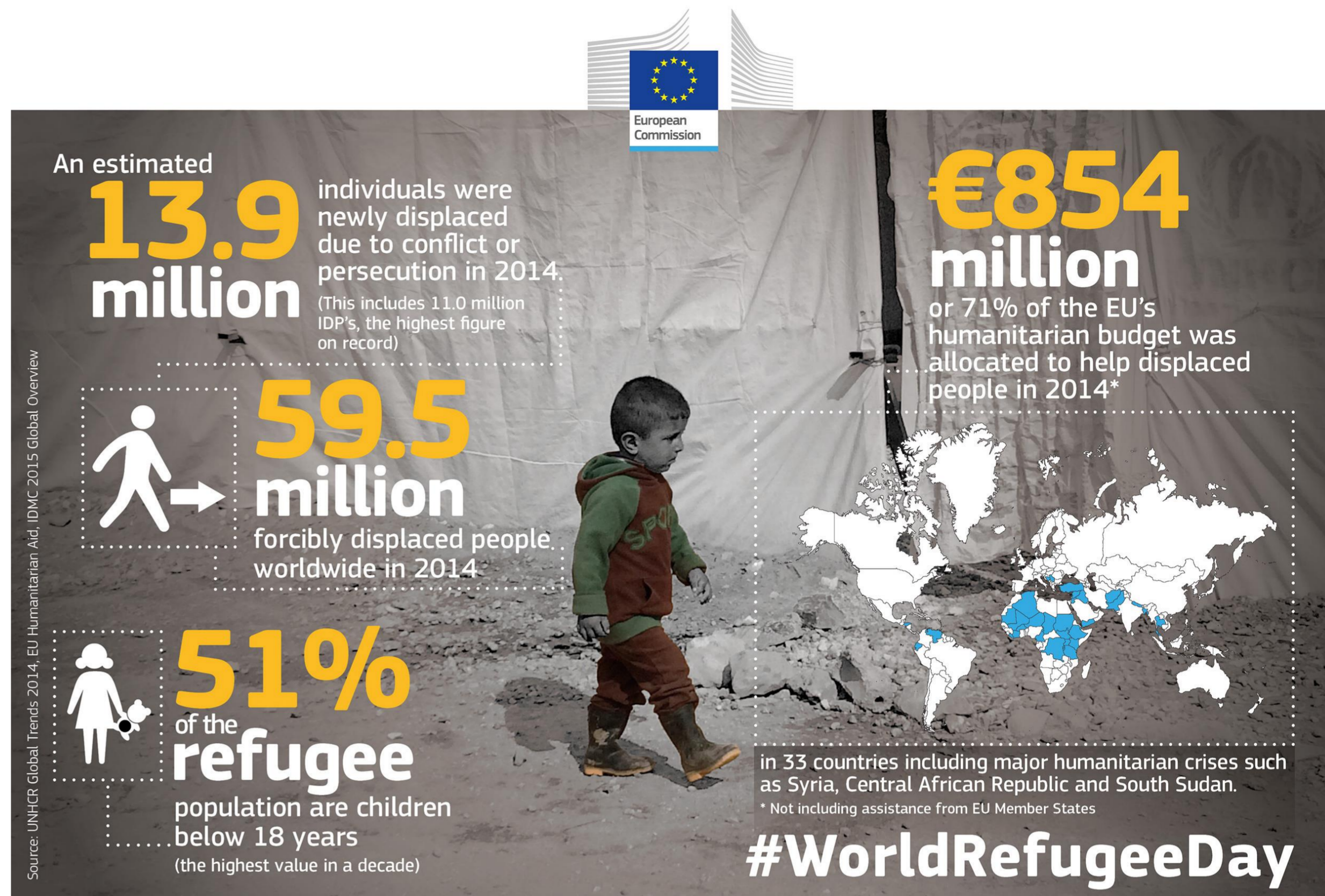


Figure 1: Refugees and internally displaced person statistics [1]

Findings / Next Steps

From the interview, three main methods of support were identified to best support refugee learners, each one bearing equal weight and importance to the learner.

They are as follows:

Emotional support

The teacher needs to be aware of the students' previous traumas and that having a teacher who is willing to listen and go the extra mile to support the learner, outside the class as well as in class, made the learner. It is possible the only supportive adult available to the student is their teacher, to whom they may rely on for guidance on how to function in their new life which is a stressful and frustrating adjustment. [2]

How do we support refugee learners?

Differentiation

Sam made a powerful statement in that when he finds lessons too hard and overwhelming, it has a physical impact in the form of headaches. In order to ensure that lessons are accessible and are having a positive impact on the students, differentiation is a crucial strategy and one that should be planned carefully, thinking about the needs of individual students.

Consistency

Sam relied heavily on his teacher being there five days a week, that she was available to talk to him about any issues and that he always knew where he was expected to be and at what time. Having a disrupted timetable, constant room changes and changes in staff is unsettling and can add further stress to their lives.

References:

[1] European Commission 'Refugees and internally displaced persons' 2015 (Online). Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en [Accessed 30th March 2016]

[2] A teacher's guide to working with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds. (Online). Available at: <http://qpastt.org.au/tbcwp1/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/School-teachers-guide-2007-updated-2104.pdf> [Accessed 3rd November 2015]