

## **A. Helping children arriving from Ukraine to manage their relations with people in the new context**

**Aim: To offer guidance on how to help children arriving from Ukraine to manage their interactions with other children and people from the locality**

Children arriving from Ukraine suddenly find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings in a place which they were not expecting to be. Their social life in the place where they settle, even if only provisionally, involves interacting with children, teachers and other people from the locality. This means developing some awareness and language skills in oral communication for the new language environment.

Here are some things that teachers and volunteers can do **at the start of this process** to help the children adjust to their new social interactions:

- communicate with them, and ask them to communicate with you, in a language which they know a little of and which they think you and other people they talk to might understand
- teach them one or two basic phrases for greeting people and asking for help (e.g. "hello", "excuse me", "please", "thank you" etc.)
- tell them that it is all right for them to:
  - say things using words from two or more different languages
  - use non-verbal means such as gestures and other kinds of body language, photos on a smartphone, etc. to aid communication
  - use automatic translation apps to translate important words if they have smartphones
  - get help, when necessary, from another child or from an adult who can act as a mediator
  - make it clear if they do not understand something and ask the other person to repeat what they have said.

Because this basic kind of oral communication is quite routine and predictable and involves only limited language resources, it is very useful for greetings, simple exchanges with other children at the school or in the neighbourhood, for buying things or asking basic questions. Difficulties arising in this kind of communication are likely to be mainly because the child does not really know the right words or expressions or way of communicating in the new country. For example, there may be problems pronouncing words or the names of places and of people (which are often used in street names), problems understanding street signs and notices, and so on. These can lead to simple linguistic - but not personal - misunderstandings.

**After a few weeks or months**, the children will probably have sufficient language skills to talk about subjects which are more personal and interesting, and this may result in other kinds of misunderstanding or incomprehension between speakers:

- The child's intentions may not be fully understood
- Certain facial expressions or hand gestures might be misinterpreted
- The child may not yet
  - understand the 'rules' of interaction in the new environment, for example ways of addressing people, how to interrupt someone politely and so on.
  - understand the meaning of certain fixed phrases used by someone else, for instance in English "are you joking?", "It's not my fault", "I'm fed up" etc.
  - know how to make a polite request, refuse politely, ask for help etc.



A good way of addressing potential breakdowns of communication with children arriving from Ukraine is to make it clear that the learning environment is a safe space in which everyone is allowed to express themselves freely. This means that everybody is expected to be open and to show respect towards others, and to be aware that differences, including differences in the ability to use language, are normal and can be overcome with patience and help.