

Teachers' Journeys with Refugee Students

Teachers' Journeys with Refugee Students:

Educating Hope

By

Nabila El Bizri and Carole Sénéchal

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEFO: Association des Enseignantes des Enseignants Franco-Ontariens

ARC: Attachment Regulation and Competency

CASEL: Collaboration for Academic Social and Emotional Learning

CRP: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

DI: Differentiated Instruction

ECE: Early Childhood Educators

ELD: English Language Development

ELL: English Language Learners

ESL: English as a Second Language

ETFO: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

FTE: Full Time Equivalent

HRW: Human Rights Watch

LEAD: Literacy, English, and Academic Development

LTO: Long Term Occasional

MOOCs: Massive Open Online Courses

MLO: Multicultural Liaison Officer

NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations

OECTA: Ontario Catholic Teachers' Association

OTF: Ontario Teacher's Federation

OSSTF: Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

PD: Professional Development

PISA: Program for International Student Assessment

PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SEL: Social Emotional Learning

SES: Socio-Economic Status

TIP: Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

UDL: Universal Design of Learning

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Armed conflicts, natural disasters, and economic hardships have forced millions of people around the world to leave their homes in search for safety and protection (UNHCR 2023c). Forced displacement of humans is not new. It has been a recurring phenomenon throughout human history. In the 20th century, both World War I and World War II caused massive displacements due to conflict, with millions of refugees fleeing war zones and persecution. In more recent times, new and ongoing crises in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar, and other areas around the globe have compelled individuals and their families to seek refuge away from their homes (UNHCR 2023c).

In 2022, millions of people had to leave their homes due to devastating floods in Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Sahel region, as well as enduring severe drought and hardship in Afghanistan, Madagascar, and the Horn of Africa (UNHCR 2023a). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2024b), over 7.5 million people have been forced to escape their homes in Sudan due to deadly conflict. People in Sudan are desperately looking for safety and protection as the violence keeps worsening, both inside the country and in neighbouring nations including Ethiopia, South Sudan, Egypt, Chad, and the Central African Republic.

Despite being one of the most overlooked regions in the world, the Sahel is experiencing one of the fastest-growing displacement crises (UNHCR, 2024b). Millions of people have been forced to escape the region due to intense and indiscriminate violence, both within and across borders. Compounding these worsening humanitarian and protection crises are the effects of COVID-19, food shortages, and climate change. Also, August 2017 saw more than 750,000 Rohingya leave Myanmar for Bangladesh as a result of brutal military crackdowns in Rakhine State. They came to join earlier waves of Rohingya who left the nation throughout the 1970s and

1990s. Presently, approximately a million Rohingya refugees reside in Bangladesh; most of them are in the Cox's Bazar district, close to the Myanmar border. The local host community's already overburdened facilities and services are under tremendous strain (UNHCR 2024b).

Afghanistan has endured decades of conflict, economic collapse, drought, and bitter cold winters, leaving millions of people there in a state of suffering and famine (UNHCR 2024b). Afghanistan is going through its darkest period after enduring numerous calamities. Currently, there are 5.7 million Afghans living in host communities across five bordering nations. In 2024, around 6 million people were internally displaced in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika due to ongoing insecurity and an alarming return of violence caused by non-state armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the previous two years (UNHCR 2024b). For Syrians living both inside and outside of their nation, life is getting harder after more than 12 years of upheaval. Hopelessness is growing as the crisis persists. For Syrians forced to evacuate, every day is an emergency due to the devastating effects of the earthquakes that have affected Turkey and northern Syria, as well as rising levels of poverty (UNHCR 2024b).

The Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis stands as one of the most substantial displacement emergencies globally. Unlike other refugee crises rooted in conflict and warfare, the Venezuelan predicament is distinct (UNHCR 2023c). More than 7.7 million Venezuelans have departed from their homeland due to an unparalleled humanitarian catastrophe stemming from years of economic adversity and political instability. The majority, more than 6.5 million people, are hosted in Latin American and Caribbean countries (UNHCR 2024b). Hence, the global refugee situation remains dire, with millions of individuals continuously being displaced due to various crises worldwide.

Refugees are defined as individuals who are forced to leave their homes to escape war, natural disasters, or persecution due to their political, religious, or cultural beliefs (Barrett and Berger 2021). There are important distinctions between refugees and immigrants. Refugees are often fleeing immediate danger or threats to their lives and well-being. They seek refuge in another country and are often unable or unwilling to return to their home countries due to fear of persecution or violence (Barrett and Berger 2021). Refugees may receive protection and assistance from international organizations such as UNHCR. They are often granted asylum or refugee status in the country they seek refuge in, allowing them to stay and rebuild

their lives (Barrett and Berger 2021). Immigrants, on the other hand, are individuals who choose to move to another country for various reasons, such as seeking better economic opportunities, reuniting with family members, or pursuing education (Canadian Council for Refugees n.d.). They may leave their home countries voluntarily and often go through legal processes to immigrate to another country. Immigrants may seek permanent residency or citizenship in the country they move to, and they typically intend to settle and establish a new life there. Unlike refugees, immigrants are not necessarily fleeing persecution or immediate danger in their home countries (Canadian Council for Refugees n.d.).

According to the UNHCR (2023c), with the ongoing war in Ukraine, the number of displaced people reached 122.6 million worldwide, including 36.4 million refugees. More than 50% of all refugees under the supervision of UNHCR originated from only three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey both provided refuge to 3.4 million displaced individuals, marking the largest refugee populations globally. Following closely, Germany ranked third with 2.5 million refugees, trailed by Colombia with just under 2.5 million, encompassing additional individuals requiring international safeguarding. Pakistan accommodated 2.1 million refugees. It is also estimated that 40% of the refugee population were under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2023c).

Canada welcomes thousands of refugees each year. The country is considered an international key player in offering refugees a new place to start their lives (Tweedie et al. 2017). However, the majority of refugees arrive in Canada with limited financial means, often needing to adapt to a new language and culture (Tweedie et al. 2017). Despite these obstacles, the findings indicate that refugees not only benefit from the security Canada offers but also seize the opportunity to forge a brighter future, becoming significant contributors to the nation's economy and cultural richness (UNHCR 2023d). Refugees have established new homes across Canada, spanning from Whitehorse, Yukon in the north, to St. John's, Newfoundland in the east, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia in the west (UNHCR n.d.). Recent census figures reveal that newcomers, especially refugees, are more likely to relocate to various regions within the country. Among refugees who arrived between 2011 and 2016, 48% reside in smaller cities and towns, a percentage slightly higher than the 44% observed among all immigrants (UNHCR 2023d). The country continues to welcome thousands of refugees every year (Government of Canada 2019).

Ontario takes more refugees than any other province or territory in the country (Ontario Citizenship and Immigration 2022). In 2014, more than 11,000 refugees settled in Ontario (Government of Ontario 2022). According to the Government of Ontario (2022), refugees are provided with a range of comprehensive support services to facilitate their settlement in Ontario. This includes access to healthcare professionals for immediate health and mental health needs, vaccinations, guidance on opening a bank account, budgeting, and understanding the cost of living in Canada. Additionally, refugees receive assistance in applying for government programs and subsidies, including the Interim Federal Health Program and Ontario Health Insurance Plan. Upon arrival, refugees are oriented and informed about their rights and responsibilities, covering aspects such as landlord/tenant relations, family law, and parenting obligations. An individualized settlement plan is developed after assessing the refugees' needs, capacities, and aspirations. This plan includes appropriate referrals to local support services in the neighborhood where the refugee family will reside. To support their initial settlement, refugees are assisted in enrolling their children in childcare, school, or community programs. They can connect with school-based settlement workers, if available, and are encouraged to establish community and social connections. Language training classes, employment assistance, mentoring, training services, occupation-specific language training, bridging programs, and credential assessment are also made available to help refugees understand the labor market and find employment. Furthermore, refugees are guided in finding a family doctor and accessing ongoing health and mental health support (Government of Ontario 2022).

Across Ontario, there are Newcomer Reception Centers (OCDSB n.d; TDSB n.d). They help newly arriving families who speak a first language other than English and who will be residing within the designated service areas. At these centers, staff members meet with parents and students to learn more about the student's past education, answer questions, and help students register for school. The Reception Centre staff also provides educators with resources to understand the various needs of students. They work with multicultural liaison officers (MLO) to help families whose first language is not English. MLOs are proficient in various languages including but not limited to: Arabic, Bengali, Mandarin, French, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

After resettling and starting school in Canada, refugee students embark on a demanding journey of integration and adjustment to the Canadian education system. Resettlement in a new country marks the beginning of a

challenging journey for refugee students as they navigate the intricacies of integration into the Canadian education system. Ayoub and Zhou (2021) highlight that these students, having endured forced displacement and often residing in refugee camps characterized by precarious living conditions, face major challenges in adapting to the educational norms and practices of their host nation. Disrupted schooling further compounds their difficulties, leaving them with significant learning deficiencies, particularly in numeracy and literacy, both in foreign languages and their native tongue (Ayoub and Zhou 2021).

Moreover, the lingering effects of trauma from past experiences weigh heavily on many refugee children, requiring a sensitive and nuanced approach to their integration into new schools and communities (Ayoub and Zhou 2021). Hence, educators should be equipped with the right pedagogical tools to address the unique needs of refugee students (Ayoub and Zhou 2021). However, educators in Canada may find themselves ill-prepared to fulfill this role effectively. The lack of preparation among educators can present significant challenges in facilitating the academic and social integration of refugee students. According to Kanu (2008) and MacNevin (2012), teachers may not possess the necessary training, skills, and knowledge to effectively support refugee students. Kanu (2008) researched the educational needs and barriers faced by African refugees in Manitoba, while MacNevin (2012) explored the challenges faced by teachers educating refugee students in Prince Edward Island. In both studies, it was found that most teachers lack the necessary resources and training to implement strategies to support the educational needs of refugee students. Despite existing literature, there has been minimal policy and practice modification within Canadian schools (Kovinthan 2016). Consequently, this book aims to delve into the firsthand experiences of elementary teachers in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario educating refugee students. We are especially interested in the experiences of teachers working with this age group because these years are marked by significant physical, academic, and social development, as well as increased engagement with the broader world (Finnan 2008). Additionally, teachers of this age group can play a vital role in supporting refugee students' academic progress while also helping them navigate their new social environment, fostering inclusion, and providing emotional support. By examining the challenges, strategies, and support mechanisms employed by educators in this context, the book seeks to shed light on the complexities of educating refugee students in Ontario schools.

Statement of purpose

Canada is acknowledged for its significant efforts in safeguarding refugees (Tweedie et al. 2017). With thousands of refugees arriving in Canada every year, the number of refugee students is increasing rapidly in Canadian classrooms (Tweedie et al. 2017). High-income nations, such as Canada, typically provide refugees with quick access to education, social, and health services (Fazel et al. 2012). Once resettled and attending school, refugee students face a challenging process of integration and adapting to the new school system (Fazel et al. 2012).

Children with refugee backgrounds may face significant challenges in learning and development (Graham et al. 2016). Due to the exposure to war, forced displacement, living in refugee camps, and disrupted schooling refugee students generally have educational delays in numeracy and literacy in foreign languages as well as their mother tongue (Ayoub and Zhou 2021). Many refugee students arrive in host countries with no schooling experience whatsoever (Ontario Ministry of Education 2008). Hence, they may not be used to the school rules and regulations of the host country. Therefore, understanding the learning problems and educational needs of this group of learners is crucial to support their development and facilitate their inclusion (Graham et al. 2016).

Additionally, refugee youth also suffer from exposure to trauma requiring careful consideration of their lived experiences while integrating them in schools into host countries (Ayoub and Zhou 2021). These traumatic experiences are due to their pre-immigration, trans-immigration, and post-immigration hardships, placing refugee students at a higher risk of mental health problems and learning delays (Stewart 2011; Sullivan and Simonson 2016).

Pre-immigration trauma refers to the complex range of distressing experiences individuals face in their home countries before seeking safety elsewhere (Stewart 2011). Stewart et al. (2019) and Walker and Zuberi (2020) highlight the various factors contributing to pre-immigration trauma, including exposure to war and violence, residing in refugee camps, and enduring extreme poverty. These circumstances not only cause immediate harm but also leave lasting psychological scars, which can make the journey toward resettlement more challenging for refugees (Ayoub and Zhou 2021).

The subsequent level of trauma unfolds during the displacement process on their way to the host country, exposing refugees to perilous situations that

threaten their lives (Kaplan et al. 2016; Reed et al. 2012; Stewart et al. 2019). Fazel et al. (2012) highlight how forced displacement can disrupt families, often causing family members to take different paths in search of safety. This separation not only adds to the emotional weight but also makes their journey more complicated, increasing the difficulties they face while seeking refuge. Refugees arrive predominantly from geographically distant and economically struggling countries (Stewart 2011). Asylum seekers often rely on human traffickers to help them in their long journey to host countries, which may take weeks or months in perilous conditions. Unaccompanied minors sometimes travel alone after losing family members. Some families are forced, along their journey, to take separate ways to safety (Fazel et al. 2012).

Post-immigration trauma emerges as refugees settle in the host country, presenting a distinct set of challenges (Kaplan et al. 2016; Reed et al. 2012; Stewart et al. 2019). Stewart et al. (2019) underscore language difficulties, financial struggles, and culture shock as key contributors to the trauma experienced in this phase. The struggle to communicate, financial instability, and the profound challenges associated with adapting to a new culture collectively contribute to the post-immigration trauma that refugees grapple with upon reaching their host destination (Amidon and Kuczarski 2020). Refugees also face the stress of proving their asylum claims and going through the long legal process required for this claim (MacNevin 2012). These lived experiences subject refugee students to higher risks of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder, seriously affecting their cognitive skills and academic performance (MacNevin 2012).

Research has shown that the lived experiences of refugee students might have major implications on their classroom performance (Perfect et al. 2016). Traumatic experiences in children are associated with deterioration in school performance since trauma has severe effects on the social, emotional, cognitive, and even brain development of children (Perfect et al. 2016). Childhood trauma also has negative implications on “students’ capacity to practice self-regulation, organization, comprehension, and memorization affecting students academically and socially throughout their school experiences” (Thomas et al. 2019, 423). According to McMullen et al. (2020), not all refugee children are traumatized. Many refugee students show remarkable resilience regardless of their tough lived experiences. Nonetheless, it is indispensable to understand that the lived experiences of most refugee students may impact their development, learning, and integration in new school systems.

The available literature discusses several challenges facing the inclusion of refugee students in Canadian classrooms. These difficulties are related to exposure to traumatic experiences and mental health problems, language barriers, and educational setbacks facing refugees in Canada (Ayoub and Zhou 2021; Kanu 2008; MacNevin 2012; Stewart et al. 2019; Tweedie et al. 2017). Additionally, a growing amount of literature is focusing on the importance, effectiveness, and sustainability of trauma-sensitive practices in classrooms including students exposed to trauma (Berger 2019; Tweedie et al. 2017). Nevertheless, there has been a scarcity of research focused on investigating the strengths and challenges faced by teachers when educating refugee students (Barrett and Berger 2021).

This book aims to understand Ontario Grades 4 to 6 teachers' experiences with refugee students. More specifically, it seeks to understand the strategies utilized by teachers to support the educational needs of this group of students. The book also seeks to identify the types of support available for teachers to assist them in performing their job in catering to the educational needs of refugee students. Through an exploration of teachers' experiences, the book also aims to identify areas where additional support and resources may be needed to enhance the educational outcomes and overall well-being of refugee students in the province. Understanding these experiences in detail is crucial for identifying effective strategies and support systems to improve the educational outcomes of refugee students. By capturing the stories of educators, the book offers a platform for teachers to express their unique experiences and share their insights on the complexities they face in the classroom and school environment.

Considering the important role teachers play in supporting the education and development of refugee students, the present book seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the teaching experiences of elementary teachers of grades 4-6 in Ontario public schools regarding refugee students?
2. How are elementary teachers of grades 4-6 supporting the educational needs of refugee students in Ontario public schools?
3. How do elementary teachers of grades 4-6 in Ontario public schools feel about their ability to support the educational needs of refugee students? What support mechanisms and resources are available to assist them in fulfilling these responsibilities? What are the mechanisms and resources they wish were available?

Significance of the book

Understanding the experiences of Grades 4 to 6 teachers in Ontario with refugee students is significant for several reasons. These experiences need to advance the support and training that teachers are receiving. This will subsequently contribute to a successful education journey for refugee students settling in Ontario.

Teachers' voices illuminate the complexities of managing cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity in the classroom, deepening our understanding of how to support the academic needs of refugee students. Moreover, this book provides teachers with opportunities for self-reflection on their teaching methods, promoting ongoing improvement and professional development. Ultimately, this continuous cycle of growth aims to improve education quality for all students, including those from refugee backgrounds.

The outcome of this book may inform in-service and preservice teachers' training specialists on the types of training required to equip teachers and teacher candidates with the necessary tools to support refugee students. Understanding the unique challenges and needs of refugee students is crucial for educators to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Furthermore, this book holds relevance for school policy makers and program developers. The insights gained from this book play a pivotal role in guiding the formulation of policies that specifically address the educational needs of refugee students. Policymakers can use the discussed findings to inform and enhance the design and implementation of educational policies, ensuring they are tailored to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of refugee students. Program developers can also draw upon these results to create targeted initiatives that provide additional support structures for both teachers and students within the school system.

This discussion on the experiences of Grades 4 to 6 teachers with refugee students also contributes to educational theory in several ways. By examining how teachers support the educational needs of refugee students, the book enriches theories related to multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed pedagogy.

Through understanding teachers' experiences with refugee students, this book identifies effective strategies implemented by teachers for integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum. This knowledge enriches

theories related to multicultural education. The book provides insights into how teachers navigate cultural differences and language barriers when working with refugee students. These insights contribute to theories of culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, teachers' experiences with refugee students can inform theories related to social-emotional learning. For instance, how do teachers address trauma, build resilience, and promote emotional well-being? Understanding these aspects enriches social-emotional learning frameworks. By examining the way teachers support refugee students who may have faced trauma, this book contributes to trauma-informed pedagogical theories. This includes understanding triggers, implementing coping strategies, and fostering resilience.

Therefore, the book's contributions extend beyond the academic realm by offering practical implications for those directly involved in shaping the educational landscape. By contributing to theory, informing teacher training specialists, policy makers, and program developers, this book aims to facilitate the creation of more inclusive and effective educational environments for refugee students, thereby promoting their academic success and well-being.

Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development

This book is guided by the Bronfenbrenner bioecological system theory of human development. This theory has been used in several studies within the context of refugee education (Kanu 2008; Stewart 2012a; Stewart et al. 2019). The theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human development within the context of various environmental systems (Paquette and Ryan 2015). It posits that individuals are influenced by a series of interconnected and nested systems, organized into microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner 1999). The microsystem encompasses the immediate and direct environments where an individual interacts, such as family, peers, and school. Mesosystems involve the interconnections between different microsystems. Exosystems include external environments that indirectly affect individuals, like a parent's workplace. Macrosystems involve broader cultural and societal influences (Paquette and Ryan 2015). Finally, chronosystems consider the influence of time and how developmental processes unfold over the lifespan (Paquette and Ryan 2015). This holistic approach emphasizes the dynamic interplay between individuals and their surrounding environments. It highlights the complexity of factors that shape human development.

Book approach

The aim of this book is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of teachers in Ontario, spanning Grades 4 to 6, who were educating refugee students. We employed a multiple case methodology, relying heavily on qualitative research methods. The principal approach to data collection involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers. To ensure the interviews were comprehensive and well-directed, the book's theoretical framework and an extensive review of literature played crucial roles in refining interview protocols and coding categories. The insights gleaned from these interviews formed the bedrock of the book's findings. Each teacher was anonymized with a pseudonym. Furthermore, teachers were given the chance to review their interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of their experiences and perspectives. They were invited to provide any necessary clarifications or additional information to uphold the fidelity of their accounts. Individual profiles were meticulously crafted for each teacher based on the interview data. Subsequently, a cross-case analysis was undertaken to identify any commonalities or shared experiences among the teachers, thereby enriching the overall understanding of the book findings.

Book overview

In this section of the chapter, an overview of the structure and content of the subsequent chapters is presented. Chapter 2 discusses Canada's historical response to global refugee crises, the country's commitment to international agreements such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the rights of refugees, particularly regarding education. The chapter also explores Ontario's education system, comparing English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs designed to support English language learners such as refugee students. Chapter 3 examines the barriers refugee students face in Canadian schools, with a focus on trauma and its impact on learning. It explores different types of trauma, symptoms exhibited by refugee students, and the challenges they encounter in their educational journey. The chapter highlights the barriers that hinder integration, such as language difficulties, cultural differences, and gaps in teacher preparedness. Subsequently, chapter 4 delves into strategies for creating inclusive and supportive educational environments for refugee students. It outlines key conditions necessary for their academic and emotional well-being, including trauma-informed teaching practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. The chapter also emphasizes the

importance of building welcoming and inclusive school communities to facilitate successful integration. Chapter 5 introduces Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory as the theoretical lens guiding the work done in this book. It explains the rationale for applying this framework to understand the multiple layers of influence on refugee students' education from the teachers' perspectives. In Chapter 6, we present detailed case studies of six teachers—Amy, Samreen, Vanessa, Sarah, Fatima, and Vivian—offering an in-depth look at their compelling narratives. Teachers reflect on their experiences with refugee students while highlighting the challenges they face and discuss the strategies they use to support the educational needs of their students. This is followed by Chapter 7 that builds upon the case studies and provides a cross-case analysis to identify common themes. It examines teacher preparedness and professional development, interactions between refugee students and their teachers, peers, and parents, as well as relationships within the broader school system. Using Bronfenbrenner's framework, the chapter explores how interactions at different ecological levels influence refugee students' experiences. Finally, chapter 8 synthesizes key findings, discussing teachers' experiences with refugee students and strategies for meeting their educational needs. It reflects on the emotional and professional challenges educators face and explores the broader implications for educational policy and practice. The chapter concludes by highlighting contributions to theory and practice, offering recommendations for future research, and providing a reflective conclusion on refugee education in Ontario.

Chapter summary

The chapter began by providing an introduction and an overview of the global context of the refugee crisis. Then, the statement of the book's purpose was the presented setting the foundation for the questions to be answered in this book. The significance of the book was underscored, highlighting its potential contributions to educational practices, policy development, and the well-being of refugee students. To frame this investigation, the chapter introduced the Bronfenbrenner bioecological framework as the guiding framework. This theoretical lens emphasizes the interconnectedness of various ecological systems, providing a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics influencing teachers' experiences within the educational environment. In the next chapter, an overview of the refugee situation in Ontario is presented, highlighting Canada's historical response to global refugee crises and its commitment to resettlement. It also

examines Ontario's education system and the various programs designed to support refugee students.

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF THE REFUGEE SITUATION IN ONTARIO

Introduction

This chapter begins by elaborating on the main causes of the global refugee crisis. It then explores Canada's historical response to this crisis. The chapter introduces the 1951 Refugee Convention, highlighting the significant rights it provides for refugees, including the right to education. Following this, it presents an overview of the education system in Ontario, emphasizing its commitment to equity and inclusion for all students, regardless of their background. The chapter also explores the distinctions between ESL and ELD programs in Ontario schools.

Causes of the global refugee crisis

The global refugee crisis is a complex and pressing humanitarian challenge characterized by the forced displacement of millions of people worldwide. This crisis stems from various factors, including armed conflicts, persecution, human rights violations, environmental disasters, and economic instability (UNHCR 2023c). As a result, individuals and families are compelled to flee their homes in search of safety and a better life.

The protracted nature of the global refugee crisis underscores its longstanding roots, extending over a span of more than 80 years (UNHCR 2023c). Throughout most of human history, conflict has been the norm rather than the exception. While there isn't a clear starting point for the crisis, various factors have contributed to its growth. One of the primary contributors to the refugee crisis is war (Bazirake 2017). Since the late 1940s, violent conflicts in developing countries have resulted in a substantial influx of refugees, with estimates ranging from 40 to 75 million people (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995). The early 1960s played a pivotal role as 24 African nations gained independence from European colonial rule between 1957 and 1962, leading to periods of unrest and violence in these

newly independent countries (UNHCR 2023b). In the early 1990s, the ethnic wars in the Soviet successor states added another 3.6 million refugees to the tally, posing a threat to the stability of Eastern Europe, increasing the numbers of asylum seekers in the world. Asylum seekers are people who have left their home country and are seeking asylum in another (Sullivan and Simonson 2016). If they are granted asylum, this grants them a refugee status and the right to stay in the host country (UNHCR 2024c). Until they receive a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee, they are known as an asylum seeker. By the end of 1992, the global count included an officially estimated 18.2 million refugees, along with an additional 24 million internally displaced people and an equal number of refugees, at the very least (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995). Internally displaced people are individuals who have left their homes as a result of conflict but have not crossed an international border (Orchard 2016). Additionally, a 40-year conflict has made Afghanistan a major source of refugees, with one in ten refugees originating from there. Following the war in Ukraine, Europe alone recorded 8 million refugees (UNHCR 2023b).

Conflict is not the sole driver of this crisis, as violations of human rights, famine, hunger, and the effects of climate change have also compelled people to flee their home countries (UNHCR 2023a). The global discourse has been significantly influenced by the refugee crisis over the years, and the situation seems to be deteriorating. Additionally, the underlying factors contributing to the ongoing refugee crisis worldwide, including warfare, climate change, persecution, political instability, and limited access to essential resources, are often interconnected (Mahmood 2023). For instance, the Syrian refugee crisis started in March 2011 when the government took violent actions against those who were rioting against it. The situation got worse leading to a civil war. Moreover, the persistent unrest in the region resulted in widespread unemployment and poverty. Consequently, a considerable number of Syrians were compelled to flee their homeland due to the inability to afford basic necessities such as food and water (Mahmood 2023).

Lately, climate change has emerged as a factor contributing to the refugee crisis (Neef et al. 2023). This makes sense, given that many refugees come from developing nations where agriculture is a key part of the economy. Reports suggest that climate change can have adverse effects on agriculture by causing heat stress in livestock, increasing pest populations, and altering weather patterns (Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs 2020). Moreover, developing countries often lack the resources to address these systemic issues through government assistance (Mahmood 2023).

Consequently, due to the absence of economic stability and financial opportunities, individuals find themselves forced to seek security elsewhere (Neef et al. 2023). This is evident in Somalia, where approximately 2.2 million people have been displaced due to droughts (Mahmood 2023).

Another significant aspect linked to the refugee crisis indicated by Mahmood (2023) is persecution. This includes religious, social, racial, and political oppression that forces individuals to leave their homeland in search of refuge elsewhere (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995). A notable example is the ongoing religious persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Over 900,000 Rohingya Muslims had to escape Myanmar due to deliberate violence conducted by nationalistic militias who oppose their religious beliefs (Mahmood 2023). Refugee crises caused by persecution often occur in countries where there is significant overall instability. These tensions force many to seek refuge in neighboring countries (Jenkins and Schmeidl 1995). Unfortunately, this cycle tends to repeat itself, placing additional burdens on neighboring nations. As a result, local citizens may develop resentment towards refugees, potentially reigniting the process of persecution (Mahmood 2023).

The refugee crisis in Venezuela stands out as unique, primarily triggered by internal economic collapse (UNHCR 2023c). Despite having the world's largest oil reserves, the country faces severe economic hardships due to mismanagement of resources (UNHCR 2023c). Additionally, the country suffers from devaluation of the national currency, leading to hyperinflation, scarcity of food and essential goods, and restricted access to medicines (Kleszczyńska 2020). Presently, a significant number of Venezuelans are unemployed and struggle to afford only one meal a day (Mahmood 2023). While many Venezuelans sought refuge in neighboring countries, they continue to experience economic instability due to the ongoing challenges in surrounding nations (Kleszczyńska 2020).

Hence, the refugee crisis is a complex problem with many different reasons behind it. These reasons are all connected, making it even harder for displaced people and communities everywhere. For instance, events like the Syrian civil war, the effects of climate change on farming, and the mistreatment of religious and ethnic groups show just how intricate the refugee crisis is. Additionally, Venezuela's situation demonstrates how economic breakdown within a country can lead to widespread displacement.

Canada's historical response to the global refugee crisis

Throughout Canada's history, a diverse array of refugees has sought sanctuary within its borders, each wave representing a unique chapter in the country's story. Starting in 1776, when 3,000 Black Loyalists fled the American Revolution, to the late 1700s, when Scots Highlanders sought refuge from the Highland Clearances, and continuing through the 19th and 20th centuries, refugees from various corners of the globe found solace in Canada. From Polish refugees fleeing Russian oppression in 1830 to the influx of persecuted Jews escaping pogroms in the Pale of Settlement in the late 1800s, Canada has provided refuge to those fleeing tyranny and persecution (Government of Canada 2024).

According to the Government of Canada (2024), the mid-20th century saw significant waves of refugees escaping Communist rule, including Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Czechs. In the 1970s, Canada welcomed thousands of refugees from Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia, while also recognizing the rights of refugees through legislative changes and international agreements discussed in the next chapter. The late 20th century and early 21st century witnessed further waves of refugees finding safety and opportunity in Canada, cementing the nation's reputation as a beacon of hope for those in need.

In the 1990s, Canada witnessed an influx of asylum seekers from various regions worldwide, notably Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. In 1992, amidst the Yugoslav Civil War's ethnic cleansing, Canada admitted 5,000 Bosnian Muslims seeking refuge. Similarly, in 1999, over 5,000 Kosovars, predominantly Muslim, were airlifted to safety from Kosovo. The year 2002 marked the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, outlining the core principles of Canada's refugee protection program. In 2004, the Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the United States was established to facilitate the processing of refugee claims from third-country nationals. Subsequently, in 2006, Canada resettled over 3,900 Karen refugees from Thailand, followed by the initiation of resettling more than 5,000 Bhutanese refugees over five years starting in 2008 (Government of Canada 2024).

By 2010, refugees from over 140 countries found refuge or asylum in Canada (Government of Canada 2024). Expanding its efforts, Canada increased its refugee resettlement programs by 20% over three years starting in 2011, alongside significant reforms to the asylum determination system in 2012. Continuing its humanitarian commitments, Canada welcomed

close to 6,600 Bhutanese refugees in 2015, in addition to fulfilling a seven-year commitment to resettle over 23,000 Iraqi refugees and beginning the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada 2024).

The Syrian civil conflict, spanning the past 12 years, has significantly increased the number of displaced people. It took several years for Canada to acknowledge the crisis in Syria (Braun 2016; Dodd et. al 2021). On September 2, 2015, the picture of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian toddler, whose body washed off a beach in Turkey, took over global media (Braun 2016). Alan Kurdi became an international figure representing a nation where children have a better chance of survival on a lifeboat in the Mediterranean than in their home countries. The moment Alan Kurdi was photographed, his story swept over the internet. Since that day, a major movement has been launched toward humanitarian aid for every child fleeing the Syrian conflict (Braun 2016). Back then, federal political parties preparing for the upcoming election promised aid and support for Syrian refugees in their campaigns. When the Liberals won the election in the Fall of 2015, the party kept its promise to facilitate the settlement of 25,000 asylum seekers in Canada by March 2016 (Braun 2016). The following year, Canada announced historical increases in multiyear resettled refugee admissions targets, as well as new commitments for resettling refugees from Africa and the Middle-East. Additionally in 2018, Canada resettled over 1,300 survivors of Daesh, exhibiting its ongoing dedication to providing refuge and support to those in need (Government of Canada 2024). Concludingly in 2022, the country provided around 30,000 refugees a chance to build a new life for themselves and their families (UNHCR 2023a).

Since 1980, over one million refugees from different countries have settled throughout Canada “as far north as Whitehorse, Yukon; as far east as St. John’s, Newfoundland; and as far west as Prince Rupert, British Columbia” (UNHCR n.d., para. 9). These efforts reflect Canada’s enduring commitment to humanitarianism and its tradition of providing refuge to those in need (Government of Canada 2024).

The 1951 refugee convention

Following the First World War (1914–1918), millions of individuals left their home countries in quest of safety (UNHCR 2024d). In response, governments drew up a series of international agreements to grant travel documents to these individuals, who were essentially the first acknowledged refugees of the twentieth century. As millions more were forcibly displaced,

their numbers surged substantially during and after the Second World War (1939–1945). As a result, the world community progressively gathered regulations, treaties, and legislation to safeguard fundamental human rights and provide assistance to those forced to escape conflict and persecution (UNHCR 2024d).

The 1951 Convention, which expanded upon earlier international agreements regarding refugees and remains the most comprehensive set of rules governing refugee rights worldwide, emerged from a process that began during the League of Nations in 1921. Serving as the cornerstone of refugee protection, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its accompanying 1967 Protocol are the primary legal frameworks that underpin the operations of the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2024d).

The 1951 Convention defines a refugee in accordance with international law and specifies the rights, protections, and assistance that a refugee is entitled to. These documents are under the guardianship of UNHCR. The UNHCR also supports governments incorporating these documents into their national laws to ensure refugees are protected and can practice their rights.

The convention's definition of a refugee is derived from Article 1(A)(2), which outlines specific criteria for determining refugee status. These criteria include a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This definition has been widely accepted and forms the basis for refugee protection globally. The convention's principle of non-discrimination (Article 3) prohibits discrimination against refugees on the basis of race, religion, or country of origin. This principle ensures that all individuals seeking asylum are treated fairly and without prejudice. The convention also establishes the rights of refugees, including the right to seek asylum (Article 14), protection against expulsion or forcible return (non-refoulement principle - Article 33), access to courts (Article 16), and access to education (Article 22), work (Article 17), and social security (Article 24). Host countries are required to adhere to the provisions of the convention and provide protection to refugees within their territory. This includes ensuring that refugees are not returned to situations where their lives or freedom would be at risk (non-refoulement principle) and providing access to legal assistance and documentation necessary for their protection (Articles 22-24) (UNHCR 2024d).

Although the convention does not provide specific procedures for refugee status determination, it encourages states to establish fair and efficient

procedures for assessing asylum claims. It recommends that states consider the individual circumstances of each case and provide access to legal representation and appeal mechanisms (Article 16). While the convention does not explicitly require burden-sharing among states, it encourages international cooperation to address refugee crises and provide assistance to refugees. This cooperation can take the form of financial assistance, resettlement programs, or other forms of support to help states manage refugee populations effectively (UNHCR 2024d).

The convention recognizes the principle of non-arbitrary revocation of refugee status (Article 1(C)(5)) and prohibits the forced return of refugees to situations where their lives or freedom would be at risk (non-refoulement principle - Article 33). This ensures that refugees continue to receive protection until they can safely return to their country of origin or find a durable solution elsewhere. Moreover, the convention allows for the establishment of regional agreements (Article 35) that complement its provisions and enhance the protection of refugees. Regional agreements, such as the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, expand the geographic scope of refugee protection and facilitate cooperation among states in addressing refugee issues (UNHCR 2024d). These details illustrate the framework established by the Refugee Convention of 1951 to protect the rights and well-being of refugees and ensure their effective integration into society.

Canada signed the convention relating to the Status of Refugees on 4 June 1969, 18 years following its adoption by the United Nations. Ever since, Canada has earned a distinguished reputation as a global frontrunner in safeguarding refugees (Canadian Council for Refugees 2009). The UNHCR offices opened in Canada in 1976 and works in four areas including protection, solutions, communication, and fundraising (UNHCR 2024a). The agency upholds the highest standards of protection for refugees and asylum seekers by maintaining Canadian asylum practices and regulations. Additionally, they provide long-lasting solutions that allow refugees to live peacefully and with dignity. Resettlement, integration, and voluntary repatriation are a few examples. The office also provides information and education to Canadians regarding the plight of refugees and other displaced people, as well as the UNHCR's activities in these areas. They also exhort the Canadian people and government to support UNHCR initiatives across the globe financially (UNHCR 2024a).