

## D. Handling initial meetings with children arriving from Ukraine

**Aim: To offer guidance on how to interact with children arriving from Ukraine during initial meetings with them**

Before planning language support, it is important to have an informal conversation with the children, for example in pairs or small groups. Here are some general guidelines.

- Talk to them in a friendly and supportive way: finding out about their language and literacy skills must not seem like an exam or a test.
- If you can use a language which they understand even a little, begin with a simple conversation about their interests, their favourite sport or activity, where they are living in the community etc.
- It is important to remember that some of these children:
  - may be able to speak other languages and can understand words in another Slavic language
  - may be able to speak a language that their parents speak
  - may have done well at school in Ukraine and may be missing being at school with their friends
  - may have well-developed literacy in their own language, but the Roman script may be new to them.
- Respect children's privacy by not asking detailed questions about their family, their home in Ukraine, their journey to the host country etc.
- If you share a language with the child who you are meeting, or if you speak a language that has some similarities with Ukrainian, use that language to aid communication. For example, in the shared or related language you can explain what you are doing and why.
- If you don't share a language and don't speak a related language, and the child is a beginner in the target language, keep everything as short and simple as possible. Use simple gestures and repeat or rephrase what you say if necessary. It may be helpful to have someone with you who speaks Ukrainian.

*Hello! I'm \_\_\_\_\_ I'm a teacher/volunteer. I want to help you with (target language).*

Start with a few very simple questions until you find out how much the refugee child can understand and say. Ask only one question at a time. You can use yourself as an example:

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_. And you? What's your name?*

*How old are you?*

*I come from \_\_\_\_\_. Where do you come from?*

*I speak \_\_\_\_\_ and a little \_\_\_\_\_. Which languages do you speak?*

*What school subjects do you like? Which are you good at?*

*What do you like to do in your free time?*

*What do you want to do when you finish school?*

- If you are still not sure about the child's speaking and listening skills in the target language, you can use some simple drawings or pictures of everyday life. You can find pictures in children's books and in



magazines etc. Be sensitive to the children's feelings and choose pictures carefully. Only use online pictures (photos etc.) which are free to download and share.

- For beginners, use real objects or pictures of only one subject so that the meaning is clear. Ask open-ended questions to encourage them to talk.

After this informal conversation, it will be important to find out more about the 'language profile' of the refugee children you will be working with (see 'Finding out about the language profiles').