

Schools have critical role to play in supporting adolescents fleeing armed conflict

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Communities in high income countries around the world continue to receive record-setting numbers of newcomers fleeing armed conflict. Although education is known to be highly important for refugee and

migrant children, relatively little is known about the diversity of associated school-based programs and their likely value in supporting the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the children living in high income countries.

A scoping review co-authored by Michael Wessells, Ph.D., Mailman School professor in Population and Family Health's Program on Forced Migration and Health, reviewed 20 [school](#)-based programs aimed at improving the [mental health](#) and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescent forced migrants in high-income countries from 2000 to 2019. Wessells and colleagues found school-based interventions have great potential for preventing adverse mental health outcomes among girls and boys affected by armed conflict and displacement.

The findings are published online in *Social Science & Medicine*.

"Our review showed that despite recurring challenges, many girls and boys manage to adjust to their new lives," noted Wessells. "Up to now, there was little discussion in the literature on how school-based programs for refugees and immigrants actually achieve holistic support for refugee and [migrant children](#) and how they enable educators, children, and families to navigate the social and cultural complexities associated with children's and families' movement to [high income countries](#)."

The review was conducted to provide a more comprehensive picture of current school-based approaches to improve the health and wellbeing of adolescent forced migrants.

Among the findings:

- Four programs (20%) offered educational and career supports, including mentoring and tutoring.
- Nine programs (45%) used group activities to build social skills

and support.

- Seven programs (35%) reportedly included specialized therapy.
- Although the reviewed programs focused centrally on serving students, 40% also engaged parents in [program](#) activities.

"These programs showcase the abilities of schools to identify and monitor student needs, provide or connect with holistic supports for refugee and migrant adolescents, and contribute to continuity of care," said Wessells, who noted that partnerships were central to most elements of the programs reviewed.

More information: Cyril Bennouna et al, School-based programs for Supporting the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescent forced migrants in high-income countries: A scoping review, *Social Science & Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112558](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112558)

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