

## **Alone In the Classroom: Working with Refugee Children in Early Childhood Education**

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### **Abstract**

The sudden influx of refugee families in Lithuania, particularly following the war in Ukraine, has posed significant integration challenges for early childhood education (ECE) institutions. While there are national plans aimed at addressing the broader inclusion of refugees, there is a notable lack of targeted educational frameworks and resources for preschool-aged children with refugee status. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of Lithuanian preschool teachers working with refugee children, uncovering a critical gap in systemic support, intercultural readiness, and institutional responsiveness. Through in-depth interviews with ten educators, the research employs thematic analysis to explore six key themes: Language barrier, Lived experiences of daily education, Teacher-curriculum mismatch, „Almighty” Teacher, Teacher training for working with refugee children, Lack of mutual communication, which led to one main theme „Teachers’ loneliness“. The findings reveal the professional isolation, emotional strain, and moral dilemmas that educators encounter as they navigate unfamiliar cultural environments without sufficient guidance, training, or translation support. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience and initiative, adapting materials and roles to ensure an inclusive and meaningful education for refugee children. This study highlights the urgent need for state-level strategies that incorporate intercultural competence, trauma-informed practices, and structural support into early childhood education policies and teacher training in Lithuania.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, refugee children, teacher experiences, intercultural education, educational challenges, Lithuania