

## How Prepared Are Our Teachers? Exploring Readiness to Work With Multicultural Children

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### Abstract

For the first time, Lithuania is experiencing a significant influx of refugee families with children, resulting in limited experience and research on multicultural education. While the European education system has expertise in teaching ethnic minority children, specific studies on refugee education are scarce (De Wal Pastoor, 2016). Most efforts thus far have focused on the integration and socialization of multicultural children rather than their education in early childhood settings. The pressing need to address the education of multicultural children became evident in 2022, when many Ukrainian refugees fled due to war. That year, the total number of refugees rose to 35.3 million, with children making up 41% of that population (UNHCR, 2023). This paper explores the experiences of Lithuanian preschool teachers who welcomed refugee children that included many different cultures into their classrooms without prior preparation. A study was conducted to uncover the challenges preschool teachers face when working with children that are representing different cultures. Key questions included their experiences, the challenges encountered, and how they adapted teaching methods without official guidelines. The thematic analysis revealed various challenges, such as a lack of foreign language skills, cultural differences, and insufficient professional support. Teachers actively sought self-guided learning to improve their skills and ensured a quality educational experience for multicultural children by independently finding suitable materials and adapting existing programs to meet their needs.

**Keywords:** early childhood education teacher; teachers' readiness; education of multicultural children; educational challenges; refugee education.