



ENABLE PROJECT

"BUILDING TRAUMA- SENSITIVE SCHOOLS POLICY PAPER"

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educators and school leaders have increasingly recognized the profound impact that trauma has on student development, behavior, and learning. Trauma can stem from a variety of experiences, including abuse, neglect, poverty, family instability, and community violence, as well as more situational forms such as migration and exile. When students face adversity, the resulting stress can have lasting effects on brain development, emotional regulation, and behavior, often disrupting their ability to engage fully in learning and establishing healthy relationships with their peers, teachers, and the rest of the educational community. Recognizing this, schools have begun to prioritize trauma-informed practices, which focus on understanding and addressing the needs of students who may be carrying the invisible burden of traumatic experiences.

Trauma-informed practices aim to create safe, supportive school environments where students feel respected, understood, and valued. These practices involve school-wide strategies that address the social-emotional needs of all students while providing targeted support to those who have experienced adversity. Such strategies can include fostering positive relationships with adults and peers, integrating social-emotional learning into the curriculum, and employing mindful discipline techniques that prioritize empathy and understanding over punitive responses. Trauma-informed practices not only help students feel safe and supported but also actively promote healing and resilience. By creating a school culture that is both nurturing and consistent, educators can empower students to build coping skills, improve self-regulation, and strengthen their sense of self-worth.



The importance of trauma-informed practices in schools goes beyond individual well-being; these practices are critical for fostering an inclusive, equitable educational environment. Research has shown that trauma-sensitive approaches contribute to improved academic outcomes, better attendance, and reduced behavioral incidents, as students who feel safe and supported are more likely to stay engaged and motivated in their learning. Moreover, trauma-informed practices help schools move away from punitive disciplinary measures, which can re-traumatize students and perpetuate negative cycles of behavior. Instead, trauma-sensitive approaches encourage understanding and trust, helping to de-escalate conflicts and cultivate a more positive school climate. This approach not only benefits students who have experienced trauma but also enriches the educational experience of all students, as it promotes empathy, respect, and resilience across the school community.

In an increasingly complex world, these practices are essential for preparing students to face challenges with resilience and optimism, equipping them not only to succeed in school but also to lead fulfilling lives beyond the classroom.





GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY PAPER

The objective of this policy paper is to provide actionable recommendations for establishing trauma-sensitive schools that address the psychosocial needs of migrant, refugee, and displaced (MRD) children.

The detailed recommendations serve as a practical roadmap for schools, policymakers, and stakeholders to transform education systems into nurturing, equitable spaces that empower all students to succeed and thrive.

This Policy Paper, jointly with the Policy Toolkit of the ENABLE project, through a comprehensive framework grounded in social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions, aim to:

- Equip educators and school leaders with evidence-based practices and strategies to support MRD students effectively.
- Guide schools in fostering inclusive, culturally responsive environments that facilitate the integration and well-being of all students, especially those affected by trauma.
- Strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, families, and the wider community, to build resilient support networks.
- Inform and influence educational policy at local, national, and European levels by providing targeted recommendations that promote systemic change.





TARGET GROUPS OF THIS POLICY PAPER

- Teachers, school heads and non-teaching staff for primary and secondary education levels,
- Local, national & European political stakeholders



POLICY OF DIVERSITY WITHIN TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

The Policy of Diversity within a trauma-informed school framework is an essential commitment to recognizing and valuing the unique identities, backgrounds, and experiences each student and staff member brings to the educational environment. In a trauma-informed context, diversity is not only about celebrating different cultures, races, ethnicities, languages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds but also about understanding and addressing the varied ways trauma and adversity impact individuals from these diverse backgrounds. Trauma-informed diversity policies aim to create a safe, inclusive environment where all students feel seen, respected, and supported, especially those who may have encountered different forms of trauma.





WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT POLICY OF DIVERSITY WITHIN TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS?

1. Recognizing Diverse Experiences with Trauma

A trauma-informed approach to diversity acknowledges that experiences with trauma differ widely based on cultural, socioeconomic, and personal factors. For instance, students from marginalized communities may be disproportionately affected by phenomena like poverty, violence, or discrimination, while others might experience trauma related to family instability, health challenges, or displacement. By understanding that trauma manifests uniquely across different backgrounds, educators and administrators can respond more empathetically and effectively, tailoring support to meet individual needs. A diversity-informed trauma policy recognizes these differences and seeks to provide a comprehensive response that avoids “one-size-fits-all” solutions, promoting personalized care for every student.

2. Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Trauma-informed schools with a strong diversity policy employ culturally responsive practices to better serve students from all backgrounds. This involves understanding and respecting cultural values, family dynamics, language preferences, and other personal or community-specific factors that influence students' experiences and behaviors. Culturally responsive practices in a trauma-sensitive setting might include multilingual support services, family engagement opportunities that reflect cultural preferences, and restorative practices that respect cultural values around healing and community involvement. Additionally, staff training in cultural competence and trauma awareness is critical, as it empowers educators to avoid biases and misunderstandings that could otherwise hinder students' ability to feel safe and supported.



3. Inclusive Representation in Policies and Practices

A Policy of Diversity within trauma-informed schools is committed to inclusive representation in all aspects of school policy, ensuring that diverse voices are included in decision-making and that all students feel represented in the curriculum and school culture. This might include ensuring that reading materials, visual displays, and school activities reflect a wide range of cultures, histories, and perspectives. When students see themselves reflected in the school environment, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and trust, which is crucial in trauma-sensitive settings. Policies that actively promote inclusion also reduce feelings of isolation and increase resilience, helping students who may feel marginalized to engage fully in their learning and social environment.

4. Equity in Access to Resources and Support

Equity is at the heart of a diversity policy within trauma-informed schools, which means providing all students with access to necessary resources, regardless of their background or experiences. Trauma-informed diversity policies emphasize equitable access to mental health resources, counseling, mentoring programs, academic support, and extracurricular opportunities. This equitable approach recognizes that some students may require additional support to overcome barriers associated with trauma or systemic inequality. Ensuring that these resources are accessible and tailored to meet the unique needs of diverse students helps mitigate the long-term effects of trauma and fosters a fairer educational landscape where all students have the opportunity to succeed.

5. Continuous Reflection and Community Engagement

The Policy of Diversity within trauma-informed schools is a dynamic, evolving commitment. Schools must regularly assess their practices to ensure they are meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, adapting policies as new challenges or insights arise. This commitment includes ongoing dialogue with students, families, and community members from varied backgrounds to ensure their voices are heard and respected. Feedback loops,

diversity committees, and partnerships with local cultural organizations can all help schools remain responsive to the community's needs and committed to inclusive, trauma-informed practices.

In essence, a Policy of Diversity within trauma-informed schools is about creating an educational environment where all students, regardless of their background or experiences, feel safe, valued, understood, and supported. By integrating culturally responsive, equitable, and inclusive practices into the trauma-informed framework, schools can build a strong foundation for academic and personal success, fostering resilience and a true sense of belonging for every student.

Building a trauma-sensitive school environment requires a holistic approach that integrates reflection, collaboration, and proactive strategies. While continuous reflection and community engagement lay the foundation for responsive practices, the effectiveness of a trauma-informed approach depends significantly on the knowledge and preparedness of the school staff. Educators, administrators, and support personnel must be equipped with the necessary skills, resources, and understanding to address the complex needs of students, particularly those affected by trauma.

The following sections present briefly the six core domains essential for creating trauma-sensitive school environments. Each domain is developed comprehensively in the full Policy Toolkit, combining theoretical insights with practical tools and strategies to support educators, administrators, and all stakeholders involved.

This document, however, presents the full version of the key recommendations to the different levels also identified in the detailed toolkit. These recommendations are tailored to provide a concise roadmap for implementing trauma-informed practices while encouraging further exploration of the comprehensive resources available in the full document.





DOMAIN 1. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Training modules and activities on trauma awareness and response.
Professional development plans and resources.
Strategies for ongoing support and supervision.

DOMAIN 2. CREATING A SAFE & SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Guidelines for fostering a safe physical and emotional school environment.
Best practices for classroom management.
Strategies for promoting inclusivity, diversity and cultural sensitivity.

DOMAIN 3. BUILDING SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Curriculum resources for social-emotional learning (SEL).
Activities and exercises for **building resilience and coping skills**.
Methods for integrating SEL into daily classroom activities.



DOMAIN 4. COLLABORATING WITH STUDENTS & FAMILIES/CAREGIVERS

Categories of caregivers of the MRD children.

Communication strategies for engaging with families.

Resources for family education and support.

Approaches for involving students in creating a trauma-sensitive school culture.

DOMAIN 5. BUILDING SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Ideas of activities to engage school neighborhood.

Tools for awareness raising campaigns about inclusion of MRD children and trauma-sensitive school culture.

DOMAIN 6. ASSESSING NEEDS & PROVIDING SUPPORT

Tools for identifying the efficiency of the use of SEL methods within school environment

Checklists and templates for monitoring student progress while using the SEL technics.



DOMAIN

7

■ POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS



A- TEACHERS WORKING WITH MIGRANT, REFUGEE, AND DISPLACED (MRD) STUDENTS

Teachers are on the front lines in creating a trauma-sensitive classroom experience. Their daily interactions with MRD students shape students' sense of safety, belonging, and academic confidence.

1. Integrate Trauma Awareness and Emotional Literacy into Classroom Practices



Encourage open discussions on emotions and self-regulation techniques with students. Introducing emotional literacy through activities such as the “Emotion Wheel” helps students articulate their feelings and understand each other’s experiences, fostering an environment of empathy and support.

2. Use Restorative Approaches in Addressing Behavioral Challenges

Approach discipline with empathy by implementing restorative practices that focus on understanding and addressing the root causes of behavior. This reduces punitive responses and allows students to learn from conflicts in a constructive, supportive way.

3. Establish Clear Routines and Predictable Classroom Procedures

Trauma-sensitive classrooms benefit from predictable routines, which help students feel secure. Providing visual schedules, giving advance notice of changes, and allowing flexibility in classroom structure can help students impacted by trauma feel more at ease and engaged.

4. Encourage Positive Peer Relationships and Inclusive Group Activities

Promote activities that foster collaboration and peer support, such as group projects and peer mentoring, to build a sense of community. For MRD students, these positive interactions with classmates can strengthen their sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.



B- SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

School administrators have a direct influence on implementing trauma-sensitive practices and creating an inclusive school culture. The following recommendations guide school leaders in fostering a supportive environment for students affected by trauma.

1. Develop and Implement Trauma-Sensitive School Policies

School leaders should establish policies that address the needs of students experiencing trauma, such as restorative discipline approaches, flexible attendance policies, and safe spaces within the school. Clear, trauma-sensitive policies can help students feel safe and supported.

2. Prioritize Professional Development in Trauma-Informed Practices

School leaders should ensure that all staff, from teachers to support personnel, receive training in trauma-informed approaches and about SEL programs. Regular workshops and refresher courses can help maintain a consistent understanding of trauma and provide practical tools for staff to support students effectively.

3. Promote a Culture of Inclusivity and Policy of Diversity in School Settings



Foster an environment that celebrates diversity, encourages empathy, and values the unique experiences of MRD students. School leaders should organize school-wide activities that promote understanding, such as diversity celebrations and empathy workshops, to create a cohesive and inclusive school community.

4. Establish Support Networks for Teachers and Staff



Provide mental health resources and peer support networks for teachers and staff working closely with MRD students. Supportive networks reduce stress and improve teacher resilience, allowing them to support students more effectively.



C- NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS (MINISTRIES, MUNICIPALITIES, EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS)

To create sustainable and comprehensive trauma-informed support in schools, national stakeholders play a critical role in policy development, funding allocation, and resource provision. Here are some recommendations

1. Incorporate Trauma-Informed Practices and SEL programs in National Education Policies

Ministries of education should mandate trauma-informed training and practices as part of national education policies. They should support SEL strategies by incorporating SEL into the school curriculum and engaging the entire school community (teachers, families, and students). This could include specific guidelines for supporting MRD students and ensuring that trauma sensitivity becomes a core component of school culture.

2. Establish Funding Programs for Trauma-Sensitive Resources and Training



Provide dedicated funding streams to schools and other educational institutions to support trauma-informed programs. Funds can support staff training, mental health resources, classroom accommodations, and community outreach initiatives, especially in areas with a high number of MRD students.

3. Foster Interagency Collaboration for Comprehensive Student Support

Facilitate partnerships between schools, healthcare providers, and social services to ensure that MRD students have access to mental health, social, and legal support. Cross-sector collaboration can enhance schools' capacity to respond effectively to the complex needs of MRD students.

4. Create Monitoring and Evaluation Standards for Trauma-Informed Programs

Develop national standards for monitoring the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices in schools. Regular assessments and data collection can help identify areas for improvement and support evidence-based policy adjustments.



D- EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDERS (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA, COUNCIL OF EUROPE)



To foster a consistent and impactful approach to trauma-sensitive education across member states, European stakeholders play a pivotal role in creating unified policies, encouraging cross-border collaboration, and providing essential resources. These recommendations aim to build upon EU frameworks, such as the European Education Area's focus on well-being in schools and the EU Council Recommendations on Pathways to School Success. Here are some recommendations:

1. Establish European Guidelines for Trauma-Informed Education and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

European institutions should work together to create shared guidelines on trauma-informed practices and SEL that align with the diversity of needs across member states. These guidelines should include recommended practices for supporting migrant, refugee, and displaced (MRD) students and should encourage schools and other educational institutions to adopt a trauma-sensitive culture that prioritizes emotional well-being.

2. Create Funding Programs for Cross-Border Training and Resources in Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Designate specific funding from programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund to support trauma-informed initiatives, with an emphasis on training, curriculum resources, and school-wide programs. These resources should focus on areas with a high concentration of MRD students and promote equity in educational access and mental health support.

3. Promote Regional and Cross-Border Networks for Knowledge Exchange

Support the development of regional networks and exchange programs for educators, school leaders, and policymakers to share knowledge, strategies, and successes in trauma-informed practices. By connecting schools, municipalities, and NGOs across borders, European stakeholders can promote the consistent application of trauma-informed education and leverage diverse experiences.

4. Develop Standards for Evaluating and Reporting on Trauma-Informed Programs at the European Level

Establish European standards for evaluating trauma-informed programs in schools, which member states can adapt to their national contexts. Regular assessment and data sharing on trauma-sensitive practices will foster transparency, help identify effective strategies and encourage evidence-based adaptations to better meet the needs of all students, especially MRD populations.

These recommendations provide a roadmap for fostering trauma-informed, supportive school environments, encouraging stakeholders at every level to play an active role in building trauma-sensitive schools. By working collaboratively, EU and national leaders, school administrators, and teachers can create a robust support system that empowers all students' success and well-being.





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