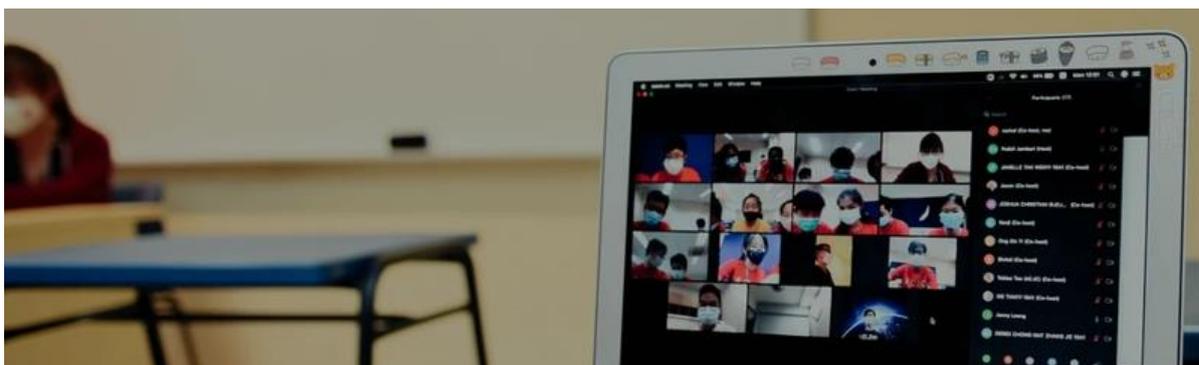


MIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE UK PANDEMIC IMPACTS, SCHOOL REPOSSES AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES



Research Brief - July 2021

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1. OVERVIEW

1.1 About this report

Lockdowns and school closures in response to Covid-19 have impacted on all students in the UK, but have also acted as multipliers of educational inequalities. Among the most vulnerable are newly arrived migrant children, as they tend to be less familiar with the educational system and life in the country. Some migrant and refugee students also face challenges due to language barriers, limited resources and, in many cases, the traumatic personal experiences of migration.

Throughout the pandemic, the specific situation of migrant pupils has received little attention among researchers, policymakers, and the media. This research brief contributes to addressing the information gaps about:

- the impact of the UK pandemic on migrant students in primary and secondary schools;
- the responses and practices implemented by schools and other local actors;
- the potential ways forward at the level of policy and practice.

This document stems from an ongoing collaboration between [NIESR](#) (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) and the University of Nottingham ([International Centre on Public and Social Policy - icPSP](#)). It is informed by a review of available evidence and by the insight emerging from two parallel studies:

- A research project undertaken by NIESR, building on an earlier report on [‘How schools are integrating new migrant pupils and their families’](#)(2019). Following the start of the first UK lockdown, additional semi-structured interviews were undertaken with teachers and headteachers across England to explore [new challenges and responses](#). The project was led by Dr Chiara Manzoni and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).
- An ongoing project conducted at the University of Nottingham on [‘Migrant Pupils in UK schools: the impact of Covid’](#), which in its first stages has focused on interviews with third sector and public sector organisations to examine the impact of the pandemic on schools, students and their families, as well as mapping local interventions. The project is led by Dr Alessio D’Angelo.

NIESR and the icPSP have also worked together to organise a series of knowledge-exchange events with teachers and practitioners, with the framework of the [‘Learning for Citizenship’](#) platform, including the international conference ‘Supporting migrant students through the pandemic’ ([May 2021](#)).

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The authors are responsible for the interpretation of all data presented in this report. Any views expressed in this report are solely the authors' and do not necessarily represent the position of their institutions or their partner organisations.

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1.2. Key Findings

- The pandemic has been a multiplier of education inequalities and many newly arrived migrants, including refugees and asylum-seeking children have suffered disproportionately with regard to: access to education (including digital divide); language and other (specialised) support; family support (e.g. with homework); ability to navigate the school system; wider economic stability and access to welfare.
- During the pandemic learning support has been provided in different ways and individual schools and teachers have put in place various forms of distance learning using online platform and offline materials. However, the availability and quality of tools, guidance and support has been varied and patchy.
- Only some schools have been able to develop targeted support for migrant pupils facing additional language barriers, although some online resources have been made available by NGOs and educational organisations.
- Several initiatives have been aiming to tackle the digital divide, but other barriers such as the lack of parental support with the home schooling or the decrease in children's engagement have been harder to address.
- During the pandemic, the pre-existing deficit of a coherent policy framework to support migrant students in the UK has been exacerbated, with no targeted responses at national level. The local public sector, however, has put in place several good – though uncoordinated – initiatives, including the production of guidelines for schools and the organisation of online seminars and other exchange initiatives for EAL practitioners.
- The lockdown and economic crisis have significantly affected the work of local third sector organisations, particularly those running supplementary classes or running mentoring schemes and parental advice. Nonetheless, there have been many diffuse local responses, e.g.: fundraising and distribution of IT devices; local campaigns; production of online resources.

2. MIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE UK - WHAT WE KNEW BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

2.1 Migrant students in the UK – characteristics and risk factors

Systematic evidence about migrant students in the UK is limited. This is due to the shortcomings and mutability of administrative sources, but also to the [human-rights concerns](#) about the collection of migration data in the context of education. The School Census in England, however, collects data on pupils who speak ‘**English as an additional language**’ (EAL). According to the latest statistics ([2019/2020](#)), the proportion of EAL students is 21% in primary schools and 17% in secondary schools.

The EAL category refers to a very heterogeneous group and includes children and families from inside and outside the European Union, refugees, asylum-seekers as well as unaccompanied children and those reunited with their families. While pupils from migrant families are included in the EAL category even if bilingual, recently arrived pupils will have more structural EAL needs ([DfE, 2012](#); [Ofsted, 2013](#)). Being an EAL pupil is not in itself an indicator of educational difficulties, as evidence suggests that many EAL pupils perform well and manage to catch up academically with their peers during their time in school ([Strand et al, 2015](#)). What is important, instead, is the level of English proficiency ([Strand and Lindorff, 2020](#)). A measure of children’s ‘proficiency in English’ level was systematically collected in the January [2017 and 2018 school censuses](#), but the Department for Education discontinued it after that point.

Language acquisition is a crucial route to achievement and integration, with schools playing a key role, considering the classroom is often the sole place where newcomers need to communicate in their non-native language. Pupils’ lack of English acquisition can result in an inability to access the curriculum ([Strand and Hessel, 2018](#)). For secondary school students, an additional barrier is represented by the lack of access to the academic language needed for examinations ([Hutchinson, 2018](#)).

Among all EAL pupils, the term ‘**newly arrived migrant children**’ is usually applied to those who have entered the state education system during the last three years. This is because only this subgroup will attract targeted funding under the national formula, although the needs of some pupils from a migrant background extend well beyond this definition.

The very concept of ‘migrant students’ is somewhat imprecise – and thus potentially controversial – hiding an extremely wide range of backgrounds and conditions. However, having arrived in the UK in recent times can represent a risk-factor for students, alongside the stage in which they enter schooling, the education experience in the country of origin (or lack of it), their socio-economic and cultural background, and the migration status of their parents.

Migrant children are also more likely to suffer from **socio-economic disadvantage**; the poverty rate among children with foreign-born parents is twice as high than among children of UK-born parents ([JRF 2016](#)). Some children in migrant families, including those refused asylum, are affected by the ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) policy, which means they do not have access to the mainstream welfare benefits that are available to UK citizens and those with ‘indefinite leave to remain’ including Child Benefit, Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Income-related

Employment and Support Allowance. They may not get access to NHS services free of charge and they have an even smaller safety net than the wider population ([Pinter et al, 2020](#)).

2.2. Migrant students in education policy and discourses

The recent history of education policy in the UK indicate that migrant students have not been simply forgotten; rather, they have been largely presented as a problem – and so progressively removed from the list of those worthy of support ([D’Angelo 2020](#)). A turning point of this process was the abolition, in 2011, of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grants (EMAG), a public fund introduced just a decade earlier to support BAME and EAL pupils. Funding has now been absorbed into general school funding and around half of Local Authorities have no central EAL spending ([Hutchinson, 2018](#)).

The presence of migrant students has been described as a potential burden rather than an opportunity - one of the many strands of the ‘migrants as scroungers’ myth – and as having a negative impact on overall school attainment. This counters all the data we have on the subject. In 2018, the government’s own Migration Advisory Committee reported “no evidence that migration has reduced parental choice in schools or the educational attainment of UK-born children” ([MAC, 2018](#)).

Thankfully, the views of teachers are often very different. A recent [study by NIESR](#) found teachers were positive about the contribution that migrant pupils and their families make to the life of their schools. This includes not only the motivation and attitude of many migrant pupils and their families, but also the enrichment of the social and cultural school environment through exposure of pupils and staff to different languages and cultures. However, the lack of bespoke funding and nation-wide programmes to support migrant pupils, restricts the support schools can give them, as they are not able to hire enough specialist EAL teachers or support staff, to supply equipment, or to translate teaching materials for the newly arrived.

More recently, and in the midst of the pandemic, came the announcement that Ofsted¹ intended to [abolish the role of National Lead for EAL](#), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT). The national subject association for EAL (NALDIC) has strongly criticised the move, observing: *“the removal of the National Lead is part of a broader ‘fight for fairness’, as outlined by Liz Truss, Minister for Equalities and Women, in a recent speech. This removes all mechanisms to support specific groups in favour of a single, undifferentiated focus on ‘inequality’. It combats a perceived ‘soft bigotry of low expectations, where people from certain backgrounds are never expected or considered able enough to reach high standards.’ From our work advocating for EAL pupils, representing specialist teachers, teaching assistants, advisors and leaders, researching and sharing good practice, we do not recognise this. Instead, we see the hard bigotry of no expectations, of pupils whose needs are clearly understood being failed because government departments and the inspectorate no longer think they are worthy of attention”* ([NALDIC 2021](#)).

¹ Ofsted is the national office in charge of inspecting schools and other educational setting across the country.

2.3. The role of schools

For migrant pupils, schools are not just places where knowledge and skills are acquired, but also fundamental spaces for the development of their sense of self, belonging and citizenship ([D'Angelo and Ryan, 2011](#)). Schools also offer mixing opportunities for pupils and parents, which are crucial for promoting integration and cohesion across communities as well as positive attitudes. Ensuring schools are adequately resourced is essential so that migrant pupils can reach their potential quickly, requiring less support in the longer term. Schools often provide support not just to pupils, but to whole (migrant) families experiencing hardship, ending up compensating for the shortcomings of the wider welfare system. For newly arrived migrants, including refugees and asylum-seeking children and their families, schools are often the first port of call providing support beyond education – for example, helping to access information, advice, health-care and benefits. Many schools also support migrant pupils by providing mentoring schemes aimed at improving their confidence and ensuring their wellbeing ([Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019](#)).

In many UK schools, however, targeted resources can be scarce, particularly where the migrant presence is smaller. When dedicated programmes are available, they sometimes place all newly arrived pupils into one group, restricting teachers' ability to cater for them as individuals. As pointed out in a [recent report](#) by Social Scientists Against the Hostile Environment, and with particular regard to parental involvement initiatives, a 'one size fits all' approach can fail to communicate effectively with parents about academic or pastoral issues and risks stereotyping all migrant parents as 'deficient', rather than properly involving them in decision making.

Still, over the years, many excellent examples of good practice have developed, often in collaboration with a range of local stakeholders. [NIESR research](#) funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on integration of new migrant students and their families, has collected evidence on what schools around England are doing to facilitate integration by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment and improving the performance of pupils. Buddy schemes (mainly used in primary schools) or young interpreter and young ambassadors programmes are examples of ways in which a diverse intake can benefit all pupils. Pupils are trained to carry out buddying roles or to translate materials, enhancing their own skills. Extra-curricular activities, such as art or drama projects, film-making or storytelling workshops are used to involve migrant pupils in school life. These activities improve pupils' language skills and confidence and, in turn, benefit their schools through increased awareness of the past and current lives of new migrants settling in the UK. One remarkable programme operating across the UK, [School of Sanctuary](#), raises awareness among all pupils about the experiences of refugees and those seeking sanctuary, increasing pupils' understanding of migration phenomena. However, many of these initiatives are often hard to sustain because of constantly changing policy and funding frameworks.

2.4. The role of the community sector

As highlighted by international research ([Eurydice 2019](#)) the successful integration of migrants students requires a ‘whole-child’ approach, i.e. supporting language acquisition and learning the curriculum on the one-hand and supporting social and emotional development on the other. Such an approach requires not falling into the trap of group homogenization and recognising individuality ([Pamies and D’Angelo, 2020](#)). In turn, this calls for a ‘whole-school’ approach, i.e. the involvement of *all* students, families and the wider community (D’Angelo and Kaye, 2018) in processes of mutual interaction and exchange.

In this respect, the collaboration between schools, the local public sector and community organisations can be particularly fruitful, with some consolidated good practice of collaboration, particularly with regard to family engagement among ethnic minority and migrant communities ([Paniagua and D’Angelo, 2016](#)). This is part of the UK’s well-established tradition of migrant-led organisations providing direct community support. The role of migrant and BAME organisations, however, saw quite a reduction in political support from the mid-2000s, in the name of the so-called ‘social cohesion agenda’ ([D’Angelo 2015](#)), whilst the emphasis on parental and community engagement ([Corter and Pelletier 2005](#)) has often been used as an instrument to progressively reduce the role of local authorities in overseeing education, expanding the role of private actors. This was part of a wider process of reforms driven by market principles and leading to an increasingly complex and fragmented education system ([Benn 2011](#)).

Still, to this date, newly arrived migrants, including refugees and asylum-seeking children and their families, often rely on supplementary education and voluntary sector services for information, advocacy and support to access their rights ([Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018](#)). In the education sector, these organisations can provide parents with specialised services and practical information to overcome institutional barriers and help schools develop a more welcoming climate or address deficit views towards poor and culturally diverse families. In terms of engagement, third sector organisations (TSOs) can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture of families and build the basis for active participation through the improvement of relationships among parents and between parents and teachers. Overall, TSOs can help nurturing children’s positive sense of their ethnicity and even reframing dominant discursive notions of otherness and schooling ([Mirza and Reay 2000](#)).

3. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANT STUDENTS

3.1. School closures and changes in education delivery

The pandemic has been a global event and although it has affected countries across the world in different ways, it has forced rapid changes in education delivery almost everywhere. Besides the different political contexts, schools faced similar challenges in supporting newly arrived migrant pupils and their families in this time of crisis, as often the transition to distance education was accompanied by insufficient support and experience with such practice. Countries closed schools at different times, following different strategies.

The UK, for example, was one of the last countries in the EU to close school premises. At the start of the first wave of the pandemic, the reluctance of the British Government to close schools seemed to relate primarily to the impact of this decision on economic productivity. However, the role of schools as a place of learning and socialisation was left – at best – in the background.

Eventually, the decision came into force on March 20th 2020, followed shortly after by the announcement that GCSE and A Level exams had been cancelled. While schools remained open during lockdown for the children of key workers and vulnerable children (including children of migrant parents, many of whom are essential workers), evidence from the Department for Education shows that [many did not attend](#). A decision to allow all children back to school was postponed several times, with some reopening taking place from the start of June, but with regional differences and, in the case of England, for some school years only. In fact, most primary and secondary school students only returned in full in September 2020. The second national lockdown – announced in November 2020 – didn't affect schools – however with a new resurgence of covid cases, the pressures to close schools mounted again in December. Eventually, soon after the school winter holidays, a third lockdown was announced. All primary and secondary schools in England had to close their gates to most pupils, once again returning to 'distance learning' as the default option. These partial school closures continued until the 8th of March 2021.

With school closures, virtual connections between teachers and students substituted the physical interaction as 'distance learning' became the default option for most, both in the UK and across Europe, though the level of preparedness varied considerably ([OECD, 2020](#)). Online platforms were extensively used at all levels of education, with television channels and other distance-learning solutions more commonly used at the primary level ([OECD, 2021](#)). The availability of advice, guidance and support has been mixed too; not only between but also within countries. The diverse effects of these measures were also connected to the level of 'digital divide', despite the significant efforts made by schools to reach children via alternative means such as printed work packs or television channels.

An online survey conducted in May-June 2020 with families with school-aged children in England highlighted a digital divide in access to technological devices for home learning during the pandemic ([Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020](#)). Results show socio-economic gaps in learning time during the lockdown which are larger than before the lockdown. The richest third of primary school children were reported to spend about four and half hours per week more on learning than the poorest third of primary school children. Among secondary school children, the reported gap was one hour a day in learning time between the richest and the poorest third of children. Survey data collected via teachers

confirm a similar picture highlighting that only 10% of teachers overall report that all their students have adequate access to a device for remote learning ([Sutton Trust, 2021](#)).

To date, the access to an appropriate device and reliable internet connection is still something the UK government is failing to achieve. In response to the first lockdown, in April 2020, the Department for Education announced a plan to support vulnerable pupils with social workers, care leavers and disadvantaged year 10s across England by giving them laptops and tablets. The [Office of the Children's Commissioner \(2020\)](#) calculated that based on the DfE published criteria to receive the support, only 37% of children in eligible groups could be allocated a device. Whilst the British government has recognised the importance of addressing the digital divide among students, its efforts are still limited and fail to recognise some deeper inequalities.

Overall the dilemma faced by the UK school system has been presented as 'a choice between danger and disadvantage' ([D'Angelo 2020](#)). By treating school closures as a short-term emergency, there has been little room to make longer-term plans and in the absence of specific governmental instructions regarding educational approaches and standards related to learners with a migrant background, these - together with other vulnerable groups of children – have been affected the most.

3.2. The impact on migrant students

In the absence of a clear framework and national guidelines, schools and teachers responded proactively to the sudden impact of the Covid-19 emergency on their pupils, including newly arrived migrants. NIESR research conducted with primary and secondary schools in England (as well as Italy Spain and Switzerland), collected the views of school staff on the challenges faced by migrant students and their families.

In line with other existing evidence, research results indicate a general **lack of technical equipment** for quality online learning, including laptops (or other devices) as well as stable broadband connections. Some pupils only had access to online learning through their parents' mobile phones and in some cases only one device was available for different siblings. In some extreme cases, the lack of basic resources such as pens, colouring pencils and paper excluded children from any type of activity. The conditions for adequate home schooling not only rely on access to technology, but also on whether an appropriate physical space for learning exists at home. The **lack of adequate space** for home schooling was reported by teachers as particularly challenging. Not having a quiet room or a desk at home means that some migrant pupils had difficulty attending online lessons and accessing teaching content.

These results have been confirmed by other studies. Although the above mentioned research by the Institute for Fiscal Study does not specify the home schooling situation of migrants, we know that on average migrant families have lower income, and children in migrant households are more likely to experience **material deprivation** than children in households where all family members are UK-born ([Migration Observatory, 2020](#)). Newly arrived migrant children or those with foreign-born parents are also more likely to live in households where the health and economic impact of the wider coronavirus crisis is particularly severe. Office for National Statistics data reveal that for some migrant and minority ethnic groups, the risk of Covid-19-related deaths is up to four times higher than the average ([Public](#)

[Health England, 2020](#)). The latest [ONS statistics](#) reveal that for some migrant and BAME groups the risk of Covid-related death is up to four times higher than the average.

Teachers and practitioners interviewed also reflected on the **impact of school closure on language development** reporting a decrease in pupils' confidence speaking in the host-country language – as well as a decrease in their vocabulary – due to the lack of practice outside the home. Development of English language proficiency is fundamental in building friendships, social inclusion and achieving successful academic outcomes ([Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017](#)). In many schools, online learning has had little or no element of pupil-to-pupil interaction, thus depriving migrant pupils of opportunities to socialise and improve their language skills ([D'Angelo, 2020](#)).

In a remote learning context, parents become a key resource for education provision as facilitators of learning. However, teachers interviewed report that some **parents were unable to support their children with online learning**. This was due to lack of time, language barriers, limited technological literacy or their unfamiliarity with the educational process. While home learning during Covid-19 has been a challenge for all involved, migrant pupils were reported to struggle the most because of language barriers within their families as parents are less likely to be familiar with the national curriculum and the UK education system, and therefore less likely to feel confident in supporting their children's learning. Other authors also stress that migrant parents are on average less able to support their children because they are unfamiliar with the school culture, organisational structure, and educational standards ([OECD 2020](#)). Parent language barriers also impacted on their ability to understand and navigate government and school guidelines. Parental engagement is therefore likely to be a factor in the effectiveness of distance learning, particularly for younger children who may not be able to access learning activities independently.

Researchers using the Understanding Society Covid-19 dataset show that during school closures, the **time spent on schoolwork at home** was significantly shorter than average for children receiving free school meals, from single-parent households, with less-educated parents, and among some black and minority ethnic groups, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage ([Bayrakdar and Guveli, 2020](#)). While the ethnic minority status is not the same as immigration status, there is some significant overlap. According to the [latest report](#) by the National Foundation for Educational Research and the Nuffield Foundation, as the new academic year began in September 2020, teachers estimated that their pupils were three months behind in their learning and that the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had increased by 46%.

Overall, primary and secondary school teachers seem to agree that particularly in the case of migrants, the effectiveness of home learning depends on the combination of their ability to access online learning independently and the support they receive from home. Teachers also reported that **engagement and motivation represented a challenge** in distance learning, particularly in the case of newly arrived migrants who are likely to feel isolated and often lack the parental support during the home schooling.

Families also faced a significant amount of **stress and economic hardship** during the pandemic, with the rise in job, housing and food insecurity, so that children's education couldn't always be prioritised. During the interviews teachers reported that those parents on zero-hours contracts or working in industries heavily affected by the pandemic saw a reduction of hours or termination of contracts. In

some cases, those who lost their jobs decided to temporarily relocate to their countries of origin making it difficult for schools to keep in touch and support students.

Moreover, government management of the pandemic led to **border closures** as well as travel restrictions which contributed to worsening the condition of many migrants living far from family members and their support network. The uncertainty over Brexit and the new migration policy in the UK is having an emotional as well as practical impact on EU and other migrant families, often unsure about their legal status and about the public services they are entitled to access. Finally, evidence from refugee organisations also indicates that for those young asylum-seekers who have moved to 'dispersal' areas since lockdown began, the assignment to local schools is taking longer than usual.

3.3. School responses

The findings emerging from the NIESR study reveal significant differences in how schools were supporting students during the pandemic, with some doing little to check in with pupils and their families at home, and others offering a full timetable via video calling facilities.

During the pandemic, individual schools and teachers have put in place various forms of **distance learning**, but - as mentioned - the availability of tools, guidance and support has been varied and patchy. NIESR research shows that only some schools have been able to develop specific forms of support for newly arrived migrant pupils facing additional language barriers, although some online resources have been made available by NGOs and educational organisations.

Many teachers in England also struggled to support pupils learning English as Additional Language (EAL) due to the **lack of tailored resources**. They explained that the majority of EAL resources are designed to be used by pupils with the support of teachers and adapting them to the home setting has not always been easy.

The research documented a wide range of **strategies put in place by individual schools**. While schools responded to the emergency by creating and using innovative remote services, teachers reported that migrant pupils were more likely to struggle with online homework because of language barriers within their families. Teachers offered individualised support through phone or video lessons, to explain tasks or contents. Yet schools soon realised that the access to IT devices represented a barrier, so in some cases offered alternative home learning options, including no-tech and low-tech solutions such as homework packages delivered to the homes of those in need or digital literacy lessons through phone calls and videos.

To overcome language barriers, schools made use of translation and interpreting services and multi-lingual teaching assistants. One way of addressing parents' language barriers was to have parent ambassadors who were able to both communicate parents' needs to schools and give information from schools to parents. In some cases, schools even put in place individualised phone or video lessons for newly arrived migrants and connected migrant pupils with each other to ensure they had some opportunity to interact in their native language too. Opportunities for students to interact through collaborative learning was reported to help keep them motivated. To boost motivation and engage

with those at greater risk of isolation schools were also using social media or interactive programmes including drama, storytelling, cooking and crafting activities. Mentoring programmes were also offered to support study skills.

However, most of these initiatives were undertaken independently, in the absence of any national framework of guidance and on top of workloads which, because of the lockdown, have become particularly burdensome for all school staff.

Families already relying on food banks and school meals struggled and for the first weeks of lockdown teachers were overwhelmed supporting families accessing essential needs. In some cases, they were signposting families to charities and food banks while in others the schools became food banks and teachers were delivering food parcels to those in need.

3.4. Community responses

The fragmented nature of the UK voluntary sector makes it extremely difficult to map and assess the impacts and responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, on the basis of the evidence collected so far as part of the University of Nottingham project, it is fair to say that these responses have been quite patchy and only able to address the needs of migrant students to a limited extent.

One of the most common type of response has been online collections of money, stationary and especially ICT equipment to be distributed to refugee and migrant students by specialised organisations or, more generally, similar collections by charitable organisations to be distributed via the schools to students in need. See e.g. the various initiatives by local [‘School of Sanctuary’](#) and [STAR](#) (Student Action for Refugees) branches, amongst the many.

Many small to medium local organisations, and particular migrant-led organisations which used to deliver supplementary education programmes have been significantly affected. Most of these groups tend to operate on the basis of voluntary work, using community halls or similar premises, and using effective but often ‘low-tech’ approaches to education. The restrictions imposed by the lockdowns (and particularly the first one) made it impossible for many to continue to run classes, tutoring and parental support. At the same time, the economic impact of the pandemic has led to a reduction of available volunteers. Other migrant and refugee organisations who previously ran externally funded education programmes (as well as other support projects for migrant children and their families) had to close these, with several practitioners made redundant over the course of 2020.

Several organisations – both in the public and third sector – hastily put together online lists and databases of learning resources for EAL and migrant learners. Among the initiatives of the largest, national organisations, notable – though not at all exhaustive - examples include the following.

- The **Bell Foundation** - which works specifically to “improve policy and practice” to support EAL children and adults – produced a set of [Home Learning](#) guidance and resources to support schools and teachers working with pupils who use English as an additional language and their families.
- Similarly, the **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)** produced sets of [‘Covid19 Resources’](#) to help UK schools to communicate with parents/carers, as well as resources schools can share

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with families to support home study and routines. As well as being available in English, many of these resources have been translated into various languages, such as Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Lithuanian.

- [Resource lists](#) have also been produced by **NALDIC**, in addition to a dedicated '[expert advice webinars](#)', in partnership with The Bell Foundation, since April 2020.
- Policy [briefings](#) and recommendations were also produced by Refugee Support Network. In 2021, after 10 years of activity, RSN [changed its name](#) in **Refugee Education UK**, to better reflect its main focus of work: supporting young refugees and asylum seekers with their educational needs. Through the pandemic, the organisation has continued to provide advice and practical support to refugee college and university students.

As for the public sector, in contrast to the lack of coherent responses at national level – discussed in sections 2.1 and 3.1 – some examples of good practice have been registered at the level of local authorities, particularly within the few EAL and Achievement Teams still active across the country. In several instances these have been organising training courses of school EAL coordinators and other teachers and, also in this case, producing online guidelines and information hubs. In the midst of the national 'policy vacuum' and reduced funding and resources, strategic coordination has been quite limited. On the other hand, our ongoing research has recorded many examples of local authority practitioners taking the initiative. This included visiting families to check the well-being of students and provide them with printed resources, meeting outdoor with parents, students and teachers; often in collaboration with other informal networks of community solidarity.

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Emerging findings from the NIESR and University of Nottingham studies indicate that - amidst the wide range of negative impacts described above – the pandemic has also become an opportunity to make some positive developments in several areas, and to learn important lessons for the future.

The lockdowns and sudden shift to online learning has resulted in:

- wide adoption of online learning tool among schools and education practitioners, with an increase in digital learning expertise which will be kept in future. This includes an increased awareness about online tools that can support learning acquisition for EAL students.
- unprecedented efforts among schools, public sector and community groups to take steps forward to address the digital divide amongst students, and particularly those more vulnerable or with reduced family support.
- increased IT skills and developed capacity for independent learning among students, with an ability to use a variety of distance learning tools, also among students less familiar with the UK education system or with limited English language proficiency.

For many recently arrived migrant and refugee students, the reduced amount of time spent in school, under ‘normal’ circumstances, has created a barrier to socialisation, but at the same time, in some cases, it has resulted in:

- a more gradual, ‘shielded’ inclusion into the school environment, with some practitioners reporting reduced level of victimisation among new refugee students, and more opportunities to access family support during the school day.
- more opportunities to practice the ‘home language’, developing or maintaining multilingualism and in some case enhancing confidence and a multiple sense of identity.
- some blurring of the boundaries between school, family and community spaces of support and belonging.

The experience of 2020 and 2021 has created the opportunity, by keeping momentum, to:

- reconfigure a better infrastructure for mixed learning, with a better integrated, more accessible use of online tools and other mechanisms of remote study.
- better recognise the diverse needs and positive contribution of all students, including EAL, migrant and refugee students, by taking an intersectional, longer term approach to processes of education and school inclusion.
- promote and support networking among teachers and practitioners working with EAL and migrant students, including exchange of resources and practices, discussion and training opportunities.
- encourage ‘whole-school’ approaches to education, bringing together schools, families and a range of local stakeholders into communities of practice and learning, underpinned by principles of equality and social justice.
- promote research initiatives that better assess the experiences and needs of migrant and other vulnerable students during and after the pandemic, looking at educational outcomes but also at a wider range of social and personal indicators of societal and individual ‘success’.

Migrant students in the UK pandemic

Throughout the pandemic the direct voice of students has been largely missing, and further research involving young people would be particularly important.

With regard to all these aspects, it is important to stress that the current narrative around the need of a '[catch-up](#)' focusing almost entirely on 'lost learning during' the pandemic should be reconsidered. Not only because of the danger of not acknowledging the positive opportunities to rethink education, but most importantly because such an approach does not take into account children's social and emotional needs as we move forward. A narrow focus on academic achievement seems to underestimate the broad role of schools – in partnership with third sector organisations and other local actors - as hubs of community interaction and support.