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Discrimination and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the Lives of Child Refugees of the 1930s: **Learning for the Present and the Future**

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Fig. 1

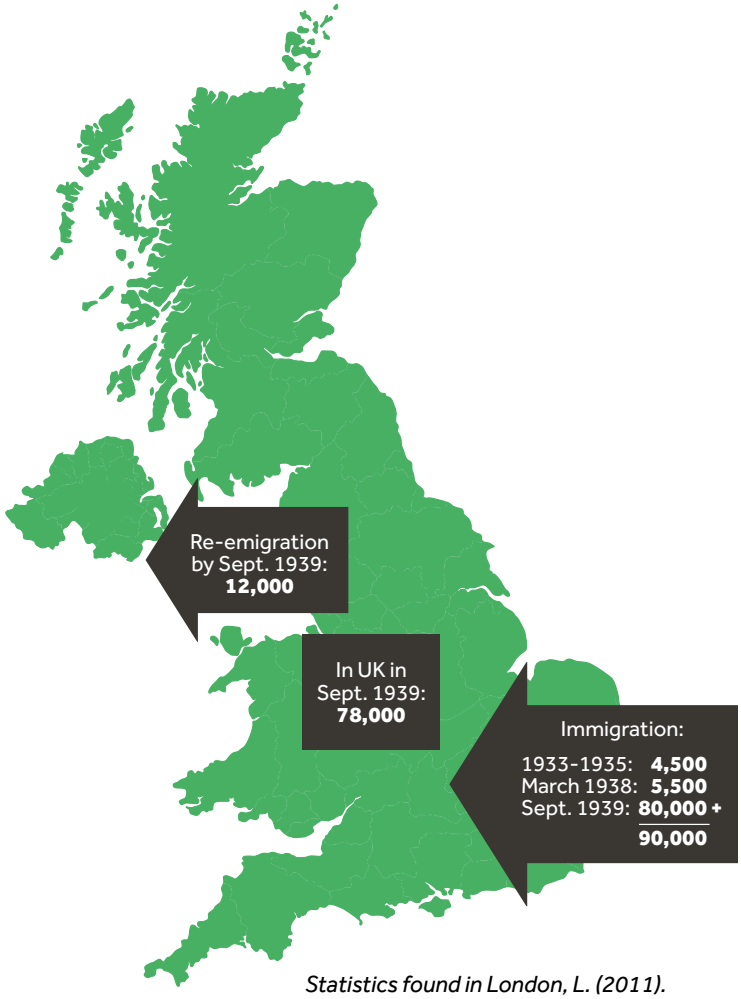
Refugees fleeing their homes due to war and conflict are often confronted with traumatic events pre-migration in their home country as well as during their journey to safety. Once arriving in a safe country, refugees continue to be at risk of facing further adverse experiences. Results from the 2020, Adverse Childhood Experiences in Child Refugee and Asylum Seeking Populations, (Public Health Wales NHS Trust) show that suffering several adverse experiences in childhood increases the likelihood of harmful behaviours in adulthood, and that the negative consequences for the individual and society are very high.[1] According to the 2020 report, certain factors increase the child refugee's risk of experiencing harms from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and one of these is 'perceived discrimination', which is understood to a be form of 'acculturation stress'.[2] This 'perceived discrimination' in the host country, which might, of course, be actual discrimination, is said to have a negative effect on mental health, causing or amplifying post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and depression.

This second ACEs report compiled by Aberystwyth University, in which learning from the past can inform the support available for present and future child refugees,[3] investigates specific ACEs such as racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia experienced by child refugees who fled for safety from the threats of National Socialism (Nazism) in Central Europe in the 1930s and who sought sanctuary in the UK. This research benefits from the longitudinal nature of the numerous narratives provided by this group of refugees, which allows a unique opportunity to investigate the experiences of racism and discrimination, and the way in which these incidents are remembered decades later. As current news of the refugees fleeing the crisis in the Ukraine makes headlines, it becomes even more important to consider how we, as a host country, can best accommodate refugees and prevent further ACEs post-migration. Learning from the experiences of child refugees seeking safety from National Socialism, this report suggests ways to minimize exclusion based on race, religion, and refugee status, and proposes ways to improve inclusion and acceptance of these individuals forced to migrate on an urgent basis.

Historical background

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party assumed power in Germany. Accumulating anti-Semitic and other discriminatory policies resulted in the flight and forced migration of tens of thousands, resulting in a European refugee crisis. As the Nazis extended their power and control over Austria (in March 1938) and Czechoslovakia (in September 1938), the demand for safe havens dramatically increased. Through extensive propaganda and government-promoted actions, the Nazis, tapping into deep-rooted discriminatory racial ideologies, blamed the Jews for the economic and political difficulties in Germany. The British government was aware of the consequences for the Jewish population and faced pressure to increase immigration numbers, which had been limited after years of having an open-door policy. Refugee organizations on the European continent encouraged any action to save vulnerable individuals, especially the children.

After the pogrom on 9-10 November 1938 (also known as *Kristallnacht*), which impacted Jewish individuals and communities throughout Germany, Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, the British government agreed to allow an unlimited number of unaccompanied children under the age of 17 into the country on a temporary basis, so long as they were not a burden on the government. This decision by the House of Commons on 21 November 1938 resulted in a movement of children now called the Kindertransport. The Home Office provided a visa-waiver entry document for each child brought to Britain on this scheme. Management and financial support for this operation was provided by the voluntary and charity sector. Outside the Kindertransport scheme, other child refugees came to the UK with their parents. But even in this situation the child may not have been able to stay with the parent. For example, if the mother came as a domestic servant, the child was often not permitted to live in the same house and required placement elsewhere. Other child refugees came independently without a parent and were met by a family member, acquaintance, or a privately arranged foster parent.



Statistics found in London, L. (2011).
Image credit: Siem van Limpt (2020).

Pre-migration experiences

Before their forced migration, most of the children had experienced some form of adverse childhood experience, be it discriminatory violence toward themselves or witnessing others being attacked, dislocation and loss of home, loss of friends, end of education, or deprivation of basic necessities. Most of these children had experienced anti-Semitism in their home country or were aware that being Jewish had resulted in severe problems for their family. The family's practice of Judaism was irrelevant. Regardless of whether the family was not religious, assimilated, or orthodox, once identified or suspected as being Jewish, the attacks, restrictions and torment ensued. George Shefi came to England aged 7 from a poor family in Berlin. He recalled:

> *[T]here are certain things which stand out in my mind. For instance, Kristallnacht stands out in my mind because the third day, when I went down, I saw the broken windows of the Jewish stores. I saw a Jewish storekeeper who had a stationary store scrubbing the sidewalk where it was written "Dirty Jew" or something. He happened to be married to a Christian woman, so they didn't smash his store, but they wrote nasty things on the pavement in front of the store. And I saw all the jeering Germans around. This I remember distinctly. It's like one of those photos which is stuck in my mind.*[4]

Pre-migration, children were vulnerable in their schools and in public spaces; post-migration, the potential environment for abuse expands to include residential placements (whether in group homes, hostels, boarding schools, or foster families). Anti-Semitic behaviour of teachers, principals, and students is often recalled in interviews and memoirs and the accounts show the lifelong impact of such discrimination. Benno Black, from Breslau, came to England aged 13 and later recalled being told at school: 'Why don't you go back to Palestine?'[5] Ben Abeles, who came to England from Prague in 1939 aged 14, recalls his experiences in Czechoslovakia pre-migration:

> *after the Germans took the Sudetenlands [in September 1938], the whole thing started turning rather ugly in the school too. ... [The other children] started blaming us Jews for the difficulties. ... [The non-Jewish children] were more hostile to us ... by calling me "dirty Jew".*[6]

Emotional forms of bullying whilst at school were prevalent. Kenneth Carey remembers how 'I had long been made to sit by myself so that I should not "contaminate" the Aryans.'[7] Other children experienced first-hand the cruelty and brutality of the Nazis. Gerard Friedenfeld remembered how he was forced to flee, and how he was later tortured by the Nazis:

> *[W]e had created our (you might call it) tent city, it began to rain. That saved us. ... [T]hree weeks later, we were taken to a [make-shift] refugee camp. ... On April 12th, the Nazis moved into our refugee camp. And they selected some of us for what they called, turnen, 'Turnen' in German means to do gymnastics. And what they really meant was beating and torture.*[8]

Discrimination in the host country

An underlying societal sentiment against Jews, with all the historical tropes, existed in the United Kingdom.[9] Aaron Goldman in his assessment of the 1930s states that 'the British government demonstrated its policy of obstructing large-scale Jewish immigration, ... [enmity was evident in the Catholic press over religious questions and resentment toward an exaggerated Jewish role in finance], ... and highly placed Tories believed that socialism was somehow Jewish and, therefore, doubly alien and a danger to Britain.'[10] In the late 1930s ignorance was pervasive of the actual circumstances of the refugees, the conditions upon their arrival and all the constraints placed on them, and this ignorance exacerbated the anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant views. Leaflets were distributed claiming that the war was being fought for the benefit of the Jews.[11] No effort was made by institutions or the government to reduce these perceptions or to inform the public. In fact, the government *opposed* passage of legislation outlawing anti-Semitism 'on the grounds that it might create antipathy toward Jews.'[12]

With impending war and a potential invasion, anti-Semitic and anti-alien feelings were openly expressed. In 1939, Mass Observation[13] conducted a survey on 'Observing the "Other"' and 'Race', as well as collecting diaries from members of the public on their observations of their fellow citizens. One report responding to a questionnaire about Jews, completed in 1939 by J.L. Deuchar, from Slough, stated:

General impressions:

(i) **Over 60% considered that Jews are in some way evil; either unscrupulous in business, the main cause of international unrest or altogether too subtle for simple Englishmen.**

(ii) **Nearly all remained willing to credit any hearsay of Jews' evil intentions and methods.**

(iii) **5% at most see Jews as a mixture of hard-working, successful, intelligent & business-like, and grasping, overbearing & deceitful elements.**[14]

Certain news publications printed letters from the public demonstrating beliefs for and against the Jewish immigration. For example, the *Picture Post* printed the following letters (excerpts provided here) on 29 July, 1939:

> **'The appeal submitted by V. Mautner, of London, in your June 24 issue, for a home for two Czech children, intensifies my desire to appeal through the medium of the "P.P." [Picture Post] to all responsible people in this country. For months now, hordes of Jews and suchlike have swarmed into this country through the gateway of sentiment, and they have entered into good homes and positions. Every alien received here means one job less for one of our own, and we blindly accept the responsibility, believing that the prosperity which prevails at the moment will last. Why is there all this blindness to our own people's needs? [...] In Manchester, Jews flood in dance-halls and cafés – they parade like peacocks in the sun and fan their obnoxious mannerisms in a disgustingly familiar and swell-headed style. They can seemingly afford good clothes and pleasure. (L. Ferguson, "Wyncote", Victoria Park, Manchester.)'**
>
> **'When is this nonsense going to stop? Have we not enough starvation and orphan children of our own to look after, without helping all the other countries' refugees. It is disgusting the amount of Jews coming into this country to add to the cut-throat crowd we have now, who spend their time cutting prices to put the Englishman out of business. (Howard Roberts, Camden Road, N.W.1)'**

Despite the strong anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiments, there were individuals speaking out in support of helping the victims of Nazi aggression, especially the children, including MPs such as Eleanor Rathbone or humanitarians such as Sir Nicholas Winton. The modicum of British people believed that compassion and a humanitarian response to the atrocities faced by the Jews on the continent were essential and responded by offering homes for children and donating money. It is important to note here how historians have argued that children were dispersed over UK to be less visible and to avoid aggravating underlying anti-Semitic feeling. Moreover, the children were given advice on how they should behave to blend in and to not stand out as refugees.[15]

"GERMAN JEWS POURING INTO THIS COUNTRY"

By Daily Mail Reporter

"The way stateless Jews from Germany are pouring in from every port of this country is becoming an outrage. I intend to enforce the law to the fullest."

In these words, Mr. Herbert Metcalfe, the Old-street magistrate yesterday referred to the number of aliens entering this country through the "back door"—a problem to which The Daily Mail has repeatedly pointed.

Soon Caught

The number of aliens entering this country can be seen by the number of prosecutions in recent months. It is very difficult for the alien to escape the increasing vigilance of the police and port authorities.

Even if aliens manage to break through the defences it is not long before they are caught and deported.

The greatest of their difficulties is employment. Every employer must

address as the other three, was discharged under the Summary Jurisdiction Act. She had been charged with knowingly harbouring Beckner.

Mr. Metcalfe said it was clear that she relied on Beckner, for she had consented to marry him. He had no reason to doubt her story.

It was stated that Beckner was born at Minsk, Russia. Fierman was born in Warsaw, and had stated that he had been married to Weiss according to Jewish rites.

Mr. Clifford Watts, who appeared for all three, said he was instructed that they were making their way to friends in Africa when arrested.

Fierman and Weiss, who was expecting to become a mother in some months, could leave this country if the magistrate would give them an opportunity.

Fierman, he added, had had to run away from Berlin. He was a Jew, and he met Weiss, who was born there. Her brother was arrested and shot.

Fig. 2

Types of post-migration discrimination

Fig. 3

When looking at personal accounts of child refugees of the 1930s, it is not always easy to extract clear moments of racism that were recognised as such. Instead, what does become obvious is how these children experienced – and, crucially, *recognised* – three different types of discrimination: anti-Semitism, anti-German, and anti-refugee feelings. These three types of 'othering' were often intertwined, and the children might have struggled to distinguish between anti-Semitism, anti-German, and anti-refugee feelings and how this manifested in other people's actions toward them. Some of the unaccompanied child refugees were very unfortunate and were victims of direct hostile acts; others were subjected to subtle anti-other actions.

Even when reflecting on their experiences from the position of an adult, these terms are often brought together and sometimes used interchangeably. Helga Newman, who came from an assimilated Jewish family and left Vienna at the age of 9, explained:

> ***You're Jewish, it's a very private thing and you want to be English. I mean, that's everybody's aim. You're a bloody foreigner is what you are if you're not English. And I think most people, except if you're very, very religious, you really hide the fact that you're Jewish. You don't particularly want this little refugee kid who's, you now, doesn't even speak English and certainly can't pass as a real English person, to be in your house, and I really think that was part of it.***[16]

The insults the child refugees faced were usually a mix of name-calling based on religion or anti-foreign feeling, which frequently took place in the playground or at school. As is evident in the following example, children often experienced anti-Semitic remarks alongside anti-foreigner comments. Ben Abeles, who arrived on a Kindertransport from Prague, aged 14, recalls his time at school in Berkshire: 'the children were unfriendly to us, and they were calling us "dirty foreigner" and of course also "Jew, Jew boy."'[17]

Poignantly, Kindertransportee Robert Sugar reflects on what he sees as the refugee condition and how less than ideal situations, often involving discrimination, were generally accepted by refugees:

> ***We came from lands where our families were still hostage, where a murder was already planned, into a land where though safe, we were not loved. Yes, some of us were treated with great kindness and some of us were great exploited and abused, but I think all of always knew we were there on sufferance – on the condition we behaved well and were a credit to our people. In short, we began to learn and understand with dismaying speed how to be refugees. Shine your shoes, keep a low profile, be proud of being a Jew, but not too much in public, and above all don't make a fuss.***[18]

This report now investigates anti-Semitism, anti-German and anti-refugee feeling in more depth in order to understand how such forms of discrimination were experienced and the impact this had on the child refugee.

Anti-Semitism

While the main type of racial prejudice child refugees fleeing National Socialism experienced pre-migration was in the form of anti-Semitism, this form of racism is not overly prevalent in their reflections on their post-migration experiences. Naturally, this is not to say that they did not face anti-Semitism, but rather there might have been several reasons why these occasions were not recognised or recorded as such. When looking at these accounts, there are several possible explanations. The subtle anti-Semitism in the UK was not as obvious as the anti-Semitism faced pre-migration on the continent, where anti-Jewish laws were enacted, and where Jews were attacked and openly discriminated against without repercussions. Exposure to these early-life overt and pervasive experiences might have caused some of the anti-Semitic encounters in the UK to be dismissed by these child refugees. By the time they left their home countries, some of the less violent racist behaviours may have been normalized from the child's perspective.

Fig. 4

Secondly, it is important to remember that the child refugees might have felt the need to show their gratitude to their host nation both during the war years and in their later lives. Many child refugees openly recognise that the displacement saved their lives, whereas others who were left behind were killed. Child refugees were regularly told when growing up that they were the lucky ones, and either adopted this sentiment or recognised their fortune themselves. Parents, writing from the continent, also frequently encouraged their children to show their gratitude to their host families. This might have prevented the children from recording such experiences of anti-Semitism at the time, and from remembering them later in life. Issues of selective memory also tie into this. Moreover, admitting to experiencing anti-Semitism might have been a setback to the children's attempts to assimilate, and therefore anti-Semitic behaviour directed towards them might have been actively or subconsciously dismissed.

Lord Claus Moser's account shows the difficulty of isolating and recognising events as anti-Semitic. Claus Moser emigrated with his family to Britain in 1936 and became Director of the Central Statistical Office. Before this appointment, he talks about when he was turned down for a job:

> ***Now, whether there was an element of antisemitism, I will never know...This was not a time when a major company took on a refugee boy. Now, I'm not entitled to say that either of those steps was antisemitic; their reasoning was that I was a refugee youngster and everything about my background made it impossible for them, in wartime, to employ me.***[19]

Kurt Fuchel, who left Vienna aged 7, instinctually and admittedly tried to assimilate. His foster family arranged English lessons for him upon his arrival and within six weeks he wrote to his parents in English: 'I no longer speak German'.[20] Kurt dismissed moments of discrimination as a result of being 'other' and not having the correct habits: '[O]ccasionally there was a trace of anti-Semitism. Someone would call me a dirty Jew or whatever. But I soon learned to kick a ball in the winter and hit a cricket ball in the summer, and I fit sort of in.'[21] The drive to assimilate was also influenced by the strong desire of having 'to be ultra good, always'.[22]

It is remarkable how many of these child refugees suggest that there was a sort of ingrained anti-Semitism in the UK; a number of accounts mention how offensive remarks were made in passing. Perhaps what is more surprising is how the child refugees themselves appear to brush off these comments, calling them trivial or 'silly'. When Ernest Goodman, who arrived shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War on a Kindertransport, was asked if he felt he was treated differently because he was Jewish, he replied: 'No, never. Never. Never. This is why I say I never cared that they made dumb remarks about Jews. From time to time, without thinking, "I Jewed." And so on. But they don't mean much by that. It gives you a jolt, but that's it.'[23] Although insisting he was not discriminated against on grounds of his Jewish background, his comments suggest that anti-Semitic

remarks, whilst apparently not taken to heart, clearly still had some sort of impact. The physical response is something he still remembers when reflecting on his experiences decades later.

Judith Kerr, the well-known children's author and illustrator who found safety in Britain with her parents and brother, likewise mentions the occasional anti-Semitic remarks made in passing, and these are dismissed as 'nothing':

> ***Little bits of antisemitism, unconscious really. People talking about the chosen people or unaware that I was Jewish. The father of a friend of mine at art school – she stopped him very quickly. But that's not antisemitism; that's nothing, it's just stupidity. It was remarkable, it's a very, very tolerant country.***[24]

Historian Jennifer Craig-Norton refers to the 'soft antisemitism grounded in ignorance'.[25] This 'soft' or 'veiled' anti-Semitism might have taken the form of 'general disgruntlement'[26] and might therefore have not registered as anti-Semitic behaviour in the eyes of the child refugee. Historian Tony Kushner's research also shows that the reactions of hosts in the countryside, where there were no existing Jewish communities, ranged from curiosity to hostility. Bernhard Rosenfeld explains how his carers asked him to remove his cap 'to see if Jews really did have horns'.[27] Indeed, this appears to be a commonly reported story in countryside settings. Anita Alpern, who was based in rural Devon, recalled a comparable experience: the people there 'didn't know what Jews were. They wouldn't have been a bit surprised if we did have the horns. They didn't understand the concept of being Jewish at all.'[28] Likewise, Dora Sklut's account describes a similar experience after she reached England with help from the Red Cross and was then evacuated to the countryside:

> ***In the country, they found me out with a Baptist family. Now, they had never seen Jewish people before. They were nice people in their own way, but they didn't know any better. And the husband wanted to know what a Jew, what it was like. They really believed – this is not a joke – he thought Jews had horns. I couldn't understand. I said, "Do I look like I have horns?", I thought he was joking. No, he actually believed that.***[29]

This attitude of ignorance and prejudice is summed up by Marion Charles, who arrived on a Kindertransport in 1938. She remembered how one of her carers casually says: 'I actually don't like Jews, you know. [...] Mind you, I've never met any Jews before, you are the first, and so far you don't appear to be like the other Jews'.[30] Anti-Semitic discrimination was not only manifested in words, but also through actions. Dora Sklut described the neglect she faced when living with a Baptist family as an evacuee:

> ***Well, the winters still were absolutely terrible: snow and cold. She locked me out of the house. And no other children. They were all inside. [...] She locked me out, and I was freezing. I was standing there in my coat and shivering. It was so bad. And I was lonely. There was nobody out there except me and the snow. Well, I got very tired of this. But other than that, they didn't mistreat me. They gave me food, and she was taking care of everything else.***[31]

This account suggests clear neglect and mistreatment perhaps fuelled by anti-Semitism. Despite the upset caused, Dora feels the need to defend her carers and express her gratitude. This is not uncommon in accounts of neglect given by this cohort of child refugees, who may feel gratitude to their host country is something that is expected of them. This gratitude often obscures the full impact of the emotional and physical neglect they might have experienced. Anti-Semitic treatment at the hands of guardians might have been only occasional, or else seen as just one part of their character.

Fig. 5

Examining these experiences of anti-Semitism enables us to better understand the environments in which children are most susceptible to racist language and what might be done to avoid situations like these repeating themselves in the case of current refugees to the UK. There is a clear need to educate potential carers, as well as the general population, about the refugees' culture, potential faith practices, and reason for their flight. This will help to break down stereotypes held about certain religions and refugees in general. Having a community formed by those who share the refugees' background or religion would also provide a support network for these refugees, as well as go some way to make the refugees' beliefs or backgrounds seem less 'other' to those in less diverse communities. Benno Black insisted he did not experience anti-Semitism in England because 'there was a small Jewish community' close by.[32] Local communities and faith groups should work together to emphasise the similarities between religions and cultures, and to show acceptance of those who are different, which in turn might counteract deep-seated prejudices that are based on emphasising and establishing difference.

To support child refugees experiencing any form of racism or bullying, it would be beneficial to have well-established safe systems for the child to express any concerns, regardless of the severity of abuse. The child needs to learn safe ways to respond psychologically as well as socially to racist expressions or actions, and if necessary, remove themselves from the situation. Care must be taken to ensure these methods do not amplify the situation by making the child a 'tattler' in the eyes of its peers. In addition, the child refugee needs to be informed and have explained in detail the mores and expectations of the British people wherever they are placed.

The child refugees might also benefit from having a reliable contact, perhaps of the same background or religion, who they are able to meet with regularly outside of the home environment. This proved helpful to Marion Charles: a Jewish acquaintance was able to make her realise that her guardian was anti-Semitic and that it would be best for her to find another placement.[33] When helping refugees settle into their new home, organizations should avoid suggesting that children should be grateful. If the refugees are constantly expected to be grateful for what they have received in the UK, it is possible that adverse experiences and mistreatment are internalized and not vocalized. Instead, counselling, perhaps in groups, should be offered to refugees, allowing a safe space for them to speak up if something is upsetting them.

'Soft' or 'veiled' racist comments or underhanded remarks – both in regard to religion, anti-Semitic slurs, and in terms of the way refugees are spoken about – are perhaps more difficult to deal with. Whilst the child refugees often ignored such 'silly' remarks, however hurtful they were, it is time to start challenging such general, prejudicial assumptions and comments. Instead of ignoring or brushing aside such comments, we should question those who make such remarks in our daily lives, making the speakers repeat what they say and thereby encouraging them to reconsider their choice of words. Bea Green, a child refugee from National Socialism, also felt the frustration of not being able to confront or argue with someone who was clearly anti-Semitic. When remembering a former fellow student who had Nazi sympathies, she recalls:

> *He took up again his original ideas of, you know, the* Herrenvolk *and superior... racial superiority and all of that and spouted this publicly. When he realised that it upset me [...] he said, "Well, you know, you're alright", you know, the argument you're alright, it's all the other Jews. And I remember there – because of the way he spoke – one couldn't actually argue against him, because there was nothing tangible to argue; it was an attitude which was so entrenched and so profoundly ill thought out, that certainly at that stage there was nothing, I felt there was nothing I could do about Stan Price. So, I remember I walked down to the beach – I don't know if you know Aberystwyth but it's a pebbly beach not a sandy beach – and I sat on the pebbles and wept into the sea. I was just so frustrated and so upset thinking that here I'd come away from this thing only to meet it again.*[34]

Anti-foreign discrimination and abuse

Kindertransportee Kurt Fuchel explained that whilst anti-Semitic comments or behaviour were often veiled or disguised, anti-German or anti-foreign feelings were sometimes easier to detect. He recalled how 'people would think I was German, so there would be resentment against that, but they eventually learned the difference between those Germans and others.'[35]

Possible public resentment against German-speaking individuals appears to have been openly discussed in refugee groups at the time. Benno Black, who arrived in June 1939, recalled how the man from the Jewish Refugee Committee 'called us all into the office [...] he said, "Don't speak German on the street in public," because he's heard complaints about it. "People don't like it, because we're at war with Germany. So don't speak German." From then on, we started speaking English. And it came fast after that. [...] When I was in the British army. They advised me to change my name to an English sounding name.'[36]

Many children were forced or encouraged to change their name to something less German or less foreign. While this effort may appear to be a practical decision, its impact is an effort to remove or dismiss the culture and ethnic persona of the child. Benno, after spending the first nine months in a camp, Barham House, after arriving in Britain, was sent with two other boys to live with an elderly couple in Northampton where the landlady told them, '"That sounds too German. I'm going to give you three boys English names."' He continues: 'So my name was Reginald or Reg for short. And the other boy's name was Günther. He became John. And the other boy's name was Karl, and he became Peter.'[37]

Following the outbreak of war in particular, many children experienced some anti-German prejudice. This was not uncommon in school settings, where other children saw the refugee first and foremost as German speaking without fully understanding what had caused them to flee or the fact that they might not identify as German. Wrapped up in an 'us vs. them' mentality as Britain declared itself at war, many school children would taunt and tease their German-speaking classmates. These comments were still hurtful even though the child refugees often realised the irony of how they had to leave Germany because they were not considered German but Jewish, yet in the UK they were seen as the German enemy who is sympathetic to Hitler's regime. A number of child refugees reflect on how they were treated by their classmates. Martha Blend wrote about how her classmates decided she was a German spy after hearing her surname, Immerdauer. They made her life 'as uncomfortable as possible' and used to chase her, try to trip her up and punch her after school.[38] Primary school boy Paul Schoenmann played truant because of the discrimination and bullying experienced from his school mates.[39]

Marion Charles recalled how the girls in her class would whisper loudly 'stupid German' or '*Hunnin*'.[40] Charles' account, however, also shows how the teacher's reaction had a positive influence. The teacher explained Marion's situation to the other children, and the bullying then stopped. How

the refugees were treated by authority figures in front of others clearly had a huge impact and is something that we should be aware of when assessing the relationships between teachers and refugees today. Kurt Treitel's account, however, shows how those in the positions of power may actively discriminate against those they perceive as different. In May 1940, Kurt Trietel's 11-year-old brother Gunther was expelled from school for being German:

> *[W]e got a letter from this headmaster saying that in view of the events which have occurred on the continent, he did not feel that he could any longer harbor a German boy in his house. So there was this strange situation that at one time we weren't wanted because we were Jews; now he wasn't wanted because he was German.*[41]

Anti-refugee discrimination and abuse

By examining accounts given by child refugees of the 1930s it is striking to see that discrimination or othering in the form of anti-refugee feeling was potentially the most common, or at least the most remembered. This form of othering is likely to have been felt more potently in everyday life, and the child refugees might have come up against such comments for many years. For many refugees, both children and adults alike, this was often the most painful feeling of exclusion, which amplified feelings of non-belonging that some refugees felt their whole lives. Where Jewish refugees might have gained strength from God or their faith community when facing anti-Semitism, those refugees facing comments about their refugee status or the fact that they were different often felt frustrated and helpless, especially considering their attempts to fit into British society.

Interviews with former child refugees reveal how this feeling of being different and excluded in some way continued throughout their adult lives. Lord Claus Moser, for example, explained: 'I haven't suffered from antisemitism. I have suffered, as I said, from occasional experiences where it's clear that people think I'm part of a minority, namely a refugee minority.'[42] When reminiscing upon his time in Whitehall and his decision to leave before Thatcher's leadership, Claus Moser admitted to feeling like an outsider despite having lived and worked for many years for the government:

> *It was a sort of reminder that "once a refugee, always a refugee", which I strongly believe in anyway. That was Whitehall, but I had a great time. [...] It was no antisemitism, but I felt that I was within a group of people who were absolutely traditional, and I was a bit of an outsider.*[43]

When looking at the childhood experiences, it appears the children were particularly sensitive about their refugee status. Martha Blend wrote about her desire to be 'a normal member of the class': 'To my recently acquired title of "the refugee" was now added another: "the evacuee". I hated both heartily'.[44] Similarly, Ilse Kagan, who fled to Britain as an 11-year-old, expressed in an interview how her guardian 'would always introduce me as this little refugee child. And I couldn't stand it. And rather than go with them, I stayed home. It shows you how much – how unhappy I really was with my situation.'[45]

For many years Martha Blend preferred to stay a 'closet refugee'. She explains: 'I felt profoundly ill-at-ease about revealing my true identity, mainly because the subject had become taboo with me, but also because of unconscious fears of what prejudices I might arouse if I were too open.'[46] This suggests that she was aware of anti-refugee attitudes, just as the Jewish community was cautious of igniting anti-Semitic feeling in their local communities and on a national scale.

Instead of rejecting her refugee identity, as much as she despised the label, Ilse Kagan ended up embracing it and found support in a hostel environment with a group of other girls who were also refugees. Although her account is positive in that it celebrates the unity of the group, it does highlight their exclusion from British society:

> *Living in a hostel was wonderful in a way, but it was totally isolated. We were very strong and supportive of each other, but we lived in an island and once you're outside of that island, it was a totally different world. We were the refugee group. We were not people. We were not children. We were refugees. We were totally different. Happy among ourselves; as happy as could be.*[47]

As mentioned in the previous report on children from National Socialism and ACEs, this group of children highly valued the support of other individuals in the same situation as themselves, and this often helped them cope with forms of discrimination directed towards them. A group setting, such as a school or hostel, in which there are several refugees tends to minimize the likelihood of discrimination.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PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

Name KRESS, Renate,

Sex Female Date of Birth 7-7-33.

Place PRAGUE.

Full Names and Address of Parents

KRESS, Otto Heinz & Hilda,
6 Kostelni,
PRAGUE VII

BRITISH COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN
IN PRAGUE.

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Fig. 6

Learning for the present and the future

Most child refugees of the 1930s feel they carry a responsibility regarding lessons that can be learnt from their experiences. This is why many choose to publicly tell or record their life history. Kurt Fuchel wrote: 'The hope is that the telling of our stories followed by action will help ensure that there will always be kind hearts and warm homes to welcome refugee children on whatever shores history casts them.'[48]

By learning more about the historic experiences of child refugees, their positive and their negative experiences, we hope to inform current policy and practice. Most child refugees of the 1930s mentioned in this report became part of UK society and local communities, and they made a diverse and valuable contribution to life in the UK. These include prominent individuals such as Lord Claus Moser and the children's author Judith Kerr but also numerous less well-known individuals whose stories are equally important. Refugees telling of ordinary lives with challenges and successes make us able to empathize. Awareness of refugee history will be able to show the benefits of offering refuge in different UK communities.

As was the case in the 1930s, we will have little control over the ACEs a child experiences pre-migration, but we are able to influence what happens once a child refugee arrives in the UK. It is evident that preparation in all settings is key: adults and children in schools, as well as foster families and communities need to be prepared for the political and social complexity of the child refugee's background, their likely experiences in their originating countries, and their experiences of flight and forced migration. Adults and children must be made aware of how to avoid discrimination, bullying behaviour and verbal abuse. Racist and discriminatory language must be called out and examined, and the ignorance or deep-seated prejudices fuelling these racial slurs needs addressing on micro, meso and macro levels of our society.

Cultural, religious, and linguistic experiences must be respected. The overwhelming desire to 'assimilate' child refugees in the 1930s had negative consequences for their sense of identity and belonging. The description of being made to change their names to more English-sounding ones appears extreme to us today, but many such practices of forcing British culture on individuals at all costs are still taking place today. There is little support for the education of children in their community languages, something that is in government policy in other countries such as Australia.

Child refugees benefit from being in contact with other refugees, preferably adult and other child refugees, who understand the difficulties of forced migration. At the same time, child refugees should be given every opportunity to interact with the host community and not simply be placed with other refugees for convenience. For example, Kindertransportee Martha Blend described how there were two class assemblies: one for the Christian children and a separate one for Jewish children – a decision she describes as 'divisive'.[49]

The placement of child refugees must be carefully considered. There should be a careful vetting of carers, and approved carers should be given detailed information about the refugee's country of origin, culture, and their possible adverse pre-migration experiences. Refugee organisations should ensure there is some sort of local community consisting of other refugees or people who originated from the same country, who speak the same language, or who practise the same religion.

Connection to community groups separate to the accommodation arrangements or host family allows the child refugee some sort of supported independence and increases their support network so that they are not fully dependent on one person or family. This might make it easier for them to remove themselves from possible harmful situations in the host family or to talk about any concerns to do with their guardians, should they arise.

Stable relationships with adults that can mitigate against negative and discriminatory experiences and who can act as advocates is seen to be very effective especially in school and local community

settings. Refugee organisations might work closer with headteachers and provide them with resources, ideally before the arrival of the refugees. Working with and supporting the child refugee in constructively managing incidences may ameliorate the potential damage to a developing child. It is impossible to remove racism and harmful discrimination from society, but it can be understood and addressed bit by bit. Some sort of counselling, individually or as a group, is also likely to benefit the refugee and allow them to express any concerns they have to professionals in a safe space. This is what child refugees to Britain in the 1930s lacked. If the children had had the space to discuss such instances of exclusion or discrimination, incidents of anti-Semitism might have been more easily identified and the long-term impact of such events could have been reduced.

Ultimately, safety and sanctuary are human rights, and they should not only be offered in return for unrealistic expectations of gratitude, which may in turn prevent child refugees from speaking out against racism and discrimination.

Fig. 7

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