



**Bridging  
Occupational Gaps**  
with **Refugees & Asylum Seekers**

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University Cyprus**

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**Occupation-centered interventions to  
enhance participation in everyday activities  
for refugee children: a systematic review.**

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# Introduction



**Global displacement at unprecedented levels.**

*(UNHCR, 2025; Appleby, 2025)*

**Refugee children are among the most vulnerable.**

*(Alipui & Gerke, 2018)*

**Forced displacement disrupts family life, routines, and participation.**

*(Nagem & Cid, 2025; Fabianek et al., 2023; Trimboli et al., 2023)*

**Occupation-centered interventions promote participation and inclusion through meaningful everyday activities.**

*(Thornton & Spalding, 2018; Hassan et al., 2024; Main et al., 2021a)*

**Parental involvement and shared goal-setting enhance children's participation.**

*(An et al., 2019; Rebold et al., 2016)*

# Literature review

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## ➤ What has been studied

Mental health, parenting, and family functioning in refugee families

*(Bunn et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2022)*

## ➤ Identified gap

Limited synthesis on children's participation in everyday occupations and occupation-centered interventions

*(Hinkley et al., 2022; Nagem & Cid, 2025)*

## ➤ Objective

To examine the effects of occupation-centered interventions on displaced children's participation in everyday occupations

# Method & Design

## Reporting and registration

- PRISMA guidelines followed
- PROSPERO: CRD42024590280

## Search and screening

- PICO-based search strategy (with university librarian)
- Databases: **PubMed, Scopus, EBSCO, APA PsycInfo**
- Reference list hand-searching
- Multi-stage screening by multiple reviewers

# Method & Design

## **Inclusion criteria:**

- Occupation-centered, child- or family-focused interventions
- Forcibly displaced children and/or families
- Outcomes assessing children's participation (OTPF-4)
- English language publications (2000–2024)

## **Eligible study designs:**

- Randomized, non-randomized, mixed-methods, and qualitative studies

## **Synthesis & quality appraisal**

- Thematic synthesis focused on participation in everyday activities
- Quality appraisal: RoB 2, JBI, MMAT, GRADE-CERQual

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# RESULTS

## Flow Chart

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**Identification**

n = 13677



**Screening**

n = 9161



**Eligibility**

n=76



**Included**

n=15

# Characteristics of included studies

<b>Study designs</b>	7 RCTs · 5 non-RCTs · 2 mixed-methods · 1 qualitative
<b>Interventions Type</b>	1 study occupation – centered, 14 studies centered on occupation
<b>Participants</b>	6,826 forcibly displaced children · adolescents · caregivers
<b>Countries</b>	Jordan · Turkey · Canada · U.S. · Malaysia · Uganda · Netherlands
<b>Settings</b>	Refugee settlements · Schools · Community · Home-based · Remote
<b>Professionals</b>	OTs · Mental health professionals · Teachers · Social workers · Creative arts therapists · Community members
<b>Risk of bias</b>	Mostly moderate · Limited blinding · Incomplete follow-up

**Child-centered interventions**  
(n = 11)

**Type of intervention:**

Creative / play-based / expressive (art, drama, music, play), Psychosocial / behavioural group programs, Occupation-centered (telerehabilitation OT), Community-level child protection, school-based

**Primary aim:**

Enhance participation in social, school, leisure, and daily activities, Support emotional regulation, peer interaction, and engagement in meaningful occupations

**Family-centered interventions**  
(n = 4)

**Type of intervention:**

Family-based mental health programs, Parenting and caregiver support interventions, Culturally tailored parent programs

**Primary aim:**

Strengthen family routines and relationships, Support children's participation through caregiver involvement and engagement

OTPF-4 Domain	Outcome Measures	Overall Findings	Indicative Studies
Social Participation	SDQ, CAFAS, interviews	Mostly significant	Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Rousseau et al., 2012; Pejic et al., 2022; Shaw et al., 2021
Education	SDQ, CAFAS, OBQ11, PedsQL	Mostly significant	Belhan Çelik et al., 2022; Birman et al., 2008; Doumit et al., 2020; Rafla et al., 2024
Leisure & Play	OBQ11, interviews	Mixed	Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Belhan Çelik et al., 2022; Heynen et al., 2022; Rafla et al., 2024
Rest/ sleep	OBQ11	Significant (few studies)	Belhan Çelik et al., 2022

OTPF-4 Domain	Outcome Measures	Overall Findings	Indicative Studies
ADLs / IADLs	OBQ11, ASQ-3	Limited	Belhan Çelik et al., 2022; Rafla et al., 2024; Birman et al., 2008; Pejic et al., 2022; Rousseau et al., 2009
Health Manangement	IRRs	Significant but limited	Jordans & van den Broek, 2024
Work	HI, HD, AYMH, PSS, SDQ	Significant (very limited)	Panter-Brick et al., 2018
Unspecified daily activities	DFS	No significant	Bryant et al., 2022

# DISCUSSION

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## **Frequently Targeted Domains:**

Education & Social participation

- Align with the developmental and inclusion needs of refugee children (Trimboli et al., 2023)

## **Underrepresented Domains:**

Health management, Rest & sleep ,Work & Play

- Limited measurement of these outcomes
- Use of tools overlooking informal, domestic, or pre-vocational activities
- Play often undervalued in post-crisis contexts
- Use of non-population-specific tools
- Emphasis on Western perceptions of meaningful occupations (Casey & McKendrick, 2023; Fler, 2009; Leufstadius et al., 2024)

## Discussion

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### Explaining Variability in Participation Outcomes

- Variation in intervention design and intensity
- Cultural and contextual relevance
- Group-based vs individual delivery formats (Panter-Brick et al., 2017)
- Duration and follow-up limitations
- Structural and sociopolitical constraints of displacement (Malfitano & Lopes, 2018)

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# Discussion

## Methodological & Measurement Challenges

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Participation often measured indirectly

Limited use of culturally informed assessment tools

High methodological heterogeneity

Predominantly moderate risk of bias across studies

Minimal involvement of occupational therapists

# Critical Analysis of Meaningful Participation

Participation  
predominantly  
measured  
indirectly through  
psychosocial and  
behavioral  
outcomes

Sociopolitical and  
structural  
constraints shaping  
participation  
remain  
underexplored

Reliance on  
Western-developed  
tools limits cultural  
and contextual  
validity

Evidence of  
colonially  
influenced research  
methodologies

Qualitative  
approaches better  
captured socially  
embedded and  
contextually  
relevant  
participation

## Limitations

- Considerable methodological heterogeneity across included studies
- Moderate risk of bias limiting the strength of conclusions
- Limited number of occupation-centered interventions and participation-focused outcomes

## Implications

- Advocate for context-sensitive, occupation-centered interventions targeting meaningful everyday activities
- Implement culturally informed and refugee-specific assessment tools to enhance meaningful participation
- Co-create socially responsive & emancipatory interventions with families, addressing sociocultural and structural factors

# Future research & Conclusion

- ❖ Limited but encouraging evidence for occupation-centered participation outcomes
- ❖ Need for methodologically robust and occupation-centered studies
- ❖ Greater focus on contextual and structural determinants of participation



# Thank you!



References available at:

<https://jumpshare.com/s/zKsg0Uezq1QdVS5JP13t>



[bridgingotgaps.euc.ac.cy](http://bridgingotgaps.euc.ac.cy)



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