WP2 - Training Kit and Trainings for VET Professionals

Handbook

Activity 2

Developed by

Training Kit for Trainers: Mental Well-being Support for Refugee Participants in Vocational-Educational Settings

Content

I.   Introduction of the project NewFuture – Better mental wellbeing for the refugees in their new future

Goals of the Project

The New Future project is designed specifically for vocational education and training (VET) professionals who work closely with course participants entitled to asylum and aims to equip these professionals with skills to correctly interpret certain emergency situations, provide appropriate support, improve cultural competences and better understand and respect specific refugee cultures.

In addition to supporting VET professionals, the New Future project is dedicated to raising awareness among refugees about their mental health, promoting self-presentation and self-reflection, and empowering potential volunteers and community leaders. By doing so, New Future seeks to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for both VET professionals and the refugees they work with.

These objectives are primarily achieved through the development of a comprehensive "Training Kit for Trainers," the implementation of "Train the Trainers" sessions, national workshops, pilot projects, and the creation of a framework for a guide aimed at volunteers and community leaders.

Training Kit for Trainers: goals & parts

The comprehensive training kit is equally for VET providers and VET professionals, refugees, asylum seekers and community volunteers and leaders. It offers training materials for educators, aimed at fostering supportive learning environments.

- A handbook consisting of 10 comprehensive modules, designed to equip trainers with theoretical background, knowledge and skills to integrate vocational education and training (VET) with mental health support, in order to foster a supportive environment that encourages personal and professional growth,
- A Toolbox offering training materials and techniques for implementation in group training, including exercises related to the 10 modules for train-the-trainer settings or training of refugees and asylum seekers,
- A Methodology Guide with a detailed outline of the training sessions
- Presentations for the visualization of the units of the handbook
- Engaging animated videos to promote mental wellbeing and mental health awareness

How to use the Training Kit?

Based on the Methodology Guide with the training outlines, relevant topics for their work with the final beneficiaries can be selected from the handbook by VET professional and implemented in their group training, applying the allocated exercises from the Toolbox, the presentations for visualization of the contents and the animated videos into the training of refugees.

II. Challenges to mental health and wellbeing of refugees

1. Context of asylum in the partner countries

(psycho-social-cultural considerations)

Refugees coming in the EU encounter numerous hurdles that can jeopardise their integration and well-being. These problems are usually divided into three categories: socioeconomic integration, linguistic barriers, and mental health. Migration itself does not count as a risk factor for health, but the circumstances of migration are often associated with physical, mental, and social health disorders.

Across the partner countries, there are significant efforts to support the psycho-social and cultural needs of refugees. While the extent and quality of these services vary, each country emphasizes the importance of mental health support, cultural sensitivity, and social integration. Collaborative efforts between government agencies and non-profit organizations are essential to address the complex needs of refugees and facilitate their successful integration into society.

2. Data about refugees and the labour market

(based on the SoA Report)

The employment landscape for refugees in the EU is complex and varies across MS. Despite efforts, refugees face lower employment rates compared to EU citizens. These rates gradually improve as refugees integrate into their host countries (EC's Joint Research Centre, 2023).

Employment Rates and Patterns:

- Initially lower, refugee employment rates improve over time. The initial years are crucial as refugees navigate legal, language, and cultural barriers (Eurostat, 2023).

- Inclusive labour market policies and robust integration programs, like those in Germany, contribute to higher employment rates among refugees (European Website on Integration, 2023).

Demographic and Geographic Variations:

- Younger and male refugees have higher employment rates than older refugees and females, influenced such factors as flexibility and family (Eurostat, 2023).
- Northern/Western Europe, including Sweden and the Netherlands, shows higher refugee employment rates due to comprehensive integration policies (EC, 2023).

Types of Employment and Sectoral Distribution:

- Refugees are often in agriculture, manufacturing, and low-skilled service jobs, due to immediate job availability and less language requirements (Eurostat, 2023).
- Many refugees, particularly those with professional qualifications, face a mismatch between skills and available jobs, often due to credential recognition challenges.

Employment Integration Over Time:

- Refugee employment prospects improve with integration programs that include language training and skills recognition. Countries investing in such programs see quicker improvements.
- Longitudinal studies show that the longer refugees stay in an EU country, the more likely they are to find stable and skill-appropriate employment, underscoring the importance of long-term integration strategies (European Commission, 2023).

3. The major mental wellbeing and/or mental health challenges faced by refugees in regard to labour market entry in their fields of expertise or according to their educational status

(based on the SoA Report)

What are the current challenges faced by refugees in the EU?

- The mental and emotional well-being of refugees in EU countries is significantly impacted by a range of factors, including pre-migration experiences, the migration journey, post-migration factors, and specific circumstances.
- Refugees coming in the EU encounter numerous hurdles that can jeopardise their integration and well-being. These problems are usually divided into three categories: socioeconomic integration, linguistic barriers, and mental health. Migration itself does not count as a risk factor for health, but the circumstances of migration are often associated with physical, mental, and social health disorders.
- One of the most significant problems that refugees encounter is finding work and achieving economic self-sufficiency. This can be attributed to several factors, including 1) accreditation of qualifications (refugees may struggle to have their foreign qualifications recognised in the EU, limiting their employment opportunities); 2) language barriers (language proficiency is often a prerequisite for securing employment in the EU, which means that refugees may face difficulties in learning the local language, especially if they lack prior exposure); 3) lack of work experience (refugees who left their home countries abruptly may not have the work experience required by employers in the EU). Adding to these are other limitations to more vulnerable people, such as women, older and disabled refugees. The fit between skills levels and jobs remains problematic, threatening de-skilling and depression of the refugees.
- Furthermore, because language proficiency is essential for effective communication, social integration, and employment opportunities, refugees frequently face challenges in learning the local language due to: 1) limited or no access to language courses (refugee camps and reception centres may not have adequate language training facilities); 2) cultural differences (unfamiliarity with local cultural norms and idioms can further complicate language acquisition); and 3) psychological barriers

(the trauma of displacement and resettlement can hinder refugees' motivation and focus on language learning).

How has migration, war, or other traumatic events impacted the mental and emotional well-being of refugees in these countries?

- Pre-migration experiences such as persecution, violence, loss of loved ones, and traumatic events can cause severe psychological distress, leading to PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders, and other mental health problems. These events are usually associated with migrants crossing the EU external borders in an irregular manner in the hope of creating a better future for themselves and their families. A 2022 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) inquiry found out that two out of three refugee women and one out of two men reported depression, anxiety or panic attacks, difficulties in sleeping and concentrating, or loss of self-confidence or feeling vulnerable.

- Furthermore, specific circumstances also impact the mental and emotional well-being of refugees, such as cultural and ethnic differences, with refugees facing difficulties adapting to a new culture and integrating into a different social environment, leading to feelings of isolation, alienation, and cultural shock and language barriers, since the inability to communicate effectively in the host language can hinder social interactions, access to services, and employment opportunities, contributing to feelings of isolation, frustration, and marginalisation.

4. Key principles for promoting mental health/mental wellbeing among refugees

Addressing the mental wellbeing of refugees in vocational-educational trainings in the European Union is of crucial importance for several reasons:

- Firstly, refugees often face significant mental health challenges due to the trauma they have experienced in their home countries and during their journeys to the EU. These challenges can greatly affect their ability to successfully participate in vocational-educational trainings and ultimately integrate into the host society.

- Secondly, mental wellbeing is not solely the absence of mental illness, but also the presence of positive qualities that contribute to resilience and overall well-being. By addressing mental wellbeing, vocational-educational trainings can provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes the participants' engagement, motivation, and sense of purpose.

- Moreover, attending to the mental wellbeing of refugees can also enhance the overall effectiveness of vocational-educational trainings by improving participants' ability to manage stress and adapt to new environments. Ultimately, prioritizing mental wellbeing in vocational-educational trainings for refugees can contribute to their successful integration, improved mental wellbeing and mental health outcomes, and overall well-being in the European Union.

III.   Training Modules

Module 1 - Understanding Trauma and Resilience

Learning Objectives:

- Define what refugee trauma is and identify its various causes and triggers
- Identify the psychological consequences of refugee trauma
- Understand the concept of resilience and how refugees cope with their trauma
- Acquire practical strategies and techniques to strengthen refugees resilience

Topics/content:

- Understanding refugee trauma, its causes and triggers
- How do refugees cope with their difficult experiences? – Introducing resilience
- Key strategies and techniques to strengthen refugees' resilience

What is refugee trauma? – understanding the concept

Refugee trauma refers to the psychological and emotional distress experienced by individuals who have been forced to flee their home countries due to conflict, persecution, or violence. This trauma encompasses a range of adverse experiences, including exposure to life-threatening situations, loss of loved ones, separation from family, displacement, and the challenges of adapting to new environments.
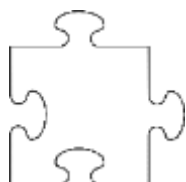
Understanding refugee trauma is crucial for VET professionals because it enables them to provide empathetic and effective support tailored to the unique needs of refugees, facilitating their integration and learning process. This awareness also helps professionals create a safe and inclusive environment that acknowledges and addresses the psychological challenges refugees may face.

Defining refugee trauma is essential as it provides a foundational understanding that helps VET professionals recognise the complex psychological and emotional challenges refugees face, enabling more targeted and effective interventions. Refugees commonly experience trauma types such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety, often triggered by exposure to violence, loss of loved ones, and displacement. VET professionals can use educational tools like slides, handouts, expert talks, and real-life testimonials to convey this information, offering a comprehensive and engaging learning experience that enhances their ability to support refugees effectively.

Specific causes and triggers of refugee trauma

Understanding the common causes and triggers of refugee trauma is vital for VET professionals, as it equips them with the knowledge needed to provide empathetic and effective support, addressing the specific psychological challenges refugees face in their journey towards recovery and integration.

The following are the most common types of causes and triggers of refugee trauma:

- **Conflict-related trauma:** it involves the psychological and emotional distress caused by exposure to war, armed conflict, or civil unrest. Refugees often witness or experience direct violence, including bombings, shootings, and other life-threatening events. This type of trauma can lead to severe anxiety, hypervigilance, and PTSD, as individuals struggle to cope with the

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memories and fear induced by such horrific experiences. For example, A Syrian refugee who fled after witnessing the destruction of their neighbourhood by bombings, resulting in ongoing nightmares and anxiety about loud noises.

- **Displacement and loss:** it involves trauma stemming from the forced removal from one's home and community. Refugees often leave behind their homes, belongings, jobs, and social networks, leading to a profound sense of loss and instability. The uncertainty about the future and the struggle to rebuild a life in an unfamiliar place can cause significant stress, depression, and a feeling of rootlessness. For example, A family from South Sudan forced to leave their village due to civil war, experiencing profound grief over losing their home, community, and way of life.

- **Separation from family:** it occurs when refugees are separated from their loved ones during their journey to safety. This separation can be temporary or permanent, and the uncertainty surrounding the well-being of family members can cause intense emotional pain, loneliness, and anxiety. The lack of familiar support exacerbates feelings of isolation and can hinder the healing process. For example, an Afghan teenager who travelled alone to seek asylum, enduring emotional distress and loneliness due to being separated from his/her parents.

- **Violence and persecution:** this trauma is experienced by refugees who have fled systemic violence and targeted persecution based on their ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, or other personal characteristics. The fear and reality of being targeted and harmed can lead to deep-seated mistrust, chronic fear, and a pervasive sense of insecurity, even after reaching a place of safety. For example, a Rohingya refugee escaping targeted violence in Myanmar, struggling with deep mistrust and fear despite reaching a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

- **Acculturation stress: i**t refers to the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture and environment. Refugees face challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation, which can lead to feelings of frustration, confusion, and helplessness. The process of acculturation can be stressful as refugees strive to integrate into a new society while preserving their cultural identity. For example, a Congolese refugee in the United States of America facing challenges in learning English and adapting to cultural norms, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

- **Survivor guilt: i**t is the feeling of guilt experienced by refugees who have survived life-threatening situations when others, including loved ones, did not. This type of trauma is characterised by a sense of unworthiness and self-blame, as survivors struggle with the question of why they were spared. Survivor guilt can impede the healing process and contribute to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. For example, a Bosnian refugee who survived ethnic cleansing, grappling with guilt over surviving when many friends and family members did not, affecting his/her mental health and sense of self-worth.
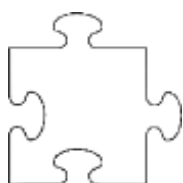
Understanding the specific causes and triggers of refugee trauma is crucial for VET professionals to tailor their support effectively, and the use of case studies can provide practical insights into real-life situations, offering diverse scenarios that highlight specific causes and triggers of trauma, thereby enhancing their ability to address the unique needs of refugees.

How can trainers identify the psychological consequences of refugee trauma?

The psychological consequences of refugee trauma encompass a range of severe mental health challenges that significantly impact the daily lives and well-being of individuals who have experienced displacement and adversity. It is crucial for VET professionals to identify and address each type of trauma to ensure that refugees receive the appropriate support and interventions necessary for their mental health recovery and successful integration into new environments.

Refugee trauma can lead to severe mental health issues such as:

- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**: it is characterised by severe anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, and intrusive thoughts related to traumatic events. Refugees with PTSD may experience hypervigilance, emotional numbness, and difficulty concentrating, significantly impairing their daily functioning. VET professionals should look for signs of hypervigilance and emotional numbness and provide a calm and structured environment that encourages open communication and offers access to mental health resources.

- **Depression**: it involves persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities. Refugees experiencing depression may struggle with low energy, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide, hindering their ability to engage in daily life. Be attentive to persistent sadness and withdrawal, and create supportive spaces where refugees feel comfortable sharing their feelings, while also connecting them with counselling services.

- **Anxiety**: it encompasses excessive worry, fear, and nervousness. Refugees with anxiety may experience panic attacks, constant worry about safety and the future, and physical symptoms like a racing heart and difficulty breathing, affecting their overall quality of life. VET professionals should recognize symptoms like excessive worry and panic attacks and employ relaxation techniques and stress-reduction activities to help refugees manage their anxiety.

- **Adjustment disorder**: it arises from difficulty adjusting to significant life changes or stressors, such as resettling in a new country. Symptoms include emotional distress, irritability, and behavioural issues, making it challenging for refugees to adapt to new environments and routines. Notice signs of irritability and behavioural changes and facilitate orientation sessions and peer support groups to assist refugees in adapting to their new environment.

- **Somatic symptom disorder**: it involves experiencing physical symptoms, such as pain or fatigue, that cannot be fully explained by medical conditions. Refugees with this disorder often focus excessively on their symptoms, leading to significant distress and impairment in their daily activities. Pay attention to unexplained physical complaints and encourage a holistic approach that includes both medical evaluations and psychological support to address underlying emotional issues.

Supporting resilience and coping mechanisms among refugees

Resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt, and recover from adversity, challenges, and significant sources of stress. It encompasses the psychological, emotional, and social strengths that individuals draw upon to navigate difficult situations and bounce back from hardships. Resilience involves a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of trauma, adversity, or significant stressors, enabling individuals to maintain or regain mental well-being and functionality.

This capacity for resilience is influenced by various factors, which collectively contribute to an individual's ability to cope with and overcome life's challenges. For refugees, the following factors can be put forwards as crucial examples of trauma coping mechanisms that can be supported by VET professionals:

- **Social support:** building relationships with family, friends, and community members provides belonging and security. Support groups and networks offer emotional support, practical help, and shared experiences. A supportive social network reduces isolation, promotes well-being, and enhances resilience by offering a safe space for expressing emotions and receiving empathy. VET professionals can create inclusive learning environments that encourage peer interaction and collaboration, facilitating the formation of supportive relationships among refugees. They can also organise group activities and workshops that promote community building and mutual support.

- **Mental health services:** access to counselling, psychotherapy, and psychiatric care helps individuals process trauma and develop coping strategies. Specialized therapies like cognitive-behavioural therapy address PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Mental health professionals educate on trauma and resilience, empowering refugees to manage their mental health, fostering recovery, and enabling them to rebuild their lives. VET professionals can partner with mental health providers to offer counselling and therapy sessions on-site or provide referrals to specialised services. They can also integrate mental health awareness and resilience training into their programmes to help refugees understand and manage their mental health.

- **Cultural and spiritual practices:** engaging in cultural traditions and religious practices provides continuity, identity, and comfort. These activities help process grief, find meaning, and foster hope. Community services, prayer, meditation, and traditional ceremonies help refugees reconnect with their cultural roots and spiritual beliefs, offering solace and control amid uncertainty and loss. VET professionals can acknowledge and respect cultural and spiritual practices by allowing space for these activities within the training schedule. They can incorporate cultural awareness into the curriculum and invite community leaders to share insights, helping refugees maintain their cultural identity.

- **Physical activity:** regular exercise, like walking, yoga, or team sports, reduces stress, anxiety, and depression by releasing endorphins and improving sleep and physical health. It fosters social connections, provides routine, and offers a constructive outlet for emotions, contributing to overall mental and physical well-being. VET professionals can include physical activities in their programmes, such as organising sports events, yoga sessions, or walking groups. These activities can be part of the curriculum or offered as extracurricular options to promote physical health and social interaction.

As a VET professional, understanding resilience and trauma coping mechanisms is vital as it equips them to support refugees in building psychological and emotional resilience, essential for successful integration and learning. In a VET context, professionals can support refugees by facilitating social support networks, providing access to mental health resources, incorporating cultural and spiritual practices into training programmes, and encouraging physical activities to promote overall well-being.
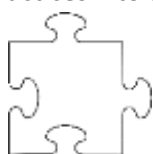
Incorporating creative activities like art, music, and writing into VET programmes is crucial for professionals as it provides refugees with non-verbal outlets to express emotions, process trauma, and build resilience, thereby enhancing their overall coping mechanisms and personal empowerment.

Active listening and empathetic response – key techniques to strengthen resilience among refugees in VET settings

Active listening is a communication technique where the listener fully concentrates, understands, responds, and remembers what is being said. Unlike passive listening, it involves engaging with the speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues, ensuring the speaker feels heard and valued. It emphasizes understanding over replying and includes paraphrasing to confirm understanding and show empathy.

Here are five tips that can support VET professionals when dealing with refugees:

- **Focus fully on the speaker:** eliminate distractions and give the speaker, i.e., refugee your undivided attention, showing that you are genuinely interested in what he/she has to say.

- **Use non-verbal cues:** nod occasionally, maintain eye contact, and use facial expressions to show engagement and encourage the refugee to continue.

- **Avoid judging or jumping to conclusions:** listen without forming an opinion or interrupting with your own thoughts, allowing the refugee to express him/herself fully.

- **Ask clarifying questions:** if something is unclear, ask open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding and demonstrate that you are actively engaged.

- **Reflect and summarise:** paraphrase or summarise what the refugee has said to confirm your understanding and show that you have been listening attentively.

Empathetic response is the act of recognising and validating another person's emotions by expressing understanding and compassion toward their experiences. It involves putting oneself in the other person's shoes and genuinely attempting to feel what they are feeling, thus creating a connection based on shared human experiences. An empathetic response goes beyond mere sympathy; it requires active engagement and communication that acknowledges the other person's feelings without judgment. This can be expressed through verbal affirmations, such as "I understand how you feel," or non-verbal gestures, such as a comforting touch or a reassuring smile.

Here are five tips that can support VET professionals when dealing with refugees:

- **Acknowledge emotions:** recognise and validate the refugee's emotions by explicitly acknowledging them, such as saying, "It sounds like you're feeling...".

- **Express understanding:** communicate that you understand their feelings by relating to their experience, using phrases like, "I can imagine how difficult that must be."

- **Avoid offering immediate solutions:** focus on understanding and empathy rather than trying to fix the problem right away, which can sometimes feel dismissive.

- **Use appropriate non-verbal gestures:** offer comforting gestures like a gentle nod or a reassuring smile to convey empathy and support.

- **Be genuine and authentic:** ensure your responses are sincere and heartfelt, as genuine empathy can foster a deeper connection and trust.
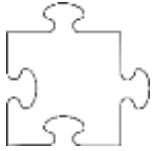
For VET professionals, active listening and empathetic response are vital in supporting refugees' trauma. These techniques build trust and create a supportive environment, making refugees feel heard and understood. Role-playing scenarios can provide an interesting exercise for practicing empathy and active listening.

Key practices to strengthen resilience among refugees in VET settings

There are different resilience strategies that VET professionals can adopt in a class setting to promote resilience and mental well-being among refugees.

Most used resilience strategies in VET settings are as follows:

- **Fostering social connections:** encourage social networks among refugees through group activities, peer mentoring, and support groups. Social support boosts resilience by providing emotional backing, practical help, and belonging. A community within the VET setting reduces isolation and aids integration. By building a strong community, refugees gain a sense of belonging and support, which is crucial for their emotional stability and integration into the new environment.

- **Providing flexible learning schedules:** implement flexible learning schedules to accommodate refugees' varying needs and personal circumstances, such as family responsibilities, legal issues, or health concerns. This approach reduces stress and helps them balance studies with other life aspects, fostering a supportive and adaptable learning environment. This adaptability not only reduces stress but also empowers refugees to manage their personal responsibilities alongside their educational pursuits.

- **Offering psychological support services:** provide psychological support services, such as counselling and therapy, to help refugees process trauma and develop coping mechanisms. Making these services readily available in VET settings can significantly boost refugees' mental well-being and resilience, enabling better engagement in their education and personal development. Access to these services ensures that refugees have the necessary tools to process past traumas and engage more effectively in their learning journey.

- **Incorporating cultural sensitivity training:** conduct cultural sensitivity training for staff and students to create an inclusive and respectful environment. Understanding refugees' cultural backgrounds helps prevent misunderstandings and discrimination, fostering a safer and more supportive learning space and boosting refugees' confidence and security in the VET setting. Such training helps create an environment where refugees feel respected and understood, enhancing their confidence and participation in the VET setting.

- **Encouraging physical activities:** incorporate physical activities and sports into the VET curriculum to reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance mental health. These activities can significantly build resilience and improve the mental well-being of refugees. Regular physical exercise not only boosts physical health but also plays a vital role in enhancing mood and reducing anxiety, contributing to overall resilience.

- **Facilitating language and communication skills:** provide language and communication skills training to help refugees overcome language barriers and engage better with the VET curriculum and peers. Effective communication is crucial for building relationships, accessing resources, and succeeding in education. Improved language skills boost refugees' confidence

and ability to navigate their new environment. Mastery of language skills is essential for refugees to fully participate in educational activities and connect with peers and instructors.

- **Promoting self-care and mindfulness practices:** integrate self-care and mindfulness practices like meditation, yoga, and journaling into the VET daily routine. These activities help refugees manage stress, stay grounded, and develop a positive mindset, supporting their mental health and resilience. They can be part of the curriculum or optional sessions. These practices equip refugees with techniques to manage stress and maintain a positive outlook, which are essential for their ongoing mental health and resilience.

- **Providing access to educational resources:** ensure that refugees have access to a wide range of educational resources, including textbooks, online materials, and tutoring. Access to these resources can help bridge educational gaps and provide the support needed to succeed academically. Empowering refugees with the tools they need can enhance their sense of control and competence, contributing to their overall resilience.
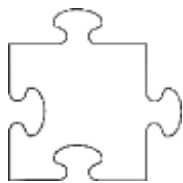
Storytelling - the art of conveying events and messages through words, images, and sounds – can be a powerful tool for VET professionals to gain insights into the personal experiences and cultural contexts of refugees, helping them to identify and implement key practices that effectively strengthen resilience among refugees in educational settings.

Resources/Materials

A theoretical understanding of refugee trauma | Virginia Commonwealth University

Understanding refugee trauma: causes, impact, and recovery | Bonyan Organisation

Traumatic experiences of refugees | Refugee Health Technical Assistance Centre

Psychosocial problems in refugee families: recommendations for support services | Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health

Coping and resilience Strategies | National Library of Medicine

Active listening as a key to readaptation and reintegration of Refugees | University of Osijek

The resilience guide – Strategies for responding to trauma in refugee children | SMAS

Making VET inclusive for refugee students | CEDEFOP

Exercises in the Handbook

Presentations on key concepts: refugee trauma and types of mental health issues

Case study analysis of different refugee traumas

Group discussions on traumas experienced by refugees, resilience strategies and the role of VET

Invitation of experts with experience as a refugee, who are aware about their traumas

Role-playing scenarios to practice active listening and empathetic response

Group art mini project, i.e., collective art piece representing resilience and recovery

Storytelling activities for the expression of own experiences creatively

Creation of personalised action plans to implement resilience strategies in VET settings

Module 2 - Culturally Sensitive and Cultural Competence

Module 2 focuses on enhancing cultural sensitivity and competence within educational settings that include refugee populations. It equips VET professionals (vocational teachers, trainers or instructors, curriculum developers, training managers, career counsellors or advisors, social pedagogues, social workers, facilitators, assessment and certification professionals, technical support staff, industry consultants, learning technologists, administrative staff) with essential skills to effectively support and understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of refugee students.

Objectives:

- Enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity in working with refugee populations.
- Understand the influence of culture on mental wellbeing and health.

Cultural Norms and Values of Refugees

This chapter presents the rich diversity of cultural norms and values that refugees bring to their new environments, emphasizing the significant role these play in shaping their experiences and interactions.

In VET environments, professionals frequently interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including refugees who bring unique norms, traditions, and belief systems shaped by their origins. These cultural identities significantly influence their behaviours and interactions, particularly in educational and workplace settings. A deep understanding of the broad spectrum of cultural backgrounds from which refugees come is crucial for VET professionals to appreciate the complexities of their integration, the potential impact on their social interactions, and the optimization of their learning and vocational training experiences.

Understanding Cultural Norms and Values of Refugees

Cultural norms are the unwritten rules that govern behaviours within different societies. These norms can significantly differ across cultures, influencing everything from communication styles to conflict resolution methods, and even attitudes towards hierarchy and authority. For instance, in many Eastern cultures, a high value is placed on respect for authority, which can manifest in a reluctance to question or challenge teachers or supervisors openly. In contrast, Western cultures might encourage a more questioning and individualistic approach to learning. Understanding these differences is essential for VET professionals to foster a respectful and effective learning environment, adapt teaching methods, and avoid cultural misinterpretations.

The core values and beliefs that drive behaviour and influence decisions are pivotal in understanding how refugees might interact within educational systems and broader community structures. For example, certain cultures may place a strong emphasis on communal success and collective decision-making, which can influence their participation in team activities or collaborative projects within a VET setting. Other cultures might prioritize personal achievement and independence, shaping a different approach to learning and vocational training. Acknowledging and integrating these values into the educational design can help tailor programs that respect cultural backgrounds while promoting effective learning outcomes.

Impact of Cultural Identity and Challenges of Cultural Adaptation

Cultural identity is a critical factor in the psychological well-being and integration of refugees into new environments. Preserving one's cultural identity provides continuity and a sense of security amidst significant life changes, but the pressure to assimilate into a new cultural environment can also create

conflicts and stress. VET institutions that actively recognize and celebrate cultural diversity through inclusive curricula, support services, and multicultural events can help mitigate these stresses, fostering a sense of belonging and community among diverse student populations.

Refugees often face considerable challenges in adapting to new cultural and social norms, which are frequently compounded by language barriers, economic difficulties, and social isolation. Misunderstandings arising from cultural differences can exacerbate these challenges, leading to social exclusion or marginalization. For example, refugees from societies that value indirect communication might find it challenging to adapt to environments where direct and assertive communication is the norm.

Strategic Approaches to Enhancing Cultural Integration

To facilitate smoother cultural integration, educational institutions can implement several strategic approaches:

- Regular, in-depth training sessions for VET professionals can enhance their understanding of cultural differences and improve their communication strategies with students from diverse backgrounds.
- Active engagement programs that facilitate interaction between refugee families and local communities can help bridge cultural gaps and foster mutual understanding.
- Developing robust support networks through mentorship programs and support groups can assist refugees in navigating the complexities of their new environments, providing both emotional and academic support.

Recognizing and respecting the cultural norms and values of refugees are paramount in creating inclusive VET environments that cater to the needs of all students. By embracing and integrating these diverse cultural elements, VET professionals can significantly enhance the educational experience and workplace readiness of refugee students, fostering a learning community that values diversity and promotes mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration.

Building Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

In VET settings, effective cross-cultural communication is critical, particularly when working with refugees. Mastering cross-cultural communication not only fosters an inclusive and productive learning environment but also equips students with essential skills for integrating into the globalized labour market. Understanding and respecting cultural differences is fundamental to creating a supportive educational experience for all students.

Understanding and Overcoming Communication Challenges in Multicultural VET Settings

Communication styles can vary widely across cultures, influencing how messages are conveyed and received within VET settings. Northern European cultures, such as Germany and Scandinavia, often value directness and succinctness, viewing it as a means to promote transparency and efficiency. In contrast, many cultures from third countries, such as those in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, may prefer more indirect and nuanced communication to maintain social harmony and show respect. For example, a student from a high-context culture like Japan might use indirect language and non-verbal cues to convey their thoughts, while a student from a low-context culture like Germany might appreciate straightforward and explicit communication. Misunderstandings can arise when a student from an East African culture perceives a direct critique from a German educator as harsh, where communication tends to be more nuanced and indirect. Recognizing and adapting to these cultural nuances is crucial for fostering a respectful and effective learning environment. VET professionals need

to be mindful of these differences to prevent misinterpretations and build a classroom culture that respects all communication styles.

Language barriers pose significant challenges in multicultural VET settings. Employing translation tools and developing visual teaching aids can significantly enhance understanding. For instance, technical vocabulary can be taught using bilingual glossaries and diagrams that illustrate complex concepts, facilitating comprehension across language divides. Encouraging peer-to-peer language support is another effective strategy. This approach leverages the diverse linguistic capabilities of students, promoting inclusive learning and enhancing language skills. For example, pairing students who speak the same native language can help new learners grasp difficult concepts more quickly and provide emotional support, making the educational experience more accessible and less intimidating. Additionally, integrating language learning software and apps into the curriculum can provide interactive and engaging ways for students to improve their language skills alongside their vocational training.

Active listening and empathy are foundational to effective cross-cultural communication. Active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, understanding their message, responding thoughtfully, and retaining the information discussed. Empathy requires an emotional connection that acknowledges and values the feelings and perspectives of others. Developing these skills involves reflective exercises and role-playing scenarios, which enhance VET professionals' ability to connect with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For instance, during group projects, an instructor might notice a student from a high-context culture struggling to articulate their ideas. By employing active listening, the instructor can discern the student's intended message and provide the necessary support or clarification. This approach not only helps the student feel heard and respected but also builds trust and rapport, which are essential for a positive educational experience.

Managing Cultural Misunderstandings and Cultivating Cultural Competence

Cultural misunderstandings can escalate into conflicts if not managed appropriately. These misunderstandings often arise from differing cultural norms and expectations. For instance, the varying significance attached to punctuality can lead to tensions in group settings. Northern Europeans may view tardiness as disrespectful, while in some African or Middle Eastern cultures, a more relaxed approach to time might be more acceptable.

Facilitating cultural awareness sessions that explore these differences openly can help students and staff develop mutual understanding and set agreed-upon norms for classroom behaviour. Conflict resolution strategies such as mediation, role-playing exercises, and the development of class agreements foster a cooperative environment where diverse cultural values are acknowledged and respected. These strategies not only address conflicts when they arise but also prevent misunderstandings by promoting ongoing cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Developing cultural competence is a continuous process that involves more than occasional training. It requires sustained engagement with the cultures represented in the classroom. Participating in professional development opportunities such as workshops on intercultural communication, attending cultural events, and engaging in exchanges with other European VET institutions enrich professionals' cultural insights and enhance their ability to navigate the multicultural teaching landscape effectively. Cultural competence also involves self-reflection on personal biases and assumptions. VET professionals must critically examine their own cultural perspectives and how these might influence their interactions with students. By fostering an environment of ongoing learning and self-awareness, VET professionals can better support their students' diverse needs and promote an inclusive educational setting. A technical college might develop a mentorship program pairing refugee students from third countries with mentors who share similar cultural backgrounds. These mentors can guide them through their vocational training journey, offering not only academic support but also cultural

insights and emotional encouragement. Another example could involve a VET institution introducing multilingual instructional materials and language support sessions. By providing resources in multiple languages, the institution helps non-native speakers grasp complex technical concepts more effectively. Additionally, integrating cultural competence training into the curriculum for all students can foster a more inclusive and understanding educational environment, preparing students to work in diverse teams and international settings.

Enhancing cross-cultural communication skills is crucial for VET professionals working with refugees from third countries. By understanding and integrating diverse communication styles, overcoming language barriers, fostering empathy and active listening, and managing cultural misunderstandings, VET professionals can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. These skills not only improve classroom dynamics but also prepare students for successful integration into Europe's multicultural workforce, contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic professional landscape.

Respecting Diversity in Mental Health Support

Refugees bring with them a diverse array of cultural beliefs, practices, and values that profoundly influence their perceptions and attitudes toward mental wellbeing and health. Effective mental wellbeing and -health support involves recognizing these cultural nuances and integrating them into tailored strategies that respect and affirm each student's background.

Cultural Perspectives on Mental-Wellbeing and Stigma

Cultural beliefs significantly shape how mental wellbeing and health issues are perceived and addressed. In many non-Western cultures, mental health might be viewed through a spiritual or holistic lens, with psychological distress attributed to spiritual imbalances or social disharmony rather than medical conditions. For instance, in some African cultures, mental health problems are often addressed through community support and traditional healing practices rather than seeking professional help. Understanding these cultural perspectives is crucial for VET professionals to engage effectively with refugee students and offer appropriate support. For example, a student from a Middle Eastern background might view mental health issues as deeply tied to family honour and social reputation, making them less likely to seek help openly. In contrast, a student from a Southeast Asian culture might interpret mental health symptoms through a religious lens, believing that spiritual interventions are necessary for healing. VET professionals need to be aware of these diverse viewpoints to offer support that is respectful and effective. Recognizing the importance of community and family in the healing process can also guide professionals in developing interventions that are more likely to be accepted and effective.

Stigma surrounding mental health is prevalent in many cultures, posing a significant barrier to seeking help. In some communities, mental health issues are seen as a source of shame or weakness, discouraging individuals from acknowledging their struggles or accessing mental health services. For instance, in many Asian cultures, admitting to mental health issues can be seen as bringing dishonour to the family. Similarly, in some African and Middle Eastern cultures, mental health problems might be kept hidden to avoid social stigma.

VET professionals can address these challenges by creating an environment that normalizes mental wellbeing discussions and reduces stigma. This might involve educational programs that use culturally appropriate language and frameworks to discuss mental wellbeing. Engaging community leaders and respected figures can also play a crucial role in changing perceptions and encouraging acceptance. For example, a workshop on mental wellbeing might be more effective if a respected elder or religious leader participates, framing mental wellbeing care as a community concern rather than an individual failing. These leaders can help bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern mental health practices, facilitating a smoother acceptance and integration of mental health services.

Implementing Culturally Sensitive Mental-Wellbeing and -Health Practices

Culturally sensitive mental-wellbeing and -health practices are essential in VET settings to meet the specific needs of refugee students. This involves adapting mental health services to align with cultural beliefs and values. Employing bilingual and bicultural counsellors can bridge language gaps and provide culturally relevant support. For instance, integrating culturally accepted forms of expression, such as storytelling or communal activities, into therapy sessions can make mental health services more accessible and effective. Recognizing and incorporating students' religious and spiritual beliefs into their care plans can also enhance trust and engagement.

An example of this might be a mental wellbeing program that includes traditional music and dance as therapeutic activities for students from African backgrounds, where these practices hold cultural significance. Similarly, offering private and group prayer sessions can cater to the needs of Muslim students, helping them feel supported in their faith while addressing their mental health concerns. Providing spaces within educational institutions for these activities can also demonstrate respect and understanding of cultural practices, further supporting the students' mental health and well-being.

Building Effective Support Systems

Creating robust support systems involves integrating services within the educational framework and the broader community. Collaborations with local mental health organizations, cultural associations, and social services can provide a comprehensive support network. For example, partnering with local cultural centres to offer workshops and support groups in familiar settings can make mental health services more approachable. These partnerships can facilitate culturally competent care and provide holistic support that addresses various aspects of students' lives.

For instance, a VET institution might collaborate with a local mosque to offer mental health workshops that align with Islamic teachings, helping to reduce stigma and encourage participation among Muslim students. Another example could be a technical school that implements a peer support program where older students mentor newcomers from similar cultural backgrounds, offering guidance and emotional support while helping them navigate the educational system. These initiatives not only provide mental health support but also foster a sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for the overall well-being of refugee students.

Continuous training in cultural competence is vital for VET professionals to serve their diverse student populations effectively. This training should encompass understanding cultural impacts on mental wellbeing, recognizing cultural expressions of distress, and learning effective communication strategies across cultures. Workshops might include role-playing exercises and scenario-based learning to practice navigating cultural misunderstandings and developing empathy for students' experiences from different cultural backgrounds. Professional development should also encourage self-reflection on personal biases and assumptions to improve interactions with students from diverse cultures. For example, a workshop could simulate common scenarios that VET professionals might encounter, such as a student refusing to participate in group therapy due to cultural beliefs about privacy and honour. By practicing responses and strategies in a controlled setting, educators can better prepare for real-world situations. Additionally, engaging with cultural experts and community leaders during these training sessions can provide valuable insights and enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the training. Detailed case studies of successful culturally informed mental wellbeing promotion and interventions can provide valuable insights. For instance, a VET institution might collaborate with a local mosque to offer mental wellbeing workshops that align with Islamic teachings, helping to reduce stigma and encourage participation among Muslim students.

Another example could be a technical school that implements a peer support program where older students mentor newcomers from similar cultural backgrounds, offering guidance and emotional support while helping them navigate the educational system. In another case, a VET program might

incorporate traditional African community gatherings, known as "Ubuntu" circles, where students can share their experiences and support each other in a culturally familiar and comforting environment. Such practices not only address mental wellbeing and health needs but also reinforce cultural identity and community bonds. These examples illustrate how culturally informed practices can be effectively integrated into VET settings to support the mental health and well-being of refugee students.

Respecting cultural diversity in mental health support is essential for the well-being and academic success of refugee students in VET settings. By understanding and integrating cultural perspectives on mental wellbeing, addressing stigma, implementing culturally sensitive practices, and building effective support systems, VET professionals can create a supportive and inclusive environment. These efforts not only enhance mental wellbeing outcomes but also contribute to a more cohesive and understanding educational community.

Conclusion

Incorporating cultural sensitivity and competence into European VET settings is essential for the effective support and integration of refugee students from diverse backgrounds. This module has highlighted the significance of understanding cultural norms and values, enhancing cross-cultural communication skills, and providing culturally informed mental health support.

- Understanding and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of refugee students is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment.
- Effective communication across cultures is vital for creating a productive learning atmosphere and preparing students for the global workforce.
- Culturally sensitive mental wellbeing practices are essential for addressing the unique needs of refugee students and promoting their overall well-being.

Recommendations for trainers

- VET professionals should engage in continuous professional development to enhance their understanding of cultural diversity and improve their communication strategies.
- Educational institutions should integrate inclusive curricula and support services that recognize and celebrate cultural diversity, fostering a sense of belonging among refugee students.
- Establishing collaborations with local cultural and mental health organizations can provide comprehensive support networks for refugee students, making services more approachable and effective.
- Encouraging active engagement between refugee families, local communities, and educational institutions can bridge cultural gaps and promote mutual understanding.

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Module 3 - Understanding Refugee Experience

Challenges Faced by Refugees

Refugees across the globe face a myriad of complex and interrelated challenges as they escape from conflict, persecution, and instability, seeking safety and a new beginning in host countries. These challenges range from immediate practical difficulties to long-term emotional and social integration issues. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective support systems and policies that facilitate successful integration and ensure that refugees can live with dignity and hope in their new environments.

1. Communication and Language Barriers

Effective communication is foundational for refugees to navigate their new environments, access services, and integrate into communities. Language barriers significantly hinder their ability to perform basic tasks, obtain employment, and interact with locals, which can lead to social isolation and economic difficulties. The document highlights the critical role of language acquisition programs in reducing these challenges, fostering better understanding, and facilitating integration. It also stresses the importance of multilingual resources in healthcare, legal, and community services to ensure that refugees can access necessary information and support.

2. Acculturation Stress

Adapting to a new cultural environment while preserving one's cultural identity is a source of significant stress for refugees. This balancing act between assimilation and cultural retention can lead to identity confusion, social isolation, and emotional distress. The document references the "cultural fusion theory," which suggests that blending aspects of different cultures can help alleviate acculturation stress and promote a more inclusive community environment. Programs that encourage cultural exchange and mutual learning can assist refugees in navigating these challenges more effectively.

3. Psychological and Emotional Needs

Refugees often carry the heavy burden of traumatic experiences, including violence, loss, and severe disruptions to their daily lives. Addressing their psychological and emotional needs is crucial for their recovery and integration. The document underscores the need for accessible mental health services that are sensitive to the traumas specific to refugees' experiences, advocating for specialized counselling and support groups that can provide a space for healing and adjustment.

4. Health Issues and Access to Care

Navigating the healthcare system in a new country can be daunting for refugees, especially when language and cultural barriers are at play. Limited access to healthcare services can exacerbate existing health issues and create new challenges. The document calls for health services that are not only accessible but also culturally and linguistically appropriate to address the specific health needs of refugees. It emphasizes the integration of health services into refugee support programs to ensure a holistic approach to refugee well-being.

5. Social Integration and Discrimination

Social integration is fraught with challenges, including cultural clashes and discrimination from the host community, which can hinder refugees from feeling accepted and safe. These issues can exacerbate feelings of alienation and impact their mental and overall well-being. The document emphasizes the

importance of community programs that promote inclusivity and understanding between refugees and host populations, including cultural competency training for public service providers and community awareness campaigns.

6. Economic Challenges and Employment

Economic integration is critical for refugees to become self-sufficient and contribute to their new communities. However, refugees often face significant obstacles in finding employment, such as unrecognized qualifications and limited understanding of the local job market. The document highlights the importance of employment support services that help bridge these gaps, including certification and training programs tailored to refugees, career counselling, and job placement services that recognize the unique talents and experiences of refugee populations.

7. Legal and Bureaucratic Navigation

Understanding and navigating the legal and bureaucratic systems of the host country can be particularly challenging for refugees, who may not be familiar with the necessary procedures to secure their rights and access services. The document suggests the need for legal assistance programs that help refugees understand their rights and obligations within the host country's legal framework, offering guidance on everything from asylum applications to family reunification processes.

8. Cultural Literacy and Communication

Cultural literacy is essential for effective communication and integration. Misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences can impede effective interactions and integration processes. The document discusses the need for programs that educate both refugees and host communities about each other's cultures, promoting mutual understanding and respect. These programs can include cultural orientation for refugees and cultural sensitivity training for the host community, facilitating a smoother integration process.

These challenges underline the complex, multifaceted nature of refugee experiences and the critical importance of targeted support systems to effectively address these issues. Comprehensive strategies that consider these diverse challenges are essential for ensuring that refugees can successfully rebuild their lives and contribute to their new communities.

Impact of migration on mental wellbeing and health (displacement, acculturation stress)

Migration, particularly under the distressing circumstances that compel refugees to flee their homes, has profound effects on mental wellbeing and health. This chapter explores how displacement and acculturation stress contribute to the psychological challenges faced by refugees. Understanding these impacts is vital for developing supportive interventions that enhance the mental well-being of individuals navigating these immense changes.

1. Psychological Impact of Displacement

Displacement involves a profound rupture from one's usual environment, severing connections with home, community, and a sense of security. This detachment often induces intense emotional turmoil, characterized by grief, loss, and a pervasive sense of instability. Refugees might experience a series of emotional stages, similar to mourning, as they come to terms with the loss of their homeland and the accompanying sense of identity. The suddenness and violence of displacement can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and powerlessness, often resulting in long-term mental health repercussions such as chronic depression, anxiety disorders, and complex PTSD. Longitudinal support systems that replicate a sense of community and provide continuous mental wellbeing and health care are crucial for mitigating these

impacts. Initiatives such as ongoing psychotherapy, support groups, and community-building activities can help alleviate the sense of loss and foster a new sense of belonging.

2. Acculturation Stress and Its Complexities

Acculturation involves adjusting to a new cultural environment while maintaining one's original cultural identity, a process fraught with stress and potential conflict. The stress arises from the pressure to assimilate into the host culture while preserving one's own cultural norms and practices. This dual expectation can lead to identity conflicts and feelings of being caught between two cultures, neither of which feels entirely like home. The document discusses how the "cultural fusion theory" can provide a framework for understanding and alleviating acculturation stress. By encouraging a blend of cultural retention and adaptation, communities can help refugees feel more accepted and less torn between different identities. Effective strategies might include cultural orientation programs that educate about the host culture, coupled with community events that celebrate diverse cultures, thus promoting a mutual exchange and understanding that eases the integration process.

3. Trauma and Its Aftermath

Refugees often escape conditions of intense trauma, including war, persecution, and violence. The scars of these experiences are deep and enduring, impacting mental wellbeing long after physical safety is secured. New environments that remind them of past traumas can trigger symptoms such as flashbacks, severe anxiety, and distrust. The importance of providing trauma-informed care, which involves recognizing symptoms of trauma and responding with understanding and support, cannot be overstated. Mental health services tailored for trauma, including trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy and other specialized modalities, might be essential. Such services not only address past traumas but also help refugees navigate the challenges of resettlement, reducing the likelihood of re-traumatization.

4. Social Isolation and Mental Wellbeing

Losing one's social network and facing barriers to forming new relationships can lead to significant isolation for refugees. This isolation can exacerbate existing mental wellbeing issues and contribute to the development of new ones, such as depression and anxiety. Building new relationships in a foreign cultural context is challenging yet essential for mental well-being. Programs that facilitate social interactions through shared activities, language classes, and community events can play a critical role in building these new networks. These programs not only help reduce loneliness but also integrate refugees into the wider community, enhancing their social support systems and overall life satisfaction.

5. Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

Numerous practical and systemic barriers prevent refugees from accessing mental health services. These include language differences, lack of awareness about available services, cultural stigma surrounding mental wellbeing, and a general scarcity of culturally competent healthcare providers. Overcoming these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes increasing the availability of interpreters, training providers in cultural competence, and outreach programs that educate refugees about mental wellbeing and health and the services available to them. Such efforts are crucial for ensuring that refugees receive the mental wellbeing care they need, tailored to their cultural and linguistic needs.

6. Resilience and Coping Strategies

Despite the overwhelming challenges, many refugees exhibit remarkable resilience, adapting to their new circumstances with strength and ingenuity. Understanding and supporting these natural resilience

factors and coping mechanisms are crucial for enhancing mental wellbeing outcomes. Programs that focus on empowering refugees, such as those offering skills training, leadership opportunities, and platforms for cultural expression, can significantly bolster resilience. Additionally, recognizing and reinforcing wellbeing coping strategies, such as community engagement and artistic expression, can promote psychological well-being and a smoother adaptation to new lives.

By understanding these dynamics, mental health professionals and community support programs can better tailor their interventions, fostering environments that not only mitigate harm but actively support the mental and emotional healing of refugees.

Trauma-specific to refugee experiences

Hereby, we will explore the distinct and profound psychological traumas that refugees endure as a result of their experiences before, during, and after displacement. Unlike trauma typically encountered in more stable populations, refugee trauma is compounded by continuous stressors such as cultural dislocation, ongoing uncertainty about legal status, and adaptation challenges in new countries.

Nature and Scope of Refugee Trauma

Refugee trauma is deeply complex and multi-layered, encompassing a wide range of experiences that extend far beyond the immediate threats to life and safety that precipitate their flight. This trauma often begins in the context of extreme social upheaval—war, ethnic cleansing, targeted violence against political or social groups, or severe repression. The initial trauma is frequently compounded by the circumstances of the escape, which may involve perilous journeys fraught with physical danger, exploitation, and abuse, leaving indelible marks on the psyche of those affected.

Once they arrive in a presumed safe haven, refugees frequently confront a host of new traumatic stressors. These include the challenge of navigating often opaque and unfriendly bureaucratic asylum processes that can extend for years. During this period, refugees commonly experience a pervasive uncertainty about their future, living in constant fear of deportation, often in detention facilities, or under stringent surveillance. The inability to gain closure from past traumas or secure a stable and safe environment in the present prevents psychological wounds from healing, thereby prolonging and compounding mental distress. Adding to this complexity, many refugees face the loss of their social identity and community. Back home, they may have held jobs, owned homes, and had a network of friends and family—all of which confer a sense of place and purpose. Displacement strips many of these individuals of their roles and status, thrusting them into environments where they are often seen as outsiders, or at worst, as burdens. This erosion of identity and community ties significantly impacts mental wellbeing, leading to feelings of worthlessness and isolation.

The trauma of refugees is also characterized by its chronic nature. Unlike many other groups who might experience trauma as an event or series of events in the past, for refugees, trauma is an ongoing reality. Continuous exposure to new stressors without adequate time or resources for recovery means that trauma can become entrenched, leading to complex and chronic mental health conditions that are difficult to treat. This ongoing aspect of refugee trauma necessitates interventions that are not only reactive but also proactive, addressing the enduring nature of their traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, the collective dimension of refugee trauma adds another layer of complexity. Refugees often flee as part of larger groups and communities, which means they share not only the collective memory of the events that led to their flight but also a communal experience of displacement and resettlement. This collective trauma can influence how individual traumas are experienced and processed. It can reinforce personal trauma but also provide a framework for communal support and healing.

Given the extensive and persistent nature of refugee trauma, understanding its scope and implications is crucial for developing effective interventions, which must aim not only to alleviate symptoms but also to rebuild a sense of safety, identity, and community among refugees.

Manifestations of Trauma in Refugee

Refugees' trauma manifests across a broad spectrum that includes classic psychological symptoms and less recognized signs.

- Refugees often exhibit a range of psychological symptoms characteristic of acute and complex trauma. These include, but are not limited to, heightened anxiety, persistent sadness, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which manifests through flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety. These symptoms are frequently compounded by emotional numbness and dissociative states, where individuals may feel detached from reality or themselves, representing a coping mechanism to shield from overwhelming trauma.
- Depression is a common manifestation among refugees, characterized by deep, prolonged sadness, a loss of interest in life activities, and feelings of hopelessness. The uncertainty and prolonged nature of the asylum process, coupled with the loss of homeland and separation from family, can exacerbate these feelings, leading to severe and chronic depressive states.
- A significant number of refugees report somatic symptoms, where psychological distress manifests as physical pain or discomfort. Common complaints include headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and generalized pain with no apparent medical cause. These symptoms not only reflect the psychological burden of their experiences but also often serve as culturally acceptable expressions of mental distress, especially in communities where discussing mental wellbeing and -health may be stigmatized.
- Trauma can lead to notable changes in behaviour. Refugees may exhibit increased irritability, aggression, or withdrawal from social interactions. These behaviours often stem from the underlying stress, fear, and frustration associated with their experiences and the challenges of adapting to new environments. Changes in behaviour can significantly impact a refugee's ability to integrate into new communities and form meaningful relationships.
- The trauma symptoms experienced by refugees can hinder their ability to effectively integrate into new societies. Symptoms such as distrust, social withdrawal, and aggression can isolate them from potential support networks and community connections that are crucial for successful integration. Additionally, the cultural misunderstanding of their symptoms can further alienate them from receiving appropriate support and empathy from the host community.
- Trauma can complicate the acculturation process, making it difficult for refugees to adjust to new cultural norms and values. The stress of navigating a new cultural landscape while dealing with past traumas can lead to acculturation stress, marked by feelings of being caught between maintaining one's cultural identity and adapting to a new one. This stress can exacerbate other trauma symptoms, creating a complex interplay between mental wellbeing and cultural adaptation.
- Trauma can also affect cognitive functions. Refugees may experience difficulties with memory, concentration, and decision-making. These impairments can stem from both the direct effects of trauma on the brain and the chronic stress associated with displacement and resettlement. Cognitive difficulties can further complicate daily functioning and adaptation to new environments, affecting everything from learning new languages to engaging in educational and professional activities.

Cultural Context and Expression of Trauma

The expression of trauma among refugees varies significantly with cultural background, influencing both how symptoms are presented and how they are perceived by others, including healthcare providers.

Different cultures have varied understandings of psychological trauma, which can significantly influence how symptoms are recognized, expressed, and treated. In many cultures, mental wellbeing issues might not be conceptualized in the same way they are in Western medicine; instead, they might be interpreted through lenses of spiritual, familial, or communal frameworks. For instance, some cultures may perceive the symptoms of depression or anxiety as spiritual ailments or as issues of collective rather than individual concern, which can affect both the sufferer's and the community's willingness to seek and accept psychological treatments.

- In many refugee-origin cultures, there is a significant **stigma** attached to mental health disorders. Such stigmas can lead individuals to suppress their emotional distress or express it in socially acceptable ways, which often do not align with Western diagnostic categories. For example, it's not uncommon for emotional or psychological distress to be expressed through physical symptoms — a phenomenon known as somatization. Refugees from such backgrounds might report chronic pain, fatigue, or other physical ailments instead of feelings of anxiety or depression, complicating accurate diagnosis and treatment.
- **Language barriers** further complicate the expression and interpretation of trauma symptoms. Even when interpreters are used, nuances in the description of symptoms can be lost, leading to misunderstandings between the healthcare provider and the patient. This barrier is not just linguistic but also cultural, as certain emotional concepts or states might not have direct translations or might be understood differently in different cultural contexts.
- Cultural norms **around gender** can also affect how trauma is expressed and addressed. In many cultures, gender roles strongly dictate acceptable behaviour and emotional expression, which can influence whether individuals feel able to express vulnerability or seek help. For example, in some cultures, it may be considered inappropriate for men to exhibit fear or sadness, pushing them to either internalize their trauma or express it through other outlets, such as anger or substance abuse.
- For many refugees, the **community and family** play a central role in the experience and expression of trauma. Collective trauma, shared by entire communities displaced by war or disaster, can have a communal component of healing and coping. Healing practices embedded within community and family structures can be powerful, yet they may also enforce norms that inhibit the expression of trauma in ways that align with Western practices.

Effective treatment of trauma in refugee populations requires **a culturally sensitive approach** that respects and integrates individuals' cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The insights discussed in this module emphasize the importance of tailored approaches that consider the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of refugee experiences. By integrating strategies that address language barriers, acculturation stress, and psychological needs, educators can significantly enhance the educational outcomes and well-being of refugee students. Moreover, empathy is key in fostering a supportive community within educational settings, encouraging an atmosphere where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, feel valued and understood.

As VET professionals move forward, they are encouraged to apply the knowledge and strategies from this module to not only aid in the healing and integration process for refugees but also enrich the learning environment for all students. The commitment to continuous learning and adaptation is crucial as the dynamics of global migration and refugee needs evolve. By maintaining a focus on

inclusivity and support, educational professionals can make a lasting impact on the lives of refugees, helping them to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope in their new communities.

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Module 4 - Psychological First Aid

This module on Psychological First Aid (PFA) is designed for VET professionals working with refugees in VET-settings. It aims to equip trainers with the essential skills and knowledge to provide first-line psychological support to refugees who may be experiencing distress or trauma.

Objectives

- Understand the principles of providing immediate psychological support in crises
- Promote mental health during emergencies
- Build strategies to help participants to manage stress during emergencies

How to Provide Immediate Psychological Support

PFA is a compassionate and supportive response to individuals suffering in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event or crisis. It aims to reduce stress and foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. PFA provides empathetic, practical support to those in distress, characterized by its "do no harm" philosophy. Unlike psychological therapy, PFA focuses on offering immediate comfort, support, and practical aid to assist individuals in managing their immediate needs and concerns, thereby fostering conditions conducive to resilience and recovery in the aftermath of trauma (WHO, 2011). Key elements include:

1. Empathetic Listening

Empathetic listening is a fundamental component of PFA that enables VET professionals to connect with refugees on a deeper, more emotional level. It's about creating a connection that makes the individual feel seen, heard, and valued on a profound level. Key practices:

- **Active listening** which requires full attention to the speaker, using verbal and non-verbal acknowledgments like nodding, leaning in, "mm-hmm" sounds, and maintaining eye contact.
- **Reflective feedback** which involves paraphrasing or summarizing what the speaker said to demonstrate understanding. For example, after a refugee shares a difficult experience, the professional might say, "it sounds like that was a really challenging time for you."
- **Open-ended questions** encouraging deeper exploration of feelings and experiences. For instance, "can you tell me more about how that made you feel?"
- **Using silence effectively** can be a powerful tool in empathetic listening, giving the speaker space to process their thoughts and emotions (Patel, s. G., et al., 2022).
- **Validating feelings** without judgment, e.g. statement like, "it's understandable to feel that way given what you've been through," or "it sounds like you're feeling really overwhelmed by this," can foster a deeper connection (Clark, a. J., 2020).
- **Avoiding premature solutions** and jumping too quickly to offer advice can shut down communication. Instead, empathetic listening focuses on understanding the person's perspective and emotions (Warner, L. S., & Shields, T. G.,2023).

2. Ensuring safety

The provision of safety, both physical and emotional, is paramount in PFA. It involves assuring affected individuals that they are no longer in immediate danger, helping to reduce ongoing perceptions of threat, and providing information on accessing essential services. (WHO, 2011). For refugees contending with language barriers, ensuring a sense of safety transcends the spoken word. This involves **non-verbal communication methods, i.e. body language, facial expressions, and physical gestures — and the creative use of visual aids and symbols** to convey safety and stability (IASC, 2007).

Helping individuals manage overwhelming emotions by providing reassurance and support, helping them understand that their feelings are valid and that there is a pathway to feeling better.

3. Stabilization

PFA aims to reduce distress, employing techniques and strategies to help individuals regain an emotional equilibrium. Practitioners offer a calm, attentive presence, with active listening and non-verbal cues to communicate empathy and understanding, thereby alleviating feelings of panic and agitation (Brymer et al., 2006). Addressing emotional distress in a linguistically diverse context requires sensitivity to non-verbal cues of trauma and anxiety. **Techniques like controlled breathing**, grounding methods, or brief mindfulness alongside the provision of a tranquil, respectful space, can help bridge the gap imposed by language differences and ensure that individuals are not exposed to further traumatic stimuli.

4. Information on Coping

One of the debilitating effects of experiencing trauma is a sense of helplessness. PFA endeavours to counteract this by **empowering individuals**, aiding them in recognizing **their own strengths and capacities** to navigate their recovery.

- This might include facilitating access to information, guiding them in practical decision-making, or simply validating their feelings and experiences, thereby enhancing their sense of agency (Brymer et al., 2006).
- Enhancing refugees' sense of efficacy and control over their circumstances involves the adept use of visual aids, such as **illustrated pamphlets, apps, and interactive digital platforms that transcend language limitations**.
- Offering practical suggestions on coping strategies tailored to the situation, such as maintaining routines, staying connected with loved ones, and engaging in physical activity which can aid in recovery.
- Providing information about common reactions to trauma and stress, helping individuals understand that their reactions are normal and expected under the circumstances.
- Instilling a hopeful and optimistic outlook towards the future is a fundamental goal of PFA. action underlines the potential for growth and recovery, even in the face of profound adversity (Brymer et al., 2006).
- Celebrating small achievements, providing opportunities for refugees to contribute and share their skills, **and visibly modelling resilience and optimism** can all inspire hope and foster a sense of possibility and future orientation.

5. Connectedness

Isolation exacerbates the psychological impact of trauma. PFA, therefore, underscores the necessity of reinforcing social supports, promoting connectedness with loved ones, community resources, and support networks (Brymer et al., 2006). **Facilitating connections through community gatherings** that celebrate cultural diversity, u**sing technology to connect refugees with language-compatible support networks, and employing pictorial guides for community and resource** can significantly enhance feelings of belonging and support.

Recognizing signs of distress and trauma reaction

Recognizing the signs of distress and trauma reactions in individuals is fundamental in providing effective PFA. Early identification allows for timely intervention, which can mitigate the long-term psychological impact and aid in quicker recovery. Key signs across various dimensions:

1. **Emotional** signs such as varying emotional reactions or emotional dysregulation:

- Look for emotional responses such as excessive fear, anger, sadness, or even guilt. People may react differently depending on their emotional resilience and personal experiences.
- Difficulty in managing emotions which might manifest as sudden tears, angry outbursts, or hysterical laughter at inappropriate times.

2. **Physical** signs such as somatic symptoms or nervous system responses:

- Increased complaints about physical ailments without a clear medical cause such as headaches, stomach-aches, or other bodily pains.
- Signs of hyperarousal including palpitations, trembling, or excessive sweating, which are the body's responses to perceived threats and stress.

3. **Cognitive** signs such as memory problems or intrusive thoughts:

- Trouble remembering aspects of the trauma or difficulty retaining new information. This can be observed through forgetfulness or repeated questioning.
- Recurrent, involuntary, and distressing memories of the event. These may manifest as flashbacks or nightmares, disrupting daily cognitive processes.

4. **Behavioural** signs such as avoidance behaviour or regression in behaviour:

- Efforts to avoid people, places, or activities that are reminders of the trauma, which can significantly restrict an individual's social interaction and activity.
- Particularly in children, a return to behaviours earlier outgrown such as bedwetting.

5. **Psychosocial** signs such as strained relationships or decline in performance:

- Increased conflict with friends and family, withdrawal from relationships, or a noticeable decline in social interactions.
- Noticeable drop in performance at work or school, which could be a result of cognitive impairments or emotional distress.

6. **Changes in worldview** such as pessimism and hopelessness or altered sense of safety:

- A noticeable shift in worldview towards a more negative outlook, feelings of hopelessness about the future, or a persistent negative mood.
- Feelings of vulnerability or a heightened state of fear about personal safety or the safety of loved ones (Brymer, M., et al., 2006)).

Cultural Expressions of Distress

Cultural background significantly influences how distress is expressed and recognized. Some cultures may place a strong emphasis on somatic symptoms when discussing emotional pain, while others might view direct expressions of distress as taboo. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for accurately identifying signs of distress and providing appropriate support. For instance, in some

cultures, mental health issues might be described in physical terms, such as fatigue or bodily pain, rather than sadness or anxiety (Kirmayer, L. J., 2001).

Language Barriers and Distress

Language barriers can complicate the identification and expression of distress. Refugees may struggle to articulate their feelings and symptoms in a non-native language, leading to potential underreporting of psychological issues. VET professionals must be aware of these challenges and adopt flexible, culturally informed approaches to communication. Utilizing non-verbal cues, visual aids, and, when possible, translation services can aid in bridging these gaps (Chang, W., & Chen, B. X., 2021).

Practical strategies for psychological first aid and trauma-informed stabilisation

PFA and trauma-informed stabilization requires a nuanced approach, especially when working with refugees who may face language barriers and are situated within a VET context:

1. Creating a Calm Environment:

- Utilize a soothing tone of voice and speak at a measured pace. This is crucial in overcoming language barriers, as it allows for clearer understanding and gives individuals time to process the information shared.
- Ensure a structured environment by establishing a predictable routine within the training sessions to provide a sense of normalcy and stability. Clear and consistent scheduling can help alleviate anxiety about the unknown.

2. Empowering the Individual:

- Recognize and validate the skills and experiences that refugees bring with them. This not only empowers individuals by acknowledging their capabilities but also integrates their expertise.
- Involve refugees in decisions about their learning and recovery processes. This practice helps restore a sense of control over their lives, which is often diminished Patel, s. G., et al., 2022).

3. Utilizing Non-verbal Communication:

The ability of a VET professional to communicate warmth, openness, and empathy non-verbally can be reassuring. **Key Focus Areas of non-verbal communication:**

- **Facial expressions** can convey basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust. For instance, a smile can cross language barriers to convey friendliness and openness, while a frown may express concern or confusion.
- **Body language, i.e. t**he way we sit, stand, and move can convey a wealth of information. Open body language, such as uncrossed arms and a relaxed stance, can signal that we are approachable and empathetic. In contrast, crossed arms might be perceived as defensive.
- **Gestures** can aid communication, especially when language barriers exist. Pointing to an object can help direct attention/indicate a choice.
- **Eye contact** can affirm the individual's presence and convey attentiveness and respect. However, the amount of eye contact that is considered appropriate can vary across cultures.
- **Use of personal space** preferences can also vary, with some cultures comfortable with close proximity during conversation, while others may prefer more distance.

- **Silence and pauses** can be powerful in conversation, allowing individuals time to process their thoughts and feelings (Mehrabian, A., 2021).

4. Integration of Technology and Communication Tools

The Integration of technology and communication tools enhances communication with refugees, especially when facing barriers such as language differences and cultural discrepancies:

- **Digital translation tools** like google translate can break down language barriers in real-time.
- **Visual communication aids such as** infographics, pictograms, and visual storytelling can transcend linguistic limitations through simple, universally understandable images.
- **Social media and messaging platforms** like WhatsApp or Facebook messenger, often familiar to refugees, can be used for ongoing support and information sharing.
- **Interactive learning** platforms, such as language learning apps (Duolingo) or VET modules can not only aid in education but also in building confidence and a sense of accomplishment.
- **Digital art applications** and music software that offer refugees possibilities for self-expression:

5. Resource Linking:

- Establish connections with **local community centres, health services, and other organizations** that offer support to refugees. Having a prepared list of resources, including those that offer services in the refugees' native languages, can be immensely helpful.
- Develop a system within the VET environment to provide continuous support to refugees. This could include regular check-ins, support groups, or peer mentoring programs with other refugees who have navigated similar experiences.

6. Educational and Psychological Support:

- Offer **language classes** as part of the vocational training, which not only aids in skill development but also eases communication barriers in everyday interactions.
- Adapt teaching **methods to be sensitive** to the needs of trauma survivors. This includes flexibility in teaching approaches, allowances for trauma triggers, and the integration of mental health breaks during sessions.

7. Building Trust and Safety:

- Establishing trust and safety which includes ensuring confidentiality, demonstrating non-judgmental understanding, and using open body language. Explain the importance of physical and emotional safety for refugees who experienced trauma and may fear authority figures.
- Designate areas within the training environment where refugees can retreat if they feel overwhelmed. These should be quiet spaces that offer privacy and comfort (Clark, A. J., 2020).

8. Training for Trainers:

- Ensure that all trainers and staff are trained in PFA and understand the basics of trauma-informed care. This preparation is crucial for them to effectively support refugees.
- Stress the importance of self-care practices and accessing professional support for themselves to maintain their well-being.
- **Cultural sensitivity** in responses due to acknowledging and respecting cultural differences is crucial in formulating responses. Offer guidelines for being culturally sensitive, such as researching cultural norms, avoiding assumptions based on stereotypes, and being open to learning from the refugees about their culture (Zhou, X., & Chi, V. L. Q., 2020).

How to teach techniques to manage stress

Teaching stress management techniques is an essential component of supporting individuals, especially refugees who have experienced trauma and are adapting to new environments. Stress management not only aids in immediate stress relief but also builds long-term resilience:

1. Breathing Exercises:

- Instruct participants in diaphragmatic breathing, which involves deep, even breaths from the diaphragm rather than shallow breaths from the chest. This helps reduce the "fight or flight" response and promotes calmness.
- Teach techniques such as the "4-7-8" breathing method, where participants inhale for four seconds, hold the breath for seven seconds, and exhale slowly for eight seconds. This method can help regulate heart rate and induce relaxation.
- Encourage regular practice by setting aside a few minutes at the beginning or end of each training session for breathing exercises. This helps integrate the practice into daily routines (Benson, H. (2000).

2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):

- **Teach PMR by explaining the process of tensing each muscle group, holding the tension, and then releasing it.** Walk participants through the process of tensing each muscle group for five to ten seconds and then relaxing it for 30 seconds. Start from the toes and move up to the forehead. This technique helps participants become more aware of physical sensations and aids in reducing muscle tension.
- Encourage regular practice of PMR, ideally in a quiet, comfortable setting. Regularity helps integrate this method into daily routines, making it more effective in managing stress

3. Mindfulness and Meditation:

- Use guided meditation sessions that focus on breathing and awareness of the body. These sessions can be facilitated through audio recordings or live guidance.
- Teach simple mindfulness exercises that can be integrated into daily activities, such as mindful eating, mindful walking, or mindful listening. These practices encourage living in the present moment and can significantly reduce anxiety and stress (Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013).

4. Cognitive-Behavioural Techniques:

- Teach participants to recognize and address stress-inducing thoughts. Techniques such as thought recording can help participants identify and modify negative thought patterns.
- Encourage the practice of reframing negative or stressful thoughts into more positive, manageable perspectives. This helps reduce the emotional impact of stress triggers.

5. Physical Activity:

- Integrate physical activities that promote relaxation, such as yoga or tai chi. These exercises combine physical movement with breathing control and can be particularly effective in reducing stress.

- Regular physical activity, even simple walking, can be a powerful stress reliever. Tailor exercise recommendations to fit individual preferences and capabilities

6. Art, Music and other creative approaches

- Provide opportunities for artistic expression, which can be therapeutic and a non-verbal way of processing emotions. Activities can include drawing, painting, or sculpting
- Use music as a tool for relaxation and emotional management. Teach participants how to choose calming music and encourage them to listen to it during stressful times or while practicing other stress management techniques.
- Guide participants through visualization exercises where they imagine a peaceful place or visualize themselves successfully managing a stressful situation. Visualization can enhance emotional regulation and provide a mental refuge from stress.
- Encourage keeping a stress management journal where participants can write about their stressors and techniques they find most effective. This can help in identifying patterns and solutions that work best for them.

7. Education and Practical Workshops:

- Conduct workshops that offer practical, hands-on training in various stress management techniques. These workshops can be interactive and include role-playing scenarios to practice stress responses.
- Provide participants with written materials or digital resources that they can refer to outside the training sessions. This could include handouts on breathing techniques, links to guided meditation videos, or lists of mindfulness apps.

By incorporating these detailed and varied techniques into your training, participants are better equipped to handle stress in their daily lives and during times of crisis. These methods not only assist in immediate stress reduction but also contribute to building a foundation for long-term mental health and well-being.

How to teach basic intervention techniques for participants to be able to help each other in stress situation

Teaching basic intervention techniques to participants to help each other in stress situations is a valuable skill in fostering a supportive community, particularly among refugees who may face unique and compounded challenges

Understanding Stress and Its Impact

- Begin with sessions that help participants understand what stress is, how it manifests differently in individuals, and its potential impact on mental and physical health. This foundational knowledge prepares them to recognize stress in themselves and others.
- Teach how to identify signs of stress and distress, including both psychological and physiological symptoms. Use role-playing scenarios to practice recognizing these signs in a simulated but safe environment.

Basic Intervention Techniques

1. **Active Listening Skills**:

- Active listening involves more than just hearing words; it's about understanding the speaker's emotions and intentions. Training should focus on teaching participants to listen without planning their response while the other person is talking, showing genuine interest, and encouraging the speaker with small verbal comments like "yes" and "I see."
- Use role-playing scenarios to practice active listening. These exercises can help participants experience both the role of the speaker and the listener, providing insight into how each position feels during the communication process.

2. **Effective Questioning**:

- Train participants to use open-ended questions that prompt more than yes-or-no answers to encourage deeper discussions about feelings and thoughts.
- Teach how to ask questions that clarify and confirm the listener's understanding without assuming or leading the conversation.

3. **Recognizing Non-verbal Cues**:

- Educate participants on how to read body language that may indicate stress or trauma, such as avoidance of eye contact, closed body language, or fidgeting.
- Through sensitivity training, increase awareness about cultural differences in non-verbal communication, which is crucial in multicultural settings.

4. **Emotional Support Techniques**:

- Train participants to express empathy effectively. This can be through verbal affirmations like "It sounds like you're really overwhelmed," and matching non-verbal expressions that show concern and attentiveness.
- Teach the importance of validating others' feelings without necessarily agreeing with them, which can help the individual feel understood and less isolated.

5. **Stress Reduction Methods**:

- Simple breathing techniques can be a quick way to help someone feeling overwhelmed. Teach participants the basics of controlled breathing to help stabilize the person's emotions.
- Introduce basic mindfulness or grounding exercises that can be done anywhere, anytime. These might include focusing on sensory experiences, like naming five things they can see, four things they can touch, etc.

6. **Crisis Management Skills**:

- Educate on how to recognize when someone is experiencing a crisis that might require professional intervention.
- Teach participants how to approach the topic of seeking professional help and how to guide peers in accessing the necessary resources **Essentials of Crisis Counselling and Intervention"** by Lennis Echterling, Jack Presbury, and Edith D. Henderson (2022).

Implementation in Training Sessions

- Organize workshops that allow for interactive learning experiences, including group discussions, Q&A sessions, and peer feedback.
- Provide handouts or digital resources summarizing key points from the training sessions. These can serve as quick-reference materials in stressful situations.

- Stress the importance of ongoing practice and learning.
- Encourage the creation of peer support networks where participants can apply their learning in real settings, under supervision initially, if possible, to build confidence and effectiveness.

Cultural Considerations

- Since the participants are from diverse backgrounds, include content on cultural competence. Understanding and respecting cultural differences in handling stress and emotional support are crucial for interventions to be effective.
- Ensure that the language of the training materials and sessions are accessible to overcome language barriers. **(Cultural Sensitivity in Mental Health: Understanding the Role of Culture in Psychological Practice"** by Michael O'Sullivan (2022)

By empowering participants with these basic intervention techniques, they not only help themselves but also create a community of support that can significantly enhance the resilience and mental well-being of the group as a whole.

Recommendation for trainers

Given the challenges on PFA, some recommendations for VET professionals working with refugees:

- Create a safe and supportive space where refugees feel comfortable expressing their emotions and experiences.
- Practice empathetic listening in all interactions to establish trust and connection.
- Engage in continuous learning about the cultures and languages of the refugee populations you serve, e.g. basic language skills in refugees' native languages or cultural norms and values.
- Be conscious of your body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues to convey warmth, openness, and empathy.
- Train yourself to read and interpret refugees' non-verbal signals accurately to better understand their emotional states and needs.
- Make use of translation apps and digital tools to overcome language barriers.
- Explore visual aids, such as infographics and pictograms, to deliver information and instructions in an accessible manner.
- Design activities that encourage reflection on the learning process, such as art-based reflections, scenario building, and digital storytelling.
- Provide training on specific techniques to manage stress and handle crisis situations, such as breathing exercises, mindfulness, and grounding techniques.
- Focus on empowering refugees by recognizing and utilizing their existing skills and providing opportunities for skill development and education.
- Develop interactive quizzes and role-play scenarios, allowing participants to apply their knowledge and receive immediate feedback.
- Engage in self-care practices and seek professional support when needed.
- Stay informed about the latest research and best practices in PFA and refugee support.

Resources/Materials

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9. Patel, S. G., et al. (2022). The Power of Listening in Helping People Change. Harvard Business Review, 100(2), 34-40.

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Module 5 - Trauma-Informed Care and Teaching Techniques

This module on **Trauma-Informed Care and Teaching Techniques** is designed for VET professionals working with refugees in VET-settings. It aims to equip trainers with the essential skills and knowledge to provide trauma – informed interventions to refugees who may be experiencing distress or trauma.

Objectives

- Implement trauma-informed teaching practices
- Create a trauma-sensitive learning environment
- Understand and learn basic techniques of cognitive behavioural approaches
- Support refugees by learning according to their goals

Why trauma-informed care?

Trauma-informed care changes the perspective to understand a refugee's experiences and context rather than focusing solely on their symptoms. It recognizes the need for VET trainers to understand a refugee's life context to offer effective services. This approach enhances refugee engagement, treatment adherence, and learning outcomes while also promoting trainer wellness and reducing unnecessary costs. It involves recognizing trauma's impact, identifying its signs, integrating trauma knowledge into practices, and avoiding re-traumatization.

The principles of trauma-informed care for VET professionals are essential to effectively address mild to moderate mental health problems among refugees. Key principles include:

- **Understanding trauma**: Recognize the widespread impact of trauma and understand paths for recovery, enabling more empathetic and effective support.
- **Ensuring safety**: Create a physical and emotional environment where refugees feel secure and protected, reducing the risk of re-traumatization.
- **Building trust**: Foster reliable and transparent relationships, helping refugees feel valued and understood.
- **Respecting personal choices**: Empower refugees by honouring their autonomy and involving them in decision-making processes.
- **Considering cultural contexts**: Acknowledge and respect diverse cultural backgrounds, adapting approaches to be culturally sensitive and inclusive.

By adhering to these principles, VET professionals can create supportive and healing environments that foster positive learning experiences for refugees.

Using knowledge about trauma in teaching

The term "trauma" originates from the ancient Greek word τραῦμᾰ, meaning "wound" or "injury," and while physical wounds are tangible, trauma can also affect the mind and emotions. For refugees, traumatic events might include experiences such as fleeing from war, losing family members during displacement, or enduring prolonged periods in refugee camps. These events can lead to both physical and **emotional symptoms**, such as depression, fear, irritability, and disturbances in sleep and eating. Trauma can impact one's body, mind, emotions, and social life, manifesting in various forms. Definitions of **trauma emphasize its nature as a deeply distressing experience that overwhelms one's ability to cope**. Reactions to trauma are highly individual; the same event may affect people differently, with some recovering more easily than others.

Neurologically, trauma overwhelms normal coping mechanisms, which typically provide a sense of control, connection, meaning, and safety. The body's responses to trauma are natural protective measures. Trauma disrupts the limbic system, which stores emotional responses to experiences. **The amygdala, the brain's "fear center," is central to trauma response and memory storage, explaining why recalling traumatic events often evokes strong emotions**.

During a traumatic experience, the activated amygdala interferes with the hippocampus, responsible for long-term memory recall. This interference can result in fragmented memories, where details of the event are recalled non-linearly or incompletely. **Fragmented memory is a natural way of processing trauma.** Understanding these neurobiological effects is crucial for providing compassionate support to trauma survivors, including refugees.

For survivors of trauma, it can be challenging to adapt and fully utilize their cognitive capacities due to the strong emotional impact of their experiences. Trauma can significantly impair concentration, memory, and decision-making skills, making it difficult for individuals to engage in learning and other cognitive tasks effectively. It is essential for VET professionals to be knowledgeable about all aspects of trauma to provide effective support. This includes understanding the neurobiological effects, recognizing symptoms, and being aware of potential triggers—situations, people, or environments that remind individuals of the traumatic event—that can provoke intense emotional and physical reactions.

VET professionals must foster an environment of trust and safety, where learners feel comfortable expressing their needs and emotions. By understanding the profound impact of trauma on cognitive and emotional functioning, VET professionals can adapt their teaching techniques and interventions, ensuring that they meet the unique needs of each refugee learner. This comprehensive awareness enables the creation of supportive and healing educational environments that facilitate positive learning outcomes and personal growth for trauma survivors.

A Supportive learning environment

Creating a supportive learning environment involves establishing a sense of safety, ensuring that the physical space is secure and comfortable, and fostering a welcoming and non-threatening emotional atmosphere. **Clear rules and consistent routines** contribute to this sense of security by providing learners with **predictable expectations**. This environment supports the paradigm shift in education towards learner-centred approaches. In this model, the trainer transitions from being the expert to being a facilitator, empowering learners to be experts in their own learning and lives. This shift aligns with trauma-informed approaches, where the trainer's role is to provide an **environment that allows learners to maximize their potential.**

Building trust is crucial in such an environment. Trust develops through consistent, respectful interactions, with educators striving to be **reliable, approachable, and empathetic**. Demonstrating genuine interest in learners' well-being and progress, active listening, validating their experiences, and being responsive to their needs all help to strengthen these relationships. Given that virtually every classroom includes learners at heightened risk for re-traumatization or vicarious traumatization due to personal trauma histories or current challenges, trainers must be familiar with the implications of trauma for learning. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma and re-traumatization is essential for providing appropriate support.

Respect for personal choices and encouraging autonomy play significant roles in this process. When learners have a say in their learning process, they feel more empowered and engaged. This might involve offering choices in assignments, supporting self-directed projects, and fostering a collaborative

atmosphere. Recognizing and accommodating diverse needs and learning styles is also important for creating an inclusive environment. For many learners, especially those who have experienced trauma, adapting to their individual needs can significantly impact their ability to learn and participate.

Considering cultural contexts and being culturally sensitive are essential for inclusivity. Awareness and respect for the diverse backgrounds of learners, along with the incorporation of culturally relevant materials and practices, help learners feel seen and valued. This cultural sensitivity supports their ability to connect with the material and each other, enhancing the overall learning experience.

Teachers and trainers play a critical role in mitigating the negative effects of trauma by forming trusting, caring, and responsive relationships with learners. Research highlights that a safe, caring, and consistent adult can buffer the experience of stress and convey empathy and optimism, which are key to healing and resilience. Creating safe and predictable environments involves establishing consistent schedules and routines, minimizing transitions, and informing learners in advance about any changes.

Understanding patterns of behaviour and potential triggers in the classroom is vital. Educators must stay alert to behaviours that indicate a learner's stress-response system is activated, and work to reduce triggering experiences. Communicating clearly that the teacher's role includes ensuring learners' safety and being a consistent source of comfort reinforces this sense of security.

Moreover, implementing positive behaviour supports and social-emotional learning strategies helps learners develop self-regulation, social competence, and self-esteem. Educators need to be well-informed about referral procedures and available resources to provide additional support if necessary.

Art therapy as useful method of teaching and interacting with refugees

Art therapy techniques provide crucial support for refugee participants, helping them express themselves more effectively. Creative arts therapies, including music, dance, and visual arts, offer a **safe and sensory-rich space for emotional expression and integration**. These therapies enable refugees to maintain their cultural identity while gradually adapting to their new environment. By fostering a sense of temporary home and facilitating self-expression, art therapy techniques play a crucial role in aiding refugees during their transition.

For VET professionals working with refugees, incorporating art therapy techniques can **enhance the learning environment and address the unique challenges** faced by these learners. Understanding the emotional and psychological needs of refugees is essential for creating a supportive and inclusive educational experience. By integrating creative arts therapies into their teaching practices, VET professionals can provide refugees with tools to better express themselves, process their experiences, and engage more fully in their learning journey. This approach aligns with trauma-informed care principles, ensuring that the educational environment is not only safe and supportive but also responsive to the diverse needs of refugee learners.

Incorporating art therapy into the training environment can be especially beneficial for refugees as they navigate their new surroundings. Art therapy leverages the creative process to encourage self-expression, promote personal insight, and develop coping strategies. By engaging in artistic activities, individuals can explore and communicate their emotions, enhance self-awareness, and improve their ability to manage stress.

Exploring Emotions Through Art: Art therapy provides a unique medium for refugees to express their emotions and experiences that might be difficult to articulate verbally. Creating or appreciating art can

help individuals process complex feelings, build self-awareness, and develop resilience. Techniques such as drawing, painting, and sculpting offer tangible ways for participants to convey their inner experiences, making the abstract nature of trauma more manageable.

Building Self-Awareness and Coping Skills: Engaging in artistic activities can facilitate self-discovery and enhance coping mechanisms. By exploring different art forms like collage, colouring, or finger painting, refugees can gain insights into their emotional state and personal strengths. These activities also provide a constructive outlet for managing stress and boosting self-esteem, helping participants to navigate their trauma more effectively.

Fostering Social Skills and Self-Esteem: Art therapy can also support the development of social skills and self-confidence. Group art projects or collaborative activities encourage interaction and communication among participants, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. Through creative expression, individuals often experience increased self-esteem and a strengthened sense of identity, which are crucial for their adjustment and integration.

Implementing Art Therapy Techniques: To effectively integrate art therapy into a trauma-sensitive training room, VET professionals can incorporate a variety of artistic techniques. Simple activities like doodling, scribbling, or using clay can be accessible and engaging for participants. More structured approaches such as painting or photography can also be employed to explore and express complex emotions. By offering a range of artistic options, trainers can cater to different preferences and needs, ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to benefit from the therapeutic process.

Creating a Supportive Space for Art Therapy: Incorporating art therapy requires a thoughtful approach to the training environment. Ensure that the space is conducive to creativity, with materials readily available and a setting that encourages exploration and expression. Providing a safe and welcoming atmosphere will allow refugees to fully engage in the art-making process, facilitating their emotional healing and personal growth.

By integrating art therapy techniques into the training environment, VET professionals can support refugees in expressing themselves more effectively and developing valuable coping skills. The creative process not only aids in emotional expression but also helps build a supportive community where individuals can feel valued and understood.

TECHNIQUES EXAMPLES:

Drawing: Participants can draw symbols or images that represent their personal experiences and emotions. This can help them visualize and communicate their feelings in a non-verbal way or encouraging refugees to create a series of drawings that tell a story.

Painting can facilitate emotional expression and self-discovery. Provide paints and ask participants to create abstract paintings that reflect their emotions or use painting to depict elements of their home culture, which can help refugees maintain a connection to their heritage and feel a sense of identity.

Collage: create vision boards using magazines, papers, and other materials to visualize goals and hopes for the future. This can inspire hope and positive thinking.

Sculpting as clay models, symbolic figures or other hands-on activity can be soothing and provide a tangible way to express abstract concepts. Work with clay to create small sculptures that represent personal experiences or aspirations or sculpt figures or symbols that represent significant aspects of their lives or emotional states, helping them to externalize and examine their feelings.

Mandala Colouring can be meditative and help focus the mind, providing a calming activity that promotes relaxation.

Photography can be used for photo journals or thematic projects. Ask participants to take photographs of their daily surroundings or objects that hold personal significance. This can help them document and reflect on their current experiences. Provide themes or prompts for photography projects, such as "What makes you feel safe?" or "Moments of joy," to guide their exploration and self-expression.

Each of these techniques offers a unique way for refugees to explore and express their inner experiences, contributing to their emotional healing and integration process. By incorporating these activities into your training sessions, you can create a supportive environment that fosters self-expression and personal growth.

A Trauma-sensitive training room design

Creating a trauma-sensitive training room is crucial for VET professionals working with adult refugees, as it can significantly impact their ability to engage and learn effectively. Refugees may have experienced trauma that leaves them hypervigilant and easily triggered by their environment. Designing a training space that addresses these needs can help create a safe and supportive learning environment.

Understanding Hypervigilance: Many refugees who have experienced trauma remain in a state of hypervigilance, constantly scanning their environment for threats. This heightened state of alertness is both physically and emotionally draining, making it essential for training rooms to minimize triggers and provide a sense of safety. VET professionals should be aware that seemingly innocuous elements, such as bright colours or unexpected noises, can cause significant distress.

Creating a Safe Spatial Layout: The spatial layout of a training room should consider the need for visibility and safety. Traumatized individuals often feel more secure when they can see exits and monitor the doorways. Arrange seating so that participants do not have their backs to the door, allowing them to see who is entering and exiting the room. Ensuring clear sightlines can reduce anxiety and help learners feel more at ease.

Thoughtful Use of Colour: Colours in the training environment can significantly affect mood and anxiety levels. Avoid institutional colours like white, grey, and beige, as well as deeply saturated colours such as red, yellow, or orange, which can increase anxiety. Instead, use calming colours like light blue, green, or purple, which create a sense of spaciousness and tranquillity. These colours can help foster a more relaxed and conducive learning environment.

Furniture and Flexibility: Flexible furniture arrangements can enhance the feeling of safety and control for learners. Tables and chairs with wheels allow for easy movement, enabling participants to arrange the space to their comfort. This flexibility also supports collaborative learning, which can be beneficial for building trust and engagement among refugees. As you update furniture, consider options that enhance both movement and visibility.

Managing Noise Levels: Both sudden and constant noises can be stressful for trauma survivors. Carpeting can significantly reduce noise levels, making the environment more comfortable. If carpeting

is not an option, using area rugs can help absorb sound and improve acoustics. Additionally, being mindful of noise-producing items and minimizing their use can prevent unnecessary stress.

Lighting Considerations: Lighting is another critical element in creating a trauma-sensitive environment. Fluorescent lights, especially if they flicker, can be unsettling. Replacing them with LED lights that provide a warmer, steady illumination can make a big difference. However, LED lights can be very bright, so use multi-switch panels to adjust the lighting as needed, ensuring it is not overwhelming for participants.

Incorporating Art Therapy Elements: Integrating elements of art therapy can also support trauma-sensitive design. Allowing space for creative expression through music, drawing, or movement can help refugees process their emotions and experiences. Art therapy can offer a temporary sense of home and aid in the gradual adaptation to new environments, enhancing overall well-being and engagement in learning.

Implementing all these recommendations may be challenging at times. In such situations, VET professionals can focus on adhering to the basic principles that are most accessible. For instance, ensuring the training room is quiet and free from harsh or flickering lights can significantly reduce stress. Avoiding disturbing images and decorations that may conflict with the socio-cultural realities of participants is also crucial.

Essential Tips for a Trauma-Sensitive Environment:

1. **Maintain a Quiet Environment:** Minimize noise levels to avoid triggering anxiety.
2. **Display a Clear Agenda:** Keep the daily schedule visible and adhere to it to ensure predictability.
3. **Provide Clear Signage:** Ensure there are clear signs directing participants to essential facilities like restrooms.
4. **Seating Arrangements:** Arrange seating so participants face the entrance, helping them feel more secure.
5. **Ensure Location Security:** Select a location that is safe and feels secure to all participants.
6. **Consider Cultural Sensitivity:** Decorate and furnish the room with an awareness of the socio-cultural background of the participants.

By focusing on these accessible principles, VET professionals can create a supportive and safe learning environment even when comprehensive changes are not feasible. The goal is to ensure that the training space is as welcoming and trauma-sensitive as possible, helping refugees to engage fully in their learning journey.

Resources/Materials

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Module 6 - Integration and social inclusion of refugees in training sessions

Learning Objectives:

- Promote social integration and inclusion of refugees
- Support refugees in building community connection**s**

Topics/content:

- Meaning of being refugee in training context and its consideration for trainers
- Strategies for promoting social integration and inclusion of refugees in training sessions
- Creating a supportive and welcoming environment for refugees in training sessions
- Addressing cultural differences and diversity in integration efforts
- Building community connections through networking and collaboration

Refugee – what does it really mean?

According to the Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention, as modified by the 1967 Protocol, a refugee is defined as a person who *"owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"*- but what does it really means?

What kind of image appears before our eyes when we think of refugees? Do we think of masses of exhausted people or of individuals alone in a foreign country? Or families with hungry small children? Of similarly qualified people, like us, who have lost everything except their lives? Completely different people who want to get on with their lives with very little change? People in tent camps or travelling with huge sacks, perhaps people behind fences? When we search for images in our browser, these are the first search results. All of them are pieces of reality - but still stereotypes.

Photo collage generated with Co-pilot

"collage of the most used photos about refugees"

The way in which we recognise people influences the attitude with which we as trainers work with the group or with individuals. It is important to have a clear idea of our role and inner motivation as a trainer.

Here are some reasons why this is crucial:

- **Building trust and rapport**: clarity about our recognition as trainers creates a professional atmosphere, making it easier to communicate and establish rapport.

- **Effective group dynamics**: we can manage group better, trough motivating participants, encouraging interaction, and facilitating efficient collaboration.

- **Focus on goals**: knowing our attitudes allows us to define our role and to focus on the training's goals. We can design sessions that not just deliver knowledge effectively but meet participants' needs too.

- **Professional integrity**: a clear understanding of our role enables professional behaviour. We can adhere to ethical standards and conduct effective training sessions.

In the following WordCloud developed with trainers in adult education there are numerous meaningful examples of the first associations to the expression "refugee".

Practical considerations in the context of the empathy of trainers

Empathy and the ability to take the perspective of others are two skills that are among the most important social competences in the trainer profession. While empathy is a natural human response and being able to take the other person's perspective is among the most critical social skills in the coaching profession, it can have both positive and negative implications in a training context.

Positive aspects:

- **Empathy and Compassion**: Feeling pity, sorrow and commiseration can stem from genuine empathy and compassion. A trainer who empathizes with the challenges faced by refugees may be more understanding and supportive.
- **Tailored Support**: these feelings can drive trainers to provide personalized assistance. They may adapt their teaching methods, offer additional resources, or create a safe space for learners.
- **Advocacy**: these feelings can motivate trainers to advocate for better conditions, equal opportunities, and inclusion. They may actively address systemic barriers.

- **Empowerment**: by acknowledging a refugee's achievements, the trainer empowers them. It reinforces the idea that refugees are not mere victims but capable individuals who can make a positive impact.

> *"The support of my first trainer was irreplaceable: it helped me to understand that I am able to navigate myself in my new environments processes. I am able, because I was able to solve my biggest challenge in my life."*
>
> *"When my coach said that I should not build my roadmap for my future in one staircase, because it is normal to find my orientation in stages, it made me feel that I was >seen<, and moreover, appreciated and respected."*

Course participants at BEST Institute, Vienna

Negative aspects:

- **Paternalism**: Excessive pity, sorrow, commiseration, regret, etc. can lead to a paternalistic attitude. Trainers may unintentionally treat learners as helpless victims rather than capable individuals

- **Low Expectations**: feelings like above might lower expectations. Trainers may underestimate learners' abilities, hindering their growth.

- **Stigmatization**: inadvertently stigmatize of marginalized groups like refugees can be caused through these feelings. It reinforces the idea that they are "less than" or need special treatment.

- **Treating as a hero** may oversimplify their experiences. Refugees face complex challenges, trauma, and diverse backgrounds. Reducing their identity to a heroic narrative overlooks the nuances of their lives. This attitude can create an unrealistic expectation toward them, or lead to feel pressure to maintain the hero-image, even when dealing with personal difficulties. It also may hinder their ability to seek help or express vulnerability.

> *"He said that he was very sorry that we had suffered so much and that we had to leave everything behind... I felt his pity and that actually put me in a bad mood... I didn't understand it. I thought about it for a really long time until I was able to express: my strength, what I rebuilt step by step after the total freeze, was taken away. I don't pity myself and I don't want anyone to do it. That makes me feel like there is something "wrong" with me. Regret has made me feel that I am less than others and will never be "normal".*

Course participant at BEST Institute, Vienna

Balancing Empathy and Professionalism

When working with refugees, trainers find themselves at the intersection of compassion and structure. The delicate balance between empathy and professionalism is paramount, shaping the effectiveness of training initiatives.

- Trainers should acknowledge emotions but maintain professionalism.

- Instead of pity, focus on **respect**, **dignity**, and **equity**.

- Understand learners' challenges without diminishing their agency.

- Implementation of activities in training courses through which all participants can recognise that their life events can convey similar experiences and emotions to them. (e.g. loss, grief, sorrow, hopelessness, but also reassurance, joy, relief, hope).

Training courses can become bridges connecting participants. Through our attitudes and reactions, we can support the social integration and inclusion of refugees.

After the personal characteristics of the trainer's work with vulnerable groups, we should turn to the strategies applicable in the groups.

How to promote strategies for integration and social inclusion in training sessions?

This topic aims to equip trainers with insights needed to foster a sense of belonging, understanding, and collaboration within diverse communities. We will explore both direct and indirect strategies that can contribute to thriving refugees in their new environments. These approaches aim to create an environment where refugees feel welcomed, valued, and empowered.

1. Direct Strategies:

Group rules, norms and agreements:
At the outset of a training session, it is essential to establish clear group rules and norms. These agreements create a foundation for an inclusive and respectful learning environment.

- **Equal rights**: ensure that all participants, regardless of their background, have equal rights to participate, express opinion, and contribute.
- **Respectful behaviour**: encourage interactions that demonstrate respect for diverse perspectives, experiences, and cultural differences. Address any discriminatory behaviour prompt.
- **Active listening**: emphasize the importance of listening attentively to others' viewpoints.
- **Conflict resolution guidelines**: establish clear procedures for resolving conflicts within the group. Train participants in conflict resolution techniques & create a safe space for expressing disagreements.

Establish clear guidelines within training sessions.
These rules promote respectful interactions,
create a safe space and ensure everyone's voice is heard.

> Ask the participants: How can the most effective participation of them be ensured? Make a list of

Language inclusivity

Use clear and simple language during training sessions. Avoid jargon or complex terminology – that might be challenging for non-native speakers.

- Use **plain language** in materials, presentations and discussions.
- Encourage using to online translators, if that serves effectiveness. (e.g. understanding an instruction, developing something on own language is easier – later can be translated)

Active participation

It carries great significance to ensure that all participants actively engage in discussions, activities and exercises.

- Equal airtime: encourage balanced participation by giving the opportunity to everyone to speak. If someone has language challenges, turn to them with lots of support techniques (e.g. differentiated task setting, more help with preparation, helping in-between questions, and offering particular attention that serves as a role model for the group members).
- Open question: ask open-ended question to promote dialogue.

> *"Daniel arrived from a war when he was 17, he has lived here for 8 years, but has worked with "his people", and so he hasn't learnt much German because he had to work. He took part in a self-presentation course with me, in which all participants had to give a presentation by the end of the week. Daniel didn't want to do it at first because he couldn't speak well. I spent the whole week support him to express himself properly. I noticed that he spoke with great enthusiasm about his original country. That became his topic and he gave a wonderful presentation, while*

Trainer at BEST Institute, Vienna

Collaborating Learning Activities

Trough designing training activities that foster collaboration and teamwork among participants we work continuously for social integration of refugee people.

- **Pair and group work:** introduce your methodological tools, explain at the beginning that you work with collaborative methods, which requires participants to work in pairs or small groups to share ideas & solve tasks collectively.
- **Peer teaching**: encourage participants to teach each other based on their expertise or cultural knowledge.

Diverse Role Models and Guest Speakers

When promoting social integration and inclusion of refugees in training sessions, trainers can strategically incorporate diverse role models and guest speakers. These individuals serve as powerful examples, inspiring participants and providing practical insights. By weaving these personal stories into the fabric of group dynamics, language learning, active participation, and collaborative activities, trainers create a holistic approach that empowers refugees during their integration.
Role Models are individuals who have successfully integrated into the host society after being refugees themselves. They serve as living examples of resilience, adaptability, and achievement and can be found in various contexts:

- **Personal stories:** invite refugees who have overcome challenges to share their experiences. Their narratives resonate with participants and provide hope.

- **Videos and films:** showcase short documentaries or interviews featuring successful refugees. Visual storytelling is impactful.
- **Podcasts and interviews:** audio platforms allow for in-depth discussions about integration journeys.
- **Local events:** identify role models participating in community events, workshops, or cultural celebrations.

> *"As part of a project, we conducted short interviews with colleagues with migration background about the challenges of relocating and building a career in Austria. The participants shared such personal and deep thoughts and feelings about their own pathways that all viewers still feel touched today when they watch the video. Since some of the group members know the trainers, they are simply impressed that they are real people who have made it, then they also have a good chance..."*

Trainer at BEST Institute, Vienna

Guest Speakers can be professionals, community leaders, or experts in fields relevant to refugees (e.g., legal rights, employment, mental health). They offer practical advice and answer questions related to integration.

- **Job Searching:** tips on finding employment, tailoring resumes, and networking.
- **Language Learning:** strategies for language acquisition and cultural adaptation.
- **Navigating Systems:** understanding local services, education, and healthcare.
- **Interactive Sessions:** encourage dialogue between participants and guest speakers. Q&A sessions allow for personalized guidance.

Trainer's Role: it is crucial to prepare the work with role models and guest speakers and brief them on the audience, context, and sensitive topics and to ensure they align with the training goals.

- Facilitation: introduce speakers, set expectations, and moderate discussions. Keep sessions engaging and respectful.
- Trauma-informed approach be sensitive to potential triggers and traumatic experiences. Prepare speakers accordingly.
- Follow-Up: reflect on the impact of guest speakers. Discuss key takeaways with participants afterward.

2. Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies for promoting social integration and inclusion of refugees involve specific and targeted methods that trainers can use during training sessions without overwhelming participants.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning involves structured activities where participants work together in small groups to achieve common goals. It promotes interaction, mutual support, and shared learning experiences.

While applying cooperative learning strategies, the trainers are guided by the following basic principles:

- **Mixed groups:** trainers form diverse groups with both refugees and locals. They assign tasks that require collaboration (e.g., problem-solving, project work).

- **Positive interdependence:** trainers emphasize that everyone's success contributes to the group's overall achievement. Participants work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.
- **Individual accountability:** each participant has a specific role or responsibility.
- **Reflection:** after the activities, trainers discuss with the group what worked well and how cooperation impacted the outcome.

Assigning **specific group roles** - such as leader/facilitator, recorder/reporter, questioner/clarifier, motivator, timekeeper, materials manager, summarizer - during implementing cooperative learning is crucial in enhancing learning experiences and promoting social integration besides equal participation and accountability for further reasons:

- Skill development: roles provide opportunities to practice different roles – partly unfamiliar - in a supportive environment.
- Efficiency: clear roles making discussions more focused and productive.

Further contributions of cooperative learning to social integration in training sessions for refugees:

- Widening social network: by group work participants build connections, learn from one another and foster a sense of belonging.
- Cultural exchange: collaborating with peers from diverse backgrounds fosters understanding.
- Language learning: group interactions improve language skills.

Cooperative learning methods and techniques and their benefits:

- **Think-Pair-Share:** participants think individually about a question or topic, pair up with a partner to discuss their thoughts, and then share their ideas with the whole class. It encourages active participation, collaboration, and diverse perspectives.
- **Round Robin:** In small groups, participants take turns answering a question or contributing ideas. A designated recorder records everyone's responses. This method encourages equal participation and ensures everyone's voice is heard.
- **Jigsaw technique:** trainers divide trainees into diverse expert groups, where each member becomes an expert on a specific topic. Then, reassemble mixed groups with one expert from each topic to share knowledge.
- **Team-Pair-Solo:** participants work together in a group to solve a problem. Next, they work with a partner to solve a problem, and finally, they work by themselves to solve a problem. This technique uses the theory that trainees progress to the point that they can solve the problem on their own only after being supported first in a team and then by a partner.

Social-emotional learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a critical aspect of education/training that supports participants' emotional well-being, interpersonal skills, and overall success. In the context of our project understanding SEL is essential.

SEL involves acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, show empathy, establish supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL contributes to a caring, just, inclusive, and healthy environment, empowering all individuals to thrive personally and on their learning pathway.

In the context of refugee mental wellbeing, SEL can provide essential tools for coping, resilience, and building supportive relationships and contribute to a successful social integration of refugees:

- Building trust and healthy relationships: SEL helps build positive connections with peers and trainers trough developing empathy, active listening, and communication skills. By fostering positive relationships refugees feel more connected and accepted within the training community.
- Mental wellness: SEL equips refugees with tools to manage emotions, reduce anxiety, build resilience and cope effectively. When they feel emotionally stable, they can engage more actively in training activities.
- Conflict resolution: it teaches conflict resolution strategies. Refugees learn to address disagreements peacefully, which contributes to a harmonious and supportive learning environment.
- Cultural competence: SEL encourages understanding and appreciation of diverse backgrounds. Refugees gain cultural competence, enabling them to navigate social norms and customs more effectively.
- Training performance: it positively impacts academic outcomes by enhancing focus, motivation, and problem-solving abilities.
- Self-advocacy: it empowers refugees to express their needs and advocate for themselves.

Emotion regulation refers to the ability to manage and modulate one's emotional responses effectively. It involves recognizing, understanding, and controlling emotions in various situations.
Why is it important for refugee trainees? Refugees face significant stressors during resettlement (acculturative stress), including language barriers, unfamiliar norms, and discrimination. Effective emotion regulation helps them cope with these challenges. Learning to regulate emotions reduces anxiety and promotes a sense of control and independence. In addition, well-regulated emotions enhance positive interactions with others, fostering social connections. Emotionally regulated refugees are better equipped to navigate their new environment and engage meaningfully.

SEL learning techniques and benefits:

- **Mood meters:** use visual tools (e.g., mood charts, mood cards, emoji's, mood barometer, photos and pictures etc.) to help students identify and express their emotions. Discuss feelings and strategies for managing them, this enhances emotional awareness and communication.
- **Circle time**: gather trainees regularly in a circle to discuss feelings, experiences, and personal stories. It could be excellent to start and close training sessions. You can apply creative versions (e.g. to express actual feelings like a weather condition/animal/colour or as statue/motion/sign). This encourages active listening, empathy, give opportunity to represent inner states without complicated language expressions while fosters a sense of community and emotional connection.
- **Collaborative storytelling:** have group member's work together to create different stories with several learning goals, incorporating different characters, settings and plot elements. You can work e.g. with story of their name, career path story, job role story writing, industry-specific story circles, employee profile storyboarding, future vision collage, etc.
- **Journal on positive things:** encourage participants write down things they find positive for each day. It could be implemented e.g. in form of circle question to be answered on a worksheet or a common flipchart paper, or short feedback on pieces of papers. Asylum seekers often have a negativity focus (what is missing, what they have lost, not achieved, what is still difficult) and postpone the sense of relatively being OK into the distant future. Reflecting on small positive experiences and recognising little everyday steps forward promotes emotional well-being and it cultivates a positive mind-set and resilience.

Empathy building

Empathy involves understanding and sharing another person's emotions, perspectives, and experiences. It promotes compassion, connection, and mutual understanding.

Empathy helps combat stereotypes and prejudice by fostering understanding of refugees' unique backgrounds and challenges. Building empathy bridges gaps between refugee and local peoples, promoting social inclusion. Empathy encourages curiosity about different cultures and promotes cross-cultural learning. Empathetic connections with others provide emotional support and a sense of belonging.

- **Perspective taking exercises:** assign participants a specific role and ask them to imagine the challenges, emotions, and experiences associated with that role. You can combine this technique with storytelling, role-play scenarios, job-profiling, etc. This enhances understanding of diverse perspectives and promotes empathy.

- **Storytelling circles:** create a safe space for participants to share personal stories related to cultural differences, challenges, learning or employee journey or moments of connection. Storytelling fosters empathy, builds connections, and breaks down barriers.

- **Empathy mapping**: provide a template with sections for thoughts, feelings, actions, and needs. Participants fill in each section based on someone else's perspective. Don't forget the reflection circle to summarize the experiences and give opportunity to express difficult feelings, insights, recognitions, effects exerted on the individuals. This helps participants step into others' shoes and identify commonalities.

- **Role-playing scenarios:** create scenarios related to cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, or other resettlement, career or emotional challenges. Participants role-play and practice expression needs, expectations in appropriate way and to give empathetic responses. It builds practical empathy skills and prepares participants for real-life interactions.

- **Active listening** can be thought including maintaining eye contact, paraphrasing and asking open-ended questions. Participants learn to truly understand others' feelings and experiences, which can help to overcome frustrating situations. (further Info in Module 4)

Creating a Supportive and Welcoming Environment for Refugees in Training Sessions

As trainers and educators, our role extends beyond imparting knowledge; it encompasses creating an inclusive space where every participant including refugees feel valued, respected, and safe. The transition to a new country can be daunting for refugees, especially when navigating unfamiliar systems, cultural norms, and language barriers. Therefore, intentionally designing a welcoming environment is essential for their well-being and successful integration.

A welcoming environment ensures that adult refugees feel accepted, valued, and supported. It encompasses physical spaces, cultural sensitivity and language support, and interpersonal interactions.

Strategies to Create a Welcoming Environment:

- **Physical Space**
  - **Decorate:** use welcoming signs, posters, and culturally inclusive decorations.
  - **Comfort:** ensure comfortable seating, good lighting, and a clean environment.
  - **Quiet area:** designate a quiet space where participants can retreat if needed.

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- **Behaviour and attitude**
    - **Positive behaviour:** model respectful behaviour and encourage participants to do the same.
    - **Address bullying or discrimination**: be vigilant and address any incidents promptly. Use group rules and norms.

- **Language and Communication:**
    - **Clear communication:** use simple language and avoid jargon.
    - **Translation services:** provide interpreters if necessary.
    - **Language barriers:** address language gaps by providing contents and exercises on different language level and with if it is possible partly with translated materials to support quick understanding.
    - **Functional literacy:** recognize that some adult refugees may have limited literacy skills. Use visual aids, practical demonstrations, and hands-on learning.
    - **Active Listening:** show genuine interest in participants' experiences.

- **Cultural Competence:**
    - **Understanding participants:** recognize that adult refugees bring diverse life experiences, skills, and knowledge. Acknowledge their resilience and the expertise they offer.
    - **Cultural awareness:** sensitize yourself, your colleagues and participants to cultural norms, communication styles, and nonverbal cues. Avoid assumptions and stereotypes.
    - **Trauma-informed approach:** understand that some refugees may have experienced trauma. Create a safe space that avoids triggering memories and fosters healing, teach them on acceptance of trauma responses and emotional regulation to handle it.

- **Community Building: (see below)**
    - **Peer networks:** encourage adult refugees to connect with one another. Peer support helps combat isolation and provides a sense of belonging.
    - **Local community engagement:** facilitate interactions with locals through joint activities, cultural exchanges, and community events.

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:**
    - understand that some refugees may have experienced trauma. Create a safe space that avoids triggering memories and fosters healing, teach them on acceptance of trauma responses and emotional regulation to handle it.
    - **Creating safe spaces:** ensure that training sessions are emotionally safe. Acknowledge participants' experiences and provide resources for mental health support.
    - **Self-care:** teach coping strategies and stress management techniques. Encourage self-compassion and resilience.

How to address cultural differences and diversity in integration efforts

In VET training sessions cultural competence ensures that trainers and participants navigate cultural differences with sensitivity, promote understanding, and create an inclusive learning environment which is in our project context one of the priority topics.

- **Inclusive curriculum design:** Inclusion means actively involving everyone, regardless of their cultural background. Adapt training materials to reflect diverse perspectives.

Methods, exercises, practical examples:

- **Case studies:** include cases from various cultural backgrounds.
- **Cultural competence modules:** integrate cultural competence topics into the curriculum.
- **Role-playing scenarios:** practice cross-cultural interactions.
- **Privilege walk:** participants physically move forward or backward based on their privilege (e.g., socio-economic status, education).
- **Scenario discussions:** present scenarios related to cultural misunderstandings and discuss potential solutions.
- **Recognizing experiences:** encourage participants and provide opportunity to them in different forms to share their experiences of feeling included or excluded during integration processes.
- **Cultural awareness sessions**
  Conduct training sessions that explore cultural norms, communication styles, and etiquette. Begin by acknowledging that cultural diversity exists and is valuable. Encourage an open mind-set and curiosity about different customs, traditions, and perspectives.

Methods, exercises, practical examples:

- **Case Studies:** discuss real-life scenarios related to cultural misunderstandings.
- **Guest speakers:** invite successful integrated members of the community with refugee background with/and cultural experts to share their experiences.
- **Cultural quizzes:** engage participants in quizzes about different cultures.
- **Cultural icebreakers:** use activities like "Two Truths and a Cultural Myth" or "Cultural Bingo" to help participants share their backgrounds.
- **Cultural mapping:** ask participants to create a visual representation of their cultural influences (e.g., family, language, religion).
- **Cultural impacts:** in a VET session, discuss how different cultural norms impact communication styles, teamwork, and problem-solving. Address the topic how people with different background can live and work together. Discuss how refugee and local people could influence each other culture in a fruitful way.

Effective Communication: teach active listening, empathy, and non-verbal cues.

Methods, exercises, practical examples:

- **Cross-cultural role play:** participants act out scenarios involving miscommunication due to cultural differences. Incorporate techniques like expressing inner voice of specific figures and shadow person to make it possible to participants to support each other if looking for solutions.
- **Communication styles quiz:** explore different communication preferences (e.g., direct vs. indirect).
- **Role-play scenarios:** role-play regularly situations where a refugee person interacts with local authorities, organisations, stakeholders to solve a problem or arrange an important issue.

Building community connections through networking and collaboration

Building community connections for the mental wellbeing of adult refugees in training sessions involves fostering a sense of belonging, support, and collaboration, the purpose is to create a supportive network that enhances the mental wellbeing of adult refugees.

We achieve this by facilitating interactions among participants, encouraging shared experiences, and promoting mutual understanding. Often there is no opportunity in our training context to organise external events and accompany group members to these, but we can support similar processes 'from the inside' by raising awareness of the importance of this issue and providing opportunities and space for those making connections with local communities to talk about it surrounded by our appreciative and positive feedback.

Key Concepts to community building

- **Social Capital** refers to the value gained from social relationships and networks. It encompasses trust, reciprocity, and access to resources. By building social capital, we strengthen community bonds and create a safety net for individuals.
- **Reciprocity:** emphasizes the idea of giving and receiving support. Participants contribute to the community by sharing their skills, knowledge, and experiences. In return, they benefit from the collective wisdom and support of others.

Methods and techniques:

- **Networking events:** meet-and-greets, cultural exchange sessions or workshops for several topics like cooking and recipes, music, dancing, folk art, folktales and storytelling, literature, celebration of nations, etc.
- **Language clubs:** refugees and locals learn each other's languages; refugees learn language from (not professional language trainer) local people supported by refugees integrated successfully
- **Collaborative projects and actions:** joint initiatives with a specific purpose, e.g., community gardens, art projects, environment protection campaigns, etc.
- **Organisation of refugees:** connect refugees with organisations working for refugee people from a specific area or with a specific purpose

- **Peer support groups:** create safe spaces for sharing experiences and coping strategies.
- **Mentorship programs:** pair refugees with local mentors/successfully integrated mentors for skill development.

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Module 7 - Community-Based Interventions

Learning Objectives:

- Define what community-based interventions are and understand their significance
- Explore several community-based interventions
- Identify key components of successful community-based interventions
- Design and implement community-based interventions tailored to refugees' needs

Topics/content:

- o Understanding community-based interventions as a way of supporting refugees
- o Challenges and benefits and the role of VET-community organisations engagement
- o Key components of successful community-based interventions
- o How to design, implement and evaluate a detailed community-based intervention plan
- o The significance of participatory approaches – involving refugees in design-making

Community-based interventions and their significance for refugees – understanding the concept

Community-based interventions are initiatives that prioritise healing, belonging, and thriving within the refugee community by offering services like counselling, therapy, and social support networks. They emphasize the importance of social connections and cultural sensitivity, providing refugees with a supportive community context to rebuild their lives. These interventions address mental health needs and complement other recovery efforts by fostering a nurturing environment, combining psychological support and community efforts to create stable and secure settings for refugees.

Community-based interventions are a supporting mechanism for promoting refugees' mental well-being, enabling VET professionals to effectively support the mental well-being and integration of traumatised refugees through a range of initiatives that prioritise healing and belonging within a supportive community context.

More concretely, the following are key services provided aimed at nurturing an inclusive community environment that support the mental well-being and overall recovery of refugees:

- **Counselling and therapy:** personalised individual and group counselling sessions, along with various therapeutic interventions (e.g., cognitive-behavioural therapy, trauma-focused therapy) to address specific mental health issues, provide tailored support and coping strategies, and promote recovery. Through group sessions, refugees can share experiences and support each other, fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding. VET professionals can facilitate access to and participation in counselling and therapy sessions by collaborating with mental health specialists and ensuring that refugees receive culturally sensitive and tailored therapeutic support.

- **Social support networks:** creating and facilitating connections among refugees and community members to build a supportive network that provides emotional and practical assistance, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity. These networks can include family, support groups, mentorship programmes, community events, and partnerships with local organisations, all aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. VET professionals can help build and strengthen social support networks by organising community

events and connecting refugees with local organisations and mentorship programmes, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity.

- **Peer support groups:** groups led by fellow refugees who have experienced similar challenges, offering peer-to-peer support and a safe space for sharing, mutual understanding, and collective healing. VET professionals can encourage and support the formation of peer support groups by identifying and training refugee leaders to facilitate these groups, providing a safe space for sharing experiences and mutual healing.

- **Educational and cultural activities:** programmes and events for refugees educate them on mental health and coping mechanisms while celebrating their cultural heritage. These activities include workshops on mental health awareness and coping strategies, as well as cultural events to honour and maintain their heritage, fostering a sense of identity and belonging. VET professionals can organise and promote educational workshops and cultural events that enhance mental health awareness and celebrate refugees' cultural heritage, reinforcing their identity and sense of belonging.
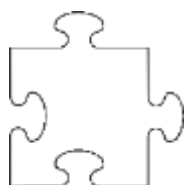
Accessing real-life stories about successful community-based interventions is vital for VET professionals as it deepens their understanding of these initiatives' significance by showcasing tangible examples of how local community support can profoundly impact refugees' mental health and integration.

Key components of successful community-based interventions

Reflecting on ongoing community-based interventions is crucial for VET professionals as it allows them to critically assess the effectiveness and relevance of these initiatives within their local context. By conducting brief research on the key components that contribute to the success of such interventions, VET professionals can identify best practices and gaps in their current approaches, ensuring that they are equipped with the most effective strategies to support refugees' well-being. This reflection and research process not only enhances their professional development but also fosters a more informed and empathetic approach to integrating refugees into the community, ultimately leading to more sustainable and impactful outcomes for both the refugees and the local community.

The following is a list of key components for a successful community-based intervention for promoting the well-being of refugees that should be considered by VET professionals:

- **Stakeholder collaboration and sustainable partnership building:** effective community-based interventions require the active involvement of various stakeholders, including VET professionals, community leaders, businesses, and local organisations. Collaboration ensures that the interventions are well-rounded, addressing multiple aspects of refugees' needs and leveraging diverse resources and expertise. Building long-term partnerships with community organisations and businesses ensures the sustainability of the interventions. These partnerships provide ongoing support and resources, making it possible to continue assisting refugees beyond the initial intervention period.

- **Needs assessment, resource mapping and continuous monitoring and evaluation:** conducting a thorough needs assessment helps identify the specific challenges and requirements of the refugee population in a VET context. This ensures that the interventions are tailored to address the actual needs, making them more relevant and effective. Identifying and mapping available community resources, such as local businesses, non-profits, and

support services, helps create a comprehensive support network for refugees. This ensures that all necessary resources are used effectively. Additionally, regularly assessing the effectiveness of the interventions ensures that they are meeting their goals and allows for adjustments to be made as needed. This process helps maintain the quality and relevance of the interventions over time.

- **Cultural sensitivity and social integration activities:** understanding and respecting the cultural backgrounds of refugees is crucial. Interventions should be designed to be culturally appropriate, ensuring that they are accessible and acceptable to the target population. Also, facilitating social interactions between refugees and the local community helps build social networks and reduce feelings of isolation. Activities such as community events, mentorship programmes, and peer support groups can promote social cohesion and mutual understanding. Language classes and cultural exchange workshops can further bridge gaps and foster communication. Additionally, involving refugees in the planning and execution of these activities ensures their needs and preferences are directly addressed.

- **Practical skills training and mental health support:** providing refugees with practical, job-related skills enhances their employability and self-sufficiency. This includes vocational training, language skills, and other competencies that are directly applicable to the job market. Moreover, addressing the mental health needs of refugees is essential for their overall well-being. Interventions should include access to counseling, therapy, and other mental health services to help refugees cope with trauma and stress. Community-based learning (CBL) plays a crucial role in this context by integrating educational experiences with real-world applications, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. Engaging refugees in community-based learning initiatives not only equips them with essential skills but also strengthens their social networks and supports their holistic development.

- **Empowerment and agency:** empowering refugees by involving them in the planning and implementation of interventions in a VET setting fosters a sense of ownership and agency. This participatory approach ensures that the interventions are more likely to be successful and sustainable. Additionally, it helps build their confidence and leadership skills, which are crucial for their personal and professional growth. By giving refugees a voice in decision-making processes, we are also promoting inclusivity and respect for their unique perspectives and experiences.

…This means that involving refugees in the design and implementation of community-based interventions is one of the keys to success

A participatory approach involves actively engaging stakeholders, including community members, in the decision-making process to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered, fostering ownership and more effective outcomes.

A participatory approach in the context of community-based interventions involves actively involving refugees in the decision-making process to ensure their needs, perspectives, and aspirations are directly addressed. This approach fosters empowerment, ownership, and more effective, culturally sensitive solutions by leveraging the insights and experiences of the refugee community.

Mastering participatory approaches

Participatory approaches that actively involve refugees in decision-making processes empower them to have a voice in shaping the interventions that affect their lives, ensuring that these initiatives are culturally relevant and truly meet their needs. By engaging refugees as active participants rather than passive recipients, these approaches foster a sense of ownership and agency, which can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of community-based interventions. Moreover, involving refugees in the design and implementation of programmes helps to build trust and mutual respect between refugees and service providers, creating more inclusive and responsive support systems. This collaborative process not only enriches the interventions with diverse perspectives and insights but also strengthens the refugees' sense of belonging and community integration.

VET professionals can effectively engage refugees by creating inclusive platforms for dialogue and feedback, ensuring that refugees feel heard and valued. This can be achieved through focus groups, surveys, and community meetings where refugees can express their needs and preferences. Additionally, VET professionals can collaborate with refugee leaders and organisations to facilitate communication and build trust. Providing training and capacity-building opportunities for refugees to take on leadership roles in these initiatives can also enhance their engagement and contribution.

Adopting a participatory approach can present challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and power dynamics that may hinder effective communication and collaboration. To address these obstacles, it is important to provide language support services, such as interpreters and translated materials, and to foster a culturally sensitive environment that respects and values diverse perspectives. Building strong relationships and trust between refugees and service providers is essential, as is ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive. Additionally, offering training and support to both refugees and professionals can help bridge gaps and facilitate more effective participation.
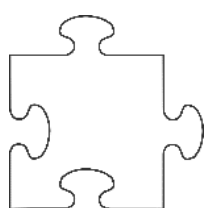
Critical thinking and personal reflection by VET professionals on the significance of participatory approaches are vital, as they enable a deeper understanding of the impact and benefits of engaging refugees in the design and implementation of community-based interventions, fostering more inclusive and effective support strategies.

…as well as collaborating with community organisations

Engaging with community organisations enhances the effectiveness and reach of vocational training and support services for refugees. This collaboration allows VET professionals to tap into the local knowledge, cultural insights, and established trust that community organisations have with refugee populations, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs of the community. By working together, they can pool resources and expertise, creating more comprehensive and sustainable programmes that address both the vocational and holistic needs of refugees. Furthermore, such partnerships can facilitate smoother integration processes, foster

community cohesion, and empower refugees by providing them with the skills and support necessary to thrive in their new environments.

These community organisations can be local refugee support groups, cultural associations, non-profit organisations like rescue committees, and community centres that offer educational and social services for refugees.

This said, engaging with community organisations presents both challenges and benefits for VET professionals.

Challenges	Benefits
▪ Differences in language and cultural practices can hinder effective communication and collaboration between VET professionals, community organisations, and refugees. ▪ Limited funding, personnel, and infrastructure can restrict the scope and impact of interventions. ▪ Ensuring that the goals and methods of various stakeholders align can be difficult, leading to potential conflicts or inefficiencies. ▪ Establishing trust between refugees, VET professionals, and community organisations can take time and effort, especially if there is a history of mistrust or misunderstanding.	▪ Collaboration brings together a wide range of skills, knowledge, and resources, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of interventions. ▪ Partnerships can expand the reach of programmes, allowing them to serve more refugees and address a broader range of needs. ▪ Engaging with community organisations can help ensure that interventions are sustainable and continue to benefit refugees over the long-term. ▪ Working closely with community organisations can improve VET professional's understanding of cultural nuances, leading to more culturally sensitive and effective interventions.
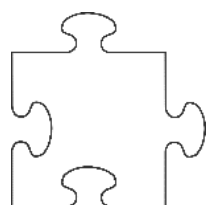
VET professionals can participate in scenario-based exercises where they mimic real-life situations of collaboration with community organisations to design community-based interventions for refugees' well-being (e.g., setting up a mentorship programme, organising a health fair, creating job training workshops). This might allow them to identify organisations they could collaborate with if a given scenario was to take place in their VET setting.

How can VET professionals effectively design and implement community-based interventions? – the community-based intervention plan

Designing, implementing, and evaluating a detailed community-based intervention plan requires VET professionals to develop realistic and actionable strategies that address the vocational training and mental health needs of refugees through a structured framework.

Initially, the design phase involves conducting a thorough needs assessment to identify the specific challenges and resources available within the community. This is followed by setting clear, measurable objectives and developing tailored interventions that integrate vocational training with mental health support. During implementation, professionals should ensure active participation from refugees and local stakeholders, fostering collaboration and ownership. Regular monitoring and adaptation are crucial to address any emerging issues and ensure the interventions remain relevant and effective.

Finally, the evaluation phase involves assessing the outcomes against the set objectives, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to measure impact and gather feedback. This iterative process not only informs future interventions but also enhances the overall capacity of VET professionals to support refugees effectively.

Here is an example of a step-by-step framework for designing and implementing effective community-based intervention plans that can be used by VET professionals:

- **Identify the problem and the community:** clearly define the specific issue affecting the refugee community within your VET setting and identify the target group. This involves setting a precise goal, understanding the scope and magnitude of the problem, and defining the community based on geographic, demographic, cultural, or other relevant criteria. Consider the diversity, strengths, and challenges of the community and how these factors relate to the problem and the proposed intervention.
- **Assess the needs and assets of the community:** conduct a comprehensive needs assessment using both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the community's strengths and challenges. Gather data through surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, or secondary data analysis. Involve community members and stakeholders in the data collection and analysis process to ensure their perspectives, opinions, and experiences are included and respected.
- **Design the intervention based on evidence and best practices:** develop a detailed intervention plan by reviewing relevant literature and existing interventions that have addressed similar issues. Identify theories, models, principles, and strategies to guide your intervention. Consult with community members and stakeholders to incorporate their feedback, ensuring the intervention is feasible, acceptable, and sustainable within the community context and culture.
- **Implement the intervention with fidelity and flexibility:** execute the intervention plan consistently and accurately, while monitoring and documenting the implementation process. Collect data on the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the intervention. Be flexible and responsive to any changes or challenges that arise, making necessary adjustments. Maintain open communication and collaboration with community members and stakeholders to keep them informed and engaged.
- **Evaluate the intervention with rigor and relevance:** use appropriate and valid methods and measures to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention. Compare the results with the intervention's goals and objectives, using relevant indicators and criteria to evaluate quality and value. Involve community members and stakeholders in the evaluation process and share the findings and implications with them.
- **Disseminate and scale up the intervention with evidence and ethics:** share the results and expand the intervention responsibly. Communicate and disseminate the results and lessons learned from the intervention through various channels and formats to reach different audiences and stakeholders. Use the evidence and best practices to inform and influence policy and practice, advocating for change and improvement. Consider the possibilities and challenges of scaling up the intervention, ensuring it can be replicated or adapted to other settings and contexts. Follow ethical principles and standards of community-based research, respecting the rights and interests of the community.

Resources/Materials

Why community is so crucial for refugees mental health | HIAS Association

The role of vocational education and training in the integration of refugees | Roskilde University, University of Innsbruck and University of Cologne

Effective methods for designing and implementing community-based interventions | LinkedIn

Effective inclusion of refugees – participatory approaches | UNHCR

Local strategies for effective migrants and refugees' integration | Whole-COMM project

Understanding community-based protection | UNHCR

Exercises in the Handbook

Presentations on key concepts: community-based interventions and key services for refugees

VET-community organisations collaboration scenarios

Group discussions and reflection on challenges and benefits of community-based interventions, the role of VET, and the importance of participatory approaches

Real-life stories about different community-based interventions and plans for refugees' recovery

Individual analysis and reflection on key components of successful community-based interventions

Community resources mapping to leverage refugees' well-being support initiatives

Creation of personalised intervention plans

Module 8 - Self-Care for Professionals

Learning Objectives:

- Develop strategies for self-care
- Promote self-care practices
- Prevent burnout and compassion fatigue
- Enhance mental wellbeing of professionals

Topics:

- Importance of self-care in preventing burn-out
- Strategies for maintaining of well-being (for individuals and for working groups)
- Examples of self-care practices in daily work routines (including art therapy approaches)
- Interventions for supporting self-care of professionals within the work-community

Challenges of our profession and its relatability to the self-care

Adult trainer and educators in VET context involving also refugee learners are actually an interface between knowledge transfer and certain helping professions: they disseminate not only knowledge, but they are also facilitators of personal growth and transformation. They engage with diverse learners, their responsibilities extend beyond the classroom, encompassing the development of skills, fostering resilience, and promoting social integration. They encounter unique challenges that require a blend of expertise from both education and helping professions.

This role therefore also has such hidden challenges, which are clearly evident in the helping professions, are made a topic in education curriculums and even relevant intervention options are explained. That is why we want to highlight and emphasise some challenges here that are more recognisable in the helping professions, but which can teach us adult trainers and educators' important aspects (Mogyoróssy-Révész, 2024):

- **Professional identity:** it is a fundamental part of our professional identity to know why we are practising this profession. We can have very different motivations, and there can be a variety of reasons (e.g. it provides a sense of control, security, stabilisation, compensation, covering for something) in the background. Partially and periodically, all of them can represent us, which is not necessary a mistake, but this requires self-awareness as a significant step in the prevention of burn-out. Based on a profound self-knowledge, the choice of helping (- associated) professions can be quite conscious and stable part of our identity.

- **Empathy**: we cannot expect constant empathy from ourselves (nor from others). Both of healthy social and professional relationships are characterised by secure bonding and rhythm. It is an excessive expectation to be accepting and supportive permanently and continuously and it leads to emotional overwhelming. To set special boundaries when we deal with people who are experiencing a crisis - like to be refugee - plays a crucial role.

- **Self-care:** if we do not want to find us in a victim role with all consequences, we have to learn how to prioritize own needs and self-care. The continuous considering the interest of other people while keep pushing ourselves into the background with the keywords we do "everything for our fellow human beings", create a pathway leading to inner emptiness, complete exhaustion, burn-out and depression. **Self-care is not selfish!**

- **Support:** we need to support each other professionally. We do need co-operative, well-meaning working groups filled with positive energy, as well as supervision, case discussions and inspiring professional training.

In this module we will review the key considerations, milestones and possible individual and community interventions, with the recommendation to adapt each aspect to your own situation and settings.

Importance of self-care in preventing burn-out

Self-care refers to adequate attention and intentional actions taken to maintain and enhance one's physical, emotional, and mental well-being (APA, 2020). It is not a luxury but a fundamental necessity, especially for those in demanding professions. Trainers and professionals working with VET (Vocational Education and Training) groups, particularly those involving refugees, face unique challenges.

- **Burnout risk:** trainers and professionals in VET settings often deal with emotionally demanding situations. The empathy and compassion they extend to their learners can take a toll. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment, is a common risk. When professionals experience burnout, their work quality may decline, affecting patient care or learner outcomes.

- **Compassion fatigue** occurs when individuals repeatedly engage in empathetic interactions with others who are suffering or traumatized. Professionals working with refugees may encounter distressing stories, trauma, and emotional challenges. Compassion fatigue can lead to emotional exhaustion, detachment, and decreased effectiveness.

- **Self-care as prevention:** self-care acts as a protective buffer against burnout and compassion fatigue. By prioritizing their own well-being, trainers and professionals build resilience and maintain their ability to provide quality support.

Trainers and professionals working in VET sessions play a vital role in supporting refugees' integration and well-being. Prioritizing self-care equips them to navigate challenges, maintain resilience, and provide effective care. By taking care of themselves, they can continue making a positive impact on their trainees' lives.

Empathy of trainers and the importance of a healthy distance

Trainers and coaches in VET training context need to connect with vulnerable people, like refugees - often trauma survivors - not just on a cognitive level, but also empathetically to provide effective support during their work.

As Babette Rothschild (2006) describes in her book Help for helpers, empathy is a remarkable human capacity. It allows us to connect with others on a deep emotional level, to understand their feelings, and to share their experiences. When we experience true empathy or compassion, our sense of self merges with another person's. The boundaries that separate us fade away, and we become attuned to their emotions and needs.

Neuroscientists have discovered specialized cells called **mirror neurons** in our brains. When we observe someone else's actions, pain, or emotions, our mirror neurons activate as if we were experiencing those feelings first hand. Essentially, our brains simulate the experiences of others, allowing us to resonate with their emotions. This interconnectedness bridges the psychological and

neurophysiological gap, enabling us to replicate others' states in ourselves—what we call "vicarious states" or empathy.

Empathy often operates unconsciously, it is an automatic process: we naturally pick up on subtle cues from others in training sessions - facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice of participants and mirror their emotions, even if we are not fully aware of it or do not want to do it. /This automatic process is part of our socialization and evolution—a link that connects us to others so we can live in harmony.

Professionals working with vulnerable populations like refugees are exposed to intense emotions and traumatic stories and without awareness, we risk absorbing these emotions, leading to compassion fatigue and at the end burn out or vicarious traumatization.

Setting boundaries and maintaining a healthy distance is essential for us to prevent emotional exhaustion. This kind of awareness allows us, trainers to balance empathy with objectivity, which on the one side can engage us empathetically without losing our professional perspective and on the other side healthy boundaries ensure our effective support and prevents burnout.

Burn-out

Burnout can result from various factors, and understanding these causes is essential for prevention and effective management.

1. **Workplace stress and demands**: professionals working with refugees often face intense emotional demands, language barriers, and cultural complexities while also excessive workload and unrealistic expectations are present. The pressure to provide quality care while managing administrative tasks can contribute to burnout.

2. **Lack of resources and support**: insufficient resources (such as time, personnel, or materials) and inadequate organizational support can strain professionals.

3. **Compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion:** constant exposure to trauma, suffering, and emotional stories experienced daily in training sessions because of empathizing deeply can lead to exhaustion and to burn out at the end.

4. **Cultural competence challenges** experiences not only refugee people but professionals working with diverse refugee populations. Lack of cultural understanding, miscommunication, and cultural clashes can contribute to stress and burnout.

5. **Role ambiguity and role conflict:** unclear job expectations and conflicting roles create stress. Professionals may struggle to balance training & educating, counselling & coaching, and administrative duties.

6. **Personal factors and coping styles:** individual resilience, coping mechanisms, and personality traits play a role. Professionals with poor coping skills or high perfectionism may be more susceptible to burnout.

Signs and symptoms of burn-out

We know more signs and symptoms of burnout, there are including some less common or usual ones:

1. Physical and emotional exhaustion:
   Common Signs:
   - Feeling persistently tired and drained
   - Experiencing headaches or muscle pain
   - Having sleeping problems (insomnia) due to stress

Less common/unusual signs:
- Gastrointestinal problems, such as stomach aches or digestive issues
- High blood pressure resulting from chronic stress
- Further frequent minor illnesses due to a weakened immune system
- Feeling mentally disconnected
- Constantly feeling on guard (hypervigilance)

2. Cognitive and behavioural changes:
   Common Signs:
   - Poor concentration and focus, feeling foggy
   - Increased irritability and mood swings
   - Feeling overwhelmed by daily tasks

   Less common/unusual signs:
   - Procrastination and taking longer to complete tasks
   - Changes in sleeping/eating habits: sleeping problems (wake-up often, bed dreams, etc.), oversleeping, loss of appetite/overeating
   - Using drugs, or alcohol as coping mechanisms
   - Taking frustrations out on others, discussing/teasing more ("yes, but…"), look for excuses, withdrawing responsibilities
   - Increased impulsivity
   - Scrolling on social media after work or instead of working as a special art of procrastination

3. Loss of interest and detachment:
   Common Signs:
   - Feeling emotionally detached from work or relationships
   - Loss of enthusiasm for your job
   - Reduced interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy

   Less common/unusual signs:
   - Feeling worthless or questioning your self-worth, Negative self-talk and self-blame.
   - Feeling undervalued: sensing a lack of appreciation or recognition by leaders and/or colleagues
   - Feeling stuck and unable to generate new ideas.
   - Isolation: disconnecting from colleagues and avoiding social situations frequently
   - Escapist mentality: constant fantasizing about a career change or quitting
   - Quiet quitting
   - Suicidal ideation (seeking professional help is crucial if you experience this)

Stages of burn-out

Knowing the stages of burn-out outlined by the psychologists Herbert Freudenberger and Gail North empowers individuals to proactively manage stress, prioritize self-care, and seek help when needed. It's a valuable tool for maintaining resilience and preventing burn-out while it is important to recognise that practice shows, the different stages may or may not occur the given order:

Self-care as a preventive measure

Self-care is not just a luxury but a fundamental need.

Self-care

- acts as a buffer against compassion fatigue. By prioritizing their well-being, professionals can sustain their ability to empathize and support refugees effectively.
- helps mitigate the impact of secondary traumatization. It allows professionals to process their emotions, set boundaries, and seek support.
- practices – also simple ones, such as exercise, adequate sleep, and healthy eating, a few minutes relaxation - contribute to overall well-being.
- is proactive. It reduces turnover rates and ensures continuity in providing quality services.
- practices send the powerful message: taking care of oneself is essential for resilience and coping.

By investing in self-care, professionals build resilience, maintain their passion for their work, and avoid reaching a point of emotional exhaustion. In addition, self-care practices the powerful message: taking care of oneself is essential for resilience and coping. When professionals prioritize self-care, refugee trainees/learners may also learn healthier coping mechanisms.

Strategies for maintaining well-being

A very large number of literature and guidelines on self-care strategies and interventions are available for individuals and working communities in the world, so hereinafter we will share the basics and most important aspects, and furthermore, give practical guidelines on how to apply them in different stages and situations.

emotional distress
can't think clearly
overreact
unproductive problem solving

deep breathing
mindfulness
grounding exercises

Can't calm down

window of tolerance

optimal problem solving
alert
engaged
accessing both emotion and reasoning

Shutting down

depressed
lethargic
unmotivated
numb

mindfulness
physical exercise
deep breathing

GREENWOOD COUNSELING CENTER

https://greenwoodcounselingcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/window-of-tolerance-2.jpg

According to the concept "window of tolerance" (Siegel, 1999'), everyone has a range of emotional intensities they can comfortably experience, process, and integrate - this is their window of tolerance. Within this window, individuals can effectively cope with stressors and maintain optimal arousal. Other researchers emphasized, that staying within the window of tolerance prevents burn-out and emotional exhaustion (Odgen and Minton, 2000)

In order to establish and apply effective support for ourselves during relatively stressful working days, we must first and foremost recognise our basic emotion regulation strategies. We need to be aware of specific triggers and circumstances that activate our stress reactions and disrupt our normal and healthy emotion regulation. (Mogyoróssy-Révész, 2019)

Self-care plans have been compiled together with clients for a long time in the field of social work. A well-structured plan and toolbox can be a highly effective help for everyone, including us trainers, in the case of universal stress management.

Individual and group strategies for maintaining well-being of professionals have the goal to expand their window of tolerance.

Aspects of individual well-being strategies

1. **Monitor stress levels:**

   Regularly assess your stress levels and their impact on your emotional and physical well-being. There are online tests and tools available how to find an opportunity that fits you and your work situation.

2. **Go back to basics:**

   Prioritize fundamental self-care practices:
   - **Exercise**: incorporate physical activity like walking, biking, or swimming
   - **Mindfulness**: practice relaxation, meditation, yoga, or deep breathing

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- **Nature**: spend time outdoors and connect with nature
- **Creative approach**: involve expressive outlets (drawing, colouring, painting, and single crafts), engage meditative sessions (like focusing on colours, textures), and explore symbols related your personal experiences.
- **Social support**: engage with colleagues on your workplace, then friends and family

3. Set boundaries

Separate work and personal life to reduce stress and improve work-life balance.

Give **time for attachment and detachment (connecting – disconnecting)**. Develop small rituals that help to reset (over-tune) yourself: it can be a
- short relaxation or meditation
- a breathing exercise
- a calming tea drinking

When finishing work, do not to run home immediately, but devoting a few minutes to temporarily closing the work-related issues:

- take notes or summarize your experiences in a few words/sentences,
- use art techniques to create a symbol for your day/session,
- use cards/images/pictures/symbols to highlight your successes and challenges,
- you can keep these contents in a box for a clear demonstration of leaving them at your workplace. You can begin you next day with them (to reconnect) or you can take it with you to case discussions, inter- or supervisions,
- check your body, recognise body sensations and do breathing or other exercises to rebalance,
- if sitting all day, move around and do a breathing exercise (container exercise),
- if you have the opportunity, take a walk to home and try to connect to the nature (find trees, flowerbeds, parks at least) or bike to home – these are light exercises, that support you in unwind and relax,
- use the power of words to close your workday: say it out loud that you are completing your work here and now and that you will continue with all important issues responsibly from the next working day.

If feeling overwhelmed, take several short breaks during the day to rebalance yourselves.

4. Seek supervision and support

Individualized, culturally competent supervision is crucial.

5. Consider culturally sensitive self-care practices

These approaches consider diverse cultural backgrounds (involving race and societal structures as well as individual family culture) and enhance overall well-being:
- mindfulness practices from different cultures (soul work, meditation, breathing exercises, mindful eating, etc.)
- traditional healing rituals (from herbal remedies to energy healing)
- traditional crafts, storytelling, music and dance
- community rituals and celebrations (life milestones, seasonal observances, festivals)

Aspects of group well-being strategies

6. Creating a supportive work environment

Foster a workplace culture that promotes well-being, collaboration, and positive relationships.

- **Team building activities**: organise team-building exercises, workshops, or outings to strengthen connections among colleagues.
- **Open communication channels**: encourage open dialogue, active listening, and empathy within the team.
- **Flexible work arrangements:** seek opportunities for flexible schedules, change overwhelming groups, and more support if it is needed.
- **Check-Ins:** schedule regular team check-ins to discuss well-being, workload, and any challenges.
- **Conflict resolution strategies**: train professionals in conflict resolution techniques to reduce workplace tension, enhance communication, and maintain a harmonious environment.

7. **Encouraging peer support and collaboration**

   Promote collaboration, mutual support, and shared learning among colleagues.

   - **Peer support groups:** establish regular peer support sessions where professionals share experiences and coping strategies and encourage colleagues to recognize and appreciate each other's efforts.
   - **Collaborative learning spaces**: create safe, inclusive environments for collaborative learning and problem-solving.
   - **Mentoring programs:** pair experienced professionals with newer colleagues for guidance and mentorship.
   - **Foster a sense of community:** organise common coffee breaks and other short activities to recharge energy during the workdays, celebrate successes and important individual and team achievements

8. **Addressing overextension and the need for balance**
   - **Self-reflection and boundaries:** encourage professionals to regularly reflect on their workload and emotional capacity. Set clear boundaries regarding work hours, tasks, and personal time.
   - **Collaborative workload management:** foster collaboration among colleagues to distribute tasks effectively. Create a supportive environment where professionals can share responsibilities.
   - **Professional development and training:** invest in continuous learning to enhance skills and adapt to evolving demands. Workplaces, employees should provide training on stress management, resilience, and self-care, professionals are pleased to seek for these opportunities.
   - **Peer support networks:** besides aspects you can find above, peer support networks could be supported by external trainings and involving co-professionals from other fields related to the adult training context and work with refugees.

Interventions for supporting self-care of professionals within the work-community

In the dynamic field of adult training, the well-being of trainers and educators significantly impacts their effectiveness and the quality of learning experiences. As we strive to empower learners, we must also prioritize the well-being of those who facilitate growth.

It is clear that individual trainers can also contribute with valuable practices to the wellbeing of their working community, however the development of a culture of wellbeing is inconceivable without a clear commitment of the organisation's leadership. Therefore, we conclude the module according to

individual and group self-care aspects and specific examples with recommendations and considerations at first for the leadership or for members of the working community who has the role and power to make decisions regarding interventions in the working community.

9. **Create a culture of well-being within the team:**
   - **Leadership commitment**:
     - Leaders have to recognize that a healthy team culture directly influences productivity, job satisfaction, and learner outcomes.
     - Demonstrate a genuine commitment to well-being by modelling self-care practices and prioritizing employee health.
   - **Clearly defined purpose and goals:**
     - Align the team around a shared purpose and specific goals.
     - Regularly revisit and communicate the team's mission to maintain focus and motivation. Incorporate aspects of individual and group well-being.
   - **Work-life balance:**
     - Acknowledge individual needs for work-life balance.
     - Allow sufficient time for preparation and follow-up, assessment, introduction of new colleagues to the working methods and the community. Quality work and innovation requires energy and time.
     - Offer flexible schedules or remote work options for processes and tasks, which can be finished not just in the office. Creative minds work not only in working hours and in the training rooms.

10. **Create and use a supportive environment for well-being:**

Organizing wellness initiatives such as yoga classes, mindfulness workshops, or health screenings can be very effective, however there are other and sometimes more realistic opportunities.

   - **Working environment:**
     - Offer quiet, calm trainer rooms for moments of rest and relaxation. Comfortable seating, yoga mattresses or pillows do not cost that much.
     - Under all circumstances, meetings should be avoided in the relax rooms and equipment such as photocopiers, scanners or training materials and tools should be stored elsewhere. If there are not enough rooms available, find possibilities, e.g. clear demarcation of larger rooms can sometimes offer a temporary solution.
     - Encourage trainers to left training rooms during breaks and do something for their self-care. Use reminding posters, images with citations, but internal emails and nice invitations can also be very welcome.
   - **Recommendations for leadership:**
     - Transparent communication: foster open dialogue by actively listening to employees' concerns and feedback. Do not wait for them, ask it regularly, as a part of the organisations culture.
     - Communicate organizational changes, expectations, and opportunities for support of professional and individual growth.
     - Recognition and appreciation are basic needs for trainers (invisibility kills!): acknowledge achievements and celebrate milestones. Regularly express gratitude for team members' contributions during "boring" workdays.

- Empowerment and autonomy: trust employees to make decisions within their roles and encourage creativity and innovation regarding the culture of well-being by providing autonomy.
- Support trainers' continuous learning to stay updated and motivated also related well-being and self-care. Consider this also a professional contribution to the development of the organisation.

1. **Dialogue Between Employers and Employees:**
    - **Regular Check-Ins:**
        - Schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss well-being, challenges, and career aspirations. Use these sessions to address concerns and provide personalized support.
        - Make this a topic in the team meetings, normalize that trainers' wellbeing is just as fundamental as the number of successful exams or employment rates in job coaching.
    - **Feedback mechanisms:**
        - Create a safe space for employees to share feedback.
        - Actively seek input on organizational processes, policies, and well-being initiatives and lack of measures.
    - **Conflict resolution strategies:**
        - Address conflicts promptly and constructively.
        - Have a strategy developed and supervised by all members of the community.
        - Don't satisfy yourself with answers like "it's been good so far, it can go on like this". New colleagues still have a fresh eye and could serve with useful intentions.
        - Encourage open conversations to find mutually beneficial solutions.

2. **Promoting a learning culture:**
    - **Continuous learning opportunities:**
        - Offer workshops, webinars, and conferences for professional growth.
        - Take part in programs, projects, events of the wider community to connect colleagues with other organizations, follow the aspects of the systematic view of related professions.
        - Encourage trainers to explore new methodologies and stay informed.
    - **Peer learning communities:**
        - Facilitate knowledge sharing among colleagues.
        - Create forums for trainers to exchange best practices and learn from each other. Give them the opportunity and time to get to know new things and try them out together.
        - Regularly ask colleagues what they are curious about and you can also mention techniques or methods you would like to include in training processes (such as practices of Somatic Experiences or Body works, singing bowls during relaxation, music- or art-therapeutic techniques.)
        - Support colleagues in writing and publishing articles, blogs, studies or summaries on specialist topics.

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Module 9 - Legal and Ethical Considerations

This module on Legal and Ethical Considerations (LEC) is designed for VET professionals working with refugees in VET-settings. It aims to equip trainers with the essential skills and knowledge about the legislation and ethical issues of supporting refugees' mental health.

Objectives

- Understand legal and ethical aspects of supporting refugees' mental health
- Understand legal and ethical responsibilities related to mental health support
- Adhere to professional standards
- Protect refugee rights

Legal rights of refugees

Supporting refugees' mental health involves considering legal and ethical issues in order to ensure that their rights and well-being are protected.

International legal framework

The UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 sets out the principles upon which the international protection for refugees is built. It establishes the rights and obligations of refugees as well as the treatment to which they are entitled by the country of asylum.

The Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which entered into force on 4 October 1967 made the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention applicable to a broader range of refugee situations. The 1967 Protocol removes the geographic and time limitations written into the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol contain the following principles:

The principle of non-refoulement, which means that refugees should not be returned to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened.

Refugees can only be expelled from a country of asylum if their presence is a serious threat to national security or public order.

There should be no discrimination in the protection offered to refugees because of their race, religion, nationality or gender.

Refugees should not be penalised for entering or being present in a country as long as they make their presence known to the authorities without delay.

Refugees are required to conform to the laws and regulations in the country of asylum.

The 1951 Refugee Convention also addresses the issues of refugees' right to documentation, access to work, public education, access to the courts, freedom of movement, freedom to practice their religion and others.

Articles 14 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) emphasize the right to seek asylum and access healthcare, respectively.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): Article 12 recognizes the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

European Union Law

The Common European Asylum System sets out common standards and co-operation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system – wherever they apply.

The [Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast)](#) (Asylum Procedures Directive) aims at setting out the conditions for fair, quick and quality asylum decisions. Asylum seekers with special needs receive the necessary support to explain their claim and in particular protection of unaccompanied minors and victims of torture is ensured.

The [Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection](#) (recast) (Reception Conditions Directive) ensures that common standards for reception conditions (such as housing, food and clothing and access to health care, education or employment under certain conditions) are provided for asylum seekers across the EU to ensure a dignified standard of living in accordance with the Charter of fundamental rights. Article 5 of Reception Conditions Directives requires the states to ensure that applicants are provided with information on organisations that might be able to help or inform them concerning the available reception conditions, including health care. Article 17 of the Reception Conditions Directives regulates the general rules on material reception conditions and health care pointing out that the state shall ensure that material reception conditions provide an adequate standard of living for applicants, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health, and that the standard of living is met in the specific situation of vulnerable persons.

Article 19 of the Directive requires the states to ensure that applicants receive the necessary health care which shall include, at least, emergency care and essential treatment of illnesses and of serious mental disorders and to provide necessary medical or other assistance to applicants who have special reception needs, including appropriate mental health care where needed. In regard to children, Article 23, point 4 of the Directive obliges the state to ensure access to rehabilitation services for minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, or who have suffered from armed conflicts, and ensure that appropriate mental health care is developed and qualified counselling is provided when needed.

The [Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)](#) (Qualification Directive) clarifies the grounds for granting international protection and therefore making asylum decisions more robust. It also provides access to rights and integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection. Article 30 of the Qualification Directive obliges the state to ensure that beneficiaries of international protection have access to healthcare under the same eligibility conditions as nationals of the Member State that has granted such protection and the state is obliged to provide, under the same eligibility conditions as its nationals adequate healthcare, including treatment of mental disorders when needed, to beneficiaries of international protection who have special needs, such as pregnant women, disabled people, persons who have undergone torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or who have suffered from armed conflict.

National Laws

Countries may have specific legislation governing the rights and protections afforded to refugees, which often include provisions for healthcare access. Compliance with local laws is necessary, and these laws vary significantly between countries.

Ethical guidelines for mental health support

Ethical guidelines for providing mental health support to refugees are essential to ensure that care is delivered in a respectful, compassionate, competent, effective and gender and culturally sensitive manner, honouring their dignity and rights while addressing their unique mental health needs.

Key ethical guidelines to follow:

Voluntary Participation: Participation in mental health services should be voluntary. Refugees should not feel coerced or obligated to receive care.

Informed Consent: Ensure refugees understand the nature of the mental health services being offered, including potential benefits, risks, and alternatives. Obtain their informed consent before proceeding with any treatment.

Fair Access: Ensure that refugees have equal access to mental health services, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Non-discrimination: Guarantee that refugees receive access to mental health services without discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

Act in the Best Interest: Provide care that benefits the refugee, aiming to improve their mental health and overall well-being.

Avoid Harm: Carefully consider the potential for harm in any intervention and strive to minimize risks. This includes being mindful of re-traumatization.

Understand Cultural Context: Educate yourself about the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds of the refugees you are supporting.

Culturally Appropriate Care: Adapt mental health interventions to be culturally relevant and respectful of refugees' beliefs and practices.

Recognize Trauma: Be aware of the potential for past trauma in refugees' experiences and how it may impact their mental health.

Sensitive Approach: Use a trauma-informed approach that prioritizes safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.

Ongoing Education: Engage in continuous learning about best practices in refugee mental health care, including cultural competence and trauma-informed approaches.

Supervision and Support: Seek supervision and peer support to navigate complex cases and ensure high standards of care.

Build Resilience: Focus on refugees' strengths and resilience, helping them to build coping skills and self-efficacy.

Collaborative Care: Work collaboratively with refugees, involving them in their care planning and decision-making processes.

Holistic Care: Collaborate with other professionals, such as social workers, legal experts, and community organizations, to provide comprehensive support. Multidisciplinary teams can provide comprehensive care that addresses both mental health and legal needs.

Coordinated Efforts: Ensure that care is coordinated and that refugees receive seamless support across different services.

Accurate Records: Maintain accurate and confidential records of mental health services provided, ensuring they reflect the care given and respect privacy.

Ethical Reporting: Report any concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation in accordance with legal and ethical guidelines.

Raise Awareness: Advocate for the mental health needs of refugees at local, national, and international levels.

Educate the Public: Work to educate the public and policymakers about the challenges refugees face and the importance of providing adequate mental health support.

Advocate for Rights: Advocate for policies and practices that promote fair treatment and access to resources for refugees.

Confidentiality and privacy issues

Confidentiality and privacy are critical concerns when working with refugees in the context of mental health. These issues must be managed with particular sensitivity due to the potential vulnerability and unique circumstances in each case.

Confidentiality and privacy issues relate to rights, promulgated in numerous international treaties, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights and European Convention on Human Rights, European Union law, including General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislations about data protection and patient confidentiality.

Confidentiality and privacy standards require to explain confidentiality policies in a language and manner that the refugee can understand, ensuring that they are aware of their rights concerning privacy and the limits of confidentiality. It is recommended to obtain explicit consent for sharing any personal information, ensuring that the refugees understand the implications of their consent.

In respect to data storage there is a requirement to use secure systems for storing personal and health information, including physical files and electronic records, using strong password protections and encryption for digital records.

The access to personal data has to be limited to authorized personnel only, ensuring that all staff handling sensitive information are trained on confidentiality protocols.

The refuges must be informed about how their data will be used, stored, and shared and about their rights to access their records, request corrections, and lodge complaints if their privacy is breached.

Privacy and confidentiality have cultural dimensions which have to be understood and considered.

It has to be underlined that past experiences of trauma or persecution may heighten concerns about privacy and confidentiality and here is the role of the service provider to reassure refugees that their information will not be shared without their consent, except in legally mandated situations.

There might be sensitive information which cannot be shared with other agencies or individuals without explicit consent from the refugee. In such cases the service providers have to be particularly cautious about sharing information that could jeopardize the refugee's safety or legal status.

For reporting and research where it is preferable (if possible) to use anonymized data in order to protect individual identities.

There is certain information, such as threats of harm to self or others, child abuse, or other serious concerns for which there is a legal obligation to be reported. This exceptions to confidentiality have to be explained to refugees at the outset of care.

There might be cases in which the service provides would face ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality. In such cases it is recommended to seek guidance from supervisors, legal advisors, or ethics committees.

While keeping personal records it is recommended to maintain detailed and accurate records of all interactions, ensuring that entries are factual and objective and avoiding including unnecessary personal details that could compromise privacy. The old records have to be disposed of securely, following legal and organizational guidelines.

It is required to provide regular training for all staff on confidentiality and privacy issues, emphasizing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of refugee populations. The training has to reflect changes in laws and best practices.

Recommendation for trainers

Understanding Legal and Ethical Frameworks. When talking about the legal framework include information and examples from the national framework (constitution, laws). Provide case studies and examples to illustrate how these laws apply in practice.

Discuss ethical principles specific to working with refugees, such as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, non-discrimination, and cultural competence. Use real-life scenarios to help trainees navigate ethical dilemmas.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Make exercises on effective communication strategies for explaining confidentiality and informed consent to refugees, considering language barriers and cultural differences.

Role-play situations to practice obtaining informed consent and explaining the limits of confidentiality.

Pay specific attention to trust-building.

Make exercises for creating a safe and welcoming environment for refugees.

Cultural Sensitivity and Competence

Cultural Awareness:

Offer education on the cultural backgrounds of common refugee populations, including customs, values, and typical mental health beliefs.

Include exercises on the impact of trauma and displacement on mental health and behaviour.

Teach how to adapt mental health interventions to be culturally relevant and respectful.

Use case studies and role-plays to practice culturally sensitive approaches.

Secure Handling of Information

Talk about secure methods for storing and handling personal information, including physical files and electronic records, provide guidelines on password protection, encryption, and secure communication channels.

Talk about the importance of restricting access to personal data to authorized personnel only.

Discuss protocols for sharing information only with explicit consent and in compliance with legal requirements.

Managing Ethical and Legal Obligations

Use scenarios to practice handling situations where mandatory reporting may be necessary in certain cases such as child abuse, threats of harm, or infectious diseases.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Emphasize the importance of collaborating with other professionals, such as social workers, legal advisors, and community organizations, to provide comprehensive care. Train on effective communication and coordination strategies within interdisciplinary teams.

Resources/Materials

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants on the Move in Europe by WHO and UNHCR.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Emergencies: What should humanitarian health actors know? by the IASC Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.

United Nations Refugee Agency. Global trends report: world at war. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016

UNICEF: Child Displacement

Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

Module 10 - Referral to Health Professionals

This module on Referral to Health Professionals is designed for VET professionals working with refugees and deals with the referral process to health professionals, ensuring that refugees receive the appropriate psychological care and support they need. The aim is that VET trainers can provide immediate and effective assistance in real emergency situations involving acute psychic problems of refugees. Ensuring that trainers are well-prepared and aware of local resources and networks will significantly improve the support and care provided to refugees in cases of acute distress which trainers are not able to handle, being aware that their work is pedagogical and not therapeutical.

Objectives

- Identify when to refer refugees to certified health professionals,
- collaborate with health professionals,
- develop culturally sensitive referral guidelines.

The Referral Process to Health Professionals, ensuring that refugees receive the appropriate care and support they need.

Recognizing the Need for Further Assistance

A trauma-informed approach is essential in working effectively with refugees, recognizing the widespread impact of trauma and understanding paths for recovery. The key principles of a trauma-informed approach include recognizing the signs and symptoms of severe trauma episodes in the work with refugees.

One critical aspect of this approach is the recognition and acceptance of trauma as a "normal" part of one's life experience. This perspective helps refugees to understand that their responses to trauma are natural and that they are not alone in their experiences. By normalizing trauma, trainers can assist refugees in integrating their experiences into their lives, reducing feelings of isolation and shame.

This approach encourages refugees to lead normal lives and supports their integration into the local labour market, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose.

Despite best efforts, trainers might encounter situations that are beyond their expertise. In such cases, it is crucial to refer individuals to professional services such as psychotherapeutic, psychosocial or psychological counselling. Trainers must be prepared to recognize when a refugee's needs exceed their capacity to provide support, and to establish a referral with professional and cultural sensitiveness.

This includes being aware of the signs of severe trauma, mental health disorders, or other psychological issues that require specialized intervention. By acknowledging these limitations, trainers can ensure that refugees receive the appropriate care they need.

For more information and facilitating the recognition of acute mental problems please refer to the classification of acute behavioural and/or mental problems please refer to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) of the World Health Organisation (WHO): https://icd.who.int/browse10/2019/en#/F40-F48

Dealing with Difficult and Challenging Individual Stories

Trainers often are confronted with difficult and challenging individual stories of refugees which can be emotionally taxing. It is crucial to keep in mind that it is important for trainers, who are often not experts for diagnosis and therapy of severe mental or psychological issues, to explore and accept their individual boundaries, and develop resilience and coping strategies to manage their emotional responses and maintain professional boundaries. This involves self-care practices, supervision, and seeking support from colleagues or health professionals when needed. By doing so, trainers can provide consistent and compassionate support to refugees without compromising their own well-being.

Culturally Sensitive Referral Guidelines

Understanding Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity in the context of mental health referrals involves recognizing and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices of refugee participants. It ensures that referrals to health professionals are made with an awareness of the individual's cultural context, which can significantly impact their acceptance and engagement with mental health services.

Key Principles for Culturally Sensitive Referrals

- **Respect Cultural Beliefs and Practices**
  - Understand and respect the cultural beliefs and practices related to mental health within the refugee's community.
  - Acknowledge that perceptions of mental health and illness can vary widely across cultures.
- **Use Culturally Appropriate Language**
  - Avoid medical jargon and use language that is easily understandable and respectful.
  - Where possible, provide information in the refugee's native language or use professional interpreters.
- **Consider Cultural Stigma**
  - Be aware of potential stigma associated with mental health issues in different cultures. Sensitively address these concerns and provide reassurance about the confidentiality and professionalism of the health services.
- **Involve Community and Family**
  - Where appropriate, involve community leaders or family members in the referral process to provide support and enhance trust.
- Understand the role of family and community in the individual's culture, as they can be crucial in the acceptance of mental health care
- **Select Culturally Competent Professionals**
  - Refer refugees to health professionals or organizations who have experience and training in cultural competence.
  - Ensure that the health professionals are aware of the specific cultural background of the refugee and are sensitive to their unique needs.

Developing Culturally Sensitive Referral Guidelines

- **Assessment of Cultural Needs**
  - o Begin with a thorough assessment of the refugee's cultural background and specific needs.
  - o Use culturally sensitive tools and questionnaires to gather relevant information.
- **Personalized Referral Plan**
  - o Develop a personalized referral plan that incorporates the refugee's cultural preferences and needs.
  - o Clearly outline the steps involved in the referral process and what the refugee can expect.
- **Communication and Information**
  - o Inform the refugee about the importance of mental health care and how it can be beneficial, using culturally relevant examples and explanations.
  - o Communicate the referral process transparently, ensuring the refugee understands and consents to the referral.
- **Follow-Up and Feedback**
  - o After the referral, follow up with the refugee to ensure they attended the appointment and felt comfortable with the service provided.
  - o Gather feedback to improve future referrals and ensure the services are meeting the refugee's cultural needs.

Example: Implementing Culturally Sensitive Referrals

- **Scenario:**
  - o A refugee from a Middle Eastern country shows signs of severe anxiety and depression. They express reluctance to seek mental health care due to cultural stigma and a lack of understanding of the services available.
- **Steps:**
  - o **Initial Assessment:** Conduct an initial assessment using culturally sensitive approaches to understand their concerns and cultural context.
  - o **Education:** Provide information about mental health in a culturally relevant manner, emphasizing confidentiality and the professional nature of services.
  - o **Referral:** Refer to a mental health professional or an organization with experience in working with Middle Eastern communities. If possible, ensure the professional is briefed on the cultural background of the refugee.
  - o **Follow-Up:** Follow up after the appointment to ensure the refugee was comfortable and address any further concerns.

Collaboration with Health Professionals

Key Aspects, Benefits and Challenges of Collaboration:

- **Communication:**
  - o If you are working in a multidisciplinary team, establish regular meetings between VET trainers and health professionals to discuss ongoing cases and strategies.
  - o Meetings with representatives from country-specific organizations will enable communication with responsible contact persons and help trainers to select the appropriate organization for referral.

- **Shared Goals:** Establish common objectives focused on the well-being and integration of refugees, ensuring that all trainers are aligned in their efforts.
- **Role Clarity:** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of trainers and health professionals in multidisciplinary teams or organizations to prevent overlap and ensure efficient use of resources, having in mind that trainers are in most cases not therapeutical but pedagogical experts.

Benefits of Collaboration:

- **Comprehensive Care:** Combining the expertise of VET trainers and health professionals leads to a more holistic approach, addressing both pedagogical and psychological needs.
- **Improved Outcomes:** Collaborative efforts enhance the overall well-being of refugees, promoting better mental health and smoother integration into society and the local labour market.
- **Resource Efficiency:** Sharing knowledge and resources among team members or with external experts prevents duplication of efforts and ensures refugees receive timely and appropriate care.

Challenges of Collaboration:

- **Communication Barriers:** Differences in terminology and professional language can hinder effective communication between team members or external experts.
- **Role Confusion:** Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities can lead to overlap or gaps in care.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited availability of health professionals or time shortage can hinder the extent of collaborative efforts.

Addressing Common Barriers to Effective Collaboration

1. **Establish Clear processes:** Develop standardized methods, such as regular meetings and shared documentation systems, to ensure all team members are informed about referral to health experts and engaged.
2. **Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly outline the duties of each team member to prevent confusion and overlap, ensuring that everyone understands their specific contributions and how to differentiate in case therapeutical interventions are needed.

Signs, Symptoms and Referral Thresholds

Establishing clear criteria for when to refer a refugee to health professionals is essential. This includes recognizing signs and symptoms of severe distress and understanding the thresholds for referral to health professionals based on symptom severity, risk factors, and available resources.

Signs and Symptoms Indicating the Need for Referral:
- **Severe Anxiety or Depression:** Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or excessive worry that interfere with daily functioning.
- **Trauma Symptoms:** Flashbacks, nightmares, and severe emotional distress related to past traumatic experiences.
- **Self-Harm or Suicidal Thoughts:** Any indication of self-harm behaviours or expressions of suicidal ideation.
- **Psychosis:** Symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, or significant disorganized thinking.

- **Aggressive or Violent Behaviour:** Unexplained aggression or threats of violence towards self or others.

Referral Thresholds:

- **Mild to Moderate Symptoms:** Initially managed by VET trainers with basic psychological first aid and support strategies. Monitor closely for any escalation.
- **Severe Symptoms or High Risk:** Immediate referral to health professionals is required. This includes any signs of suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or psychosis.

Chronic or Persistent Symptoms:

- Referral for specialized care if symptoms persist despite initial interventions by VET trainers.

Guidelines for immediate actions in case of acute psychic problems of participants

In real emergency situations where a refugee is experiencing acute psychological problems, it is crucial for trainers to act promptly and effectively to ensure the individual's safety and well-being, as well as the safety and well-being of the whole group of learners and his or her own.

By following these guidelines, trainers can provide immediate and effective assistance in real emergency situations involving acute psychic problems of their refugee participants. Ensuring that trainers are well-prepared and informed about local resources will significantly improve the support and care provided to refugees in distress, as well as have a positive impact on trainers, since this will support them in coping with potential unforeseen situations.

Immediate actions

- **Stay Calm and Assess the Situation**
  - Remain calm and composed to provide a stable presence.
  - Assess the situation quickly to determine the severity of the problem. Look for signs of acute distress, such as panic attacks, severe anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or aggressive behaviour.
- **Ensure Safety**
  - Ensure the immediate safety of the refugee and those around them. If the person poses a risk to themselves or others, remove any dangerous objects from the vicinity.
  - If possible, move the individual to a quiet and safe space to minimize external stressors.
- **Provide Reassurance and Support**
  - Use a calm and soothing voice to reassure the individual.
  - Acknowledge their feelings and let them know that help is available.
- **In case immediate professional help is needed**
  - Call Emergency Services for immediate medical help
  - If the situation is critical and requires immediate medical or psychological intervention, call Emergency Services for immediate medical help
  - Provide clear and concise information about the individual's condition, your location, and any immediate risks.

Follow-Up and Support

- **Referral to Health Professionals**
  - After the immediate crisis is managed, ensure that the individual is referred to certified health professionals for ongoing support.
  - Follow the guidelines developed in Module 10 for making effective referrals to specialists, including psychotherapists and counsellors.
- **Document the Incident**
  - Document the details of the incident, including what occurred, how it was handled, and the steps taken to ensure the individual's safety. This information is crucial for future reference and ongoing support.
- **Provide Continued Support**
  - Continue to offer emotional support and monitor the individual's well-being. Ensure they attend follow-up appointments with health professionals.
  - Engage with community organizations and support groups to provide additional resources and support networks for the individual.
- **Develop an Emergency Response Plan**
  - Establish a clear emergency response plan within your institution that outlines specific steps to take during a psychological crisis.
  - Include contact information for emergency services, local mental health resources, and internal support protocols.

Country-Specific Referral Networks

It is essential to consider the various national support strategies and organizations that impact the handling of mentally vulnerable individuals. Different countries have a range of organizations and institutions dedicated to supporting refugees, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups.

These organizations play a crucial role in providing mental health services, social support, and integration programs. Understanding the national context, including the available resources and support systems, is vital for VET trainers to effectively refer and connect refugees to the appropriate services. These frameworks ensure that individuals receive appropriate care while protecting their rights and dignity.

Austria

In Austria, a range of organizations are dedicated to supporting refugees, providing a comprehensive network of services that include mental health care, social support, and integration programs. Understanding this national context is crucial for trainers to effectively refer and connect refugees to the appropriate services. Key organizations and resources available in Austria:

Mental Health Services

1. **Hemayat**
   - Hemayat provides psychological counselling and psychotherapy for survivors of torture and war.
   - Website: Hemayat
2. **Zebra**
   - Zebra offers psychological and social support for refugees, including trauma therapy and legal assistance.
   - Website: Zebra
3. **Pro Mente Austria**
   - Pro Mente focuses on mental health services, providing support and counselling for refugees with mental health issues.
   - Website: Pro Mente Austria

Non-Profit Organizations

- **Caritas Austria**
  - Caritas provides extensive support for refugees, including accommodation, legal advice, language courses, and mental health services.
  - Website: Caritas Austria
- **Diakonie Österreich**
  - Diakonie offers various services for refugees such as legal assistance, social integration programs, and psychological support.
  - Website: Diakonie Österreich

- **Volkshilfe**
  - Volkshilfe focuses on social services for refugees, including housing, job integration programs, and psychosocial support.
  - Website: Volkshilfe

Community Groups

- **Asylkoordination Österreich**
  - This umbrella organization coordinates the efforts of various NGOs working with refugees, providing advocacy, information, and support.
  - Website: Asylkoordination Österreich
- **Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock**
  - A community-based project offering emergency accommodation, legal support, and integration services for refugees.
  - Website: Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock

Integration and Social Support Programs

- **Red Cross Austria**
  - The Austrian Red Cross provides emergency relief, health services, and integration programs for refugees.
  - Website: Red Cross Austria
- **SOS Mitmensch**
  - SOS Mitmensch advocates for the rights of refugees and migrants, offering social support and integration initiatives.
  - Website: SOS Mitmensch

In case of a severe psycho-social crisis:

- **Emergency Services** (144) for immediate medical help
  - If the situation is critical and requires immediate medical or psychological intervention,
  - Provide clear and concise information about the individual's condition, your location, and any immediate risks.

- **Seek Professional Help**
  - Contact local mental health crisis teams or psychiatric emergency services if the situation does not require immediate medical intervention but still needs professional attention.
  - In Vienna, the **Psychiatric Emergency Service (PSD) Vienna** can be reached at +43 1 31330 for immediate psychiatric support.

- **Crisis Intervention Center**
  - offers immediate help for people in acute psychological crises. Contact: +43 1 4069595.
  - Provide the individual with the contact information and, if possible, assist them in making the call.
  -
- **Hemayat and Zebra**
  - For trauma-specific crises, organizations like **Hemayat** (+43 1 408 38 89) and **Zebra** (+43 316 83 14 14) offer psychological support and can be contacted for immediate assistance.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, refugees receive support from a combination of government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs. The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) provides legal aid, temporary accommodation, and access to essential services like healthcare and education. NGOs, such as Caritas Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Red Cross, and the Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria, play a crucial role in filling gaps by offering additional services, including food distribution, language classes, vocational training, and psychosocial support. These organizations work closely with international bodies like the UNHCR to enhance refugee integration and advocacy efforts, ensuring more comprehensive support for refugees in Bulgaria.

Government agencies:

The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) in Bulgaria is a government body responsible for managing refugee affairs. It oversees the asylum process, provides accommodation and integration support, and ensures access to services such as healthcare and education for refugees and asylum seekers. SAR plays a key role in implementing national policies related to refugee protection and integration.
You can contact the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) in Bulgaria through the following details:
Address: State Agency for Refugees 5, G. S. Rakovski Str. Sofia 1000, Bulgaria
Phone: +359 2 981 87 14
Email: sar@government.bg
Website: www.aref.government.bg

For the most up-to-date contact information, it is advisable to visit their official website or reach out directly.

The Bulgarian National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking is a governmental body dedicated to addressing and preventing human trafficking in Bulgaria. It coordinates national efforts to combat trafficking through policy development, interagency collaboration, and public awareness campaigns. The Commission works to improve victim support services, strengthen legal frameworks, and enhance law enforcement training to effectively address human trafficking and support victims.
Website: www.antitraffic.government.bg

International Organizations:

The UNHCR has a representation in Bulgaria, led by a Head of Mission, to provide support and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers.
Web page: https://www.unhcr.org/bg/

The Bulgarian Red Cross has a representation in Bulgaria, led by a Head of Mission, providing humanitarian aid and support to refugees and vulnerable populations.
Website: www.redcross.bg

NGOs providing counselling, legal help, and integration:

Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants - a non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting and empowering refugee and migrant women in Bulgaria. BCRM focuses on advocacy, integration, and the protection of the rights of women and children in these vulnerable communities. The organization provides a range of services, including legal assistance, social and psychological support, and educational programs, such as language courses and vocational training. BCRM works to ensure that refugee and migrant women can successfully integrate into Bulgarian society while promoting gender equality and human rights.
Website: https://bcrm-bg.org/

Bulgarian Council on Refugee and Migrant Women (BCRM) – BCRM provides comprehensive support to refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria. Their services include legal aid, psychosocial assistance, educational programs, and emergency relief. BCRM focuses on empowering women and children, helping them integrate into society and advocating for their rights.
Website: www.craw-bg.org

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) is a leading human rights organization in Bulgaria that provides legal support and advocacy for vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum seekers. BHC works to protect their rights through legal representation, monitoring of conditions in refugee centres, and public awareness campaigns. The organization also conducts research and reports on human rights issues, aiming to influence policy and promote better treatment of refugees in Bulgaria.
Website: www.bghelsinki.org

The Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR) is a Bulgarian NGO focused on promoting and protecting the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. FAR provides legal assistance, advocacy, and information services to ensure that these vulnerable groups can access their rights under national and international law. The organization also engages in public education, research, and policy work to improve the legal and social framework for refugees and migrants in Bulgaria.
Website: www.farbg.eu

Caritas Bulgaria is a charitable organization that provides humanitarian aid and social support to vulnerable populations, including refugees and migrants. The organization offers a wide range of services, such as emergency relief, housing assistance, healthcare, language courses, and vocational training. Caritas Bulgaria focuses on helping refugees integrate into society by promoting social inclusion and providing the tools they need to become self-sufficient. Additionally, they collaborate with other NGOs and local communities to strengthen their support network for those in need.
Website: www.caritas-bg.org

The Nadja Centre Foundation is a Bulgarian NGO that focuses on providing psychological support and counselling services, particularly to survivors of trauma and violence, including refugees and migrants. The foundation offers specialized therapeutic programs for women and children who have experienced abuse, aiming to help them recover and rebuild their lives. In addition to direct counselling, the Nadja Centre also engages in public education, advocacy, and training for professionals working with vulnerable populations, contributing to a broader effort to improve mental health care and support in Bulgaria.
Website: www.centrenadja.com

"Right to Childhood" Foundation - The organization provides psychological assistance, social support, and educational programs to help these children integrate and thrive. The foundation is committed to safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their well-being in challenging circumstances.
Website: www.childhood.bg

Germany

Germany has a well-established network of support services aimed at addressing the complex needs of refugees, including those related to mental health and psychosocial well-being. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds and traumatic experiences of many refugees, it is crucial for VET (professionals to be familiar in the available referral resources to ensure that refugees receive comprehensive and culturally sensitive care.

Mental Health Services

1. **Berlin Center for the Treatment of Torture Victims (bzfo.de)**
   o Website: bzfo.de
2. **Refugio Munich**
   o Website: refugio-muenchen.de
3. **Center for the Treatment of Torture Victims - Ulm (Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Ulm)**
   o Website: bzfo-ulm.de
4. **Refugio Stuttgart**
   o Website: refugio-stuttgart.de
5. **Center for Refugees and Victims of Torture - Freiburg (Freiburger Netzwerk Psychosoziale Beratung für Flüchtlinge)**
   o Website: psz-freiburg.de
6. **Refugio Bremen**
   o Website: refugio-bremen.de
7. **Refugio Frankfurt**
   o Website: refugio-frankfurt.de
8. **XENION Psychosocial Help for Politically Persecuted People e.V. (XENION Psychosoziale Hilfe für politisch Verfolgte e.V.)**
   o Website: xenion.org
9. **Center for Trauma Survivors - Düsseldorf (Zentrum für Traumaüberlebende - Düsseldorf)**
   o Website: ztd-duesseldorf.de
10. **Center for Refugees and Victims of Torture - Hamburg (Flüchtlingszentrum Hamburg)**
    o Website: fluechtlingszentrum-hamburg.de
11. **Center for the Treatment of Torture Victims - Hannover (Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Hannover)**
    o Website: bzfo-hannover.de
12. **Refugio Cologne (Refugio Köln)**
    o Website: refugio-koeln.de
13. **Center for Psychosocial Care for Refugees - Leipzig (Psychosoziales Zentrum für Flüchtlinge Leipzig)**
    o Website: psz-leipzig.de
14. **Refugio Schleswig-Holstein**
    o Website: refugio-sh.de
15. **Center for the Treatment of Torture Victims - Dresden (Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Dresden)**
    o Website: bzfo-dresden.de
16. **Refugio Würzburg**
    o Website: refugio-wuerzburg.de

Non-Profit Organizations

1. **Caritas Germany**
   - Caritas provides comprehensive support for refugees, including accommodation, legal advice, language courses, and mental health services.
   - Website: Caritas Germany (caritas.de)
2. **Diakonie Germany**
   - Diakonie offers various services for refugees such as legal assistance, social integration programs, and psychological support.
   - Website: Diakonie Germany (diakonie.de)
3. **Pro Asyl**
   - Pro Asyl advocates for the rights of refugees and provides legal advice and support.
   - Website: Pro Asyl (proasyl.de)
4. **AWO (Arbeiterwohlfahrt)**
   - AWO offers support services including housing, integration programs, and mental health services for refugees.
   - Website: AWO Germany (awo.org)
5. **Malteser Hilfsdienst**
   - Provides emergency aid, social services and support, mental health care for refugees.
   - Website: Malteser Germany (malteser.de)
6. **Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe**
   - Offers medical and psychological services for refugees and displaced persons.
   - Website: Johanniter Germany (johanniter.de)
7. **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH**
   - Provides support for refugee integration and mental health care projects.
   - Website: GIZ (giz.de)

Community Groups

1. **Refugees Welcome Germany**
   - Helps connect refugees with local host families and provides integration support.
   - Website: Refugees Welcome Germany (refugees-welcome.net)
2. **Flüchtlingsrat (State Refugee Councils)**
   - Coordinates support services and advocacy for refugees at the state level.
   - Website: State Refugee Councils
3. **Start with a Friend e.V.**
   - Matches refugees with local volunteers to help with integration and social support.
   - Website: Start with a Friend (start-with-a-friend.de)
4. **NeMO (Network of Migrant Organizations)**
   - Provides support and advocacy for migrant and refugee communities.
   - Website: NeMO Germany (ne-mo.de)
5. **Welcome Alliance**
   - A network of volunteers and organizations providing support and integration services for refugees.
   - Website: Welcome Alliance (welcomealliance.de)
6. **Kiron Open Higher Education**
   - Provides refugees with access to higher education and support services.
   - Website: Kiron (kiron.ngo)

Emergency Services

1. **Emergency Services (112)**
    - o In case of immediate medical or psychological emergencies, dial 112 for emergency services.
2. **Psychiatric Crisis Services**
    1. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Berlin**
        - o Phone: +49 30 39063-0
    2. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Munich**
        - o Phone: +49 89 54727-0
    3. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Hamburg**
        - o Phone: +49 40 428 11 23 33
    4. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Frankfurt**
        - o Phone: +49 69 6301-3852
    5. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Stuttgart**
        - o Phone: +49 711 278-4000
    6. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Cologne**
        - o Phone: +49 221 221-93399
    7. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Düsseldorf**
        - o Phone: +49 211 5987790
    8. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Leipzig**
        - o Phone: +49 341 972 4444
    9. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Dresden**
        - o Phone: +49 351 8561111
    10. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Hannover**
        - o Phone: +49 511 532-6635
    11. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Bremen**
        - o Phone: +49 421 4082145
    12. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Nürnberg**
        - o Phone: +49 911 398-2640
    13. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Essen**
        - o Phone: +49 201 7227-0
    14. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Dortmund**
        - o Phone: +49 231 4503-9000
    15. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Mannheim**
        - o Phone: +49 621 1703-2850
    16. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Karlsruhe**
        - o Phone: +49 721 974 500
    17. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Bonn**
        - o Phone: +49 228 287 33233
    18. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Münster**
        - o Phone: +49 251 976-5200
    19. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Freiburg**
        - o Phone: +49 761 270-65900
    20. **Psychiatric Crisis Service Mainz**
        - o Phone: +49 6131 17-2539

Portugal

In Portugal, a variety of organisations and institutions provide essential support for refugees, including mental health services, social support, and integration programmes. Below is a list of key services available to refugees in Portugal:

Mental Health Services

- Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados (JRS - Jesuit Refugee Service) is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, founded in 1980 by the Society of Jesus. The mission of JRS is to accompany, serve and advocate the cause of refugees and forcibly displaced persons worldwide. In Portugal, JRS was established in 1992 and since then it has been supporting migrants and refugees by providing them social, psychological, medical and legal support, and by implementing projects that focus on language learning, training, developing skills and access to the labour market. More information at https://www.jrsportugal.pt/en/home-2/.

- Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa (Portuguese Red Cross) is part of the global Red Cross network, providing crucial support to vulnerable populations. Its services encompass psychological trauma support, legal aid, access to education, and labour market integration. More information at https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/acolhimento-de-refugiados.html [only available in Portuguese].

- Fundação Portugal com ACNUR (Portugal with ACNUR Foundation) is a national partner of the United Nations Refugee Agency. Set up in 2021, it aims to raise awareness and funds to support the UNHCR's humanitarian aid programmes. Mental health has become a priority for the UNHCR, with the organisation increasingly focusing on developing a mental health and psychosocial support programme to help these populations face the challenges of displacement, care for their families, secure livelihoods and contribute to their host communities. More information at https://pacnur.org/pt/onde-estamos/areas-de-trabalho/saude-mental [only available in Portuguese].

- Ordem dos Psicólogos (Portuguese Psychologists Association). Together with JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service, the Portuguese Psychologists Association has produced a mental health kit for migrants, translated into 10 languages. Since 2022, the SNS24 psychological counselling service 808 24 24 24 has also been available in English (besides Portuguese), providing access to a psychologist specializing in clinical and health psychology (crisis intervention), free of charge and available 24 hours a day, particularly to support refugees from Ukraine coming to Portugal. More information at https://www.ordemdospsicologos.pt/pt/noticia/5040.

Integration and social support

- CPR – Conselho Português para os Refugiados (Portuguese Refugee Council) is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Portugal, providing services such as legal aid, social integration programmes, and psychological support. More information at https://cpr.pt/ [only available in Portuguese].

- PAR – Plataforma de Apoio aos Refugiados (Refugee Support Platform) is a platform of Portuguese civil society organisations that supports refugees. Faced with the urgency of the migratory crisis that took place in the summer of 2015, more than 350 Portuguese organisations decided to cooperate to respond to the needs of refugees within their borders. More information at https://www.refugiados.pt/ [only available in Portuguese].

- APIRP - Associação de apoio a Imigrantes e Refugiados em Portugal (Migrants and Refugees Support Association) is a non-profit organisation that supports migrants and refugees in Portugal who, regardless of their origin, language and gender, have decided to live in Portugal. Its main goal is to support their integration in Portugal. More information at https://apirp.pt/ [only available in Portuguese].

- ACM, I.P. – Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, I.P. (High Commissioner for Refugees) encompasses national and local support centres in Portugal, including the National Refugee Integration Support Centre (NAIR), that ensure that refugees receive appropriate services and support for their integration. They manage and update refugee hosting availability, coordinate with civil society and local authorities, raise public awareness, facilitate integration services, monitor arrivals, allocate community funds, and represent ACM, I.P. in national and international forums. More information at https://www.acm.gov.pt/ru/-/apoio-a-integracao-de-pessoas-refugiadas [only available in Portuguese].

- CATR – Centro de Acolhimento Temporário para Refugiados (Temporary Refugee Reception Centre) of the Lisbon Municipality has been welcoming refugees to the city with the support of a technical team from JRS – Jesuit Refugee Centre prepared to provide specialised support. Among the activities carried out by the Centre, JRS is responsible for receiving, directing, welcoming and accompanying the refugees from the moment they arrive to the airport, as well as providing individualised accompaniment, guidance, integration activities, legal support, psychological support and diagnosis. More information at https://www.jrsportugal.pt/catr-centro-lisboa/ [only available in Portuguese].

- Refugees Welcome Portugal is part of an international movement that was born in 2015 whose main mission is to contribute to the successful integration of migrants and refugees into host communities. Its website provides essential resources and support networks, as well as creating integration opportunities for people looking for a fresh start. More information at https://refugees-welcome.pt/.

Recommendations for trainers

Working with refugees who have experienced trauma and other mental health issues requires VET trainers to adopt a sensitive, informed, and supportive approach. Here are key recommendations for VET trainers to consider in their daily work:

- Be aware of common signs of trauma such as anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, and difficulty concentrating.
- Create a classroom environment that feels safe and predictable. Minimize triggers that could cause distress and be mindful of the participants' emotional states.
- Understand that trauma can affect concentration, memory, and learning capacity. Be patient and offer flexibility in deadlines and participation.
- Provide participants with choices in their learning process to help them regain a sense of control and autonomy.
- Be aware of and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of your participants. Understand that cultural context can influence how trauma is experienced and expressed.
- Encourage participants to engage in self-care activities and routines that help them manage stress and anxiety.
- Support learners in developing resilience by fostering a positive and hopeful outlook, setting achievable goals, and recognizing their strengths and achievements.
- Clearly define professional boundaries to protect your well-being while providing support to your participants.
- Understand the limits of your role as a trainer. Try to familiarize the signs that indicate a need for professional mental health intervention.
- Use the established referral guidelines to connect participants with health professionals. Ensure that referrals are culturally sensitive and appropriate.
- Regularly reflect on your teaching practices and their impact on participants with mental health issues. Seek feedback from colleagues and participants.

Resources/Materials

Providing first aid in psychosocial crises: https://www.gesundheit.gv.at/leben/psyche-seele/krisenintervention/erste-hilfe-psyche.html

World Health Organization. (2019): Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99) https://icd.who.int/browse10/2019/en#/F40-F48

A video on trauma-informed approach in adult education: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxvR5A4WmoQ

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). (2007). IASC Guidelines for mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. https://www.who.int

Brymer, M., et al. (2006). Understanding the Impact of Trauma - Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/

Kirmayer, L. J. (2001). Cultural variations in the clinical presentation of depression and anxiety: Implications for diagnosis and treatment. Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 62(Suppl 13), 22-28. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11434415/

National Institute of Mental Health, NIH Publication No. 22-MH-8066: Helping Children and Adolescents Cope With Traumatic Events - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (nih.gov)

Appendix for Module 2 - Cultural Sensitiveness and Cultural Competence

Topics

- Cultural norms and values of refugees
- Building cross-cultural communication skills
- Respecting cultural diversity in mental health support

Cultural norms and values of refugees – comprehension through cultural awareness

International processes of relocations, resettlements of different cultural groups from one to another country is nowadays a frequent phenomenon. That leads to changes: representatives of various newcoming cultures bring their worldviews, mindsets, traditions, ways of communication and, at the same time, learn other (new) patterns from the host culture. Of course, that can cause changes of habits, worldviews, mindsets of locals and newcomers. Therefore, new intercultural spaces are created – cities (villages, towns, etc.) change visually, architecturally, "behaviourally", according to the citizens' demands, preferences and individual cultural characteristics (e.g. background, worldview, intentions etc.).

Refugees are representatives of various cultural groups with different cultural norms, values, worldviews and traditions, that can correlate with the host culture mind-set or can cause barriers and misconceptions (in case of lack of cultural competence of communicators).

Representatives of different cultural groups (for example, while direct communication occurs) may feel mutual prejudices from the very beginning of interrelations, especially when focusing rather on differences among them. Moreover, when representatives of some cultural group try to adapt in a new place – they face many challenges, which may increase cautious (maybe even antagonistic) attitude to "dominant", host culture group, and oppositely. To all this, generalising may produce stereotypes, discrimination and racial biases in the intercultural relations.

Educational strategies can help to enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity

In case, if providing (e.g. in educational centres) teaching focused on explaining and implementing the concept, that different nations, cultural groups are initially representatives of human race with the same values – it can help to understand, why it is logical to have and show respect to other cultural groups. It can be a good practice, to ask representatives of other cultural groups about some peculiarities, traditions etc., in order to reflect and analyse instead of generalising.

> Good to know:
> It is better to ask open questions about e.g. cultural norms and values, in order to reflect and analyse instead of generalising.

Respecting cultural diversity in mental health support

Accordingly, such ideas can help to learn to recognize other cultures, not to judge them as e.g. "not civilized enough", but rather to observe other mindsets as unique, specific ways of processing reality, with specific achievements.

It is important in individual intercultural communication and in working with refugee populations, when providing support.

Such approach, to have and to show respect to other cultural groups, can enable:

- to enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity (in working with refugee populations);
- therefore, to understand cultural influences on mental health;
- to change the viewpoint towards aware and careful attitude to own environment (to improve the process of intercultural communication).

How to provide the building of cross-cultural communication skills

- to clarify the reason and to explain the significance of awareness-raising education in the sphere of cultural (intercultural, multicultural) interrelations.
- to clarify the terminology of the conceptual field culture (e.g. culturally sensitive, cultural competence), revealing the essence of the concept culture and explaining corresponding derived notions (culturally sensitive, cultural competence);
- to observe the steps, necessary for reaching the ultimate goal (to possess the quality of being culturally **sensitive** and to master **cultural competence**).

Building of cross-cultural communication skills, enhancing cultural awareness, quality of being culturally sensitive can help to deal with modern challenges of intercultural communication.

> **Task for developing cross-cultural skills**

Some theoretical knowledge may be useful to understand conceptual framework as a necessary basis for the way forward.

Culture, culturally sensitivity, cultural competence

Concept **culture** is a matter of current interest, core notion and objective of the studies in different scientific disciplines. Moreover, there exist many derived concepts and corresponding terms (e.g. **culturally sensitive** and **cultural competence**).

Consequently, for clarification and better understanding, it seems logical to consider several focuses of investigations of concept **culture** in different scientific disciplines, e.g.:

- in terms of anthropology culture can be presented as a certain mindset, behaviour of a cultural group of people and their produced artefacts;
- sociology investigates relations between culture and society;
- for linguistics it's more relevant to investigate interrelations of culture and language, role of language in intercultural communication, phenomenon of multilingualism, etc.;
- in philosophy culture can be defined as knowledge, beliefs and customs that people acquire through membership of a particular group;
- in psychology term "culture" is explored in connection with investigation of mental and behavioural processes.

It is logical that definitions of "**culture**" in terms of psychology involve concepts of values, beliefs and behaviours – as psychology is focused on the study of mind, mental processes, conscious und unconscious reasons and patterns of behaviour.

It is an interesting point that mind and **culture** can be observed as "mutually constituted" [5]. Considering this connection, it can be stated that **culture** is individual acquisition (as it is specific way of making decisions and acting accordingly – so it is revelation of individual's mind, of individuality). And at the same time **culture** is an influencing factor, that had been already formed by other individuals through ages and further guides the norms, patterns of behaviour.

Thus, **culture** can be observed as one of the reasons that motivate individual's behaviour. Individual, in turn, creates and develops **culture**.

While investigating and unfolding the concept **culture**, it may be useful to observe several definitions. For example:

- culture is understood as a complex term that includes notions of cultural patterns and identity, beliefs, values, norms etc. [6].
- Culture – is programming of the mind, "mental program", which moves from collective to individual. As culture differentiate representatives from different cultural groups, then it is possible to observe culture of some cultural group as the personality of some individual [4].

Unfolding the concept **culture** reveals the connection with emotional manifestations and attitudes of a person. Even more transparent is the role of emotional attitude when dealing with the notion **culturally sensitive** (**cultural sensitivity**).

Terms "**sensitive**", "**sensitivity**" descript some emotional attitude and also reveal supposed usage of empathy (as one of the meanings of the word "sensitive" is "empathetic". Besides, "sensitive" – it's not only about feeling, as it also means the attentiveness to (slight) signals, changes, etc. and therefore implies appropriate response.

Accordingly, being **culturally sensitive** means attentiveness to (cultural) details, genuine interest to another culture (may be revealed in asking open questions), that definitive may build better intercultural communication.

Thus, **culturally sensitive** and **cultural sensitivity** can be also characterised as:

- ability to understand as well as to appreciate cultural differences that promotes effective behaviour in the intercultural communication.

In fact, **cultural sensitivity** combines thinking, evaluating, observing, collecting, comparing, analysing that leads to:

- gaining knowledge about cultures, communication, etc.;
- improving the attentiveness to details in intercultural communication;
- at the same time understanding the deep similarities among all cultures, that can be consolidating and creating synergy.
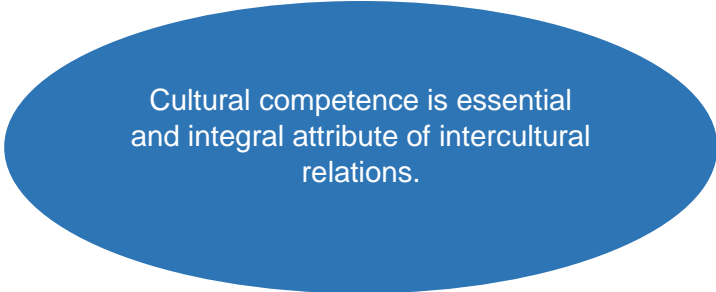
One of the key points, practical revelations of **cultural sensitivity** can be usage of the language-aware approach – a concept that reveals and acknowledges the fact how language is important. Idea to increase visibility of languages (of some minor cultural groups) may signalise, for example, about loyalty to these cultural groups. Language awareness, as a socio-cognitive aspect of the lived space, influences construction of meanings and is considered in examinations of linguistic landscape [2].

Task for developing cultural literacy, awareness and therefore sensitivity

The quality of being **culturally sensitive** enables harmonious communication and interaction with other cultural groups, following the norms and respecting the values of one´s own, as well as other cultures.

It can be accentuated that **cultural sensitivity** can be one of the premises of enriching **cultural competence**. It is discussed in studies, where also other important constitutional parts are revealed and explained.

Building cross-cultural communication skills and applying cultural sensitivity leads to cultural competence

Cultural competence is essential and integral attribute of intercultural relations.

Cultural competence - in "The Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication" - is based on considering behavioural peculiarities, where cultural norms and behavioural patterns are classified in groups (Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Re-Active). Communicational style, time orientation, social interactions of representatives of different social groups are supposed to be important peculiar characteristics and criteria of the cultural groups [1].

Some constitutional parts of **cultural competence** may be indicated as follows: processing the context (information, knowledge about different cultures), appropriateness, effectiveness, motivation [6]. If to interpret – appropriateness is also about relevance, openness and curiosity; effectiveness is about skills; motivation – the same as inspiration and intention; and it is also emphasised role of knowledge.

According to other definition, **cultural competence** consists of essential facets – cognition (ability to develop patterns from cultural cues), motivation (ability to engage others) and behaviour (accordingly to cognition and motivation) [3].

In another variant, to have **cultural competence** means to notice, to understand, to recognize, to respect cultural differences of the representatives of different cultural groups. The necessity to have **cultural competence** is observed as convincing rationale, pointing interpersonal, peace-keeping and other reasons [6].

As **cultural competence** is relevant and broad field for investigations, there also arise different terms and definitions, that also explain certain strategies of intercultural communication and are in fact very similar with **cultural competence**: cultural intelligence, cultural quotient. **Cultural intelligence** or **cultural quotient** consists of motivation, cognition, meta-cognition (strategy), behaviour. An important point is to realize and to consider other personal qualities. Goal of acquiring and refining **cultural intelligence** is to behave effectively in different intercultural environments [3]. Thus, **cultural**

intelligence can be observed as greater readiness to recognize cultural peculiarities, and **cultural competence** can be considered more as possessing of information about cultural groups. In combination, **cultural competence** and **cultural intelligence** are considered to create **culture proficiency**.

From all terminology and definitions, mentioned above it is possible to conclude that **cultural competence** can be defined as:

- continuous process of self-development in terms of self-exploring, reflecting, exploring the world. Learning process (that includes enriching awareness, observing, collecting and analysing the information, expanding the worldview, liberalising, understanding human nature);
- result of the learning process at the same time, which can be observed as achieved knowledge. Theoretical knowledge as a product of theoretical analysis contains information about components of cultural competence. Also, all at once it is formulated instruction of necessary steps of self-development in intercultural communication.
- practically implemented knowledge and therefore achieved skills that can foster and manage appropriate behaviour, which enables successful intercultural communication.

Cultural competence can be also understood as achieved comprehension, awareness of existence of different representations of national traditions, mindsets etc. And at the same time understanding of existence of basic deep similar identity (basic needs, global values etc.) among all cultural groups – something that is essential for humanity and reveals in similar moral ideas, inherent to different cultures, religions, nationalities. Thus, it should be taken into consideration, that all cultural groups want the same, and at the same time to understand, that each culture has its revelations, preferences and so on. Such understanding can help in the communication with the representatives of different cultures, working with refugees, also when providing support.

Goal of (intercultural) communication is clear – to negotiate, to reach consensus, to benefit from communication and to thrive. Achievement of such productive result needs self-development according to the certain plan: acquiring of some knowledge, qualities, skills. These necessary (for mastering **cultural competence**) "steps", "levels" are actually the same as constitutional parts of **cultural competence**.

Building cross-cultural communication skills

So, for successful intercultural communication it is necessary to possess, e.g.: **cultural sensitivity** and awareness, motivation, curiosity, openness, to have specific cultural knowledge, to acquire and develop skills.

- Awareness and motivation are initial issues for successful intercultural communication. Understanding that there are the differences, observing them, learning about them leads to specific cultural knowledge (understanding the ways other cultures perform).
- Inspiration, intention are also important parts of the successful cultural communication, as they can enable development of mutual engagement among communicators.
- Knowledge – it is also necessary to keep in mind that acquiring information about certain cultural group (knowledge) is also necessary step of the gaining **cultural competence**. Among multiple varieties of cultural groups – it is good to focus on some global specific structures that form the way of revelation of national cultural mindset, values – about attitude to interrelations with others (e.g. individualism / collectivism), attitude to time perception

(monochronic / polychronic cultures), attitude to self-revelation in communication (position in space), economic and political positioning in society. (And it is possible to learn more and more, e.g. about the geographical-historical-political reasons).

> ### Activity for trainers

It is important to research and acquire information about different cultures for the building cross-cultural communication skills and for the gaining of the **cultural competence**.

Learning more about cross-cultural communication skills and respecting diversity of cultures

> In the process of intercultural communication, it is important to keep in mind that communication includes not only the language, but also tone, intonation, active listening, etc.

Therefore, for effective cross-cultural communication it is useful to learn information about style of communication (for example, gestures) of different cultures. Correspondingly, to respect and to follow intercultural norms of communication.

We know that approximately 50-80% of interpersonal communication takes place through e.g. facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc. – and to try to refine it, that can help to make communication more successful. In a communicative process each interlocutor feels, understands the intention of another. In this case it is again about awareness (admitting the aims), intention (wish to self-develop), knowledge (considering cultural peculiarities).

> ### Game for developing cross-cultural skills for successful communication

Thus, there are many issues to be aware of (skills, approaches, knowledge, connection with mental and behavioural processes), when to organise successful communication with representatives of different cultures and to provide (mental health) support for refugees.

Enriching the goal to acquire the necessary competence for effective intercultural relations is principally connected with aware continuous practical attempts. Attempts to discover, to recognize and to learn about the own and other mindsets, values and cultures.

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Appendix to Module 3 - Understanding Refugee Experience

Topics

- Challenges faced by refugees
- Impact of migration on mental health (displacement, acculturation stress)
- Specific approach to refugee experiences

Today's societies involve different social groups and refugees represent large groups in different countries, they need care and support

Nowadays, a lot of authorities and experts in different countries deal with the question – how to increase collectiveness and decrease confrontations and segregations in the societies. It needs communication with individuals and with the different social groups. Today's societies involve many social groups and refugees represent large groups in different countries, they need care and support. The point is how to deal in a proper way with coordination of large groups of people, to provide proper fulfilment of their basic needs, afterwards to help newcomers to learn, to find appropriate work, to feel themselves good – thus, they can also get ready to contribute to the building of the friendly and healthy society.

Figuring out needs and exploring challenges faced by refugees can help

- to find strategies how to cope with challenges, how to deal with effective fulfilment of the needs and therefore to impact positively on mental health;
- to create strategies that promote effectively empathy and compassion for refugees (how to teach, to train empathic and compassionate attitude; to provide principles of self-care attitude), thus providing support
- to decrease tendency to anxiety and strengthen capacity to counteract the effects of stress, what can have positive effect to mental health.

If to explore challenges faced by refugees, it should be mentioned that proper communication with the refugees is initial requirement and necessity for building trust in the process of finding appropriate solutions. There can be healthy issues, bare necessities, psychological and emotional needs, replacement and acculturation stress, language barriers. According to this, support for refugees should involve not only material assistance, but also mentorship programs and emotional support, with empathic and compassionate approach.

It is necessary to take into consideration that when basic needs are fulfilled, then it is important to support fulfilment of emotional needs, which provides mental health. Thus, addressing displacement stress and acculturation stress is also important part of providing emotional support.

Process of acculturation

Acculturation is actually the process of gaining new knowledge about traditions, mindset, language, etc. of the host culture. Process of acculturation and dealing with acculturation stress may lead to different tendencies – from segregation to assimilation. Process of acculturation can be also described in terms of "cultural fusion theory", which clarifies that when acculturation occurs (it's predominantly learning traditions, mindset, language etc. of the host culture), some aspects of newcomers' cultures are maintained, and some aspects are also fused into the host culture [2].

Interesting to know:
understanding and maybe observing
mutual exchanges among cultures may
focus interest of the representatives of

How to build healthy and reasonable way to deal with displacement and acculturation stress

- to discuss the problem of acculturation;
- to discuss individual peculiarities of displacement and acculturation stress to reveal reasons of difficulties such as language barrier; lack of cultural knowledge and skills in communication with locals; revealing of bicultural stress.
    - (Bicultural stress refers to the challenges and demands when confronting a new cultural setting – acculturative stress [1], as well as enculturated stress, which is connected with the pressure against acculturation, to maintain one's culture);
- to discuss (individually) strategies of solving the problems.

General strategies to resolve displacement and acculturation stress

The revealing of misunderstandings (knowledge of main points of communication theory can be helpful);

- individual understanding of language acquisition importance is necessary, therefore usage of aware attitude and techniques; process of language acquisition (of the host country);
- individual understanding of necessity to learn about host culture; therefore, gaining cultural literacy, skills and competence;
- to teach, to learn, to train methods of awareness, reflection in order to deal with bicultural stress and improve mental health;
- to look for participation, to be involved in meaningful social activities (as a rule, such activities are useful both for a person and for the whole society: e.g. learning, volunteering, refining professional skills).

Organisation of support demands effective communication

According to communicative theory, communicative process consists of some components: idea, sender, encoding of information that is sent, channel selection, decoding information that is received, feedback. Often it may occur that sent and received information is not the same. It can be different because of specifications of "encoding" information (how sender formulates message), and peculiarities of "decoding" (how receiver understands message).

Therefore, in the process of communication, it can sometimes lead to misunderstandings (especially by lack of information, lack of time to be aware of details). Other reasons – lack of language knowledge, way of thinking and acting (cultural mind-set), making assumptions – cognitive distortions, which may cause misconceptions, misunderstandings, stereotypes.

Misunderstandings can appear even in case of communication among native speakers, and of course, in intercultural communication as well. Especially in the in case of intercultural communication it may

lead to problems almost on all steps, also especially encoding (formulating) and decoding (understanding), because of:

- lack of language competence;
- lack of cultural competence (in the sense of knowing traditions, mind-sets, etc.).

Thus, language proficiency is important influential factor – for effective communication, for building mutual empathic relations, for professional development and fulfilment of emotional needs.

Language acquisition is essential part of acculturation, integration and even of possibility to have more empathic support (which leads to fulfilment of emotional needs and is important for mental well-being)

Without language acquisition empathy can be displayed only nonverbally. More language acquisition – more integration.

Different ways of dealing with acculturation stress are connected with aware language acquisition, which needs cognitive efforts but helps to cope with stress, to overcome barriers, to fulfil emotional needs, to decrease anxiety, so is important for better mental health.

Good to know:
the important goal for trainers is to create aware attitude to language acquisition (understanding of importance).

Strategies and activities:

- self-reflection and discussing of individual problems in the process of language acquisition, considering of possible individual strategies (individual activity or group discussion of the same issues: changing of opinions);
- discussing of the individual goal in terms of language acquisition, individual view (individual activity or group discussion of the same issues: changing of opinions, experiences, useful recommendations may lead to increased engagement).

Cultural literacy as an important part of acculturation

Lack of communication with representatives of the host culture as well as lack of cultural literacy can lead to possible misunderstandings.

Awareness of communicative and cultural differences, appropriate knowledge can help to build trust, can lead to understand and address the needs and concerns of representatives of different cultures and to maximize their talents [5].

Correspondingly, it may decrease the level of anxiety and uncertainty, with positive impact on mental health.

Strategies and activities:

- to create language and cultural environment. (If to communicate with representatives of different cultures e.g. in multicultural classes, it is possible to get used to be among different cultures, and it makes process easier);
- to discuss individual understanding of importance as for learning cultural peculiarities of the host country; individual goal; individual view;
- to present information (about cultural peculiarities of the host country and about principles of intercultural communication), to pay attention to compare and explain differences and to look for commonalities, to think about general human values;
- to train awareness and reflection.

> Self-reflection activity: to analyse own communication with representatives of the host culture – what seems inappropriate, why, how to deal with (individual strategies may include: to get more information, to increase communication, to look for good examples in communication, to look for general human values).

Emotional needs

Mentioned problems and possible strategies overlap with fulfilment of emotional needs, what is important to decrease tendency to anxiety and helps to strengthen capacity to counteract the effects of stress (what can have positive effect on mental health).

For organising better support for refugees in this sphere, it should be discussed individual emotional needs, e.g. connection (community), autonomy (self-sufficiency, independence, freedom), reciprocity (mutuality). Among emotional needs such as autonomy or spontaneity [6], there are also needs of validation and appreciation – and these are connected with development of self-esteem and self-actualisation.

> Interesting to know:
> fulfilment of such emotional needs as self-esteem and self-actualisation (what is important for mental health) is connected with language acquisition and professional development.

To have aware approach can help to develop and grow further personally; also, to support professional development (which also can be part of work with emotional needs: it gives the person new perspectives, new approaches, new self-evaluating, maybe new goals). As it is suggested in Abraham Maslow's model, development process (personal growth and fulfilment of needs) is in process, starting with fulfilment of basic needs and proceeding to self-esteem and self-actualisation [4]. Similarly, McClelland's acquired needs theory suggests that development and motivational process are connected with such needs, as: achievement, power and affiliation [7].

Thus, necessity to fulfil the emotional needs causes self-development, and fulfilment of the needs is provided by self-development.

It is possible to mention that core emotional needs of refugees and representatives of the host country are actually the same, – it can help to pay attention to resemblances and general human values, therefore, it may lead to development of sincere empathic and compassionate approach.

Strategies to deal with fulfilment of emotional needs

- to teach about aware approach and to train awareness and emotional literacy;
- to notice own emotions (journaling);
- to develop healthy habits, to look at problems from different angles;
- to clarify importance of learning how to care about own individual emotional needs (it should be learnt, how to fulfil the needs, and that it is also individual continuous process, which is important for mental health).

> Activity "Reflection on current thoughts and feelings": to write down thoughts and feelings; to reflect and discuss the necessary changes, methods and strategies.

Fulfilment of the emotional needs of refugees influences positively on the mental health and is clearly connected the self-growth process. In turn, process of self-development influences the fulfilment of emotional needs, may lead to changing the perspectives, attitudes, goals.

Such a strategy must be implemented through empathic and compassionate approach, which is initial part of emotional support.

Empathic and compassionate approach

There are denoted several types of empathy – cognitive empathy (logic), emotional empathy (feelings), compassionate empathy (logic, feelings and willingness to help).

Empathy accounts for the naturally occurring subjective experience of similarity between the feelings among different people, minimal recognition and understanding of emotional state of others. Awareness, mental flexibility and emotion regulation constitute the basic components of empathy [3].

For compassion are important e.g. sensitivity, sympathy, empathy, motivation (to care) and non-judgement. Empathy is characterized by awareness of other people's emotional experiences and compassion is characterized by the desire to find out how to act to help the other person.

The same as in interpersonal interrelations – it is good if intercultural relations of host culture representatives and refugees are based on mutual respect and friendliness. Lack of empathic communication may provoke cautious attitude of refugees to the representatives of host culture. That in turn may cause more distress, avoidance of communication, unhealthy behaviours, segregation.

Understanding that relations should be built not on the feelings of anxiety and dependence (what is not example of respectful interrelations), but on the empathic and compassionate attitude, may help to make relations better. Thus, for organising effective support for refugees, it is important to develop empathic and compassionate approach. Process of understanding another individual with intention to help and showing such intention is helpful for better interrelations, cooperation, outcomes.

Promoting empathy can be observed as mutual process. As trainers in general have theoretic knowledge about empathy, it is anyway relevant to continue to develop this skill and more – to teach refugees about empathic attitude.

Strategies and activities

To raise empathy means to raise awareness, to notice what is around. Awareness can be understood as mental attitude, based on the focus attention to oneself and others. It may develop balance and connection, wish of togetherness and all good for others, nonaggressive approach.

> **Activity to increase awareness:** to reflect and to recognize mutual influence in the relations; to train aware activities, e.g. listening without judging, then to reflect (template with the questions), to mention the differences but look for commonalities.

Motivation and self-development as part of coping with stress

Received and produced empathic and compassionate attitude comes to real motivation. (Motivation as punishment and praise is not very effective). Motivation is necessary to learning process. Unwillingness to learn among refugees may be based on feeling of uncertainty and lack of mutual empathic attitude with the representatives of host culture. Also, if not understanding the practical reason or lack of necessary qualifications, skills, lack of knowledge (also skills to learn, to research, to find out proved information). If to have the information and to know how to process it – it is possible to learn to build strategies (in this case refugees can create their own strategies). After understanding the concrete goal may arise the wish to learn, to work.

Strategies of educating, informing; to teach how to learn:

- to teach how to learn, to form learning skills and attitude;
- to pay more attention to educational, informative, explanatory work as for attitude to role of education and professional development;
- to teach aware attitude to resources, to environment, nature, ecological issues;
- to pay more attention to self-care (healthy food, healthy activities, healthy daily routine, sport, etc.).

By the way, teaching strategies to form learning skills and motivation are also about the training of empathic aware attitude.

Healthy social relations can positively influence mental well-being

People in general want to have residence and work in a place where prevail order, structure, clear transparent rules. Although to keep certain order (also in trivial meaning) needs intentions and efforts, that's why it is not always accomplished and appreciated.

Motivation together with empathic and compassionate approach can help to build better communication with society and make so that people that receive help also want to provide help to others. It can help to fulfil emotional needs, strengthen empathic and compassionate relations and has positive impact on mental health.

Strategy of involving into active social participation:

- to offer participation (may include activities that contribute to the good of the community, society), to explain outcomes of such contribution: fulfilment of emotional needs, therefore, positive effect on mental health.

Nice practices may be observed in VET schools – it is connected with learning language, certain working professional skills, learning how to learn, how to evaluate resources, how to keep certain discipline rules, learning about healthy way of life. Furthermore, it is about involvement and feeling of togetherness.

Through learning process, from feeling weak and dependent – to responsibility, participation, civility generosity, with the next aim – to create healthy successful society.

Learning different skills – results in understanding the importance for personal development, betterment of mental health of refugees and (globally) is helpful for building the good and thriving society.

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