



DigIT: Developing Digital Skills and Tools for Better Inclusion of Refugees and Immigrants

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Toolkit to higher education (HE) training for educators

CHAPTER-5

Psychosocial perspectives on well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking people and how to encourage a focus on education



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Introduction

Access to higher education (HE) is a fundamental right that should be granted to all individuals regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. However, refugees and immigrants often face numerous barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their desire and motivation to access HE. These barriers can be cultural, social, economic, and legal in nature, and they require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to overcome.

HE professionals play a crucial role in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants, as they are in a unique position to provide tailored support and guidance. However, HE professionals need to be aware of the specific challenges faced by refugees and immigrants and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address these challenges.

This digital toolkit is designed to address this need by providing HE professionals, student association members, social workers, teachers/career advisors from schools and colleges, and workers from refugee support organizations with a comprehensive guide on how to facilitate access to HE for refugees and immigrants. The toolkit's objectives are to raise the level of competence and socio-economic awareness among HE professionals, enhance refugees/immigrants' professional and personal growth, and encourage refugees/immigrants to pursue their education and contribute to community development.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the toolkit, the recommendations provided are based on the latest legal and policy developments affecting access to HE, as well as the best practices identified by experts in the field. This digital toolkit was created to serve as a valuable resource for HE professionals and other stakeholders involved in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants. By equipping HE professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants, we can promote social inclusion, diversity, and community development.

Chapter 5-
Psychosocial perspectives on well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking people and how to encourage a focus on education

Introduction:

The psychosocial well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking individuals is a multifaceted and critical aspect of their journey towards recovery and resilience. Forced migration often exposes them to traumatic experiences, loss, and social dislocation, highlighting the significance of understanding and addressing their emotional and social needs. Education plays a pivotal role in supporting the psychosocial well-being of these individuals, offering hope, empowerment, and a pathway to social integration. This module explores the psychosocial perspectives on the well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers, emphasizing the importance of education as a means to encourage their focus on personal growth, empowerment, and improved quality of life.

Background of the Challenge:

The impact of displacement and trauma on refugees/immigrants' well-being and academic success

The well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking individuals extends beyond physical health, encompassing psychological and social factors that significantly impact their overall adjustment and resilience. Understanding well-being in the context of forced migration is key.

This circumstance disrupts individuals' lives and exposes them to various challenges, including trauma, loss, and social dislocation, which makes it a necessity for the people that accompany them, to have a comprehensive understanding of their well-being in this unique context.

Strategies for promoting mental health and well-being among refugees/immigrants in higher education

Provide dedicated support services, such as counselling, mental health support, and social activities, to help refugees and immigrants integrate into the HE community.

Refugees and immigrants may experience difficulties in several domains that can be a barrier to integrating into the HE community and being able to continue their education. Amongst them are cultural differences, language barriers, social isolation and mental health issues. An important factor to be considered is mental health. Everyone has its own life trajectory, interpretation of events and nuanced experience. The one-size-fits all should not be the approach with people that experience forced displacement. They should not be homogenized and though refugees should not be considered an item with the same characteristics and experiences, it should be taken into account that forced displacement can come with consequences for mental health. According to the European commission, “there is considerable variation in the prevalence of mental disorders in refugees and migrants. Poor socioeconomic conditions are associated with an increased risk of depression among resettled refugees”. To overcome challenges such as cultural adjustment issues, anxiety, stress, depression or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), it is crucial to provide dedicated, individual and group support and counselling services that cater to the specific needs of refugees and immigrants to help them deal with mental health. Support on mental health issues will contribute to successfully continue with their education and integrate into the HE community.

Counselling services can help refugees and immigrants overcome the challenges they may face and mental health support can provide them with help to manage psychological issues, such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition to counselling and mental health support, social activities can also help refugees and immigrants integrate into the HE community. Providing them opportunities to connect with other students and staff members, build relationships, and develop a sense of belonging. Activities can include events such as cultural celebrations, language exchange programs, and community service initiatives.

HE institutions can collaborate with refugee support organizations and other community partners to provide these dedicated support services. They can also establish student-led initiatives, such as student clubs or peer mentorship programs, that can provide additional support and resources for refugees and immigrants.

The role of education in supporting refugees/immigrants' recovery and resilience

Education plays a crucial role in empowering refugees and asylum-seekers, facilitating their social integration, enhancing their self-esteem, and providing them with hope and future opportunities for personal growth and well-being.

By providing a structured and supportive environment, education offers a sense of normalcy, a platform for self-expression, and opportunities for personal growth. It enhances self-esteem, reduces psychological distress, and enables individuals to develop coping mechanisms to overcome trauma and adversity. Education also acts as a vital tool for social integration by facilitating cultural understanding, language acquisition, and social interaction.

The integration and well-being of refugees and immigrants are complex processes that involve various factors, and education and teachers themselves play a crucial role in supporting their recovery and resilience as well as the transition to higher education. A successful transition is shown to be possible not so much because of previous experiences but through personal ambition and the proper support when entering the system (Brownlees & Finch, 2010, p. 95).

Step-by-step Implementation with the Visible Progress to Achieve:

A step-by-step implementation approach, coupled with visible progress indicators, allows for the systematic and measurable advancement of educational initiatives that support the psychosocial well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking individuals.

- Identifying Educational Needs and Aspirations:

Recognizing the diverse educational needs, aspirations, and prior experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers is essential for designing educational programs and interventions that address their specific requirements and support their psychosocial well-being.

- Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Learning Environments:

Educational institutions can create environments that embrace diversity, promote inclusivity, and foster a sense of belonging for refugees and asylum-seekers, thus contributing to their psychosocial well-being and academic success.

- Developing Individualized Education Plans:

Tailoring education plans to the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations of refugees and asylum-seekers ensures that they receive targeted support and opportunities for growth and development.

- Providing Social and Emotional Support:

Access to comprehensive social and emotional support services, such as counseling, mentorship, and peer support networks, can address the psychosocial challenges faced by refugees and asylum-seekers and promote their overall well-being.

- Monitoring and Evaluating Progress:

Regular monitoring and evaluation of educational interventions and individual progress help identify areas of improvement, assess the effectiveness of support measures, and ensure that the psychosocial well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking individuals is being adequately addressed.

Case studies of successful initiatives that have promoted psychosocial well-being among refugees/immigrants in higher education

External Sources

- The UN Refugee Agency - Higher Education Programs for Refugees:
<https://www.unhcr.org/education/higher-education.html>
- The European Commission's Erasmus+ Program for Refugees:
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-refugees_en
- The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>
- The Journal of Refugee Studies: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs>
- The Migration Policy Institute: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>
- The International Association of Universities - Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Higher Education: <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Refugees-Displaced-Persons-and-Higher-Education>
- The World University Service of Canada - Student Refugee Program:
<https://www.wusc.ca/our-work/student-refugees/>
- The Refugee Education Initiative: <https://refugeeeducationinitiative.org/>
- The Higher Education Support Program by the Open Society Foundations:
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/what-we-do/themes/higher-education-support-program>
- The International Refugee Assistance Project: <https://refugeerights.org/>
- European website on Integration: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/report-health-refugees-and-migrants-who-european-region_en

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- Hockings, (2011, p. 521).