



Photo: 1 Colourbox

Career guidance for refugees and migrants

How can career guidance for refugees and migrants contribute in building more inclusive and resilient societies?

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Career support services are designed to support individuals as they learn about themselves and how best to make the most of their talents, interests, and skills in rapidly changing labour markets. This sometimes complex process is made that much more difficult when supporting members of marginalised communities: e.g. refugees and migrants (ETF, 2020). These remain among the most vulnerable members of society faced often with xenophobia; discrimination; poor living, housing, and working conditions; and inadequate access to health services, despite frequently occurring physical and mental health problems (WHO,

2019). But within guidance and counselling this topic is largely under-researched (Hughes et al, 2019; Akkok, 2022).

Introduction

Today all over the world many people make one of the most challenging decisions in their lives: to leave their homes and townships in search of a safer or better life. In these extraordinary times, career support services must help refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to adapt and prosper in new settings.

The words “refugee”, “asylum seekers” and “migrant” are often used to describe people who are on the move, who have left their countries and have crossed borders. These terms are often used interchangeably but it is important to distinguish between them as there is a legal difference (Amnesty International, 2018; Hughes et al, 2019) which can affect an individual’s entitlement to welfare support, education opportunities and/or employment access. Millions seek to escape from armed conflicts or other crises or violence. Some no longer feel safe due to being targeted just because of who they are or what they do or believe – for example, for their ethnicity, religion, sexuality or political opinions.



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Supporting refugees and migrants can be difficult in the context of social, economic, and public health crises which have led to multipronged challenges and barriers to resettlement

services and community support. Many refugees and migrants have experienced trauma related to war or persecution that may affect their mental and physical health. These traumatic events may occur during displacement from their country of origin, or in the resettlement process. Career guidance can effectively support refugees and migrants to build a new life. It can improve their wellbeing through information, advice and expert guidance and counselling support. The latter involves jointly exploring ways of harnessing talents and skills to create a livelihood and, most importantly, to be able to take action.

At a macro-level, the UN Sustainable Goals (2015) identifies seventeen goals with related targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹, with only one target that makes an explicit reference to migration processes and policies.

- Under Goal 10 “Reduce inequalities within and among countries” target 10.7 focuses on the facilitation of “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration, and mobility of people, which includes the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” that should be measured through four related indicators, three of which are potentially relevant to refugees.
- [The additional indicator 10.7.4](#) added to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework within the 2020 Comprehensive Review explicitly mentions refugees (IAEG-SDGs, 2020), in the context of forced displacement and visibility of vulnerable people

In the face of a humanitarian crisis, Europe is confronted with the challenge of ensuring that refugees can be resettled, be integrated successfully within societies, and contribute to the economy (2017, p.1). Career guidance is called upon to play a key role in the [UN Global Compact for Orderly and Safe Migration](#) (UN, 2018). Objectives 1 and 18 specifically highlight the need to invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences, and to include the criterion of skills in national/local data collection. Career guidance viewed through a social justice perspective supports the creation of a better society, offering hope, dignity and strives for equity and equality for all, thereby enhancing social integration, community cohesion and more inclusive societies and

¹ Agenda 2030, paras 10 and 19: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

economies. A dynamic suite of approaches and tools are required to meet the diversity of individuals and their unique set of circumstances.

Six key dimensions to working with refugees and migrants

Practitioners recognise the range of approaches and tools often span from legislative arrangements and entitlements to various ways of advocating on behalf of those most vulnerable. Six key dimensions are outlined below to stimulate action at a local, regional and/or national level.

- Legislative arrangements and entitlements to public funds and welfare support vary between countries. This means careers practitioners need to invest time in understanding the rules, constraints, and enablers when informing and guiding youth and adult refugees and migrants.
- Within a country there will be significant variations and expertise in relation to working with this target group. For example, within closely neighbouring areas, one municipality may be hosting large groups of refugees and migrants and another very few. Cultural dynamics will be at play therefore careers practitioners must consider how best to learn more about ways of designing and delivering multi-cultural guidance and counselling.
- Career guidance viewed through a social justice perspective supports the creation of a better society (Arthur, 2014; Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen, 2017). It offers hope, dignity and strives for equity and equality for all, thereby enhancing social integration, community cohesion and more inclusive societies and economies. Wrong assumptions, inequalities and bias have to be challenged by career guidance practitioners, underpinned by a strong evidence-base. This can then have a positive effect in influencing the public perception of refugees and migrants and the policymakers' stance.
- Good quality careers support services operate in a multitude of environments, which offer practitioners opportunities to flex their skills working with various clients. A challenging but essential part of this is developing multicultural guidance/counselling expertise, looking inward, and examining one's own biases and privileges. Careers practitioners must be self-aware and examine how their upbringing and backgrounds

influence the way they treat their clients. It is vital that practitioners then learn how to balance those tendencies with greater awareness and perspective.

- Career guidance practitioners can effectively support this target group to identify key contacts in local communities, resources and to encourage participation in community and culturally relevant support groups. This often acts as a gateway to skills, education, training and/or occupational development. Gathering data on the stories and needs of refugees and migrants and feeding this back into education and employment systems is a key imperative.
- Advocating on behalf of these clients can take different forms according to Andrew Bassingthwaite. For example,
 1. “self-advocacy” – building trust and empowering the client to make choices and decisions that can have a positive impact on their lives. This approach should incorporate cultural humility and sensitivity (Cadens, 2018)
 2. “professional advocacy” – serving as a bridge between the client and those in positions of power e.g. people working in housing, welfare and disabilities services, as well as work with employers – to make them aware of the needs and talent available.
 3. “public advocacy” – making greater use of the careers practitioner’s voice and evidence-base in making public statements that highlight the needs of these specific target groups, bringing together communities of interest, and informing public policy formation.

Practitioners’ confidence and ability to advocate on behalf of their clients will vary depending on the breadth of their work, time allocated for advocacy activities and confidence in doing so. This requires new and effective ways of good and/or interesting policies and practices.



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At every level, careers support should involve working closely with education personnel, training providers, community agencies and employers to ease the transitions of children, young people and vulnerable adults. Overall, a dynamic suite of approaches and tools are required to meet the diversity of individuals and their unique set of circumstances.

Selected example

In Norway, the RefuNEET project “[Career guidance for young refugees– escaping NEET status](#)² with good counselling towards training and employment” was led by Oslo Metropolitan University (formerly Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences). Project activities was aimed at early assessment of the competences of young refugees (age 15-29) combined with effective career guidance and counselling in order to avoid NEET

Turkey has been hosting an incredible number of refugees from Syria and other countries (around 6 million). Turkey is the largest refugee host country. There are many implementations and innovative practices for social and labour market inclusion. One example is the pre-employment support programme of IOM designed to make the process

² NEET refers to not in education, employment and/or training.

of adaptation to the labour market easier for Syrians and vulnerable host community members. It aims to enhance basic knowledge and skills which support the employability of job seekers. It aims to support job seekers of the two target groups to acquire the basic knowledge/information and, to a certain level, skills that could facilitate their work-based learning.

Within the Turkish Employment Agency, [Job Clubs](#) and a [Job Coach service for individuals with special needs](#) provide intensive job and employment counselling for disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, youth, individuals with disabilities, and long-term unemployed) to motivate them and support them with job-search skills.

In Bulgaria, with support from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU), the '[Solidarity' project aims](#) to help Ukrainians settle into Bulgarian life by making it easier for them to find a job. The project also provides accommodation and financial support as well as workshops to develop job skills.

In Austria, [a programme for vulnerable youth](#) is designed as youth coaching and career guidance, at three age levels, designed to support and prepare them for vocational education and training (VET) and those with disabilities and not in education, employment or training (NEET) to enable them to make decisions and support their transitions.

In London, [a careers chatbot \(CiCi\)](#), powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, with an inbuilt translation facility is being piloted with Ukrainian young people and adults within a local Facebook community centre. This personalised bot will support individuals and provide data on the range and types of education, training and labour market searches undertaken by refugees and migrants.

In Glasgow, [The Bridges Programme](#), provides support for the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and anyone for whom English is a second language. Recognised as an example of Best Practice in Scotland, the UK and Europe, Bridges works with employers and partners to ensure that clients have the best possible support to help them into work (if eligible), education or further training.

Conclusion

A greater focus on investment in multi-cultural guidance/counselling support seems pivotal. Career practitioners need to be trained, empowered, and well-equipped to design and deliver multi-cultural career guidance. Government policies are gradually moving towards a focus on vulnerable young people and adults within a multi-cultural environment. We, as professionals, need to ensure that people's career readiness is tackled at a grassroots level and career guidance must maintain a broad reach, with a practical focus. Moreover, the support provided must be needs-driven with more targeted and personalised careers support activities specifically for refugees and migrants.

There is evidence that proactively designed careers interventions can compensate for educational and social inequalities (Mann et al., 2018; Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2017; Hughes et al, 2016). In a period of global turbulence, such as that anticipated in the aftermath of Covid-19 and during the worldwide impact of the war in Ukraine, effective careers support services can minimise inequalities and prepare young people and adults to navigate a challenging education and work transitions (Hughes, 2022). In these extraordinary times, career guidance can help people to understand how the changes and transitions individuals and societies face will shape their life, employment, personal relations, finances, and plans (Akkok, 2021).

Some key objectives for more diverse and inclusive career development support services:

- Person-centred multi-agency services, culturally relevant and needs-driven developed within a holistic approach.
- Blended and multi-channelling that acknowledge the digital divide and tailor services accordingly.
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning as an effective tool for labour market integration and employability.

Prioritisation of multi-cultural guidance/counselling training programmes that demonstrate diversity and inclusion in education and the workforce and involve refugees and migrants as active contributors.

Key Facts

- While the UN SDG targets are aspirational and global, the Agenda is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments relating to human rights and international law.¹
- There were increasing numbers of refugees to Norway in 2015. Between 2015 and 2016, there were 593 unaccompanied minors from Syria applying for asylum in Norway - 3,652 from Afghanistan and 89 from Iraq. Latest numbers (Jan- August 2019) 48 from Afghanistan, 39 from Eritrea and 21 from Syria. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports the refugees are mainly 18-35 years; 60% men – 40% women; and social profiles vary.
- Turkey has been hosting an incredible number of refugees from Syria and other countries (around 6 million). Turkey is the largest refugee host country.

Fact file

Migration is an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students. Visit: <https://www.iom.int/about-migration>

Links to further reading

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