



WEBINAR SUMMARY

Solidarity: An ethical imperative for advancing the role of education in migrant and refugee inclusion in Europe

Webinar: Psycho-social support for resilience and well-being of children in the context of migrant and refugee inclusion in Europe.

WEDNESDAY 21 APRIL 2021

SUMMARY:

Title of the Webinar: Psycho-social support for resilience and well-being of children in the context of migrant and refugee inclusion in Europe.

Date: Wednesday, 21 April 2021.

Moderator: Ms. Athanasia Rapti, Social Worker, Scientific Supervisor of Shelter for UAM, SYNYPARXIS.

Objectives of the Webinar: To build a dialogue on the role of psycho-social support for migrant and refugee children, especially with regards to unaccompanied minors, as an essential procedure of their transition to adulthood and their smooth inclusion in host societies in Europe.

KEY POINTS FROM THE PANELISTS:

Ms. Athanasia Kotsiatou, Director of Social and Legal Services, SYNYPARXIS.

A psychosocial approach tends to respond to people's interconnected social and psychological needs, addressing them in an integrated manner. Psychosocial support means support given to victims of disaster, catastrophe, violence and fostering resilience, which aims to ease resumption of normal life by preventing longer-term consequences of potentially traumatic situations. Psychosocial support is closely related to human rights, facilitating access to employment, education, procedures for recognition of qualifications, social welfare, healthcare and accommodation.

In our organization we work with unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and we have seen this is

an extremely vulnerable population. The process starts with case management, with an individual plan the psychosocial supporter must conduct when a minor or a beneficiary arrives at the shelter. Assessing the minor's situation and needs is an important phase which takes time as it includes observation sessions and getting to know the minors' background and needs. Based on this, an Individual Action Plan is drafted, with short- and long-term goals in order to address the minor's needs and support him as well as possible. This plan can be revised through the follow-up process. In essence, case management is a flexible procedure that adopts feedback and revises the plan again and again. Finally, the case comes to a closure (family reunification, adulthood, drop outs).

If you work with psychosocial support, it is very important that you have knowledge of the cultural, political and economic context of minors in the country of origin. Another important focus is the transition to European reality. The psychosocial supporters have to provide early intervention by covering the basic needs. Second step has to do with community work in order to welcome and integrate minors in the host communities. It is very important to support the communities to accept the newcomers and not see them as a threat.

The psychosocial supporters have to decide whether their goal is integration or inclusion. If you want to talk for inclusion and not integration, the challenge is to support the children to keep the contact with their country of origin. We can support this by joining regional celebrations, giving them the chance to have frequent contact with members of their family in Europe or in their country of origin, and support them to keep in touch with their mother language and



their culture. I strongly believe that psychosocial support is one of the main paths for resilience and wellbeing for migrant and refugee children.

Ms. Neelam Fida, Global Child Protection Advisor, Islamic Relief.

It is important to remember that many of the children arriving to Europe feel they had no choice, no future and no safety in the home they were brought up in. They have no alternative but to take matters into their own hands and take the risk of being exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation at the hands of people smugglers or traffickers to embrace a better future. Most of these children will experience horrific scenes during this transition, with long lasting impacts on the children's wellbeing.

What basic support can host communities provide? We know the gaps that exist, but how are they being addressed and how are measures being adjusted? Reviewing existing approaches to address the needs of children is critical, and a more effective coordination of referral pathways including local communities is needed. Local actors are often on the front line in humanitarian efforts for refugee and migrant children, from immediate assistance to long term measures. There is a critical gap in the response to provide spiritual care amongst survivor's war and violence, considering the intense harm and trauma these children might have experienced. It is essential that faith actors play the role of Psychosocial First Aiders with the necessary technical know-how in providing that important initial support, building

their resilience and promoting messages of wellbeing. Faith communities can also play a central role in providing inclusive and accessible education. Within these safe spaces we could provide recreational activities, and some level of normality missing from the lives of the children.

We can establish referral mechanisms which include faith actors to alleviate some of the pressure on the existing mechanisms. We need to ensure that these faith actors and local actors have the necessary financial and technical resources to provide psychosocial support and spiritual care that is very much needed. Ensuring faith sensitivity is embedded in the existing social provisions is needed to ensure that cultural and spiritual needs of children are being heard and incorporated for longer and meaningful impact.

Ms. Efi Kallou, Educator, Shelters of Unaccompanied Minors, SYNYPARXIS.

When working with UAMs the main goal is to help them integrate in the society, and this is best achieved by their inclusion to the public school. We must distinguish between integration and inclusion. In the integration the children are absorbed into the mainstream education system, which helps them become a part of a group but does not help them retain their cultural identity as they are the ones that have to adjust to the existing system. Inclusion educates children in a way that benefits all children, with their participation in the school environment without having to lose their cultural identity. However, achieving inclusion is a challenge as it requires changes to the educational system in order to adapt to the characteristics of children.

Education for unaccompanied minors include non-formal education in the shelters and formal education in the public schools. Teachers in the shelters are responsible for non-formal education and of preparing the children for formal education. There are many challenges, such as the children's indifference towards learning Greek due to the uncertainty of their stay. It is also a challenge to have the lessons and activities in the same building that is their home. The children have no contact with other children, acting as an obstacle for socialization and inclusion. Many of the children are illiterate without any form of past education, and they have to start from the beginning. Many of the children are also psychologically traumatized, affecting their will to participate in activities in the shelter.

In the shelters various creative activities are held that prepare the children for inclusion in formal education, and are done in collaboration with psychologists and social workers. After enrollment in Greek public school, they keep frequent communication and cooperation with the personnel of the schools. A minor entering the Greek educational system can attend multicultural schools or a local public school with classes for refugees. However, bureaucracy and time-consuming procedures have a significant impact on registration, and many refugee children are excluded due to lack of space in the public schools or the unwillingness of the schools to accept them.

Multicultural schools have specialized personnel, tools, handbooks and methods, differentiated instruction and curriculum, inclusive environment and implementation of multicultural projects. However, the number of multicultural schools is inadequate and not preferred by domestic



students. General public schools lead to faster inclusion through contact with local children. Reception classes for refugees aim for faster learning of the language, however these are not a common practice in schools and there is also lack of specialized people.

Another challenge is the lack of a standardized test for refugees and migrants, which excludes refugee children from valid diagnosis and a proper intervention from school. This leads to exclusion and slow progress for the children with learning disabilities and other difficulties.

Mr. Karel Jungheim, Migration Specialist, Kerk in Actie.

In the Netherlands, refugee children have to wait a long time in a pre-reception center before getting in the system. However, they have many activities (formal and informal education), and they start learning the language. Unaccompanied minors arrive are placed in the hands of an official organization NIGOs (the Dutch Guidance Organization for Unaccompanied Refugee Children), that places them in asylum seeker centers or with

host families. During this procedure, formal education is not always available. There is lobbying and advocacy to make education available for all children at all stages.

Many NGOs are active in the asylum seeker centers. For example, the Dutch Refugee Council organizes 'Child Rights Clubs', where children discuss about their rights. There is also attention to sports and cultural activities through other organizations. Several activities are arranged during the week, but less so during the weekends and holidays. Local churches also sometimes organize activities for refugee and migrant children.

One challenge is that the asylum seeker centers are like small islands, where only the refugees live. The children and also adults get used to that environment, socializing mainly with other refugees. After getting a status from the IED (Ministry of Migration), people move to welfare housing in to a local municipality. From the asylum seeker centers people are distributed all over the country, where they need to start building social relationships all over again.

Education is compulsory for children between 5-16 years, and as refugee status holders, children enjoy the same rights and obligations as others. The municipality is responsible for their integration, and are advised by a national knowledge-center for mental health. The municipalities work together with NGOs, churches and mosques to organize social activities. The civil society and local organizations have a great level of trust among the refugees, and refugees have also organized churches themselves, where the children are brought together for social activities and worship.

Dutch Refugee Council organizes summer camps for refugee children, those in asylum seeker centers and families who cannot afford to take a vacation. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the churches and mosques organized programs of welcoming for new refugees in the municipalities, with social activities such as 'sharing your table'.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted especially the refugee children, who have had difficulties in accessing the education online during lockdowns. Because of the unfavorable socioeconomic position of parents, refugee children are also more vulnerable for domestic violence. The children are in a kind of a limbo culturally between two worlds, their country of origin and the new country.

Refugee children are sometimes discriminated against on the labor markets. There are special cases such as UAM's without a status and outside the procedure, once they are 18-years old they have no access to an asylum seeker center anymore, and are supposed to leave the country, outside the official structures these children are more vulnerable. For the children whose parents don't have any status it is very difficult to make their way.

The role of the church is not to organize social services (done by the government), but the most important that you can give us (refugees) is the feeling of welcome and friendship. The most important think we can give as a church in the Netherlands is the human capital, accompaniment, social activities and friendship.

INPUTS FROM BREAK-OUT GROUP DISCUSSION

Challenges and opportunities:

- Children are often traumatized not only of the journey but also arriving to a new place, it is a very subtle issue how to work with traumatized children
- How to take a faith sensitive approach into account, support the child's identity, reach the child's inner needs and provide spiritual comfort and psychosocial support, taking into account the existing language barriers?
- How to support teachers to be aware of the psycho-social needs of the child, and address them properly?
- The existence stigma about providing socio-emotional support
- Bureaucracy and state policies in Europe can be contradictory to the European values and spirit such as solidarity, multiculturalism and accepting diversity; these are not implemented in practice, there are unfriendly policies from the states and local communities towards integration of minors and migrants, a lack of real inclusive environments
- The policies of the state influence the attitude of local communities; if they are not welcoming, the local communities will not be welcoming to strangers either
- Assessing the age of UAMs is difficult, officials might not be qualified enough for this and children face the risk of being placed with adults; children sometimes

placed in custody for a long time, limiting their movement and access to the society

- Lack of money and financial support makes children vulnerable to exploitation, especially children that are homeless
- There is a tendency to criminalize children who are exploited rather than the people exploiting them
- Supporting children in Covid times is difficult with limited access to them
- Is the system well prepared to support refugee children, and help them learn?
- Are we empathizing with the host community enough, is there PSS support we can give to them? Can we recognize the fears and grievances of the host community?

Recommendations:

- Supporting teachers to be able to support traumatized children is key
- Teachers to be trained on activities that help the refugee children to not be left behind and inclusive approaches that strengthen relationships among communities.
- In the Netherlands, if a child is not doing well in school a teacher identifies this and contacts the local doctor or the PSS organization and health care specialist who will help solve the problem.
- It is important to know the roles and boundaries of each profession, teachers shouldn't be psychologists, there should be complementarity and collaboration between different sectors; Not trying to solve the problem yourself but seeking help



from qualified persons; Know your limits and refer to the right specialist

- Important for refugee children to attend the same school as the local children
- Training more specialized people who can understand the trauma of children coming from another place
- Create safe spaces for children, establish consistency in their lives, create trust with the children and their families
- Give stable and long-term psychosocial support; teaching the children skills to be resilient and able to face adversities in their new environment
- Teachers can promote non-violent communication skills and help the refugees take part in discussions, engaging the children in group work rather than competitive work.
- Organize events to help children socialize; Provide social spaces for children to interact

- during Covid times online; Search for new solutions to keep people included
- Organize local community interventions, e.g., Dutch grannies (church volunteers) reading books with children helps children learn the language and feel part of the society
- In Glasgow local museums and community centers have programs acknowledging an artefact from a part of the world where some of the refugees are coming from showing it is being honored and respected, and that those museums are welcoming spaces for cultural exchange
- Organize and take part in celebrations in neighborhoods; Invite people into your families; Have a simple conversation and get to know each other
- Engage local churches, mosques and faith actors as they can play an important role in local communities and in supporting children
- Encourage civil society and religious organizations to work together and to provide their inputs as parts of the community
- Acknowledge school's central role in the local community, as a place not just for teaching and learning but for the community to come together, to meet the other, for socialization and for connection with the community; Advocate for a 'Whole School Approach'
- Keep the children informed about what is going on, including in their country of origin
- Enable the children to engage online in discussions and provide information to them
- Supporting further cultural exchange as a mutual process and learning more about each other
- Creating opportunities to learn about each other's religions & beliefs and encouraging dialogue.
- A Community Sponsorship program in the UK for Syrian refugees, where the refugees work together with the religious and community stakeholders to find a home, school, health care facilities, and learn English.

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