

Including the Voices of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Social Work Curriculum Development



Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The global definition of the social work profession has impelled social work professionals to deal with the multiple challenges of the ongoing global migration process, often dealing with acute needs from refugees and asylum seekers. Considering this situation, we convened an international workshop that focused on including the voices of refugees and asylum seekers when assessing their needs. The challenges faced by social work educators and students when preparing to work with migrant populations from various backgrounds in different hosting countries gave rise to this international cooperation. The aims of the workshop were: to connect refugees and asylum seekers with social work students and educators, to enrich our combined knowledge. In addition, we planned to interweave our findings into future social work curricula of the countries involved and discover what is the best way of implementing such a module.

Specifically, the first day of the workshop was devoted to refugee and asylum seeker and faculty encounters to explore the migrants' and students' needs and to enhance understanding of the social effects of worldwide migration processes on migrants and host countries' social workers. The second day focused on analysing workshop materials and feedback by the project faculty from day one, with an international expert panel and discussing and addressing the above population needs. Furthermore, dealing with the desired social work curriculum including new ways of researching and teaching. The third day focused on reflecting on the workshop materials as a whole and discussing the implications of our findings with regards to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and curriculum and training recommendations.

Process and Outcomes

In advance of the 3-day workshop which took place in Graz, Austria in May 2023, several preparatory phases were completed including:

- Online meetings with project partners to define and refine project aims, get to know each other, and share country specific information about the topic.
- Refugee Voices from the United Kingdom (UK) – a focus group was carried out among a diverse group of refugees in Northern England to discuss experiences of being a refugee in the UK. A key theme here was the lack of accurate shared understanding between refugee service users and social work services regarding the roles and responsibilities of social workers. It was found that clichéd beliefs acquired by both the local host country and refugees themselves, posed a serious challenge.
- A presentation about the situation of migrants in Israel gave insights into challenges faced by social workers. A focus on children and families highlighted that the threat of violence and fear of ‘others’, were the main issues preventing both children and their parents from feeling a sense of belonging within Israel.

Workshops were held on three consecutive days with a different focus on each of the three days.

Day One: 28 social work students and 17 guests with lived experience of being a refugee in Austria and four faculty members met together, with the aim of listening to the voices of refugees. All were willing to share their experiences and discovering first hand their needs and the challenges faced. Feedback showed that both refugees and students appreciated the opportunity to get to know one another in a shared safe space. Those talking about their experience of seeking asylum in Austria, appreciated the chance to tell their stories and be listened to and appreciated. Students at times felt challenged because of the personal nature and emotive content of the discussions. The workshop was bilingual (German and English). However, linguistic barriers were still perceived, and in similar settings language barriers need to be considered. Exercises that were used at the start of the workshop focusing on shared humanity and experience were beneficial. It became clear that understandings of the terms ‘social work’ and ‘refugee’ varied, depending on the background and experiences of the respondent. Overall, peer education and interacting with experts by experience is extremely enriching for students. The individuality of each person and the uniqueness of their experience was an aspect that was frequently mentioned in reflections after this workshop.

Day Two: An online international expert panel discussion was the main item on this day’s agenda. Our experts addressed the question: *As a social worker, or social work educator in the field of*

refugees and asylum seekers, what knowledge and skills do you consider essential for social work students to acquire during their studies? Again, it was stressed that attention needs to be paid when using the term 'refugee' as they are not a homogenous group. Some experts also emphasised the differences between the experiences of adult refugees, and children. Skills and knowledge needed in working with refugees and asylum seekers often overlaps with other fields of social work with vulnerable people. It was generally agreed that trauma informed practice needs to play a central role in social work education in this field and that cultural sensitivity is necessary. For example, social workers need to be aware that there are differences in what is culturally acceptable and legal/illegal. The importance of hope especially in connection with mental health, is an area which needs more attention. On a macro level, it was pointed out that social workers need to work with policymakers and stakeholders to initiate supportive and effective policies.

Day Three: After in depth discussions around curriculum development considering reflections on the outcomes of the first two days, several recommendations for potential social work modules were made. Essential components should include: legal aspects of the asylum system in the host country; cultural considerations from the main countries of origin (geography, politics, history, economics, religion, cultural differences, legal differences, traditions, common world views, language etc), forced relocation as a traumatic event and trauma informed social work; peer education and learning from those with lived experience (for example in the format of our Day One Workshop). Finally, time was spent considering the implications of social work with asylum seekers and refugees for the United Nations Sustainable (SDGs). In particular, SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals, were felt to be closely connected to social work with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Conclusion

The workshops proved to be a positive experience for all participants and the main aims of the project were fulfilled. There was a fruitful exchange between participants from different cultural backgrounds with different perspectives of the complex issues involved being heard. The Day One Workshop successfully connected those with lived experience of being refugees and asylum seekers, with social work students and educators. This workshop provides a format which can be adapted and replicated in different social work education settings.

Furthermore, it became clear over the course of the workshops that there is really no field of social work which is not affected by some of the challenges of migration and that specialised skills, knowledge and understanding is warranted. Our recommendation is that modules focusing on the specific issues surrounding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, should be an integral part of any social work programme.

Rational and Purpose of the Project

In recent years we have seen migration on a global scale, and most recently forced migration due to wars in Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. We strongly believe it is necessary to listen to the voices of those affected by forced migration since they are the experts by experience. Often professionals act with the best intentions. However, without asking the people affected about their needs, and listening to refugees' and asylum seekers' stories, there is lack of understanding and the support offered can be ineffectual. Our project took the form of an International Three-Day Workshop. The aim was to aid curriculum development in social work education regarding the field of migration. One main objective was to connect refugees and asylum seekers with educators and students. This project also built on the findings of the EASSW project: *Challenges for the Social Work Profession at a Time of a Global Migration Crisis: Is a New Social Work Curriculum Needed?* (2016). The current project should enrich knowledge and interweave findings into future social work curricula for the countries involved. The four different schools of social work involved in this project are from the Middle East, Central Europe and the UK. This implies different cultures, different methods of social work education and different social policies regarding refugees and asylum seekers. We hoped this would give rise to a fruitful exchange, different perspectives and a more nuanced understanding of the complex issues involved.

Overall, this international collaboration should enable an exploration of proposed innovative social work curriculum developments, in the different countries based on the refugees' and asylum seekers' voices and their lived experiences. The project should impact methods, enhance staff development and the community involvement of staff and students. During the workshops, social work students and refugees and asylum seekers were able to meet each other in a safe space as equal partners in a shared learning and research experience. The workshops should strengthen understanding of the real situation of refugees and asylum seekers, provide ideas for curriculum development and enhance mutual international faculty relationships.

Biographies

Karen Meixner is a lecturer and international coordinator for the Institute for Social Work at the FH Joanneum Graz, Austria. Her focus in teaching is on international and intercultural social work and social work and sustainability. Her research and publications focus on the topics of online hate speech, diversity and inclusion, as well as social work and the criminal justice system. She works for the probation service and is founder and Chairperson of IdK – Inklusion durch Kreativität – An association for promoting inclusion and celebrating diversity in our society. She holds master's degrees in social work and teaching from Austria, and a BA (Hons) in Modern Languages from Durham University, UK.

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Dr Alison McInnes is a registered social worker and academic. She is a Director of Transnational Education at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and Programme Manager for the Childhood and Early Years Studies and the Guidance and Counselling franchise degree programmes in Singapore. She is also Co-Chair of the JUCSWEC, International Committee in the UK and is an External Expert for five universities in Europe for the Erasmus Mundus ADVANCES MSc ISW Advanced Practice Programme. Her research interests include international social work, myths surrounding ageing, food insecurity, young people, and alcohol. She has worked extensively internationally as a social work consultant including in Tajikistan for UNICEF and has taught widely in the US and across mainland Europe.

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Dr Terry Murphy is a social work academic, activist, and international consultant with 35 years' experience as a practitioner manager and educator. He practiced in child protection in England and Northern Ireland. He currently researches at Teesside University in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law and is also the Northern Regional Chair of the University and College Union. He has been an international consultant since 2000 for the United Nations UNICEF organisation and national governments, working extensively in Africa and Central Asia in child safeguarding and social work education as well as North America, Ukraine, and Europe. He has held several visiting academic posts. His research interests include deinstitutionalisation, indigenous social work practices and trade unionism.

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Orit Nuttman-Shwartz, PhD, MSW, GA, is a Full Professor at the School of Social Work at Sapir College in Israel and is the Israeli representative at the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and in the European Cooperation in Science and Technology Transnational Collaboration on Bullying, Migration and Integration at a School Level. She was the founder and first Head of the School, and former Chairperson of the Israel National Social Work Council. Her research includes the effects of continuous and shared exposure to armed conflict threats on individuals and communities, on clients and social workers. She has published more than 93 articles and book chapters. She was funded by the IASSW and EASSW to develop curricula on social work in the context of political conflict, on international social work and on global migration crisis and received with others an EU Tempus fund to develop an international academic curriculum for child and youth welfare. Nuttman-Shwartz was awarded the Katan Prize and the Israeli Parliament Award for Academic Scholarship in Social Work.

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Description of the Process of Implementation

Essential planning for success

There was a lot of work done prior to the 3-day event which took place in Graz in May 2023. The online component included numerous online meetings carried out via MS Teams, as well as countless emails and phone calls. Tasks which needed to be completed by members of the project team before the workshops included:

- Finding and inviting participants with refugee experience to participate in the workshops and focus groups.
- Input from the UK: focus group and word association exercise.
- Administrative details: finding a suitable location, finalising the programme, ordering the buffet (from an agency working with refugees), designing and printing posters, preparing presentations and questionnaires, emailing participants explaining the purpose and content of the workshops.
- Creating a safe educational space for the students and the refugees.
- Creating a professional meeting schedule before, during, and after the workshop, which allowed adjustments to the programme.
- Preparation of interview schedules for the workshop.

- Preparing the Austrian social work students for participation in the workshop, including sensitisation exercises and familiarisation with the interview schedule.
- Inviting a panel of experts for the international online session.

During this international cooperation we found it necessary to build mutual understandings and trust before the workshops took place. For this reason, we found our pre-workshop face to face meeting, (the day prior) beneficial in getting to know each other face to face, and in fine tuning details of the workshop. This certainly contributed to the smooth running of the 3 days of the workshops.

Refugee Voices-from the UK

Prior to Day One Workshop, a focus group was carried out among a diverse group of refugees in Northern England. This was held to discuss both the journey that had led the participants to leave their home countries and their experience after arriving as refugees within the UK. This included both their experiences of primary migration and of secondary relocations within their country of refuge. Several positive issues were discussed, including a focus on physical and psychological health and developing social networks. A key common theme was the lack of accurate shared understanding between refugee service users and social work services, as to the roles and responsibilities of social workers, where legal and statutory powers may be involved.

The key leaning points for social work education include:

Both local host countries and refugees themselves may acquire inaccurate and clichéd beliefs about each other. This is a problem that social media has greatly exacerbated. In the case of Middle Eastern or other refugee countries or origin, these ideas have been defined as Orientalism and in the case of western host countries as Occidentalism. These models describe frameworks in which the complex and diverse realities of societies both in countries of origin of migrants, and of destination countries of migration, are replaced by clichéd and often prejudiced ideas. Challenging these ideas is part of developing good practice. A good starting point is to encourage students and refugee groups they may work with, to look at the diverse regional and local cultures that exist including cuisines, sports, and regional cultural figures. This can help deconstruct the idea of the monolithic single culture within States by identifying the tapestry of local cultures and experiences, which collectively produce national cultures and beliefs.

It is important for students to understand that a range of services delivered by social workers in the host country, may be delivered by extended family or community groupings, or religious institutions in a refugees' country of origin. Therefore, examining how social work itself, translates to the refugees' languages and meanings is beneficial. The different roles and responsibilities of social workers acting in advocacy roles supporting refugees and those assessing and ensuring the enforcement of legal standards around childcare, safeguarding or mental health, need to be clearly understood by students and local materials produced to communicate these to refugees. Social work then can have a wide variety of functions and in respect of refugees these can range from dedicated specialist advocacy, through to the clinical treatment of trauma, to assessment and intervention on behalf of the host government. There needs to be clear shared understanding of these roles to promote good practice. Moreover, refugees may experience problems with both physical and psychological health, housing, financial support, and employment through to increased risks of family stress, or criminal exploitation. In almost all cases good practice when working with refugees, involves multi agency practice.

The Situation of Migrants in Israel – Presentation

Prof. Orit Nuttman-Shwartz gave a short presentation devoted to the situation in Israel (for further details, see <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy129> <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-021-00811-1>) The results highlight the need for continued efforts to strengthen children's migrant connections with the macrosystem (e.g., the youth movements), which provides children with a sense of home. Furthermore, violence and fear of others were the main issues which made it difficult for the children and their parents to have a successful acculturation process and to feel a sense of belonging to the school, to their classmates, and to Israel. This lessened their ability to cope with COVID-19 and the subjective meaning they gave to their migration and their faith in God. Overall, a high sense of resilience helped them cope with language barriers, alienation, racism, longing, and even COVID-19.

Voices of refugees and asylum seekers

IASSW Project

Orit NuttmanShwartz

Sapir College
Israel



IASSW AIETS

Workshop Day One

Participants:

- Twenty-Eight Second Year bachelor's degree social work students.
- Seventeen guests from Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Nicaragua, Syria and Ukraine.
- Four members of faculty two from FH Joanneum, one Northumbria University and one from Sapir College.



The welcome phase of the workshop

Students arrived before the start of the workshop and were briefed on what was expected of them (active listening, ethical implications, interview recommendations, cultural sensitivity, respecting boundaries, risks of retraumatizing etc) and were given time to familiarise themselves with the

interview schedule. Students and guests were provided with name badges and were asked to give permission for any photographs and outcomes, to be used for research and teaching purposes.

Structure of Workshop One

The workshop was bilingual (English and German). Initially students sat on chairs in a circle. After the welcome they split into smaller groups around the room. The workshop started at 16:00 and ended at 19:00. Posters with the results of the focus group in the UK and presenting the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and Israel were displayed in the room.

- Welcome – 30 minutes for guests to arrive for welcoming coffee and cake.
- Welcome by Head of School of Social Work (Anna Riegler, FH JOANNEUM) and the Project Lead/Principal Investigator (Karen Meixner).
- Faculty demonstrate Exercise 1; with objects they have brought along which are special to them.
- Small Groups Exercise 1 – discuss items they have brought along and what they mean.
- Exercise 2 – Triangle of Commonality – What do all group members have in common?
- Exercise 3 - Word Association Exercise – What words do you connect with the terms "social worker," and "refugee".
- Break for international buffet, networking and small talk.
- Interviews.
- Feedback and reflection.

We conducted the above with the four facilitators, under the umbrella of group analysis theory. We aimed to create an open discussion which enabled all the participants to get to know each other and to learn from each other. This involved using transitional objects that the participants were asked to prepare in advance including pictures; food; photos, etc. We also encouraged all to read the poster about the refugee policies and status in each of the three countries and engage in the interview process. At the end of each part, the participants were asked to share their ideas, thoughts, and emotions. A final question was posed: What is the message that we need to take home to continue to address social workers' involvement with refugees and asylum seekers?



Enjoying the international buffet in the break

Workshop Day Two

Morning

During our morning session we analysed workshop materials and feedback from Day One and reflected together on the workshop.

Afternoon

In the afternoon an International Expert Panel Discussion addressed the question: ***As a social worker, or social work educator in the field of refugees and asylum seekers, what knowledge and skills do you consider essential for social work students to acquire during their studies?***



Experts taking part in the panel discussion:

Dr Anne Abaho Nkumba University, Uganda

Dr Terry Murphy, University of Teesside, UK,

Dr Dina Sidhva, University of the West of Scotland

Dr Koidu Saia and Olha Lysa, University of Tallin, Estonia.

Workshop Day Three

We reflected on the on the international expert panel discussion and what we had learned and compared this to outcomes from the Day One Workshop. Then we discussed the implications of our findings with regards to the UN SDGs. Finally, we discussed which curriculum recommendations had arisen because of the Workshops.

Discussions of Outcomes

Outcomes from the Workshop Day One



Orit Nuttman-Shwarz, Alison McInnes, Karen Meixner – opening the workshop.

We were able to identify the following outcomes and recommendations based on the oral and written feedback from the Workshop on 2nd May:

Outcomes From the Word Association Exercise

The following table shows the different words students and refugees connected with the term **“Refugee.”** There are many parallels, but some differences.

Refugees	Students
	Asylum
Better Life (x2)	Better Life
Bombs	
Crying, hardship and suffering	
Culture	Culture
Danger	Danger
Demonstrations	
Depression	
Discrimination (x2)	Discrimination
Family (x2)	Family
	Fear
	Flight
	Hard journey
	Help
Hunger	
Injustice	
Integration (x2)	Integration (x2)
	Job (x2)
Leaving home (x2)	Leaving home (x2)
	Natural disaster
New language	New language
New stage of life	
Persecution	
Pressure	Pressure
Racism	Racism
Safety (x2)	Safety
War (x2)	War

The following table shows the different words students and refugees connected with the term “**social work.**” In contrast to the answers of Austrian students, a social worker for a refugee is first and foremost a person who listens to them and is there for them. Someone they can trust, a safe haven in a country where everything is new to them. They have an advisory function and social workers should provide security.

Refugees	Students
	Activate resources
Basic security/support (x2)	Basic security/support
Compassion and kindness	
	Case Work
	Connecting
	consult and accompany
Education	Education
Empathy	Empathy
	Empowerment
	Eye level
Feeling well and happy	
	Giving a Voice
Help for self help	Help for self-help
	Human Rights Profession
	Inclusion
Legal support	Legal support
Listening	Listening
Medical service	
	Networking
	Participation
Psychology	
Social Problems	Social Problems
Therapy	Therapy
There is somebody with me	
Work	Work

From the Voices of Refugees

Fourteen of the 17 guest refugees taking part in the Workshop, completed the written feedback sheet handed out at the end of the session. The feedback showed that our guest refugees were extremely happy with process and the structure of the Workshop in general. They appreciated the friendly and welcoming atmosphere and the international buffet. In general, there was a strong feeling that the guest refugees wanted to be involved. They felt that they had something to say and wanted their stories to be told and their voices to be heard.

Refugee Feedback Summary:

1. How interesting did you find the activities in the workshop

😊 1 2 3 4 5 😞

86% of participants circled 1 and the remaining 14% circled 2 indicating that all refugee participants found the workshop very interesting or interesting.

2. How useful did you find the activities in the workshop?

The results for the second questions were similar. With 11 participants (79%) circling 1; two participants (14%) circling 2 and one participant circling 1 and 2. This indicated that they also found the activities in the workshop (very) useful.

3. How comfortable did you feel talking to the social work students?
Regarding this question, 11 refugees circled 1. This time there was one participant who circled 2 and two participants who circled 3. Indicating that they were not particularly comfortable, nor were they particularly uncomfortable, talking to the students. The reason given for this in the follow up question were problems the refugees felt they had communicating in German.

Written feedback from refugees about the workshop

Analysis of the free written feedback added by some participants, uncovers several themes which were mentioned by several participants, including:

Behaviour/attitude of the social work students – it was frequently mentioned that the friendly and respectful way the guests were treated by the students was much appreciated. The refugees were also grateful that the students were genuinely interested in their stories.

“We talked like old friends – they were very friendly and pleasant.”

“... the fact that they were interested, showed a real interest to listen to what the guests had to say.”

Telling their story - Many refugees commented that for them it was a good experience to be able to tell their story and be listened to.

“It is good to tell your story when the people who are listening are really interested in it. Thank you for that.”

Community feeling - “talking together” and “sharing experiences,” were mentioned frequently as being the most useful and/or interesting part of the workshop.

Language - Refugees found it useful that they were able to practice German with Austrians and found it important to speak English. However, the fact that refugees felt their language skills were weak, was what led to some feeling not totally comfortable in the Workshop environment.

From the Voices of Students:

Twenty-six Students filled out the feedback form for the Workshop. It was clear from the feedback that students appreciated to opportunity to meet the refugees and listen to their stories first hand, as one student put it “It was interesting to hear the stories without a media interest”.

Several students found the activity “triangle of commonalities” especially interesting, and many mentioned that they found talking about the object interesting and useful.

Student Feedback Summary:

1. How interesting did you find the activities in the workshop

😊 1 2 3 4 5 😞

Around three quarters of students found the activities in the Workshop interesting, or very interesting. Of those students who circled “3” as their reason, they highlighted that it was most interesting just to talk to the refugees and hear their stories and additional activities were not necessary.

2. How useful did you find the activities in the workshop?

The results for the second question were similar, with around three quarters of students finding the workshop useful, or very useful.

3. How comfortable did you feel talking to the social work students? Although more than half of students (58%) felt comfortable, or very comfortable, almost 20% of students did not feel comfortable. However, looking more closely at the written feedback it seems students were rather worried that the refugees felt uncomfortable – and this made them uncomfortable. For example, some students stated that they felt the topics were very personal and sometimes traumatic. Some students criticised the setting “It was a loud and uncomfortable setting,” and others stated that the language barriers made the situation uncomfortable.

Written Feedback from Students about the Workshop

Social work students were asked to write a reflection about the Workshop. The following representative quotes have been chosen, as they illustrate sentiments which were most often expressed:

1. Students appreciated the opportunity to talk directly and in person to the refugees:

“We hardly ever get the possibility to talk with refugees about their experience and that we had this opportunity is simply awesome! “

2. Students realised that each refugee is an individual and using the term ‘refugee’ can be problematic since it does not take account of differences:

“The individuality of the persons and especially the uniqueness of their experiences, emotions and experiences must be preserved in any case. Refugees are often referred to by politicians or a large part of society. In these discussions, interviews or the like, the term always encompasses a multitude of people who have all fled their country with their own history, their own experiences and their individual dreams and desires. It must be the task of social workers, educators, and all other persons with whom refugees come into contact, to always adjust to the very personal experiences of the people and to pick them up where they are at the moment.”

“...and even if there were similarities, everyone has their own unique experiences.”

“The two refugees that we were with were from Afghanistan and Ukraine, so there were also quite big differences in their experiences. They were really open to talk about them and it was inspiring hearing them talk”.

3. For some students, the political role of social work became clearer:

“I felt so sorry for them and their families, and on the other hand it showed me how important political social work is. Social work needs to stand up for general condition for refugees and of course for human rights.”

4. Some students reflected on the skills needed in social work practice in the field of work with refugees:

“The Workshop highlighted the significance of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and social inclusion in social work practice, as well as the importance of providing spaces where marginalised voices can be heard.

5. The importance of language and food – and how they can connect or separate, were also mentioned:

“The language barrier was also very noticeable in our group. I imagine it is very difficult to talk about experiences of war and flight in a language that one does not yet know very well.”

“How important language is and how food connects were the most important insights of this afternoon.”

6. There were different opinions about the setting:

“I found it positive that we were present as a whole year group in order to convey a sense of community and inclusion to the refugees.”

“...we would have preferred to be in small groups so that a more trusting and intimate atmosphere could be created. So, the refugees sat a bit on display... even though they were discussing very touching and important topics.”

Summary of Outcomes from the Workshop

What came out clearly from the interviews with the refugees was that **cultural understanding** is important. Refugees and asylum seekers need an easily accessible way to inform themselves about different cultural norms in their host country.

Language was often mentioned as a significant difficulty in the asylum process. Therefore, language barriers need to be considered. The refugees appreciated that this Workshop was at least bilingual (English and German) and often used a mixture of both.

Laws and regulations of the host country need to be explained clearly, as these may differ from the country of origin of the refugee.

General Recommendations

- The Workshop was beneficial for all involved – repeat it.
- Language barriers need to be considered – the Workshop should be at least bilingual – and more time may be needed if language skills are a problem. Look into new technology and the opportunities this presents.
- Ensure a safe space is created for interaction and exchange.
- Peer education is extremely useful – and interacting with experts by experience is enriching for students.
- The exercises which focused on shared humanity/experiences/commonality were useful – especially in the initial phase of the Workshop facilitated as icebreakers.
- Some monetary incentive is advantageous if possible. The thank-you bag was well received by the refugees participating in our Workshop. It contained vouchers which could be spent in Graz.

Facilitator Recommendations

- At least two facilitators are necessary for the workshop – to answer any questions that arise and to guide the process. The set up of the room is very important. It needs to be a safe space in a suitable room. A circle is a good option since everyone is on one level and can see each other. Flexibility is necessary in such a situation. For example, we altered the timetable of the Workshop when we realised more time was needed than we had originally scheduled for certain activities.
- The international buffet with food from around the world, was organised by the non-profit organisation ISOP, which focuses on work with refugees and migrants in Graz. ISOP supports equal opportunities in society and in the labour market, by initiating and implementing social, educational, and cultural projects. One such project is the social enterprise which provided the

buffet. In general, it could be seen in the Workshop that food is important. It connects people, provides a shared experience and a topic of conversation and can be a connection to home. At our Workshop we noticed that a lot of conversation came up around the topic of food, as a result of the buffet.

- The large group in the beginning was positive because no one feels alone, there is a sense of belonging and shared experience. However, the smaller groups were beneficial for more in-depth work.
- At least three or four hours are needed for this kind of Workshop. Especially if language is a problem more time will be needed, with several breaks.
- Student preparation in advance is important. At the end it is important to conceptualise and debrief. In a follow-up session with the students a critical reflection on the Workshop is beneficial.
- A debriefing session after the Workshop is completed is advantageous. We discovered that the pleasant and friendly atmosphere was appreciated, that participants felt the Workshop provided a relaxed and safe environment in which to discuss the relevant topics. Some wanted to continue or repeat the experience, and several groups swapped contact details. The bilingual format was appreciated and felt to be necessary. The guest refugees liked to meet new people and were keen to be involved again.
- We found that the financial incentive (€20 Graz vouchers was useful). However, we are cognisant that this is not always possible. When simply observing the body language of the group it was not possible from their behaviour, to distinguish between students and refugees, as the workshop progressed, they seemed to form one homogenous group.

Outcomes Workshop Day Two

Conclusions of Reflexion

The majority of the refugees were very satisfied mainly as a result of: being heard, students listening to their stories, sitting together, feeling no fear, the welcoming supportive and friendly atmosphere, sharing experiences, the equality of the setting and the personal item introduction (14 responses).

Panel discussion

What we learned from the panel:

The skills and knowledge needed to work with refugees and asylum seekers often overlap with other fields of social work, for example social work with other vulnerable groups ie. people with drug or alcohol problems.

It can make a difference depending on whether we are dealing with adult or child refugees. For example, an adult can be more attached to country of origin and may want to return home as soon as possible. On the other hand, a child may have spent a significant portion of their life in new country and may want to stay – this is what they now call ‘home.’ Moreover, children may learn languages quicker and easier, as they are often given more opportunities to do so, and they may develop different strategies of coping.

Social workers need to be aware of wider problems like domestic violence and child safety. They need to be aware that there are differences in what is culturally acceptable and legal/illegal. The importance of hope and humanity should not be forgotten especially in connection with mental health. This is perhaps an area where social work could increase support. Trauma is a huge issue when it comes to people who have had to leave their home involuntarily. Trauma informed practice therefore needs to play a central role and cultural sensitivity is necessary.

It is important to remember that although there are similarities, each country is different. The experience of being a refugee in country A may be completely different to being a refugee in country B. The structural conditions, political landscape, and attitudes of the native population, all play a role. Relativism is important – it is difficult to compare the experiences of refugees in for example Uganda, UK and Austria – as the contexts are so different. What is often forgotten is the support needed when refugees want to return home. This is the primary goal of many refugees – but preparation is needed to cope with the new situation they may find themselves in, in their home country. We need to be careful when talking about refugees. This is not a homogenous group – not ‘the refugee’! There are numerous different groups with different backgrounds and needs. Some may be more traumatised than others. Also, their experiences in a country can differ greatly, depending on where they are from, and the perception of their country of origin, in the host country.

Several further understandings:

1. Refugees need to be taught local languages (the host country needs to help them to know at least basic words) – likewise social workers need to know basic words in the refugees' languages and use interpreters when necessary.
2. Social workers need to know how to work with traumatised refugees, as they many have lived through mass/cumulative traumatic events.

3. Social workers must know how to create hope and enable people to maintain routine in uncertain situations and plan their future lives.
4. Social workers need to work with policymakers and stakeholders to initiate supportive and effective policies to host refugees and help them to adjust. For example, the "adaptation programme" taking place in Estonia with Ukrainian refugees. This programme includes financial, employment, education, and emotional support.
5. There is a need to identify vulnerable groups of refugees such as older people; single parents/carers; orphans, etc.
6. Social workers need to be aware of the generational gaps between adults who want to return, versus children that want to stay in the host country.
8. Social workers need to know how to work with those who have suffered violence; to increase health; and to work with a variety of organisations – NGOs and governmental and resettlements.
9. Although there is global knowledge about refugees and our professional values are shared social justice, humanity, and human rights, it is important to understand the variety of refugees' situations, as a refugee camp in Uganda is different than the hosting programme in Austria.

Outcomes Workshop Day Three

Recommendations in relation to SDGs

The UN SDGs provide a framework for good practice. Social work can contribute significantly to achieving several of the goals. In our discussions it appeared that the following goals are closely connected to work with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants:

SDG 3 – Good health and wellbeing

Especially Targets 3.4¹ and 3.8²

SDG 4 – Quality education

All targets 4.1 – 4.7

¹ 3.4 "By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being."

² "Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all."

SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities

Especially Targets 10.2³, 10.3⁴, 10.7⁵

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Especially targets 16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.6, 16.7, 16.b

SDG 17 – Partnership for the Goals

Especially 17.6, 17.9, 17.16, 17.17

Recommendations for Curriculum Development

Discussions and reflections over the course of the Workshops lead us to recommend a potential module on refugees and asylum seekers in the in 2nd year of a Bachelor degree programme. However, before such a module can be taken students need to have learned how to conduct a culturally sensitive interview, as this is a requisite for the Workshops. Therefore, for this reason the module is not suitable for 1st year students. The following should be included in the module:

- Legal aspects of the asylum systems in their home country.
- Insights and information about the main countries of origin of refugees e.g., politics, history, economics, geography religion, cultural differences, laws, traditions, language, and typical world views etc.
- Awareness of cliched beliefs and prejudiced ideas acquired by local host countries and refugees themselves. Deconstruction of these ideas.
- Different understandings of 'social work' around the world.
- Forced relocation as a traumatic event - a family perspective.
- Workshop – exchange with experts by experience. The Day One Workshop could be used as a model here.
- Ongoing critical reflection.

³ „By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status“

⁴ „Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard“

⁵ “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”

Conclusion

The Workshops proved to be a positive experience for all participants. The main aims of the project were fulfilled. There was a fruitful exchange between participants from different cultural backgrounds with different perspectives of the complex issues involved being heard. The Day One Workshop successfully connected those with experience of being refugees and asylum seekers, with social work students and educators. This Workshop provides a format which can be adapted as necessary and replicated in different social work education settings internationally.

It became clear over the course of the Workshops that there is no field of social work which is not affected by some of the challenges of migration and that specialised skills, knowledge, and understanding is needed. Our recommendation is that modules focusing on the specific issues surrounding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants should be an integral part of any social work programme.

The suggestions made in this report are only suggestions and will not necessarily be useful in all contexts. We are aware that we mainly hold certain Global North/Eurocentric views/perspectives and there are other voices from the Global South which are missing, and which are equally, if not more important and need to be heard. We are not homogenous groups of people, and any recommendations need to be adapted to the context of the country you are working in, and the social work curricula will need to be adapted accordingly.