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REACT

TOGETHER FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

REACT TOOLKIT COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA, POLAND AND BULGARIA

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Table of content

1. Overview of the REACT Project

- 1.1 Project Background and Objectives
- 1.2 Focus Areas of the Project
- 1.3 Stakeholders and Project Scope

2. Purpose and Structure of the Toolkit

- 2.1 Purpose of the Toolkit
- 2.2 Structure and Content

3. Linguistic Skills Development

- 3.1 Importance of Language Proficiency
- 3.2 Language Learning Strategies
- 3.3 Resource Materials and Technology Integration

4. Mental Health Support

- 4.1 Understanding Refugee Mental Health Needs
- 4.2 Support Strategies
- 4.3 Mental Health Resources and Case Studies

5. Best Practices and Case Studies

- 5.1 Compilation of Successful Case Studies
- 5.2 Testimonials



Table of content

6. Implementation Guidelines

- 6.1 Step-by-Step Instructions
- 6.2 Adapting Materials

7. Evaluation and Feedback

- 7.1 Tools for Assessing Effectiveness
- 7.2 Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

8. Special Focus on Marginalized Groups

- 8.1 Understanding the Needs of Marginalized Groups
- 8.2 Tailored Support for Vulnerable Groups
- 8.3 Best Practices for Inclusion

9. Translation and Accessibility

- 9.1 Language Accessibility
- 9.2 Digital and Physical Accessibility
- 9.3 Online Availability and Updates

10. The Situation of Ukrainian Roma in the War Crisis

11. Summary of the REACT Project and Toolkit

12. Recommendations on the Use of the Toolkit



Chapter 1: Overview of the REACT Project

1.1 Project Background and Objectives

The REACT - Together for Ukrainian Refugees project was initiated as a response to the urgent needs created by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which has led to the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II. By mid-2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported over 8 million Ukrainian refugees spread across Europe. Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria have become primary host countries, receiving large influxes of refugees seeking safety and support.

Objectives of the REACT Project:

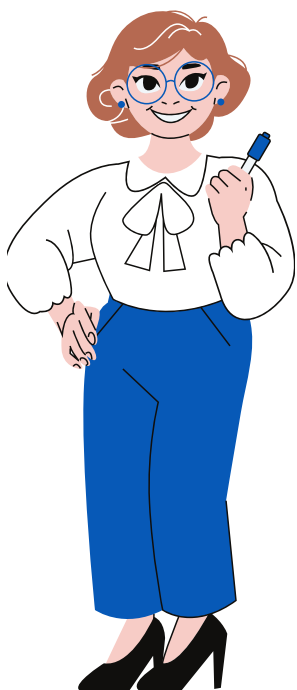
- **To Enhance Support Services for Refugees:** By focusing on language acquisition, mental health, and social integration, the project aims to address critical barriers to successful resettlement.
- **Capacity Building for Community Workers:** The project provides training and resources for local social workers, NGOs, and volunteers, equipping them with practical tools to assist Ukrainian refugees effectively.
- **Fostering Long-Term Integration:** REACT emphasizes sustainable integration strategies that promote self-sufficiency, community engagement, and economic stability for refugees.

Collaborative Approach:

The project involves partnerships with local NGOs, government agencies, mental health professionals, educational institutions, and cultural mediators. This collaborative model ensures that the toolkit integrates diverse expertise and remains responsive to the evolving needs of the refugee population.

Key Statistics

- **According to Eurostat (2023), Ukrainian refugees face a 40% higher risk of unemployment in host countries due to language barriers and limited access to social networks.**
- **A study by IOM (2022) highlights that mental health issues among refugees, including anxiety and PTSD, affect over 30% of the displaced population.**





Chapter 1: Overview of the REACT Project

1.2 Focus Areas of the Project

1. Language Proficiency as a Foundation for Integration:

- Research from the OECD (2021) found that language proficiency is the single most important factor influencing refugees' access to the labor market. Refugees who attain basic proficiency in the host country's language are 70% more likely to find employment within their first year.
- The REACT project prioritizes practical language skills tailored to immediate needs, such as navigating public services, accessing healthcare, and seeking employment.

2. Mental Health and Trauma Support:

- The psychological impact of war and displacement can be profound. Studies indicate that refugees often exhibit high levels of trauma-related symptoms, such as hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, and social withdrawal (WHO, 2022). REACT integrates trauma-informed practices into its mental health support services, offering community workers specialized training in psychological first aid (PFA) and cognitive behavioral techniques.

3. Community Integration and Economic Empowerment:

- REACT promotes community engagement through local partnerships, cultural exchange programs, and volunteer initiatives. By facilitating access to vocational training, job placement services, and language courses, the project aims to reduce economic disparities and promote self-reliance among refugees.

1.3 Stakeholders and Project Scope

The scope of the REACT project extends across Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania, where it collaborates with a network of over 50 local organizations. Key stakeholders include:

- National Governments and Local Authorities: Coordinating with policymakers ensures that refugee support services are aligned with national integration strategies and funding frameworks.
- Educational Institutions: Partnerships with universities provide access to research, training materials, and language instruction expertise.
- Mental Health Organizations: Collaboration with mental health professionals enables the integration of evidence-based practices in trauma care and psychological support.

Chapter 2: Purpose and Structure of the Toolkit



2.1 Purpose of the Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to serve as an accessible, practical guide for social workers, NGO staff, and volunteers involved in supporting Ukrainian refugees.

It aims to

- **Centralize Best Practices:** The toolkit consolidates insights from multiple sources, including academic research, field reports, and expert recommendations, to provide a comprehensive resource for frontline workers.
- **Promote Effective Interventions:** By offering step-by-step guides, templates, and evidence-based strategies, the toolkit helps practitioners implement effective support measures tailored to the specific needs of Ukrainian refugees.
- **Facilitate Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing the diverse backgrounds of Ukrainian refugees, the toolkit emphasizes culturally responsive practices that respect individual experiences, languages, and traditions.

Intended Audience

The toolkit is targeted at a broad range of users, including:

- **NGO Staff and Volunteers:** Offering practical tools and frameworks for everyday interactions with refugees.
- **Social Workers and Mental Health Professionals:** Providing specialized strategies for addressing trauma, language barriers, and integration challenges.
- **Local Authorities and Policymakers:** Informing the development of inclusive policies and support programs for refugee integration.

Chapter 2: Purpose and Structure of the Toolkit

2.2 Structure and Content

The toolkit is divided into thematic sections, each addressing a core area of refugee support:

- **Introduction and Background:** Outlines the purpose, scope, and target audience of the toolkit.
- **Linguistic Skills Development:** Focuses on strategies for language acquisition and literacy improvement, including lesson plans and digital resources.
- **Mental Health Support:** Provides detailed guidance on trauma-informed care, psychological first aid, and culturally sensitive mental health interventions.
- **Implementation Guidelines:** Step-by-step instructions and best practices for deploying language and mental health programs.
- **Special Focus on Marginalized Groups:** In-depth analysis of the unique challenges faced by vulnerable subpopulations, including Roma refugees.
- **Evaluation and Feedback:** Tools for assessing program effectiveness and gathering feedback from participants to inform continuous improvement.



Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

3.1 Importance of Language Proficiency

Language proficiency plays a pivotal role in helping refugees access employment, build social networks, and utilize essential services. Studies show that conversational proficiency in the host language significantly improves access to jobs and enables social integration. Research from UNHCR underscores how refugees with conversational skills are more likely to engage in the community, utilize healthcare, and receive social services, enhancing their sense of belonging and independence in host countries.

The research shows that refugees who achieve conversational proficiency in the host country's language are significantly more likely to:

- **Access Employment:** Language skills enable refugees to find jobs, navigate work environments, and engage in professional development opportunities.
- **Build Social Networks:** Proficiency in the local language allows refugees to connect with neighbors, participate in community events, and form support networks.
- **Access Essential Services:** Understanding the host country's language is key to accessing healthcare, legal services, and social welfare programs.

“Language proficiency is the cornerstone of refugee integration, unlocking access to employment, essential services, and social networks.

When refugees achieve conversational fluency, they not only enhance their sense of belonging but also gain the tools to rebuild their lives with independence and dignity.

”



Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

3.2 Language Learning Strategies

I. Contextualized Learning

Definition and Importance:

Contextualized learning tailors language instruction to the real-life contexts and immediate needs of refugees, helping them acquire vocabulary and phrases they are likely to use in daily interactions. Research highlights that focusing on **familiar**, practical scenarios makes language acquisition **faster** and improves retention, as learners connect words and phrases to **specific**, memorable contexts (Journal of Language Learning, 2021). For refugees, this approach is especially **beneficial** as it **prepares** them to navigate common situations they encounter in the **host** country.

Key Components of Contextualized Learning:

1. Focus on High-Frequency, Practical Vocabulary

Begin with vocabulary that meets refugees **urgent** needs, such as words and phrases related to:

- **Healthcare:** Terms related to medical issues, appointments, and **describing symptoms**.
- **Employment:** Basic job-related language, including workplace vocabulary and phrases for job interviews.
- **Daily Life:** Common phrases for shopping, transportation, and asking for directions.
- **Public Services:** Language for understanding forms, engaging with social services, and handling emergencies.

By prioritizing practical vocabulary, refugees can engage with their surroundings and handle daily interactions with greater confidence.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

2. Scenario-Based Exercises

Incorporate role-playing activities and situational dialogues that simulate real-life encounters. For example:

- Doctor Visits: Practicing phrases for describing symptoms, asking about treatment, or following a doctor's instructions.
- Public Transportation: Learning to ask for directions, buy tickets, and understand announcements.
- Grocery Shopping: Practicing interactions with shopkeepers, asking about products, and understanding prices.

Scenario-based exercises make language learning more dynamic, allowing learners to practice and remember vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

3. Workplace and Community Integration Language

For refugees seeking employment, contextualized learning can include job-specific terminology and workplace etiquette. Practical scenarios could involve:

- Interview Practice: Common interview questions, personal introduction phrases, and describing job experience.
- Basic Work Instructions: Understanding and responding to basic instructions in a work environment, such as safety guidelines.
- Community Engagement: Language for interacting in social or cultural events, helping refugees feel more comfortable participating in community life.

4. Use of Visual and Physical Cues

Visual aids like flashcards, images, and videos enhance contextualized learning by connecting words with their meanings through visuals.

For example, using photos of healthcare settings to teach related terms can solidify the connection between the word and its application. Similarly, mimicking actions (such as pointing to body parts when teaching healthcare terms) supports retention and aids comprehension for refugees with lower literacy levels.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

5. Building Confidence Through Repetition and Feedback

Contextualized learning should be adaptive, allowing frequent repetition of words and phrases in different settings. Offering immediate feedback during exercises (e.g., correcting pronunciation in role-playing scenarios) helps learners improve quickly and builds their confidence in using the language. Regular review sessions reinforce key vocabulary and ensure that learners retain and feel comfortable using the language.

Implementation

Example:

To illustrate, if the lesson focuses on healthcare, the curriculum might include a vocabulary list with terms like “pain,” “medicine,” and “appointment.” Exercises could include role-playing a visit to a health clinic, filling out basic health forms, and understanding a doctor’s instructions. By practicing in a simulated setting, refugees gain familiarity with the language they will need in similar real-life situations, reinforcing both comprehension and comfort.

Advantages of Contextualized Learning:

This approach makes language learning efficient and directly applicable, which is especially critical for refugees who may need immediate language skills for safety, self-sufficiency, and basic social interaction. Contextualized learning also builds a foundation for future language acquisition, helping learners feel more engaged and reducing the anxiety often associated with learning a new language in high-stress situations. With these structured, practical methods, contextualized learning supports both immediate communication needs and long-term linguistic confidence, equipping refugees to participate more fully in their host communities.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

II. Peer-to-Peer Learning

Definition and Value:

Peer-to-peer learning leverages the social and collaborative aspect of language acquisition, where refugees learn with or from each other, often facilitated by local volunteers or mentors. This approach enables language learners to practice speaking, listening, and comprehension in a supportive, interactive setting, making it particularly effective for building conversational skills and cultural understanding. Research from the OECD (2022) shows that peer-supported learning enhances language proficiency and fosters a sense of community and mutual support, crucial for refugees' well-being and social integration.

Core Components of Peer-to-Peer Learning

1. Conversational Practice with Real-Life Scenarios

Peer-to-peer learning typically involves conversations on everyday topics, allowing learners to practice vocabulary and expressions that they'll use in real situations.

In small groups or pairs, participants engage in dialogues around:

- **Introductions:** Practicing how to introduce oneself, ask about others, and build basic social connections.
- **Daily Interactions:** Conversational exchanges relevant to shopping, using public transportation, or discussing family and work.
- **Cultural Topics:** Talking about cultural norms, traditions, and values in both their home and host countries to build cultural awareness.

These conversations build practical language skills, increase comfort with speaking, and help refugees adapt to local norms and expressions.

2. Supportive Learning Partnerships

Creating "learning pairs" or small groups enables consistent practice and relationship-building. Learning pairs can include:

- **Refugee-to-Refugee Partnerships:** These partnerships create a shared, empathetic learning environment. Refugees may feel more comfortable practicing with peers who understand their challenges and can encourage each other.
- **Refugee-to-Local Partnerships:** When paired with local volunteers or residents, refugees benefit from conversational practice with native speakers, learning nuances of pronunciation, colloquial expressions, and cultural context. This connection also fosters a sense of belonging and reduces isolation.



Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

3. Interactive Language Games and Exercises

Incorporating games and interactive exercises—like role-play scenarios, memory games with vocabulary flashcards, or storytelling—engages learners and supports memory retention. Some effective peer-learning activities include:

- **Role-Playing:** Practicing scenarios such as asking for directions or ordering at a restaurant.
- **Vocabulary Challenges:** Teams compete to use new vocabulary in sentences or dialogues, promoting active learning.
- **Storytelling and Sharing Experiences:** Learners describe events or tell stories in the new language, boosting both narrative skills and confidence.

These games and exercises make learning more enjoyable and strengthen language skills by integrating repetition and hands-on application.

4. Cultural Exchange and Social Integration

Peer-to-peer learning naturally facilitates cultural exchange, especially when local volunteers or host community members are involved. Through informal conversations, refugees learn about local customs, traditions, and social etiquette while sharing aspects of their own culture. This mutual exchange:

- **Increases Cultural Competence:** Understanding local social norms and cultural references helps refugees adapt and feel more comfortable in their host communities.
- **Builds Community Connections:** Peer learning reduces social isolation, as it helps refugees make friends and build informal support networks, contributing to long-term integration.

5. Feedback and Encouragement within Peer Groups

Peer learning also creates an environment where participants can give and receive constructive feedback. For example:

- **Pronunciation Practice:** Learners correct each other's pronunciation in a friendly, supportive setting.
- **Language Tips:** Participants share memory aids or tips for recalling vocabulary and grammar.
- **Encouragement and Support:** Knowing they are not alone in their challenges, learners feel more motivated, which boosts confidence and reduces the anxiety of learning a new language.

This type of supportive feedback enhances learning retention and reduces performance pressure, making the process more enjoyable and sustainable.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

Implementation Example:

A peer-to-peer learning group might meet once a week in a community center, library, or online, where refugees are paired with each other or local volunteers. A session could start with a vocabulary review, followed by a role-play activity around a specific scenario (such as attending a job interview). Partners would then exchange feedback, discuss cultural differences related to the scenario, and end with a short reflection on new words or phrases learned.

Advantages of Peer-to-Peer Learning:

- **Empowerment and Self-Esteem:** Refugees feel a sense of accomplishment as they help each other learn, building self-esteem and social bonds that can reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Higher Engagement:** The interactive, cooperative nature of peer-to-peer learning keeps participants engaged and eager to attend sessions.
- **Lasting Social Connections:** This approach facilitates genuine connections and friendships, helping refugees feel supported not only in language learning but also in their adaptation to the new environment.

Challenges and Mitigations:

While peer-to-peer learning is highly effective, it may require some structure to prevent language errors from being reinforced. To address this:

- **Facilitator Support:** Volunteers or group facilitators can guide conversations, clarify vocabulary, and provide accurate language models.
- **Guided Sessions:** Providing topics or themes ensures that participants remain focused on practical language use relevant to their needs.

In sum, peer-to-peer learning is a powerful tool that goes beyond language acquisition, fostering social bonds, cultural exchange, and emotional support. By learning from and with each other, refugees develop essential language skills and a stronger sense of community, supporting both their immediate needs and long-term integration.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

III. Integrated Digital Tools

Definition and Importance:

Digital tools are valuable resources for language learning, offering interactive, accessible ways to practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and conversation skills. For refugees, many of whom may have limited access to formal language classes or learning materials, apps and online platforms can provide essential language support that's flexible, self-paced, and often free. Studies show that combining digital tools with in-person learning significantly improves language retention and engagement, making it a powerful complement to other learning methods (Language Learning and Technology Journal, 2020).

Key Components of Integrated Digital Tools:

1. Mobile Applications for Language Practice

Language-learning apps such as Duolingo, Memrise, HelloTalk, and Google Translate allow users to practice vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation at their own pace. Features that enhance learning include:

- **Gamified Lessons:** Apps like Duolingo incorporate quizzes, points, and achievements that keep learners motivated and engaged.
- **Conversational Practice:** HelloTalk and similar apps pair users with native speakers for text or voice chats, enabling real-time language exchange.
- **Instant Translation and Pronunciation Tools:** Apps like Google Translate help learners understand and pronounce new vocabulary quickly, making it easier to communicate in daily interactions.

Mobile apps are particularly useful for refugees who may have access to smartphones but lack time or resources for formal language programs.

2. Video-Based Learning Platforms

Video platforms such as YouTube and edX offer language tutorials and courses covering everything from beginner vocabulary to advanced grammar and cultural nuances. Benefits of video-based tools include:

- **Access to Visual and Auditory Learning:** Refugees can see and hear native speakers, aiding pronunciation and comprehension.
- **Customizable Learning Pace:** Learners can pause, rewind, or rewatch content based on their individual needs.
- **Diverse Content:** Channels on YouTube provide free tutorials on a variety of topics, including specific cultural contexts, workplace language, and emergency phrases, helping refugees navigate real-life situations.

Video-based platforms also provide context for how language is used in social settings, which can be especially valuable for understanding conversational norms.



Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

3. Digital Language Communities and Support Groups

Online communities like Facebook groups, Reddit forums, and language exchange platforms offer social support, cultural insights, and informal learning opportunities.

By joining these groups, refugees can:

- **Engage with Native Speakers:** Refugees can practice conversation with native speakers, ask questions, and receive feedback on language usage.
- **Seek Peer Support:** Many groups are dedicated to refugees or new language learners, providing a supportive space to share challenges and experiences.
- **Access Cultural Resources:** These groups often share resources and tips on navigating the local language and customs, helping refugees understand the cultural nuances of their host country.

Social learning environments not only improve language skills but also build confidence and connections within a larger community.

4. Interactive Vocabulary and Grammar Tools

Websites like Quizlet, FluentU, and BBC Learning English offer vocabulary lists, grammar exercises, and interactive quizzes tailored to beginner and intermediate learners. These tools are especially helpful for:

- **Reinforcing Key Vocabulary:** Quizlet's flashcards and quizzes make it easy for learners to memorize essential words and phrases.
- **Practicing Listening and Pronunciation:** FluentU and BBC Learning English provide audio clips and videos that help learners improve their pronunciation and comprehension.
- **Self-testing for Progress:** Digital quizzes give instant feedback, allowing learners to assess their progress and focus on areas needing improvement.

Such tools ensure continuous engagement and help refugees reinforce what they've learned through structured exercises.

5. Digital Literacy Support and Accessibility

For some refugees, limited digital literacy may be a barrier to using online language tools effectively. The toolkit can support digital literacy by:

- **Offering Step-by-Step Guidance:** Providing easy-to-follow instructions on downloading and using language apps, registering for online platforms, and joining language forums.
- **Connecting with Digital Mentors:** Some community centers or volunteer programs pair refugees with digital mentors who can help them navigate language-learning technology.
- **Emphasizing Accessibility Features:** Suggesting tools that offer offline access, large fonts, and audio support ensures inclusivity for refugees with limited internet or literacy skills.

With these resources, refugees who may be new to digital tools can access and benefit from language apps and online platforms with confidence.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

Implementation Example:

A community organization might offer a weekly digital literacy workshop to introduce refugees to language-learning apps. During the workshop, participants could download a recommended app (such as Duolingo or HelloTalk) and explore its features with guidance from a facilitator. The session could end with setting weekly language goals, which participants can review in the following workshop.

Advantages of Integrated Digital Tools:

- **Self-Paced, Flexible Learning:** Digital tools allow refugees to learn at their own pace and fit practice into their schedules, especially beneficial for those balancing work, family, or other responsibilities.
- **High Engagement Through Interactivity:** Features like gamification and instant feedback keep learners motivated and increase retention.
- **Broader Cultural Exposure:** Online platforms expose refugees to cultural references, slang, and social norms that are harder to learn in traditional classroom settings.

Challenges and Mitigations:

While digital tools offer numerous benefits, they may also present challenges:

- **Internet Access:** Refugees with limited internet access may struggle to use some apps or platforms. The toolkit could recommend tools with offline access options (like Duolingo's offline lessons) to address this.
- **Overwhelming Content:** Refugees may feel overwhelmed by too many options or extensive lessons. Providing a curated list of beginner-friendly tools and guiding them on how to navigate these resources will help keep the learning process manageable.

In conclusion, integrated digital tools empower refugees to develop language skills through interactive, self-directed methods that can complement other learning approaches. By providing access to vocabulary practice, cultural insights, and real-time communication, digital tools support refugees in their language journey, contributing to their overall social integration and confidence in their host country.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

3.3 Resource Materials and Technology Integration

Resource materials and technology integration refer to the use of various learning aids—both physical and digital—that support language acquisition and enhance engagement. For refugees or learners with limited access to traditional education systems, integrating resource materials with technology provides crucial, versatile learning opportunities. These resources can include textbooks, flashcards, digital applications, multimedia content, and interactive platforms that deliver targeted language exercises and support self-directed learning.

Integrating these tools into language learning programs allows for a blended approach, where learners can benefit from both structured materials and adaptive technology that responds to individual learning speeds and styles. Research indicates that a combined use of printed resources and technology-enhanced tools improves retention, offers diverse learning modes (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic), and makes learning accessible to a broader audience, including those with limited formal education (Educational Technology Research and Development, 2021).

Core Components of Peer-to-Peer Learning

1. Printed and Physical Resources

Printed materials, such as textbooks, flashcards, workbooks, and posters, serve as foundational resources for building vocabulary and grammar skills. Benefits of physical resources include:

- **Consistency and Reliability:** Printed materials are always accessible without requiring internet or devices, making them ideal for learners with limited digital access.
- **Supplemental Learning:** Workbooks and flashcards support memory through repetition and are particularly helpful for practicing high-frequency words and phrases.
- **Visual and Tactile Engagement:** Printed materials offer a hands-on approach that can reinforce learning, especially for beginners or younger learners who benefit from tactile experiences.

Additionally, printed resources can be adapted to suit different skill levels, focusing on specific language needs such as basic communication, workplace vocabulary, or formal language structures.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

2. Multimedia Learning Tools

Multimedia resources, including audio clips, video lessons, podcasts, and interactive simulations, allow learners to experience language in varied and engaging formats.

Key features of multimedia learning include:

- **Auditory and Visual Support:** Audio-visual materials provide pronunciation examples, intonation patterns, and real-life conversational contexts, which enhance comprehension and speaking abilities.
- **Cultural Context and Immersion:** Videos and audio clips often feature native speakers in real-life scenarios, helping learners pick up cultural cues, expressions, and slang.
- **Interactive Simulations and Role-Playing:** Digital simulations allow learners to practice language use in virtual scenarios, such as navigating a market, introducing themselves, or asking for directions.

Multimedia resources accommodate different learning styles, improve language retention, and are especially effective in helping learners develop listening and speaking skills in a non-pressured environment.

3. Educational Apps and Language Software

Mobile apps like Duolingo, Memrise, Babbel, and Quizlet make language learning accessible on smartphones and tablets. Advantages of using educational apps include:

- **Gamified Learning Experiences:** Many apps incorporate quizzes, points, rewards, and interactive challenges, which motivate learners to engage in consistent practice.
- **Adaptive Learning:** Language apps often adjust to the learner's proficiency level, helping them focus on areas where they need more practice.
- **Instant Feedback:** With built-in assessments and progress tracking, learners receive real-time feedback, which reinforces learning and helps them stay on track.

Apps allow self-paced, flexible learning that can be customized according to the learner's schedule, making it a practical tool for busy individuals or those with irregular access to in-person classes.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

4. Online Language Learning Platforms and Digital Courses

Platforms like Coursera, edX, BBC Learning English, and YouTube provide structured online courses and resources for language learning.

These platforms offer:

- **High-quality, Curated Content:** Many platforms collaborate with universities and institutions to offer expert-designed courses and resources.
- **Live and Recorded Classes:** Learners can attend live classes with instructors or watch recorded lessons, allowing them to learn at their own pace.
- **Community and Peer Interaction:** Many platforms feature discussion forums, where learners can interact with peers, ask questions, and engage in collaborative learning.

These platforms provide a flexible, scalable solution for language learning, particularly for learners who may need specialized or advanced language courses that are not locally available.

5. Interactive Whiteboards and Projectors for Group Learning

In classroom or group settings, interactive whiteboards and projectors can significantly enhance engagement. Benefits include:

- **Visual Reinforcement:** Teachers can display visuals, play videos, and write vocabulary or grammar exercises, making concepts easier to understand.
- **Hands-On Interaction:** Interactive whiteboards allow learners to participate directly, reinforcing learning through active engagement.
- **Shared Learning Environment:** These tools support group activities, games, and collaborative exercises, fostering a sense of community and teamwork among learners.

For in-person or blended classes, interactive whiteboards bridge traditional and digital learning, making lessons more dynamic and responsive to students' needs.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

6. Digital Storytelling and Language-Building Software

Digital storytelling tools like Storybird and Book Creator encourage learners to practice language skills by creating stories, writing descriptions, and narrating events. Features of these tools include:

- **Creative Language Use:** Learners use vocabulary and sentence structures in context, which reinforces language application rather than rote memorization.
- **Visual and Audio Elements:** Many tools allow users to add images and audio, which enhances engagement and helps learners visualize and understand story contexts.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Learners can work in pairs or groups to create digital stories, helping them build communication skills and work collaboratively.

Digital storytelling makes language learning more creative and relevant, allowing learners to express themselves in the new language, which can boost both confidence and retention.



Chapter 3: Linguistic Skills Development

Implementation Example:

In a blended language program, learners might start with vocabulary flashcards and printed worksheets, then move to an educational app for self-paced exercises. The group could watch a video lesson together using a projector, then discuss it in pairs or small groups. Finally, the class could end with a digital storytelling activity, where learners narrate a story or describe an image using newly acquired vocabulary.

Advantages of Integrated Digital Tools:

- **Flexible and Accessible:** Learners can choose resources that match their skill levels and learning preferences, whether through mobile apps, printed materials, or video lessons.
- **Enhanced Engagement and Retention:** The variety of resources keeps learners interested and helps reinforce learning by targeting multiple sensory channels (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).
- **Culturally Rich and Practical:** Multimedia tools and real-life scenarios help learners acquire language skills that are not only practical but also culturally relevant, aiding social and professional integration.

Challenges and Mitigations:

Some learners may face barriers like limited internet access, device availability, or digital literacy. To address these challenges:

- **Offline Options:** Using printed materials, downloadable apps with offline features, and pre-loaded multimedia content ensures continuous access for learners without reliable internet.
- **Digital Literacy Support:** Offering basic digital literacy training alongside language programs helps learners become comfortable with technology, increasing their ability to access and benefit from digital resources.

In summary, integrating diverse resource materials and technology into language programs provides a comprehensive approach that meets the varied needs of refugees and other learners. By combining traditional resources with digital innovations, educators can create an engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environment that promotes linguistic growth, cultural understanding, and personal empowerment.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

4.1 Understanding Refugee Mental Health Needs

Refugees often face severe psychological stress from the trauma of war, displacement, and loss of family and community. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) reports that displaced populations are at high risk for mental health conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety, with rates of severe mental health issues potentially exceeding 30% among conflict-affected groups.

Barriers to Mental Health Support:

- **Stigma and Cultural Barriers:** Many Ukrainian refugees may be reluctant to seek mental health support due to cultural stigmatization of psychological disorders.
- **Language and Communication Issues:** Language barriers can prevent refugees from accessing mental health services or communicating their needs effectively.
- **Limited Access to Services:** The sudden increase in demand for mental health services in host countries has stretched resources, making it difficult for all refugees to receive timely care.

Supporting the mental health of refugees and other individuals experiencing displacement is essential for their overall well-being and successful integration into new communities. Refugees often face numerous psychological stressors, including trauma from past experiences, uncertainty in their current situation, and cultural adjustment challenges in their host countries.

This chapter outlines three critical pillars of mental health support that can guide practitioners in providing effective and empathetic care: Culturally Sensitive Support, Community and Peer Support Networks, and Trauma-Informed Care.





Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

1. Culturally Sensitive Support

Definition and Importance:

Culturally sensitive mental health support recognizes and respects individuals' diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values. For refugees, who may come from vastly different cultural contexts, mental health interventions that are culturally attuned foster a sense of respect, inclusion, and trust. Culturally sensitive support reduces misunderstandings and ensures that mental health services resonate with each individual's personal and cultural identity.

Key Components of Culturally Sensitive Support:

- **Cultural Awareness in Mental Health Practitioners:** Mental health professionals working with refugee populations should undergo cultural competence training, helping them understand cultural norms, communication styles, and stigma related to mental health in the refugee's culture of origin. This knowledge enables practitioners to provide care that feels accessible and respectful to the individual.
- **Language and Communication Considerations:** Providing interpreters or offering services in the refugee's native language can make a significant difference in building trust and ensuring clear communication. For refugees, being able to express themselves in their language reduces frustration and ensures their experiences and feelings are understood accurately.
- **Culturally Relevant Therapies:** Some therapies, such as storytelling, group sharing circles, or arts-based therapies, may resonate more deeply with certain cultural groups than traditional talk therapy. Practitioners can also incorporate cultural practices, such as mindfulness, prayer, or community rituals, if appropriate, to support mental health in a culturally sensitive way.

Implementation Example:

A mental health support center might offer sessions where practitioners are trained to understand and respect the cultural backgrounds of refugee clients. They could also employ interpreters who are sensitive to both the language and cultural nuances, allowing for a more comfortable and accessible therapy experience.



Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

2. Community and Peer Support Networks

Definition and Importance:

Community and peer support networks involve creating spaces where individuals can connect with others who share similar experiences, challenges, or backgrounds. Refugees may experience isolation due to language barriers, cultural differences, and physical separation from family and friends. Peer support networks provide social interaction, mutual understanding, and shared experiences, which are vital for building resilience and reducing feelings of loneliness or alienation.

Key Components of Community and Peer Support Networks:

- **Peer-Led Support Groups:** Peer support groups, often facilitated by trained individuals who have lived experience as refugees, provide a space where members can share their challenges and coping strategies in a non-judgmental environment. These groups can foster empowerment and belonging, helping individuals feel less alone in their journey.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pairing refugees with mentors from the same cultural background or with other refugees who have successfully integrated provides guidance and emotional support. Mentors can offer practical advice on navigating new environments and coping with emotional challenges, promoting both social integration and mental well-being.
- **Social and Recreational Activities:** Organizing group activities, such as communal meals, storytelling sessions, art workshops, or outdoor excursions, can create bonding opportunities and strengthen social connections. These activities can reduce stress, promote joy, and create a support network that feels familiar and comforting.

Implementation Example:

A refugee support organization might establish weekly peer support groups led by trained refugees who act as facilitators. They could also organize cultural events where participants can share their traditions, celebrate important cultural holidays, and engage in social activities, creating a sense of community and connection in the new country.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

3. Trauma-Informed Care

Definition and Importance:

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that acknowledges and responds to the prevalence of trauma and its impact on individuals, particularly refugees who may have experienced war, violence, loss, or displacement. Trauma-informed care seeks to create a safe, supportive environment that avoids re-traumatization, promotes healing, and empowers individuals to regain control over their lives.

Key Components of Trauma-Informed Care:

- **Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment:** Ensuring that therapy spaces are calm, welcoming, and non-threatening helps individuals feel physically and emotionally safe. Practitioners should establish clear boundaries and routines, offering predictability that can be comforting for those who have experienced trauma.
- **Empowering Individuals:** Trauma-informed care encourages practitioners to involve individuals in decisions about their treatment, promoting a sense of control and agency. Empowering refugees by giving them choices and respecting their preferences helps counteract feelings of helplessness and supports self-confidence.
- **Understanding Trauma Responses:** Practitioners trained in trauma-informed care are aware of common trauma responses—such as hypervigilance, avoidance, or emotional numbness—and adjust their approach to be sensitive to these behaviors. They may use therapeutic techniques such as grounding exercises, breathing techniques, or body-based therapies (e.g., movement, art, or sensory integration) to help individuals manage stress and anxiety.

Implementation Example:

A trauma-informed mental health center might offer private therapy rooms with soothing colors and comfortable seating, minimizing triggers. Practitioners could introduce grounding techniques or mindfulness exercises as part of therapy sessions, helping clients manage intense emotions without feeling overwhelmed.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support



Conclusion

A comprehensive mental health support program for refugees combines culturally sensitive approaches, community-based support networks, and trauma-informed practices.

This approach addresses the unique challenges refugees face by fostering a sense of belonging, validating cultural identity, and helping them cope with trauma in safe, supportive ways.

By incorporating these principles, mental health practitioners can create a compassionate, effective framework that supports both psychological healing and social integration, ultimately empowering refugees to rebuild their lives with confidence and hope.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

4.2 Support Strategies

● Psychological First Aid (PFA):

PFA is a widely recommended approach for providing initial mental health support to individuals affected by trauma. It involves helping individuals feel safe, connected, and supported. The Sphere Handbook (2018) outlines core PFA principles, including active listening, assessing needs, and connecting individuals with further resources.

o Practical Steps for PFA:

1. Establish Contact

Approaching someone in distress requires sensitivity and care. Begin by calmly introducing yourself with a friendly, non-threatening demeanour. Offer your name and explain why you are there, creating a safe, welcoming atmosphere.

Key Actions:

- Approach slowly and avoid sudden movements, which may be perceived as threatening.
- Maintain a respectful distance to avoid making the person feel overwhelmed or pressured.
- Use simple, clear language to introduce yourself: "Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I'm here to help."
- Ask for permission before engaging further, saying something like, "Is it okay if we talk for a moment?"

Goal: Establishing initial contact helps build trust and shows the person that they are not alone. It reassures them that someone is present, attentive, and ready to listen without judgment.



Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

2. Provide Comfort

Offering comfort through compassionate, non-verbal communication can be very soothing for individuals in distress. Simple gestures such as nodding, maintaining gentle eye contact, and listening attentively without interruption convey empathy and understanding.

Key Actions:

- Use calm body language: keep your posture relaxed and open, avoiding any aggressive or impatient gestures.
- Maintain eye contact (if culturally appropriate) to show that you are fully present and attentive.
- Nod occasionally and offer encouraging words like “I’m here,” “Take your time,” or “I’m listening.”
- Avoid forcing conversation if the person isn’t ready to talk—sometimes, just being there is comforting enough.

Goal: Providing comfort through empathetic, non-verbal cues helps alleviate anxiety, allowing the person to feel understood and cared for, which is crucial during moments of distress.

3. Assess Needs

Once a connection is established, assess the person’s immediate needs by gently inquiring about their concerns. This step involves asking simple, open-ended questions to understand how they’re feeling and what type of help might be most beneficial at that moment.

Key Actions:

- Use questions like, “How are you feeling right now?” or “Is there something you need or that I can help with?”
- Listen actively to their responses, taking note of verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Avoid probing too deeply into traumatic experiences; focus on the present and their immediate needs.
- Remain patient if they are unable to articulate their needs, gently guiding the conversation if necessary.

Goal: The objective of assessing needs is to identify specific support or resources that may be beneficial to the person in distress. It provides clarity on the type of assistance they require, whether it’s emotional support, physical needs, or simply a listening ear.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support



4. Connect with Resources

After understanding their immediate needs, provide information about resources that could offer further support. This could include mental health services, community organizations, or emergency contacts. If necessary, refer them to specialized care for continued support.

Key Actions:

- Offer information about mental health services or helplines in a clear and accessible way, explaining how they could help.
- If possible, provide written information or contact details for easy access later on.
- Offer to help with next steps, such as calling a helpline together or arranging a follow-up with a professional.
- Emphasize that seeking support is a positive and constructive step toward well-being.

Goal: Connecting the person with resources empowers them to take actionable steps towards further assistance and support. It ensures they are not left alone in managing their distress and that they have a pathway to more comprehensive care if needed.

These steps provide a framework for effectively supporting someone in distress while maintaining a compassionate, practical approach. Psychological First Aid (PFA) helps ensure that those experiencing acute stress receive immediate care and access to ongoing support.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

4.3 Mental Health Resources and Case Studies

Providing refugees with accessible mental health resources is essential to support their psychological well-being.

This section highlights two effective resources: Guided Mindfulness Techniques and a Case Study on a Community-Based Mental Health Initiative. Both examples illustrate practical, scalable approaches that can be adapted to different settings, helping displaced individuals manage stress and access critical support services.

Guided Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness techniques such as simple breathing exercises and body scans offer accessible, low-cost tools to help refugees manage stress and anxiety. These exercises can be done individually or in groups and are easily adaptable to different cultural contexts. The toolkit includes scripts for these mindfulness exercises, allowing volunteers and practitioners to guide sessions with ease. The scripts are designed to be easily translatable, so they can be shared in the native languages of participants, fostering a sense of familiarity and comfort.



Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

Key Techniques:

- **Breathing Exercises:** Deep breathing exercises, such as “4-7-8 breathing” (inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds), help calm the nervous system and reduce anxiety. Practitioners can lead participants through a series of these breaths, encouraging them to focus on each breath to ground themselves in the present moment.
- **Body Scan Meditation:** In a body scan exercise, individuals are guided to mentally “scan” each part of their body, noticing sensations and releasing tension. Starting from the head and moving down to the toes, this technique encourages relaxation and awareness, helping participants reconnect with their bodies after stressful experiences.
- **Grounding Exercises:** Grounding techniques, like the “5-4-3-2-1” method (identifying five things they can see, four they can touch, three they can hear, two they can smell, and one they can taste), help individuals stay in the present moment. This is particularly useful for individuals who experience flashbacks or acute stress reactions.

Benefits:

- **Emotional Regulation:** These mindfulness techniques can help refugees regulate their emotions, reducing feelings of anxiety, fear, or helplessness.
- **Accessibility:** These exercises require no special equipment and can be done almost anywhere, making them highly accessible.
- **Self-Empowerment:** Practicing mindfulness can give individuals a sense of control over their reactions to stress, fostering resilience and self-empowerment.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

Implementation Example:

An organization supporting refugees might offer weekly group mindfulness sessions where a facilitator leads participants through guided breathing and body scans. These sessions could take place in a quiet, comfortable setting, allowing participants to relax and feel at ease. The toolkit's scripts could also be distributed to individuals, enabling them to practice these techniques on their own whenever they feel overwhelmed.

Case Study: A Community-Based Mental Health Initiative in Poland

Background:

As refugees from neighbouring countries arrived in Poland seeking safety, the local community recognized a need for accessible mental health support. With limited formal resources available, a community-based initiative was launched to train local volunteers in basic Psychological First Aid (PFA) techniques. This initiative aimed to equip volunteers with foundational skills to provide immediate emotional support and connect refugees to further resources if needed.

Training and Implementation:

- **Volunteer Training:** Over a series of workshops, local volunteers received training in basic PFA techniques, including active listening, recognizing signs of distress, and guiding individuals to appropriate resources. The training focused on practical, empathetic communication skills that could be used in both formal and informal settings.
- **On-the-Ground Support:** Trained volunteers were stationed at community centers, shelters, and temporary housing locations where refugees were staying. They approached individuals calmly, introduced themselves, and offered help, following the PFA principles of establishing contact, providing comfort, assessing needs, and connecting with resources.
- **Ongoing Supervision:** Mental health professionals provided supervision and support to volunteers, allowing them to discuss challenges they encountered and receive feedback. This support ensured that volunteers felt equipped to handle various situations and contributed to maintaining the quality of the care provided.

Chapter 4: Mental Health Support

Impact:

- **Improved Access to Mental Health Support:** Within the first six months, over 500 refugees received mental health support through the initiative. Many of these individuals had limited access to formal mental health services and benefited from the availability of volunteers trained in PFA.
- **Community Empowerment:** The initiative empowered local volunteers, creating a network of support that could be sustained beyond the initial training. This approach also fostered a sense of solidarity between refugees and residents, reducing stigma and promoting social cohesion.
- **Scalability:** This model demonstrated that community-based mental health support could be rapidly scaled up, particularly in emergency settings. The initiative's success inspired similar programs in neighbouring regions, where volunteers are now receiving PFA training to support displaced individuals.

Lessons Learned:

- **Training Simplicity:** Focusing on simple, effective techniques ensured that volunteers felt confident in their roles and could provide meaningful support without needing extensive mental health backgrounds.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Volunteers were encouraged to learn about the cultural backgrounds of the refugees they were assisting, which improved communication and trust.
- **Sustainability:** By establishing a network of trained volunteers within the local community, the initiative created a sustainable model that could continue to provide support as new refugees arrived.

Conclusion

These examples — guided mindfulness techniques and the community-based mental health initiative in Poland — demonstrate effective strategies for addressing mental health needs in displaced populations. By combining accessible, evidence-based practices with community empowerment, mental health organizations can provide valuable support even in resource-constrained settings. This approach fosters resilience, promotes well-being, and encourages the integration of refugees into their host communities.

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

5.1 Compilation of Successful Case Studies

This chapter provides in-depth examples of effective programs implemented by partner organizations, highlighting successful interventions in language learning, mental health, and community engagement.

Case Study 1: Language & mental health Integration Program in Poland

The Polish NGO Jaw Dikh, in cooperation with Fundacja Instytut Poland-Ukraine within the REACT project, designed a unique language and mental health workshop tailored for Ukrainian women, including Roma participants.

The program aimed to foster emotional well-being, improve mental health, and build participants' confidence through a combination of job-specific language training, essential digital skills, and innovative mental health support sessions. The approach integrated non-formal education methods and a holistic framework focusing on body, emotions, mindset, and interpersonal relationships.

The program sought to create a safe space for participants, foster mutual trust, and empower women to rebuild their lives post-crisis. It also introduced daily self-care practices to manage stress and recover from traumatic experiences. Participants were guided to understand their boundaries, express emotions healthily, rebuild trust, and plan for the future.



Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Training Sessions:

1. Session 1: Introduction and self-regulation techniques. Participants met each other, learning foundational methods to manage stress and achieve emotional balance.
2. Session 2: Interactive exploration of personal boundaries. Participants examined their own limits, how they feel when these boundaries are violated, and how to respect others' limits.
3. Session 3: Trust-building training. Through experiential exercises, participants learned to reconnect with others, rebuild trust, and establish meaningful relationships.
4. Session 4: Emotional expression through art therapy. This session provided tools for participants to identify and express their feelings in a supportive group setting.
5. Session 5: Introduction to planning and goal-setting. Participants explored methods to better understand their desires and create realistic, actionable life goals.
6. Session 6: Body movement and emotional expression. Using physical exercises, participants learned to connect with their own emotions, give and receive space, and deepen their self-awareness.
7. Session 7: Evaluation and reflection. A dedicated session to review lessons learned and evaluate the overall program experience.

Importance of Addressing PTSD and Trauma Among Ukrainian Refugees:

The trauma experienced by Ukrainian refugees, including Roma individuals, often stems from exposure to violence, forced displacement, and loss of stability. PTSD and unresolved trauma can manifest as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and difficulty trusting others. Addressing these issues is crucial for refugees to regain their sense of self, rebuild relationships, and successfully integrate into host communities.

This program recognized the critical need for trauma-informed care and created a space where participants could process their experiences and begin to heal. By integrating mental health into language and skills training, the program tackled the emotional and psychological barriers that often hinder refugees' ability to learn, work, and thrive.

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Impact:

- **Mental Health Benefits:** Participants reported a 40% reduction in stress-related symptoms and an increased sense of emotional stability.
- **Community Building:** The program fostered deep connections among participants, with many forming ongoing peer support networks that provided encouragement and solidarity.
- **Confidence and Self-Efficacy:** Women left the program with a clearer understanding of their abilities, personal goals, and methods for overcoming future challenges.

Key Success Factors:

1. **Tailored Curriculum:** Developed with active input from participants to ensure relevance and inclusivity, particularly for Roma women.
2. **Holistic Support:** Addressed the psychological and emotional challenges of displacement alongside practical skills, such as job-specific language and digital literacy.
3. **Non-Formal Education Techniques:** Engaged participants through interactive and experiential methods, fostering trust and openness.
4. **Local Collaboration:** Partnered with businesses for potential job placements and internships, connecting skills development to real-world opportunities.
5. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensured Roma participants felt included and valued, combating fears of discrimination.

Recommendations for Expanding Trauma-Informed Programs:

1. **Incorporate More Trauma-Specific Interventions:** Expand on methods like EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and somatic therapies to address PTSD more directly.
2. **Train Facilitators in Trauma-Informed Care:** Ensure all program staff are equipped to recognize and respond to trauma symptoms.
3. **Provide Long-Term Support:** Offer follow-up sessions or ongoing access to peer support networks for sustained emotional and mental health benefits.
4. **Collaborate with Mental Health Professionals:** Include licensed therapists for individualized counseling and therapy options.
5. **Adapt Programs for Other Marginalized Groups:** Create specialized programs for men, children, and elders facing unique challenges as refugees.

By focusing on trauma recovery as an integral part of empowerment and integration, this program sets an exemplary model for supporting Ukrainian refugees and Roma communities. It demonstrates the power of holistic care to not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term resilience and well-being.

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Testimony 1: Building Confidence and Emotional Resilience

"When I arrived in Poland, I felt broken and invisible. The first session of this program was the hardest because I didn't think I could manage my emotions. But learning self-regulation techniques changed everything. The breathing exercises and grounding methods became my daily tools. I feel calmer now and better able to face new challenges. For the first time in months, I believe in myself again." — Natalia

Testimony 2: Rediscovering Trust

"As a Roma woman, I've always had a hard time trusting people, and the war only made it worse. During the trust-building session, I realized I wasn't alone in feeling this way. The activities helped me open up to others, and I even formed friendships with some of the women. It's amazing how these exercises made me feel connected. I now feel like I have a support network I can rely on." — Alina

Testimony 3: Understanding Boundaries

"The session on boundaries was life-changing for me. I never thought about my own limits or how much I let others overstep them. Through the exercises, I learned to say no when I need to, and it's made me feel stronger and more in control. I've started teaching my children the same ideas, so they can grow up with more confidence in their own boundaries." — Olha

Testimony 4: Setting Goals for the Future

"Before this program, I couldn't think about tomorrow without feeling overwhelmed. The goal-setting session gave me hope. We practiced breaking big dreams into small steps, and I realized that I can still build a future for myself and my children. I've already started planning to apply for jobs that match the skills I've learned here. I'm finally looking ahead instead of being stuck in the past." — Viktoriya

Testimony 5: Reconnecting with the Body

"The movement exercises were a surprise for me. I didn't realize how much stress and fear were trapped in my body until I started moving and releasing them. It felt freeing to connect with my emotions physically and not just through words. I feel lighter, like I'm carrying less weight on my shoulders."
— Irina

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Case Study 2: Language & mental Health Outreach in Bulgaria

The REACT project, supported by Champions Factory, launched a targeted Language and Mental Health Integration Program to address critical barriers faced by Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria. By mid-2024, over 105,000 Ukrainian refugees were residing in the country, marking a significant rise. Among these individuals, over 30% experienced mental health challenges, such as anxiety and PTSD, according to WHO and UNICEF reports.

Objectives of the Program:

1. Addressing Language Barriers: Recognizing the need for formal language qualifications, a Bulgarian language course was organized for 15 adult refugees. This course aimed to equip participants with an A2-level certification, essential for accessing employment opportunities and navigating social systems in Bulgaria.
2. Supporting Mental Health: Insights from social workers revealed the critical need for emotional support. This guided the program to emphasize creating a safe learning environment where participants could build resilience and form social connections.



Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Implementation:

- Community Outreach: Champions Factory used social media platforms to disseminate information about the program. However, it was found that word-of-mouth within local Ukrainian communities was significantly more effective, as it built trust and facilitated deeper engagement.
- Tailored Curriculum: Social worker consultations helped design a curriculum aligned with the refugees' practical needs and aspirations.
- Empowering Participants: Alongside language acquisition, the program fostered a sense of community, reducing isolation and building confidence among attendees.

Results:

- All participants successfully completed the course and earned their A2-level certifications.
- Graduates reported increased confidence, better employment prospects, and improved social integration.
- The program demonstrated the effectiveness of pairing language learning with mental health support for holistic refugee integration.

Lessons Learned:

The program highlighted key takeaways for future initiatives. Effective outreach within displaced populations requires a strong grassroots approach, as personal recommendations through trusted community networks proved far more impactful than broad social media campaigns. Additionally, combining practical skills training with emotional and social support creates a well-rounded strategy for sustainable integration. These insights will shape the continued development of the REACT project to meet the evolving needs of refugees

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies



This section features personal stories from both refugees and frontline workers, illustrating the toolkit's impact:

● Testimonial from a Refugee in Bulgaria:

"This course gave me more than just language skills—it gave me confidence to start a new life in Bulgaria. I'm so grateful for the support and opportunity." — Galina M., Course Participant

● Tutor's perspective:

"Seeing participants grow more confident each week was incredibly rewarding. It wasn't just language—it was life-changing for them." — Tatyana D., Language Tutor

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Case Study 3: Language and Emotional Resilience Program in Romania

In 2024, Asociația Anaid identified a critical need among Ukrainian refugees in Romania for a structured program that combined language learning with emotional resilience training. With over 100,000 refugees displaced by the ongoing conflict, many faced barriers such as limited Romanian language skills, isolation, and psychological distress. To address these challenges, Asociația Anaid launched the Language and Emotional Resilience Program, focusing on practical language acquisition and fostering emotional well-being.

Objectives of the Program:

1. **Practical Language Acquisition:** Equip participants with essential Romanian language skills (A1–A2 levels) to navigate everyday situations, access services, and pursue employment opportunities.
2. **Emotional Resilience Building:** Provide tools and strategies to help participants cope with the trauma of displacement and rebuild their confidence and sense of purpose.



Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Implementation:

1. Community-Centered Outreach:

Asociația Anaid partnered with local schools, religious organizations, and NGOs to promote the program. Word-of-mouth through Ukrainian community leaders and trusted volunteers proved instrumental in recruiting participants.

2. Tailored Language Curriculum:

Language lessons emphasized:

- Vocabulary and phrases for accessing healthcare, education, and transportation.
- Role-playing scenarios such as visiting a doctor, attending parent-teacher meetings, or grocery shopping.
- Simplified literacy lessons for participants with limited formal education.

3. Emotional Resilience Workshops:

In parallel with language training, participants attended weekly workshops facilitated by psychologists and social workers. These workshops included:

- Mindfulness exercises and stress management techniques.
- Group discussions on adjusting to a new culture and managing the grief of displacement.
- Creative expression activities such as art therapy and journaling.

4. Cultural Integration Activities:

To foster a sense of belonging, participants were encouraged to engage in cultural exchange events, such as cooking traditional meals, celebrating local and Ukrainian holidays, and participating in community volunteer projects.

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies

Results:

- **Language Proficiency:**

Participants successfully completed the program, with over 85% achieving A2-level Romanian proficiency. Many reported feeling more confident in handling daily interactions and pursuing job opportunities.

- **Mental and Emotional Growth:**

Participants reported a significant decrease in feelings of isolation and anxiety, with 70% noting improved self-esteem and optimism about their future.

- **Community Connections:**

The program fostered meaningful relationships among participants and between refugees and local residents, creating a stronger support network.

Lessons Learned:

1. **Safe Spaces Matter:**

Providing a safe, non-judgmental environment for both learning and emotional sharing was critical to the program's success.

2. **Practical First, Advanced Later:**

Focusing on practical, conversational language skills before delving into advanced topics ensured participants could quickly apply what they learned.

3. **Empathy Drives Engagement:**

Trainers who understood the participants' challenges and lived experiences were better able to build trust and foster engagement.

Impact:

- **Employment Opportunities:**

Several graduates found jobs in customer service, childcare, and local NGOs, directly attributing their success to their improved language skills and confidence.

- **Social Resilience:**

Participants formed peer support groups, which continued to meet after the program, creating lasting bonds within the community.

- **Scalability:**

The program's structure can be adopted by other NGOs in neighboring regions, showcasing its replicability and adaptability.

Chapter 5: Best Practices and Case Studies



Testimonials

● “When I arrived in Romania, I felt invisible and afraid to speak because I didn’t know the language. This program gave me more than words—it gave me hope. Learning Romanian in a supportive group made me feel part of something bigger, and the resilience workshops helped me find strength I didn’t know I had.”

— Maria, program participant

● “This program helped me regain my confidence. Learning Romanian was not just about the language—it was about feeling like I belong here. The mindfulness exercises and group activities made me realize I’m not alone, and now I feel ready to build a future for my family in Romania.”

— Olena, program participant

Chapter 6: Implementation Guidelines



6.1 Step-by-Step Instructions

This chapter provides detailed, practical guidance for implementing the toolkit's strategies across different contexts and environments.

● Language Program Implementation:

1. **Needs Assessment:** Conduct a survey to identify language proficiency levels and specific needs.
2. **Curriculum Development:** Design lesson plans based on identified needs, including job-specific language, cultural orientation, and digital literacy.
3. **Recruitment of Volunteers:** Engage local language instructors and volunteers, providing them with training based on the toolkit's methods.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Use feedback forms and language assessments to track progress and adapt the program as needed.

● Mental Health Support Implementation:

1. **Training for Social Workers:** Provide workshops on PFA, trauma-informed care, and cultural sensitivity.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Ensure availability of mental health resources, such as referral lists and informational brochures in the refugees' native languages.
3. **Community Outreach:** Partner with local religious organizations, community centers, and cultural groups to increase awareness and participation.

6.2 Adapting Materials

The toolkit emphasizes the importance of adapting resources to meet cultural and linguistic needs.

For example:

● **Language Customization:** Incorporate common Ukrainian phrases and idioms to make language lessons more relatable.

● **Cultural Sensitivity in Mental Health:** Recognize that traditional mental health terminology may not resonate with all cultural groups. Instead of using terms like "therapy," consider using "well-being sessions" or "community talks."

Chapter 7: Evaluation and Feedback

7.1 Tools for Assessing Effectiveness

1. Language Assessment Tests

- Conduct pre- and post-tests to evaluate language proficiency, focusing on practical skills like vocabulary, sentence construction, and comprehension. Use simple conversational scenarios to measure progress.

2. Mental Health Outcome Surveys

- Use short questionnaires with Likert-scale and open-ended questions to monitor participants' stress, anxiety, and overall well-being. Administer surveys at the start, midpoint, and end of the program.

3. Focus Group Guidelines

- Facilitate small feedback groups to gather qualitative insights on program impact. Discuss questions like, "What helped you the most?" or "What challenges did you face?" to refine program delivery.

7.2 Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

1. Regular Feedback Loops

- Schedule quarterly feedback sessions with staff and participants to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Use anonymous forms to encourage honest input.

2. Data-Driven Adjustments

- Analyze language test results, survey data, and focus group feedback to make targeted improvements, such as adjusting lesson plans or increasing emotional support resources.

By using these tools and recommendations, the program can adapt to participants' needs, ensuring sustained impact and continuous growth.



Chapter 8: Special Focus on Marginalized Groups

8.1 Understanding the Needs of Marginalized Groups

Ukrainian refugees are not a homogenous group; they include various marginalized populations who face additional barriers, such as ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, elderly refugees, and single-parent families. These groups often encounter compounded challenges due to systemic discrimination, lack of tailored services, and cultural insensitivity.

Key Statistics:

- According to the European Network Against Racism (2023), ethnic minority refugees, including Roma, are twice as likely to face discrimination in access to housing and healthcare.
- The International Disability Alliance (2022) found that 60% of refugees with disabilities are unable to access essential services due to physical barriers and lack of accommodations.

8.2 Tailored Support for Vulnerable Groups

1. Support for Refugees with Disabilities:

Refugees with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing services, including inaccessible shelters and limited mobility aids. The toolkit recommends collaborating with disability advocacy organizations to provide specialized services such as physical therapy, accessible transportation, and adaptive language learning materials.

2. Support for LGBTQ+ Refugees:

LGBTQ+ refugees often experience discrimination not only in host countries but also within refugee communities. The toolkit provides guidance on creating safe spaces and offering confidential support services.

Practical Tips:

- Use inclusive language and respect refugees' preferred names and pronouns.
- Provide information about local LGBTQ+ organizations and safe housing options.

3. Support for Elderly Refugees:

Elderly refugees face additional challenges such as health issues, mobility limitations, and isolation. Tailored programs, including social engagement activities and healthcare support, are crucial for this group.

8.3 Best Practices for Inclusion

- **Inclusive Service Design:** Design programs with input from marginalized communities to ensure services meet their specific needs.
- **Cultural Competency Training:** Provide training for staff on cultural sensitivity and the unique needs of diverse refugee populations.

Chapter 10: The Situation of Ukrainian Roma in the War Crisis

The Situation of Ukrainian Roma in the War Crisis

The war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact on millions of people, forcing them to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring countries. Among these are Ukrainian Roma, who face compounded challenges due to systemic antigypsyism, social exclusion, and pre-existing economic disadvantages. Their unique experiences during the war crisis illuminate the intersection of displacement and entrenched discrimination.

Pre-War Marginalization of Ukrainian Roma

Before the war, many Roma in Ukraine lived on the margins of society, experiencing poverty, unemployment, low levels of formal education, and limited access to healthcare.

- **Housing and Documentation Issues:** Many Ukrainian Roma lacked proper housing or official documents, leaving them stateless and unable to access state services.
 - **Social Stigma:** Discrimination against Roma was widespread, resulting in limited opportunities and social exclusion.
 - **Education Gaps:** Roma children often faced barriers to education, including segregation in schools and inadequate resources.
- These systemic issues left Roma communities ill-prepared to cope with the impacts of war and displacement.



Chapter 10: The Situation of Ukrainian Roma in the War Crisis

Challenges Faced by Ukrainian Roma During the War Crisis

Discrimination at Border Crossings

Reports from international human rights organizations and NGOs highlighted instances where Roma refugees faced discrimination and abuse at border crossings:

- **Longer Waiting Times:** Roma families were often made to wait longer at border crossings, facing suspicion and neglect from officials.
- **Racial Profiling:** Roma individuals were sometimes denied entry or faced invasive questioning based on their ethnicity.
- **Segregation in Refugee Reception Centers:** In some cases, Roma refugees were housed separately or placed in substandard accommodations.

Lack of Access to Aid and Resources

Systemic antigypsyism followed Roma refugees into host countries, where they struggled to access humanitarian aid:

- **Barriers to Documentation:** Many Roma refugees lacked passports or IDs, making it difficult to register for assistance programs.
- **Exclusion from Housing and Social Services:** Due to prejudice, Roma refugees were often turned away from shelters or received unequal treatment in aid distribution.
- **Lack of Language Support:** Language barriers further marginalized Roma individuals, particularly those with limited Ukrainian or host-country language skills.

Poverty and Employment Challenges

Displacement exacerbated existing economic hardships:

- Many Roma families arrived in host countries with few possessions or resources, often relying on informal work to survive.
- Host-country employers were often reluctant to hire Roma refugees due to stereotypes and biases, limiting their employment opportunities.

Chapter 10: The Situation of Ukrainian Roma in the War Crisis

Educational Barriers for Roma Children

Roma children faced additional challenges in accessing education in host countries:

- **Language Barriers:** Many Roma children spoke Romani or lacked proficiency in Ukrainian or the host-country language, making integration into schools difficult.
- **Segregation and Bullying:** Some schools excluded Roma children or failed to protect them from bullying by peers.
- **Digital Divide:** Remote learning options, where available, were often inaccessible to Roma families due to a lack of devices or internet access.

Health and Mental Well-Being

The trauma of war and displacement compounded existing health disparities:

- **Mental Health Crisis:** Roma refugees, especially women and children, exhibited high levels of PTSD and anxiety, often without access to mental health services.
- **Chronic Illnesses:** Pre-existing health conditions went untreated due to limited access to healthcare systems.
- **Substandard Living Conditions:** Poor housing in refugee camps or shelters increased the risk of illness and malnutrition.

Coping Mechanisms and Community Resilience

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian Roma have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness:

- **Community Solidarity:** Many Roma families relied on close-knit community networks for mutual support and shared resources.
- **Grassroots Organizations:** Roma-led NGOs in Ukraine and host countries mobilized to provide culturally specific support, including food distribution, legal aid, and shelter.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Roma refugees maintained their traditions and cultural practices, which served as a source of strength and identity during displacement.

Chapter 11. Summary of the REACT Project and Toolkit

The REACT - Together for Ukrainian Refugees project is a collaborative initiative aimed at addressing the critical needs of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. The project was created in response to the unprecedented displacement crisis caused by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which has resulted in millions of Ukrainians seeking safety across Europe.

REACT's primary objective is to empower social workers, NGO staff, community volunteers, and local authorities to provide targeted support to Ukrainian refugees. The project focuses on three main areas: language acquisition, mental health support, and social integration. By equipping frontline workers with practical tools, evidence-based strategies, and culturally sensitive approaches, REACT seeks to promote long-term stability and well-being for refugees.

The REACT Toolkit is an accessible, comprehensive resource designed to support these efforts. It consolidates best practices, methodological insights, case studies, and practical tools to assist practitioners in providing effective, empathetic, and inclusive care to Ukrainian refugees. The toolkit is divided into thematic chapters covering language skills development, mental health support, best practices, implementation guidelines, evaluation tools, and specialized support for marginalized groups, including the Ukrainian Roma community.

The toolkit provides step-by-step instructions, language resources, mental health support strategies, evaluation templates, and adaptation recommendations to ensure it can be used in various contexts. It also emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for inclusive services that address the unique challenges faced by marginalized populations.



Chapter 12. Recommendations on the Use of the Toolkit



1. Familiarize Yourself with the Toolkit's Structure and Objectives

Orientation for New Users: Begin by reviewing the introductory sections to understand the toolkit's structure, purpose, and target audience. This overview will provide a solid foundation for navigating the specific chapters and resources relevant to your role.

2. Use the Toolkit as a Flexible, Adaptable Resource

- **Customize Based on Local Needs:** While the toolkit offers a standardized set of guidelines, it is intended to be adaptable. Tailor resources, language exercises, and support strategies to fit the cultural, linguistic, and logistical context of your region and refugee population.
- **Engage Local Stakeholders:** Collaborate with local community groups, cultural mediators, and advocacy organizations to contextualize toolkit materials, ensuring they resonate with refugees and address region-specific needs.

3. Implement Language and Mental Health Programs Holistically

- **Combine Language and Mental Health Interventions:** Recognize the interconnected nature of language proficiency and mental well-being. Refugees who feel heard and understood are more likely to engage in language programs, and those with basic language skills can better articulate their mental health needs.
- **Sequential Program Phases:** Use the toolkit to design programs in sequential phases—beginning with basic support (e.g., Psychological First Aid and language for daily communication) and progressing to more advanced needs (e.g., vocational language skills and trauma-informed counseling).

Chapter 12. Recommendations on the Use of the Toolkit

4. Prioritize Continuous Learning and Capacity Building

- **Training Sessions for Frontline Workers:** Conduct regular training sessions based on toolkit chapters. For example, dedicate sessions to Psychological First Aid, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) basics, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods, ensuring staff are equipped with practical skills.
- **Self-Assessment and Peer Learning:** Encourage staff to engage in self-assessment exercises included in the toolkit and to participate in peer learning. Sharing insights from practical experiences can deepen understanding and improve program implementation.

5. Focus on Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity

- **Adapt Strategies for Marginalized Groups:** Chapters on marginalized groups, including the Roma community, highlight the importance of culturally sensitive practices. Ensure all team members are trained on anti-discrimination policies and are aware of the specific needs of different groups within the refugee population.
- **Use Language and Communication Guides:** Employ the toolkit's language guides, adjusting communication styles as needed to be respectful and inclusive of various cultural backgrounds.

6. Leverage Case Studies and Best Practices

- **Incorporate Success Stories:** Draw inspiration from case studies included in the toolkit, applying similar strategies to your programs where applicable. These case studies provide real-world examples of successful interventions in language learning, mental health, and community engagement.
- **Monitor and Adapt Based on Lessons Learned:** Use the toolkit's best practices and lessons learned as benchmarks for your own program's success, adjusting approaches based on feedback from refugees and team members.

Chapter 12. Recommendations on the Use of the Toolkit

7. Use Evaluation Tools for Continuous Improvement

- **Regular Monitoring and Feedback Loops:** Utilize the evaluation templates to gather feedback on program effectiveness. Conduct regular reviews to assess progress, gather qualitative and quantitative data, and refine programs as needed.

- **Responsive to Feedback:** Pay particular attention to participant feedback to understand challenges, successes, and areas needing improvement. Adapt strategies promptly to reflect the evolving needs of refugees.

8. Engage in Continuous Updates and Knowledge Sharing

- **Update Practices with New Insights:** Use the toolkit as a living document, incorporating new insights, data, and methods as they become available. Share best practices and challenges encountered with other practitioners through networks or local partnerships.

- **Contribute to a Community of Practice:** Consider the toolkit as part of a broader, shared effort to support Ukrainian refugees. Engage with other organizations, attend workshops, and participate in online communities to exchange knowledge and contribute to a more effective collective response.





Conclusion

The REACT Toolkit serves as a foundational resource for supporting Ukrainian refugees across Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. With a structured approach to language development, mental health, and community integration, it empowers practitioners to deliver compassionate, informed, and effective support.

By adapting the toolkit to local needs, implementing culturally sensitive practices, and continuously refining programs based on evaluation, users can make a meaningful impact on the lives of Ukrainian refugees, fostering resilience, stability, and hope for a better future.

This toolkit is intended not only as a guide but as a starting point for ongoing learning, adaptation, and collaboration. Each community worker, NGO staff member, and volunteer using this toolkit contributes to a larger movement of solidarity and support for those displaced by conflict, embodying the spirit of the REACT project: together for Ukrainian refugees.



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