

Social Trauma and Forced Migration

Rethinking Integration, Education and Mental Health

Best Practice Recommendations

Adopted by the
Policy Makers Conference Berlin, 1 December 2018
DAAD network *Migration – Trauma in Transition*

Edited by
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Introduction

Migration in the 21st century is a part of an ongoing global change that must be addressed with attention, wisdom and mutual respect. The editors believe that, especially in the case of forced migration, unconscious processes in the mental life of both refugees and members of receiving societies influence the decision processes and might thwart the negotiation and implementation of legislative and administrative programmes.

Social Trauma is one key concept to explain the psychological mechanisms at work in refugee reception. On the one hand, it is often Social Trauma (Hamburger et al., 2018) that has turned the refugees' homes into unsafe places and forced them to flee, and, on the other hand, they meet societies on their way, whose collective identity is shaped by social trauma, as well. Xenophobic reflexes may blindfold the democratic discourse and impede a rational policy, respecting the needs and potentials of both migrants and host societies.

The following recommendations intend to help to avoid the burnouts and failures so many well intended policies have been ending up into in the past. They are politically neutral in regard to sovereign decisions on the migration policy that each and every country can take in the frame of its international obligations. Still, from the viewpoint of psychosocial considerations, they make a case for the clear and transparent communication and reliable implementation of the said decisions on policies, lest populations as well as refugees will be left over to unstructured fears, and group-related phantasies originating in the trauma-informed collective identity might arise, that in the end might bring well-intentioned integration policies to a halt and foster retraumatizations on both sides.

Reference

Hamburger, A., Tutnjevic, S., Hancheva, C., Özçürümez, S., Stankovic B. & Scher, C. (Eds.) (2018). *Forced Migration and Social Trauma: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London. New York: Routledge.

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Dialogue Process and Policy Makers Conference

The following recommendations have been elaborated by a two-year discussion process between forced migration experts and discussants from the academic fields of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology and political science in the frame of the DAAD network *Migration – Trauma in Transition*.¹

The First Dialogue School (2017) at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo (chair: Professor Dženana Husremović, PhD and Professor Maida Koso-Drljević, PhD) explored the intersection of trauma psychology and public policy and prepared the ground for formulating questions and suggestions to responsible administrators. Results of this first dialogue (see contributions by Özçürümez, Hancheva, Hamburger, and Atanassov in Hamburger et al, 2018) served as a basis for

The Second Dialogue School (2018) at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade (chair: Professor Biljana Stanković, PhD), where questions were re-discussed and a draft for the concluding policy makers conference was negotiated. All participating experts and their affiliations for both dialogues are given in the appendix.

This working process has been completed by a concluding discussion and modification of the recommendations in the frame of

The policy makers conference in Berlin, 1 December 2018

“Dreams to Nightmares - Welcoming Culture, Xenophobia and Social Trauma Along the Balkan Route”.

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Conference participants: Invited policy makers and experts

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President, Psychosocial Innovation Network, Belgrade, Serbia and Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Conference Participants: Network Members *Migration – Trauma in Transition*

<i>Professor Nikola Atanassov</i>	New Bulgarian University, Dept. Psychology, Sofia, Bulgaria
<i>Professor Sotiris Chtouris</i>	University of the Aegean, Dept. of Sociology, Lesvos, Greece
<i>Professor Gordana Djigić</i>	Vice Dean for Science, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia
<i>Professor Aleksandra Hadžić</i>	University of Banja Luka, Department of Psychology, Banja, Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Professor Andreas Hamburger</i>	MTT Network Speaker, International Psychoanalytic University, Berlin, Germany
<i>Professor Camellia Hancheva</i>	Sofia University, Dept. Psychology, Sofia, Bulgaria
<i>Professor Vladimir Hedrih</i>	Vice Dean for International Relations, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia
<i>Professor Maida Koso-Drljević</i>	Univ. Sarajevo, Dept. Psychology, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Professor Gamze Özçürümez Bilgili</i>	Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey
<i>Professor Saime Özçürümez</i>	Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey; Chair, The Turkish UNESCO Committee on Management of Social Transformation and Migration
<i>Carmen Scher, MA</i>	MTT Network Coordinator, Head of International Office at International Psychoanalytic University Berlin
<i>Professor Slavica Tutnjević</i>	University of Banja Luka, Dept. Psychology, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Professor Anastasia Zissi</i>	University of the Aegean, Dept. of Sociology, Lesvos, Greece

Recommendations

The recommendations are the result of an intensive discussion of the questions and suggestions the two Dialogue Schools put before the policy makers and representatives at the Berlin Conference. They were discussed under three leading questions:

- How and why does refugee care in countries en route and in target countries meet support and resistance in the receiving societies?
- How do the refugees' traumatic biographies interact with trauma-based national and/or ethnic identities in the transit and/or target countries?
- Which measures should be taken to prevent socio-traumatic entanglements and obstacles to refugee care programmes due to these entanglements?

Recommendations in all sections of this document aim to inform principles, practices and policies that address forcibly displaced populations (asylum seekers and refugees) and migrants who move across international borders. Accounting for the fact that migration flows are mixed and legal recognition and reception of migrants vary across national and local contexts, the recommendations emphasise working through social trauma in forced migration with a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The text uses 'refugees', 'asylum seeker', 'migrants' and 'others' together, and interchangeably in order to highlight transformations in categories nationally and internationally in the processes of forced migration.

Integration

Integration is based on developing a new identity. In migration, identity is challenged by social destabilisation, loss of alignment to ethnic, class and group identities, traumatic experiences, and often by becoming “the refugee” in the eyes of a receiving society. These complex identity issues, however, are rarely reflected in international policy making on protection of refugees.

In host societies, social identities are also facing challenges. The European Union is built on socio-traumatic scars, such as the two World Wars and many dictatorial systems. Modern European citizenship identity is an ongoing process of bargaining with the future. It must emerge from daily and continuous experience, that an increase in solidarity brings a return in freedom, justice and prosperity. In this context, a rational and humanitarian solution of the refugee issue is a milestone for the European identity-in-progress.

Integrative measures involve volunteers as an initial encounter that helps negotiating cultural identities, and to grasp the momentum of the transformations. They can be supported by psychological supervision. Everyday encounters with the population will be useful to mutually define their relation.

We offer the following recommendations:

1. Since ambiguous information available on refugees and asylum seekers in different countries triggers xenophobic prejudices, distorting legitimate concerns held by the receiving societies about the impact of the irregular influx on regulated social systems, and the fact that *nation states are constrained while hosting new populations settling in their countries*, we recommend to develop and implement a realistic and agile public communication strategy, namely:
 - a. To consistently deliver clear and transparent information about the national legal framework and policies on refugee reception, legal status determination and resettlement as well as social cohesion to receiving communities, refugees and asylum seekers;
 - b. To open and promote public discussions based on evidence and enable a reasoning discourse around social cohesion;
 - c. To encourage local communities to address and reflect on their reservations about incoming strangers by engaging with their past and present experiences and collective memories;
 - d. To engage with the local questions and challenges around social cohesion by involving all stakeholders;
 - e. To relay clear information about the number of people on the move irrespective of their legal status, and the short, medium and long-term plans about reception and settlement of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants irrespective of their legal status to all stakeholders;
 - f. To contextualise how the refugee phenomenon would be affected in relation to current social, economic and identity challenges (and realities) in the respective national, regional and local contexts;

- g. To contribute to the framing and process of coping with the refugee phenomenon in the framework of responsibility sharing in international protection, interpretation of international legal norms at the national level, and identify policies which also address local concerns;
- h. To clarify the expectations of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants about what they need to do to participate in processes of integration and social cohesion;
- i. To explain the complexity of the unaccompanied minors phenomenon, and to account for this complexity in all practices and policies.

2. Since only real contact can correct prejudice-creating imaginary constructs and pave the way for mutual understanding and social cohesion, we recommend:
 - a. To facilitate practical social connections, informal encounters and social exchanges among refugees, asylum seekers and others, irrespective of their legal status and the receiving communities;
 - b. To support livelihood opportunities for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants while respecting the concerns of the populations of receiving societies about labour market competition and welfare benefits while promoting and safeguarding social cohesion (e.g. by balancing support for refugees with support for locals who directly interact with them, by promoting interaction that fosters mutual understanding and respect in the workplace);
 - c. To identify ways of engaging with the local communities and asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, irrespective of their legal status (e.g. undocumented migrants);
 - d. To promote cultural mediation by involving all actors in a meaningful way;
 - e. To enable information exchange among asylum seekers, refugees and migrants irrespective of their legal status as well as local communities about the forced migration experience through narratives of other asylum seekers and refugees who have been through similar processes;
 - f. To promote civic participation of the asylum seekers, refugees and migrants irrespective of their legal status in the local communities by enabling them to organize their voice in associations;
 - g. To encourage and facilitate all initiatives for collaborative social interaction that come from all actors at the local level.

3. Since allowing refugees to transform their endangered cultural identity into a new identity within receiving societies, thus positively shaping the social cohesion experience, and since active agency in the frame of a legitimate discourse are the best predictors for social success and personal wellbeing in general, we recommend:
 - a. To facilitate ways of preserving and promoting the identities of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (irrespective of their legal status);
 - b. To bring out the cultural commonalities and the differences between the refugee communities and the societies which receive them in order to exchange views for mutual understanding towards integration and social cohesion;
 - c. To account for and enable knowledge transfer for the constructive historical and current experience of functioning multi-ethnic models in the origin countries, as well as in the host countries;
 - d. To accelerate processes leading to the acquisition of identities going beyond refugeehood, and in so doing to prevent transgenerational passing of traumatic identities;
 - e. To facilitate the discussion on awareness of and construction of inclusive identities within host communities by involving all stakeholders.

Education

The needs for additional support of the most vulnerable group of refugees - unaccompanied minors and other child refugees - must be systematically explored and appropriately met. Early and complex trauma may lead to severe disorders and thus urges for early preventive measures. A sudden change of cultural environment and identity must be met in time.

We offer the following recommendations:

1. All following measures should be designed in a way to equally account for the needs of all children of the host society, and not only refugees.

2. Since accounting for cultural differences regarding the concept of childhood, as well as the expectations of age-appropriate tasks and behaviours will help children to find their place in the host society, we recommend:
 - a. To account for differences between schooling systems from the country of origin and transition countries and enhance flexible adaptation systems in order to prepare children for their personal transition to the new system;
 - b. To help schools become receptive to cultural expectations children are used to, e.g. being defined as child vs. adult;
 - c. To facilitate peer interaction and mutual cultural information exchange, and to raise awareness that culture is a dynamic concept open to negotiation;
 - d. To ensure an appropriate level of language competence for inclusion in public education;
 - e. To encourage nominating tutors from the culture of origin as role models;
 - f. To include culture competent advisors in curricula development;
 - g. To provide multi-perspective learning material;
 - h. To include competent cultural dialogue mediators, preferably with personal migration background;
 - i. To raise awareness and promote communication strategies for informing refugee communities on basic principles in education of host countries (e.g. gender equality, compulsory school attendance);

3. Since re-traumatization and accumulation of traumatic effects impedes adaptation and educational prospect, we recommend:
 - a. To allocate resources for professional services (psychologists, pedagogues, social workers and cultural mediators) in order to care for the school as a space for social integration;
 - b. To provide clear information about life options and choices, for both children and their parents (even if they are still in the home country);
 - c. To provide psychoeducation for teachers and parents about trauma and trauma-related symptoms;
 - d. To provide professionally framed exchange between parents, in order to connect people with similar experiences.

4. Since the experience of forced migration often challenges children's ability to trust authorities and adults, and their belief that their own actions and experiences do matter, we recommend:
 - a. To support pedagogically-guided self-expression in arts and sports;
 - b. To promote physical health behaviour and respect physical boundaries;
 - c. To support availability of psychological and psychosocial services;
 - d. To support schools to cooperate with social services in order to work on non-attendance by exploring children's and parents' fears, reservations and preferences;
 - e. Capacity building for teachers, as to preserve their own job commitment and inspiration to remain open to differences;
 - f. Inclusion of children and parents in school boards and pupil councils;
 - g. To introduce monitoring and feedback procedures on the aforementioned measures at the school level, including representatives of the refugees' communities.

5. Since the lack of a clear future orientation is an obstacle to successful inclusion, organisations and institutions of the host culture should cooperate with refugee children so as to create meaningful educational and career prospects of life. Therefore, we recommend:
 - a. To provide culturally sensitive pre-school assessment and orientation programmes integrated in schools;
 - b. To provide prospects for parents in terms of economic and social resources to enable sending their children to a variety of schools and thus to avoid imbalanced allocation across neighbourhoods;
 - c. To consider the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors regarding their future orientation;
 - d. To enhance a coordinated cooperation between all involved institutions beyond the educational sector (e.g. by case management);
 - e. To connect legal guardians more closely to educational personnel;
 - f. To facilitate transition to continuous and higher education levels, and identify specific obstacles.

6. Since achieving a psychosocial identity in a receiving community requires developing a meaningful personal story through restoring continuity of the past and the present, we recommend that trained professionals:
 - a. encourage systematic activities like story-writing, acting, painting etc. about projective fictional characters;
 - b. organise creative-symbolic activities that enhance self-reflection and mentalization (e.g. “we are all made of the same dough”; theatre etc.);
 - c. encourage presentation of own culture and worldview;
 - d. encourage intercultural discussions (e.g. parents’ groups).

7. Adult education and lifelong learning should be treated according to the aforementioned recommendations.
 - a. To provide continuous language support
 - b. To support further career pursuits

Mental Health

Expert groups in mental health suggest a refugee-centred approach. They suggest to be aware that, in the context of forced migration, mental health issues are caused by societal and political factors, and that an early diagnostic approach is necessary to make sure that refugees with individual and/or social trauma can be recognised and find appropriate treatment without stigmatizing the whole group. It is necessary to teach mental health professionals how to deal with social trauma. Individual and group intervention can be designed, as well as specialised supervision schemes for first line helpers and volunteers.

We offer the following recommendations:

1. Since mental health problems among refugees and asylum seekers show an increased prevalence, which also might lead to long-term effects on individual and societal wellbeing, we recommend:
 - a. To provide timely available cultural sensitive diagnostic and crisis intervention for the recent arrivals, if mental health issues are given;
 - b. To accelerate the access to the mental health system, including the overcoming of structural and language barriers;
 - c. To provide sustainable psychological help according to the individual needs within the national mental health system;
 - d. To enhance professional networks across the border;
 - e. To provide information to the refugees about available mental health services.

2. Since intercultural differences (e.g. expressions of illness in different cultures) are known to influence diagnostics and treatment, we recommend:
 - a. Building on the resources of the forcibly displaced;
 - b. To enhance professional networks for providing culturally sensitive training for therapists, psychologists, helpers and psychological training for interpreters;
 - c. To enhance culturally adapted translations of assessment tools in psychology;
 - d. To provide cultural mediators and culturally sensitive supervision to support mental health professionals.

3. Since forced separation from familiar social and cultural structures influences psychological adaptation, we recommend:
 - a. Listening very closely and being respectful of self-reported needs;
 - b. To take into account and establish contact with the informal social support systems refugees are used to;
 - c. To use case management in order to help refugees adopt a proactive approach for maintaining community-based and self-sustaining social support networks.

4. Since the social construct of “refugee” in a given host society influences refugees’ mental health issues, we recommend:
 - a. To raise public awareness of the uncertainty of refugee plight and its long-lasting effects;
 - b. To destigmatise the label of “refugee”.

5. Since practitioners and especially volunteers run specific risks for vicarious trauma, we recommend taking preventive measures such as:
 - a. sustainable working conditions;
 - b. secure job positions;
 - c. trainings, supervision on a sustainable base for practitioners providing room for self-reflection and place for vulnerability;
 - d. abide by good practices.

Appendix: Experts contributing to the Dialogue Schools

All academic MTT network members listed in the Policy Makers conference (p. 6) were also part of the two Dialogue Schools. They met the following network colleagues and experts from the field:

Sarajevo Dialogue 2017

<i>Dijana Djurić</i>	Institute for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Dzenana Husremović</i>	Vice Rector and Dept. Psychology, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Elmedin Muratbegović, PhD</i>	Professor of criminology at the Faculty of Criminal Justice Sciences, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Chrysanthi Papadopoulou</i>	Master's student of psychology (IPU Berlin), with experience of fieldwork with unaccompanied refugee minors in Lesbos, Greece
<i>Jean-Jacques Petrucci</i>	Barrister, solicitor and psychologist, Hamburg, Germany
<i>Diana Riđić</i>	International Organization for Migration, psychological counselling at DOMINO, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Tamara Simonović</i>	Coordinator, Group for Children and Youth "Indigo", Niš, Serbia
<i>Biljana Stanković</i>	Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, Serbia
<i>Marko Tomašević</i>	Director of Klikaktiv – Center for Development of Social Policies, Belgrade, Serbia

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Vesna Andree Zaimović

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Andrea Žeravčić

Director, Save the Children, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Additional experts to the [Belgrade Dialogue 2018](#)

Rainer Czerwinski

Psychologist, psychoanalyst-in-training, expert and supervisor for refugee care institutions, Munich, Germany.

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