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EduOnMed

TRAINING FOR REFUGEE AND MIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN
MATTERS RELATED TO MEDICINE

August, 2023

Recommendations for policy makers, NGOs and institutions

Introduction

Policy debate over migration has intensified in recent years in Europe, and policymakers and relevant stakeholders play a critical role in shaping and facilitating the design of state policies. This document summarises recommendations for policy makers on refugee and migration issues at domestic and EU level. The recommendations are based on good practices from the activities of the EduOnMed ERASMUS+ project and are advocating for intercultural competence and diversity sensitivity. This document is useful for DG HOME senior officials, parliamentarians at EU and Member States level, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Migration and Asylum and Ministry of Health of the host countries in concern, Ombudspersons, local municipalities, medical and pharmacists associations, academia, humanitarian organisations, NGOs and relevant think tanks.

EduOnMed

EduOnMed is an ERASMUS+ project aiming to raise awareness and provide vocational training for professionals working with refugees and migrants, on matters related to medicine and intercultural communication. The project has been implemented by GIVMED, CESIE & GrowthCoop, which are organisations located in Greece, Italy and Spain accordingly.

The main objective of EduOnMed project is to bridge intercultural, intergenerational and social divides by fostering social inclusion and intercultural understanding as well as by improving the competencies of migration professionals in relation to health and medicine matters. Linked to this, the project focuses also on the physical and mental health of refugees and migrants as the skills that the participants will acquire will be used to improve the refugees and migrant's wellbeing and will help their integration.

The EduOnMed partnership carried out local roundtables and seminars with professionals working with refugees and migrants, in Greece, Italy and Spain. The programme has been adapted according to the feedback of participants and a special focus has been given to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it changed the perception and interaction between patient and health professional. The EduOnMed curriculum and game have been developed and adapted to the professionals' needs and they can be used as tools for their own careers.



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Context

For a long time, health care education in Europe has focused primarily on conveying medical knowledge to students and training specialised skills and methods deemed necessary for performing the job as a surgeon, a nurse, a paramedic, etc. What has been lacking within this approach is an emphasis on social and communicative skills needed for encountering patients as well as for working together with colleagues in teams. Staff members tend to lack intercultural competencies; awareness of intercultural competence has not been raised to its full extent, especially in rural areas.

Both in Greece, Italy and Spain a large percentage of the refugee and migrant population expresses that health services do not meet all of their needs, with the main reasons being long waiting times in hospitals, difficulty in communicating with health professionals, costs of care and medicines, the complexity of the system and lack of knowledge of available health services.

In addition to bureaucratic barriers, the refugee and migrant population often encounters language and cultural barriers. The difficulty in understanding the local language limits their ability to express their needs and requirements, and prevents them from understanding what services are available to them. The health system needs a reorientation of care through a model that responds to the experiences, expectations and health needs of a very diverse society (Karl-Trummer, Novak-Zezula & Metzler, 2010).

Intercultural Competence & Diversity Sensitivity

“Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is conceptualised as an individual’s ability to achieve their communication goal while effectively and appropriately utilising communication behaviours to negotiate between the different identities present within a culturally diverse environment” (Portalla & Chen 2010: 21). ICC comprises three dimensions, including intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect), intercultural sensitivity (affective aspect), and intercultural effectiveness (the behavioural aspect) (Chen & Starosta 1996).

They argue that the three are closely related but separate concepts. Where intercultural awareness represents the cognitive process a person goes through in his or her own and others’ cultures, intercultural sensitivity represents both the ability of an individual to distinguish between the different behaviours, perceptions, and feelings of a culturally different counterpart and the ability to appreciate and respect them as well (Chen & Starosta 1997). And finally, intercultural effectiveness deals with the ability to attain communication goals in intercultural interactions.

Intercultural sensitivity is one of the important dimensions for people who work or live in intercultural workplaces where the cultural differences occur. Bennett (1986) argues that intercultural sensitivity is related to interactants’ ability to transform themselves not only effectively but also cognitively and behaviorally from denial stage to integration stage in the development process of intercultural communication in order to



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have empathic ability to accept and adapt cultural differences as pointed out by Chen & Starosta (2000: 4).

Recommendations for policy makers, NGOs and institutions

The following recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system that recognizes and respects the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of the population it serves. Policy makers and NGOs play a crucial role in shaping these efforts to improve intercultural health issues.

Training for healthcare professionals: Invest in comprehensive training programs tailored to healthcare professionals, focusing on enhancing their cultural competence and communication skills. These programs should ensure that healthcare providers are well-versed not only in diverse cultural norms and beliefs but also proficient in overcoming language barriers for effective intercultural communication. The training should encompass understanding how cultural dimensions influence health-seeking behaviours, treatment preferences, and adherence to medical advice. EduOnMed's educational resources are available online on the project's webpage in English, Greek, Italian and Spanish, and can be used for the training programs (eduonmed.givmed.org). The curriculum offers a theoretical framework, but also a diversity toolbox for health professionals through five activities, also available online.

Community Engagement and Partnerships: Foster partnerships between healthcare institutions and community organisations, particularly those representing culturally diverse populations. Collaborate on health outreach programs, public health campaigns, and community-based healthcare services. Engaging community leaders and cultural liaisons can help bridge gaps in access to healthcare services.

Language Access Services: Prioritise language access services, including interpreters and translated materials, in healthcare settings. This is essential for ensuring that individuals with limited proficiency in the dominant language can access and understand healthcare information, participate in informed decision-making, and effectively communicate their health concerns.

Research and Data Collection: Support research into health disparities among different cultural groups. Collect and analyse data to identify disparities in healthcare access, outcomes, and experiences among various cultural and ethnic populations. Use this data to inform policy decisions, allocate resources, and develop targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Cultural Tailored Health Promotion: Encourage the development of culturally tailored health promotion initiatives. Recognize that health messaging and interventions should be culturally relevant, considering cultural norms and preferences. Tailoring health programs to specific cultural groups can increase their effectiveness in promoting healthy behaviours and early interventions.



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Cultural Competence in Mental Health: Recognize the importance of cultural competence in mental health services. Promote the inclusion of culturally competent mental health professionals and the availability of culturally relevant therapies and support for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. EduOnMed's educational materials, also, focus on the physical and mental health of refugees and migrants as the skills that the participants will acquire will be used to improve the refugees and migrant's wellbeing and will help their integration.

Preventative Care and Education: Emphasise preventative care and health education initiatives that consider the specific cultural needs and beliefs of different communities. Invest in culturally sensitive health education programs to raise awareness about common health issues and prevention strategies within these communities.

Equitable Access to Healthcare Resources: Ensure equitable distribution of healthcare resources, facilities, and services in culturally diverse areas. Address healthcare deserts and disparities in access to healthcare infrastructure, considering the specific needs of the local population.

Patient Feedback and Advocacy: Encourage patient feedback mechanisms and the establishment of culturally diverse healthcare advocacy groups. These groups can provide valuable insights into the healthcare experiences and needs of various cultural communities, helping to shape policies that improve healthcare equity.

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