ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN FROM AFGHANISTAN

SYSTEMATIZATION, BEST PRACTICES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UN WOMEN

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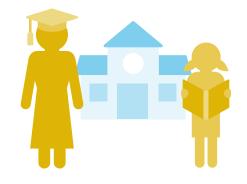**UN WOMEN**

2023

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I. INTRODUCTION

UN Women is committed to guarantee equality between men and women as beneficiary partners of humanitarian action. It supports other United Nations organizations through its inter-institutional coordination and leadership role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women plays its humanitarian role, providing coordination and leadership, technical experience, skills development, and evidence-based response.

UN Women Chile, through the programme Tu Oportunidad - Second Chance Education, has sought to develop a program for the economic empowerment and social and cultural integration of migrant and refugee women from Afghanistan. This multisectoral initiative was made possible through the inter-agency collaboration of UNHCR and ECLAC and the support of the Afghan-Chilean Cultural Institute Foundation and the Ascend Athletics Foundation as members of civil society[1].
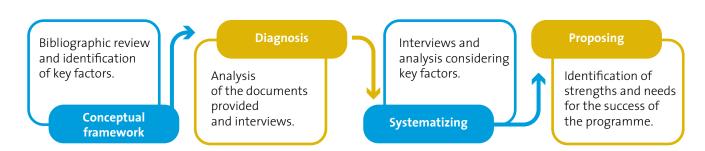
This document is based on the final report on the systematization of the processes developed in the Programme for the Economic Empowerment of Migrant and Refugee Women from Afghanistan that analyses the theoretical and methodological approaches used, and identifies the best practices and lessons learned.

This systematization was developed in phases, starting with the creation of a conceptual framework that provided an enriched vision of the critical factors for the success of economic empowerment programmes for migrant and refugee women. Based on this input, an analytical framework was created, leading to the development of interview guidelines, and identifying the key stakeholders. After the data was collected and produced, it was analysed according to the previous categories.

The objective of this work is to become a tool to contribute to the policy discussion, from evidence-based experience, so that the methodology and initiatives of future interventions support migrants and refugees in a comprehensive manner.

FIGURE 1. Phases of the systematization process.

Bibliographic review and identification of key factors.

Conceptual framework

Diagnosis

Analysis of the documents provided and interviews.

Interviews and analysis considering key factors.

Systematizing

Proposing

Identification of strengths and needs for the success of the programme.

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1 Initiative funded with the contribution of the Silicon Soccer Corporation.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN

Economic empowerment refers to a process through which women acquire skills, resources, opportunities, and control over their own economic well-being, which allows them to improve their autonomy, decision-making capacity, and participation in social and economic life (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2002). Women's economic, social, personal, and political empowerment is interconnected; this means that the positive changes that come from one of these dimensions in the lives of women will not be sustainable if the others are not addressed (Oxfam, 2017).

Academicians and professionals have developed several definitions and practical approaches for women's economic empowerment. There is consensus on the fact that empowerment may be an incremental process in the long-term that requires the creation of favourable structural conditions, that the context and experience matter, that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and that the identification of facilitators and supporting them can be

a fruitful approach in practice (Clingain, Jayasinghe, Hunt y Gray Meral, 2021).

Specialized literature has identified several barriers to migrant and refugee women's economic empowerment. The work of Gettlife and Khan (2020) on the restrictions for women's economic empowerment is especially interesting. They identify and divide the different types of barriers, mentioning the existence of access and agency barriers. Access restrictions are understood as externally imposed barriers or limits to access resources (financial, material, informational, educational, or legal) that women can use to promote their economic empowerment. Agency restrictions relate to social and psychological factors that limit a woman's ability to make and act on her own decisions about the economic activities in which she would like to participate and how she uses her resources (including her time, skills, and material resources). The following table presents those identified by the researchers:
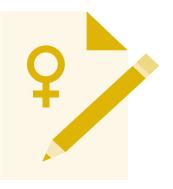

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TABLE 1: Restrictions on the economic empowerment of migrant and refugee women

Restrictions linked to access	Restrictions linked to agency
• Capital (entrepreneurship funds or work capital). • Legal situation, documentation, and the right to work. • Language skills and/or certifications. • Financial resources for education on their new jobs. • Studies recognition. • Access to information on training, market, and labour market opportunities. • Access to childcare. • Discrimination. • Market insecurity.	• Unpaid care work and other responsibilities at home. • Prioritizing the work of men and the opportunities for men at the expense of those for women. • Preferences of men and their families in terms of accessing a job. • Harassment and gender violence. • Decision-making autonomy. • Mental health and self-esteem associated with trauma and physical abuse experiences before and after the fleeing of refugees. • Resettlement intentions.

(Gettlife and Khan, 2020)

The recent research of *Kabir & Klugman (2019)* on the salary and labour gaps faced specifically by women refugees suggests the following main causes:

• Gender occupational segregation that keeps women in unqualified and underpaid sectors of the economy.

• Crossing of inequalities and discriminatory social norms at home and in society in general.

• Legal barriers for displaced populations to participate in the labour market.

• Concentration of women in the informal economy, with low salaries and without legal protection.

• Gender social and commercial networks to which women usually have less access.

• Lack of resources to promote women's economic empowerment in crisis situations.

Although it is considered that there are not any universal recipes to achieve the economic empowerment of women affected by crisis and displacement, specialized literature indicates that the following items are considered critical (*Clingain, Jayasinghe, Hunt, and Gray Meral*, 2021):

• Access to quality economic opportunities and stable income.

• Access to resources including information (including on rights), immigration, education, training, skills development, and financial education.

• Access to financial services.

• Access to social and financial networks.

• Security against violence, discrimination, and harassment, even in the homes, communities, schools, and work, and during movement/migration.

• Laws and policies that support the rights of displaced women affected by the crisis and gender equality, assets, property, companies, and work, as well as safe movement.

• Social and gender norms that acknowledge the contribution of women at home, in society, and the economy and that allow them to generate, use, and control resources.

• Acknowledgment and redistribution of unequal loads of unpaid domestic and care work.

• Collective action and meaningful participation in the decision-making process.

Evidence suggests that a fundamental pillar to reach economic empowerment is participating in formal labour and other activities that generate quality income for refugee women and their families and the host country's economy (Kabir and Klugman, 2019). However, it is clear that a more comprehensive approach is vital for a transformative change in women's lives, recognizing the multifaceted nature of empowerment (Clingain, Jayasinghe, Hunt, and Gray Meral, 2021).

A focus on the nuances is vital to overcoming stereotypes and stigma against women affected by displacement who are often considered "vulnerable and/or victims" or "notably resilient," which limits understanding the complex and various factors that shape their realities and preferences. Displacement experiences can be enormously varied (including the urban/rural location, the duration of displacement, and the available resources or opportunities), and the differences in power related to intersectional inequalities such as gender, age, race, caste, ethnic identity, faith, disability condition, and socioeconomic class (Holloway et al., 2019.)

This is why we must understand the specific context of migrant and refugee women from Afghanistan identifying the challenges and barriers that these women face.

MIGRATORY CONTEXT

After 40 years of war and a situation marked by the economic downturn and the increase in poverty, the people of Afghanistan faced an increased conflict after the withdrawal of international armed forces and the later takeover of the country by the Taliban in August 2021. As a result, it is estimated that there are more than 2.6 million Afghan refugees in the world, and almost 80% are women and children (UNHCR, 2021).

Afghan women and girls are the most affected by the new regime. There are serious concerns about the setback in women's rights and the restrictions on their participation in life and society, with impositions on education, the right to work, and the free movement of girls and women (OCHA, 2022).

Over the last few years, Afghanistan has experienced long-standing conflicts, a severe drought, and COVID-19. From the socioeconomic point of view, this has significantly impacted the country's economy and women's lives. 95% of Afghans do not get enough to eat, reaching almost 100% of households led by women (OCHA, 2022).

In the labour aspect, women in Afghanistan face significant barriers, such as gender discrimination and restrictive socio-cultural norms. In 2021, the percentage of women over 15 participating in the labour market reached only 23.3%, unlike men, with 77.1%. Afghan women face restrictions in their movement and access to economic opportunities due to gender norms and discrimination practices rooted in society (UN Women, 2020). Also, the political instability and the security situation in Afghanistan affected the capacity of women to access formal employment and generate income.

The gender gap in access to education is also considerable in Afghanistan. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNESCO, 2021), the gross enrolment rate in primary education between 2018 and 2020 for Afghan girls was only 83% compared to 127% for boys[2]. Also, the literacy rate of young Afghan women is low, where only 41.5% of women between the ages of 15 and 24 know how to read and write, compared to 71.2% of men (UNICEF, 2023).

Similarly, from a cultural perspective, gender norms and discrimination practices rooted in Afghan society, such as gender segregation and access to education and employment, as well as movement restrictions for women, also influence the economic situation of women. Over the last decades, the lives of women and girls have been significantly transformed in Afghanistan. Before this, a considerable number of Afghan women and girls attended schools and worked in several occupations and jobs in the public space. However, while the Taliban regime settled, women saw their lives trapped in violence and uncertainty (Sinha 2021).

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2 The gross rate of school enrolment can be higher than 100% because it includes students who are older or younger than the official age group.

Girls and women have been deprived of their fundamental right to education because, since 2021, they are not allowed to attend secondary school or higher education (UNESCO, 2023). In 2022, the Taliban banned mixed education in private and state universities (UNESCO, 2023). Under the previous Taliban regime, cases of forced marriage, sexual slavery, rape, honour killings, floggings and stoning, and large-scale corporal punishment were common (Shah, 2021). Currently, there is fear of history being repeated to the extent that the new regime expands its control on all fields of Afghan society and institutions.

Due to the above, Afghan women face an extremely adverse reality for their economic empowerment and general well-being, which has led to a massive migration. During 2021, 80% of people who suffered from forced displacement were women and children (UNHCR, 2021). Most have migrated to Iran or Pakistan (90%, according to UNHCR, 2021) and European countries. Only a few women have arrived in Latin America, where at least 29 women have been reported in the Chilean territory and who participated in the UN Women Chile Tu Oportunidad Programme.

INTERVENTIONS AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN

Several interventions and programmes have been implemented in different parts of the world to improve economic opportunities and strengthen the autonomy of migrant and refugee women. Nevertheless, the success of these interventions is not guaranteed and depends on a series of key factors. This analysis identifies and assesses the key factors contributing to the success of the interventions and economic empowerment programmes for migrant and refugee women.

Academic and technical literature highlights several key factors influencing the success of interventions and economic empowerment programmes for migrant and refugee women. Firstly, the importance of a comprehensive and holistic approach that addresses the different dimensions of economic empowerment is highlighted, including work training, access to funding, business support, and the promotion of women's leadership (ILO, 2017; UN Women, 2019). These programmes must be designed in an inclusive manner. They must be gender-sensitive, taking into account the cultural, social, and economic differences that migrant and refugee women face in their context of being in a host community (UNHCR, 2018).

Another key factor for the success of these interventions is the **active and meaningful participation** of migrant and refugee women in the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes of the programme. It is vital to involve women beneficiaries in the decision-making process and in setting their own goals and economic objectives that contribute to strengthening their sense of belonging, empowerment, and the sustainability of the interventions (UN Women, 2017; IOM, 2020).

In addition, creating **partnerships and collaborations** between different stakeholders such as governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and host communities is another key factor for the success of these interventions. The collaboration between different stakeholders allows to leverage synergies, resources, and knowledge and facilitates the creation of a favourable environment for the economic empowerment of migrant and refugee women (IOM, 2020; UNHCR, 2018).

Finally, the **adaptation and contextualization** of the interventions in the specific realities of migrant and refugee women is another key factor for its success. It is important to consider the specific characteristics of each context, such as the legal, socioeconomic, and cultural situation of migrant and refugee women, to ensure that the interventions are appropriate and effective (ILO, 2017; UN Women, 2019).

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES

The inclusion of refugee women in the work field can be influenced by the variety of socio-emotional variables that must be considered. First, **trauma and stress** related to forced displacement and the experience of being a refugee can have an impact on the mental and emotional health of women, which can affect their ability to look for a job and perform in the workplace (De Vroome and Van Tubergen, 2010.) Therefore, providing emotional and psychological support services may be necessary to help refugee women overcome these barriers.

Second, **cultural and language integration** is important for the success of refugee women in the workplace (Sharifian et al., 2020). The need to learn the local language and understand the cultural norms and the work systems to integrate effectively. This implies providing language and intercultural skills training.

Third, **gender discrimination** can be a problem in the workplace, especially if refugee women come from cultures that have traditional gender expectations, such as the case of Afghanistan (Sharifian et al. 2020.) It may be necessary to educate and raise awareness among employers and colleagues to ensure that refugee women have the same work opportunities and are treated in a fair and equal manner. Social restrictions that may make the participants drop out must also be considered, such as childcare or lack of family support due to patriarchal gender roles.

Finally, the **lack of social networks and community support** can also be a challenge for refugee women in the workplace (Gettliffe and Khan, 2020). Establishing programmes and support networks to help refugee women connect with other workers and establish workplace and community relations is important.

In summary, including refugee women in the work sphere requires careful attention to the socio-emotional variables that may affect their success and well-being.

UN Women / Pablo Sanhueza

LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN THE HOST COUNTRY

This is key to achieving social inclusion and economic empowerment for migrant and refugee women. A study on Afghan women in Australia (Sharifian et al. 2020) identified the barriers to learning English as a second language. These were grouped into three large categories: Pedagogical, socio-cultural, and internal. The following figure (Fig. 2) presents and provides details as follows.

FIGURE 2. The barriers faced by Afghan refugee women to learn English in an extraterritorial context are:

Pedagogical Barriers	Socio-cultural Barriers	Internal barriers
Language teaching approaches	Cultural expectations of Afghan women	Psycho-emotional barriers
Materials and curriculum	Family support	Illiteracy in the first language
Teachers		Age

We believe that it is necessary to dive deep into the **pedagogical barriers**. To do this, it is also necessary to provide evidence of the associated problems. The mentioned study claims that although Afghan women were motivated to learn English, the teaching approach did not promote their autonomy and independence; it focused more on grammar than on developing oral communication skills. This led to frustration in the participants because they said they needed to learn to speak fast to go to the doctor, do some shopping, and pay their bills (Sharifian et al., 2020). The focus of the evaluation also brought in problems since it was focused on identifying the competency level and not the progress, which created the feeling of not making progress since they did not acquire a high proficiency level.

A common comment was that the Afghan refugees felt discouraged when facing instruction texts that included too much vocabulary with which they were not familiar or that they had not learned, even if it had been taught in their classes. A possible disconnection was also noticed because the materials had been developed for Western migrants who knew the alphabet. It is also mentioned that the teachers did not know about the social and political context of forced evacuation that their students had experienced and their cultural and ethnic differences.

Finally, it is suggested that the teachers clearly define the objectives and goals of every class and activity and relate them to real-life situations to motivate the participants to learn. In other words, the greatest challenge for the participants when learning English was the resources available to them.

Although the barriers presented are related to the English language, based on the critical examination of the literature on migrant women's economic empowerment and social integration programmes, we believe these can be transferred to different aspects of the problem.

III. SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE PROCESSES DEVELOPED BY THE PROGRAMME

DESIGN

UN Women Chile starts working with women from Afghanistan in March 2022. This comes in the context of the programme Tu Oportunidad-Second Chance Education, whose purpose is to provide tools for women's autonomy and economic empowerment through information technologies and in collaboration with private and public institutions.

In this context, the design considered is related to the actions already developed in such programme. Such actions were aimed at being contextualized to Afghan women based on the information collected on them.

A characterization survey took place to collect information on the main needs and social and economic barriers of women, such as their Spanish language level and digital use level. Language was a problem in responding to the survey, due to which many women responded with the help of other members of the Afghan community. Twenty-five women in total responded to the survey.

The diagnosis showed that the language barrier is a key obstacle to the social integration of Afghan women in Chile to exercise their rights and find economic sources to address their needs. Therefore, the initiative's logic was to support women to address the barriers and information voids that hinder their economic empowerment through different components.

The first component of the initiative was an introductory Spanish course implemented by ECLAC to facilitate social and cultural integration in the host country with the active participation of 25 Afghan refugee women. Sixteen participants graduated successfully, certifying their basic Spanish level (A1) after completing more than 45 hours of classes. A second course was offered, where 10 participants graduated from levels A1.2 or A2. Both groups connected via WhatsApp, which acted as an important support network for the participants during the learning process and the different components of the initiative.

In parallel and in partnership with UNHCR, in-person legal advice sessions were conducted with the support of university legal clinics. Through this component, 19 participants and their families got to know each other, became part of Chile's social protection network, and received more information on their migratory status. The sessions were crucial to providing them with information on their rights and how to fully develop in the environment where they live. Also, UNHCR gave the participants tablets to have a device with Internet access.

Regarding digital literacy, 9 women participated and successfully completed the training in digital skills offered to improve their integration through technology tools. The course focused on developing digital competencies to look for jobs and work in Chile. The participants learned basic computer concepts, using the Spanish keyboard, Microsoft Word, and PowerPoint, filling in online forms, using emails, and browsing websites. This in-person course was adapted to the pace of each participant and their previous digital experience.

Regarding economic empowerment, the initiative provided free and personalized assistance for accessing the labour market in Chile. This included assisting in redefining work objectives, creating a CV, job searching strategies, and preparing interviews for 14 participants. In parallel, an awareness-raising strategy was developed with potential employers to highlight the benefits of hiring refugee women. This strategy included establishing a first contact with at least 7 companies. The participants not looking for a job but interested in establishing their own businesses were referred to initiatives focused on entrepreneurship thanks to Second Chance Education Programme's network with civil society organizations.

UNHCR / Felipe Concha

INSIGHTS

Regarding Spanish courses, the learning objectives related to the verbs to be and to have were achieved with the group with a higher language proficiency. On the other hand, learnings for the group with more difficulties were focused on literacy and language proficiency.

An additional outcome is the bond created where the teacher remains in contact with the participants via a WhatsApp group. She is the only one who keeps in touch with the participants to date.

Another result is the creation of incipient support networks that helped participants feel that someone was interested in them.

Similarly, progress was made in terms of getting to know the different institutions that are supporting refugees. An initial joint diagnosis process was established among institutions to identify the needs, urgencies, and interests for a comprehensive planning process. Progress was made regarding inter-agency networks, creating an inter-agency working group comprised of the Ministry of the Interior, UNHCR, and UN Women, among other community support organizations.

COMPREHENSIVE AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE PROGRAMME

Women's economic empowerment programmes must have a comprehensive approach, addressing the different dimesions of economic empowerment, including work training, access to funding, company support, and the promotion of female leadership (ILO, 2017; ONU Mujeres, 2019). These programmes must be designed in an inclusive manner. They must be gender-sensitive, taking into account the cultural, social, and economic differences that migrant and refugee women face in their context of being in a host community (UNHCR, 2018).

This is, their design must consider the factors that are key for female empowerment, both internal and external, seeking to create strategies to address them. This programme included strategies to overcome digital and language barriers, Spanish courses, work guidance, digital skills training, labour insertion support, and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE, PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, AND PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

The programme contributed to the economic empowerment of migrants and refugee women considering a gender perspective and acknowledging gender inequalities. It addressed the specific context of Afghan women, promoting their economic autonomy with a sensitive aproach to the Afghan culture and traditions.

Individualized support was provided through socio-labour trainers and facilitators who adapted to each participant's needs and levels of Spanish. The objective was also to establish close links, create support spaces, and listen to the participants. However, this implied significant challenges, such as language and cultural barriers, the low participation of users, and the socio-emotional difficulties that affected labour insertion.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

The programme established partnerships with organizations, such as the Ascend Athletics Foundation and UNHCR, to identify Afghan women and obtain support in the implementation process. Collaboration was also established with Fundación Emplea to provide labour guidance and contact with companies interested in hiring refugee women.

From the private sector and thanks to the collaboration with Microsoft, digital literacy courses were offered focused on job search and work performance. These partnerships are a key factor in creating awareness of the social condition of the refugee and migrant communities in Chile.

Similarly, the Afghan community was a key partner in achieving motivation, communication, and following up with the participants.

The programme promoted the creation of incipient support networks, both between participants and through the intersectoral work group comprised of different organizations involved in supporting refugees.

IV. RELEVANT FACTORS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION

Within the framework of this systematization, relevant factors for comprehensive intervention were identified across 5 main areas: institutional, pedagogical, sociocultural, economic and psycho-emotional.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Institutional factors have to do with the government support migrants receive to regularize their migratory situation and settle in the host countries. Programmes need to consider the refugees' specific situations and the regulatory frameworks facilitating their effective settlement. Some actions related to institutional factors are the support to regularize their migratory situation, support for the validation or reaccreditation of studies, favour a fluent link with government institutions that ensure access to education, health, housing, and justice, promote a positive immigration climate and for the existence of

anti-discrimination laws and equal opportunities in gender, nationality, among others.

UN Women's strategic partnerships such as the one with UNHCR supported women in regularizing their migratory situation. Similarly, the work with the Afghan community sought to favour the link with government institutions, serving as interpreters for the women for the procedures they needed to carry out. The Intersectoral Roundtable for Social Action of refugees and asylum seekers, led by the Ministry of Interior, raised issues regarding the recognition and validation of studies of migrants with the corresponding entities.

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PEDAGOGICAL FACTORS

This dimension is related to the learning approaches that are used in women's empowerment programmes for migrant women. It has been identified that it is necessary to develop a learning process based on the learning principles of adults, intercultural education, and trauma-sensitive pedagogy. Considering this, it is important to create programmes where learning methodologies stimulate the development of women's autonomy and independence, with content that responds to their urgent needs, that considers their cultural and language context, the development of networks, and that are sensitive to their socio-emotional needs.

To ensure the above, it is required to develop a culturally responsible pedagogy (Sleeter, 2011). This refers to the learning-teaching process that adapts to the cultural characteristics of migrant women, considering their norms, values, and traditions. This implies that the content and materials used can reflect their culture and specific context. For this, it is necessary to understand the cultural and language background of migrant women for whom the programme is intended.

In the context of the programme, efforts to adapt materials and content to the participants' culture were made; however, in some cases, these were not made on time since there was no previous knowledge of the culture from which these women came. Although efforts were made to train facilitators, the cultural gap was too wide to address without more substantial support. The need to have cultural mediators who knew the culture in depth and could support the adaptation of the materials became evident. This role was undertaken by a person from the Afghan community voluntarily, but it is necessary to include these roles formally.

On the other hand, promoting a trauma-sensitive pedagogy implies that the learning-teaching processes acknowledge and address the impact of trauma experienced by migrant women. This can be addressed by creating safe spaces, strengthening resilience, avoiding re-traumatization, and offering the proper emotional and psycho-social support. Regarding the programme, this could not be addressed from its design. All the people interacting with Afghan women said they tried to address this issue from their institution and by establishing support bonds. According to them, a safe space was created in the Spanish courses, where the participants even took the opportunity to ask about personal topics that were relevant to them. However, this was not enough, and neither should it be expected that this pedagogy is developed if the teachers have not undergone professional development processes focused on women's trauma and support. Training professionals who interact with the participants in this approach will help them understand the effects of trauma, use trauma-sensitive approaches, and identify signs of distress and traumatic reactions.

Regarding the acquisition of the host country language, it is suggested to address learning from a communication approach. This is centred on developing the skills to communicate with others to be part of social exchanges and to become part of the labour force. Methodologies such as role-play, group discussions, and conversation activities are suggested, creating language immersion processes. This method promotes confidence and collaborative learning, allowing migrant women to practice the language in real-life situations. When focusing on grammar rather than communicating, the participants become frustrated (Sharifian et al., 2020.)

SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS

Taking these factors into account helps understanding the context in which migrant women are and adapting the programme to their specific needs and realities. The literature suggests language and linguistic barriers, cultural norms, and gender roles in their countries of origin, religion, and spirituality, as well as community networks and social support, as key considerations.

The following are identified as facilitating actions in the socio-cultural area: developing programs with strategies for acquiring the language of the host country, addressing gender issues and violence prevention, increasing contact and support networks (connecting them with already established communities and offering mentoring programs), developing cultural competencies through social devices, raising awareness among employers and coworkers about immigrant culture, as well as creating partnerships and collaborations with private and public organizations.

Regarding language barriers, the importance of offering materials and resources in the participants' mother tongue and providing interpretation or translation services when needed is highlighted. It is also important to identify if there are literacy and language skills needs among the participants and address them.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

When implementing a programme for migrant and refugee women's economic empowerment, it is necessary to consider a series of economic factors that may affect their participation and achievements. It is vital to understand the financial situation and the economic needs of migrant women and adapt the programme to address their specific challenges based on this information. Some economic factors recommended to be considered by literature are the access or barriers to work opportunities, access to financial services, access to entrepreneurship funds or work capital, knowledge of labour rights, work training, and financial support.

Facilitating actions in the economic aspect when implementing programs include: providing support for job searching, work interviews, using third-party job placement organizations, ensuring the knowledge of the remunerations system and work rights, retraining for a new job, access to entrepreneurship funds and work capital, career training and planning without a gender bias, and promoting financial support while doing training, and internships.

The literature says that the programmes must address the barriers and challenges that migrant women may face when looking for a job or engaging in economic activities. This may include the lack of work experience in the new country, the lack of recognition of their skills and qualifications, the language or cultural barriers in the labour market, and employment discrimination. This implied that it may be necessary to provide work training, job searching support, entrepreneurship advice, and skills development opportunities to improve their labour perspectives.

PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL FACTORS

When implementing a programme for migrant and refugee women, it is essential to understand the psycho-emotional factors involved to ensure their mental and emotional well-being. These factors significantly impact the adaptation, participation, and success of migrant women in the programme. Some key psycho-emotional factors to be considered, according to the literature, are trauma and the mental health condition of migrant women, adaptation stress, self-esteem and empowerment, cultural identity, belonging, and self-expression.

Facilitating actions in the psycho-emotional aspect when developing programmes are access to wellness activities

(mindfulness, sports, etc.), addressing mental health with professionals in serious cases, developing religious spirituality, peer mentoring for well-being, leadership workshops to promote entrepreneurship and social participation and promoting self-knowledge and self-efficiency.

It cannot be denied that migrant women have experienced trauma before, during, and after their migration. Due to this, the programmes must consider the possible presence of trauma and promote a trauma-sensitive approach providing emotional support, access to mental health services, and referral to specialized professionals when needed.

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V. BEST PRACTICES

Based on information gathering, key informants highlighted the following best practices or elements that facilitated the programme's implementation process:

1. **Survey and creation of a preliminary diagnosis:** It is emphasized that it was necessary to characterize the participants, get to know them, and identify their needs. This is why a survey to collect information on Afghan women is valued, including their Spanish language level, studies, and digital skills, among others. This information allowed to identify immediate needs and design proper interventions. It is emphasized that it is necessary to continue strengthening the collection of information on the refugee and migrant communities because the initial information was insufficient to contextualize properly.

2. **Adapting on the go:** With the above and due to the difficulties encountered during the implementation and to identify the needs, the team prioritized contextualizing the strategies to the participants' daily lives and culture. Design, methodologies, and interventions adjustments were made to help overcome language and connectivity barriers.

3. **Articulation of inter-sector interventions:** Although it is mentioned that it is necessary to continue creating spaces to articulate efforts to support refugee and migrant communities in Chile; and that there is still a long way to go, it is acknowledged that progress was made regarding the conversations and dialogues established with the different sectors, highlighting the participation of the Afghan community, the Ascend Athletics foundation, ECLAC, and UNHCR in the programme.

4. **Education and training approach:** The programme offered Spanish courses to address the language barrier and digital literacy workshops to improve digital skills. Training tools were provided to contribute to women's economic empowerment and autonomy. Fundación Emplea highlights the in-person workshops as a key aspect of establishing bonds. This approach can be one of the programme's great strengths.

UNHCR / Felipe Concha

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to point out that stakeholders interviewed identified lessons that must be considered in future implementations. These lessons learned can provide valuable guidelines for future programmes and projects that seek to empower migrant and refugee women in similar situations. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that these lessons come from the information provided, and that could be extended with a more thorough evaluation and considering other factors specific to the programme.

Lessons learned:

1. Cultural awareness and personalizing interventions to understand and adapt to the participants' needs and cultural context.

2. Strengthening community networks because collaborating with representatives of the Afghan community and other organizations was a valuable partnership to create a more significant impact.

3. Having relevant and updated data to understand the needs and characteristics of the participants.

4. Flexibility and continuous adaptation of the programme's interventions based on needs and contingencies.

5. Develop and strengthen intersectoral collaborative partnerships to access more resources and support for the participants and extend the program's scope.

6. Generate a comprehensive approach that allows to address the needs of the participants and support them with the development of different skills crucial for economic empowerment. It is particularly relevant to include psycho-emotional support since the design stage of the programme.

7. Consider socio-emotional support from professionals with the proper tools and psychological experience. This is especially difficult when the language and cultural barrier is very high, and it is mentioned that it is necessary to move forward in finding different strategies.

8. It is necessary to consider that, in many cases, the participants live in contexts of violence and that the support provided must consider this aspect.

9. It is important to move towards a state-led strategy to address the needs of refugees.

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