

# Persons with Refugee Experiences Education Project – Interprofessional (PREP IP)

## Building on Partners' Experiences: Lessons Learned and Good Practices



October 8, 2022

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Persons with Refugee Experience Education Project – Interprofessional (PREP IP) is a partnership project between five universities and two organizations providing health care services to refugees and migrants, co-funded by Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union



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*The work in the PREP IP project builds on results and experiences from of previous projects within the partner organisations, calling for interprofessional and intersectoral strategies to ensure sustainable services for refugees. PREP IP crosses the boundaries of professions by targeting various rehabilitation professions, sectors, topics, countries, and cultures. Within the context of the current global refugee crisis, there is a need for interprofessional education for professionals working with refugees.*

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## Summary

In this work we analyzed experiences that the PREP IP project partners have gained in projects from 2013 – 2019. 15 projects related to working with refugees or migrants have been described. Of these 6 projects had an occupational therapy perspective, 3 projects had a physiotherapeutic perspective, and 6 projects were described as interprofessional. Most of the projects were focusing on education, while some were also directed to health care service. The projects were diverse, and all of them reported on benefit for various groups of stakeholders, or user groups, and a general experience is that such projects have the possibility to make a change. For proper implementation, four key aspects should be paid attention to. These are; user involvement, building partnerships, management and sustainability.

## Background and Methodology

The purpose of this report is to analyse and present partners' lessons learned and good practices in implementation of initiatives in the field of refugee and migrant health by documenting their experiences in previous projects. The report will be used to situate the PREP IP, guide its implementation, and inform the development of the interprofessional framework.

A mixed method approach was used to document partners' good practices and lessons learned in implementation of projects with refugees within the time period 2013 - 2019. Data was collected in a series of online partner meetings, by reviewing the project documents and in a survey completed by 15 individual team members. The PREP IP project team analyzed data by using the qualitative content analyses to identify lessons learned and key practices.

### Description of the projects

#### *General description*

The projects were diverse in terms of target groups, perspectives, focus and the overall orientation. The projects targeted different groups including refugees, migrants, students, teachers, and health care workers. The projects were implemented as partnerships including transnational and transdisciplinary network of partners such as universities, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations. 14 of 15 projects reached their objectives.

The projects mainly received public funding through regular funding for universities or health care services and external funding from European Union funding programs, such as Erasmus+. Some projects relied on voluntary work through NGOs, donations, and crowdfunding. The projects which were part of the curriculum or integrated in health care services received funding from the government or health insurance covered the related costs.

The projects had either an occupational therapy perspective (n=6), a physical therapy perspective (n=3), or an interprofessional perspective (n=6). Ten projects were educational, 4 were service projects and one was a research project.

#### *Projects with an occupational therapy perspective*

The projects with the occupational therapy perspective were either related to education (n=3), services (n=2) or research (n=1). The educational projects aimed at bringing students together with community organizations to develop an understanding of what person, environment, and occupation (PEO) means in meaningful occupations. In addition, the purpose of another project in this context was to show students the role of factors such as person, environment, and profession, which will facilitate the socio-

economically disadvantaged refugees to continue their work related to their occupation in the places they migrated. Another project's aim was to carry out meaningful occupations directly with refugees and migrants. One project was about "connecting with food", i.e., shared cooking and eating with refugees, students and lecturers. Health Care Information for Refugees in Hildesheim: A Collaboration between Occupational Therapy Students and Refugees. In the services group, things like sewing, woodwork and gardening were carried out. Another project described included Occupational Therapy referral for the recovery of various activities and participation. The research project was a feasibility study of school-based Occupational Therapy for children with experience in displacement.

### ***Projects with a physiotherapeutic perspective***

The projects with the physiotherapeutic perspective can be divided into the field's education (n=2) and services (n=1). Both educational projects were about the creation of online training programs: one to build up or improve the competencies of physiotherapists in the care of refugees in rehabilitation and the second for preparing physiotherapists to deliver services for refugees. The services project is about direct physiotherapy work with refugees in a camp.

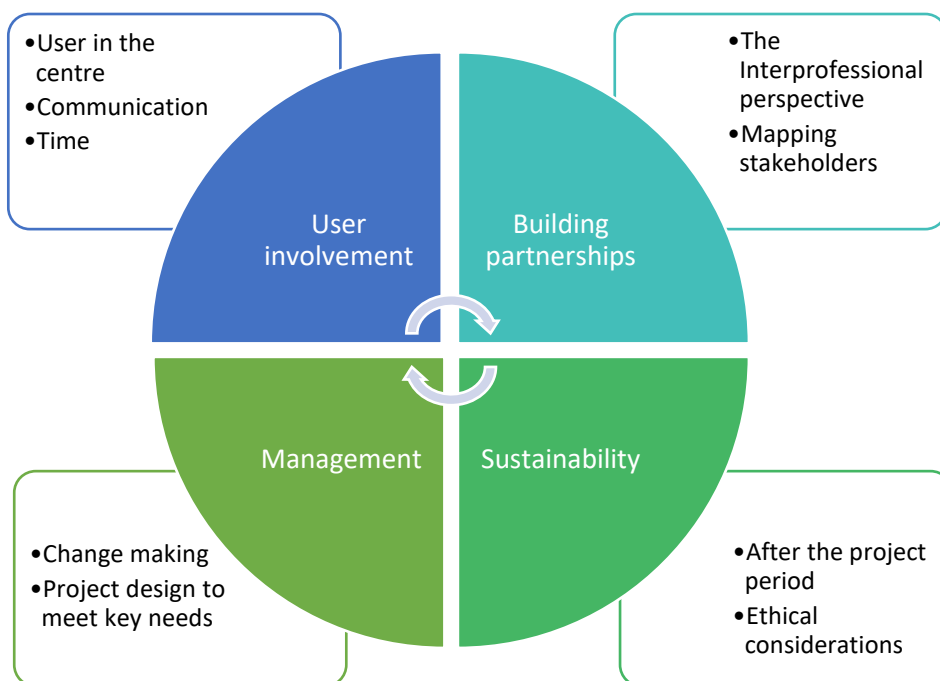
### ***Projects with an interprofessional perspective***

Most of the projects with an interprofessional perspective were in the educational field (n=5), only one was in the service field. One of the educational projects was about interdisciplinary cooperation in psychosocial interventions. Three projects were about learning the needs of refugees regarding health care information as well as the concept health literacy and how increasing it, and how health professionals can cooperate with institutions to provide adequate health information to refugees. One project was about the technical advice to staff on site and online concerning cerebral palsy and others. The project in the services field was about daily work in school and private practice with parents and children with a refugee background. The aim was finding solutions for mobility and participation.

## **Results**

### **Key elements for project implementation**

From the projects we identified four key elements central for implementing projects in the field of refugee and migrant health. These are 1) user involvement, 2) building partnership, 3) management and 4) sustainability, Figure 1. These elements are discussed further in the following section.



**Figure 1: Overview of key elements and subtopics for project implementation of projects involving refugees and migrants.**

## User involvement

### *User in the centre*

User involvement is a central aspect in most projects, also in the projects described in this report. We want to emphasize two main points; ensuring to meet the need of the user groups and promote active participation. Activities can be well-meant, but they have little effect if they don't target a felt need. Special attention should be paid to educational projects as they aim to meet multiple objectives for different groups, namely meeting educational needs of students while providing valuable services to refugees. It is also important to pay attention to the user group competence, for example in use of digital tools, and that proper training is included in the process if needed. Close contact with individuals and families can be a useful way to build necessary competence on the needs, but also visiting the refugees' countries of origin, can if possible be of high value.

Active participation is important for the creation of a safe space where the individuals feel valuable, which is important for the motivation to be involved in activities. Some partners have experience in working with refugees in refugee camps. This is a good example on strengthening the role of students and the migrant community, it also reduced the workload of the personnel in the camp, and it helped understanding the challenges refugees face.

## ***Communication***

Most of the projects faced difficulties with communication, and major challenges were language barriers and proper communication with multiple stakeholders. This can have a large effect both on understanding needs and proper project implementation. On the other hand, many projects - and especially those organizing activities for students, refugees and health care personnel can be important learning environment for building communication strategies for those involved.

A successful use of interpreters demands planning and appropriate access. Where the access to trained interpreters is scarce, it challenges both communication between the stakeholders and implementation of the project. Still, it might promote some well worth creativity in use of sign- and body language that might work for its purpose on some occasions. Still, it is important to be aware of this and take responsibility for safe communication strategies.

Communication between all project stakeholders and the regional authorities are essential for good project implementation. One important aspect of this is to clearly communicate project objectives to all stakeholders, this helps the stakeholders to be more compatible with the project objectives. This involves providing training about the project materials and dissemination plans. This is not new, but we experience that it can be challenging to provide sufficient information throughout a long project period and when the project group contain several different stakeholder/user groups.

## ***Time***

Building safe and strong relations takes time. It is therefore important to design the project so that it is possible to take the necessary time in the given context. A prolonged approach might be particularly valuable when working with vulnerable groups, such as torture survivors or with topics that are commonly viewed as being taboos. It is also important to schedule for having necessary time for assuring good communication, which might involve the use of interpreters.

## **Building partnerships**

### ***The interprofessional perspective***

The need of interprofessional perspective and collaboration have been emphasized in several projects. For higher education institutions (HEI) there is a clear need to collaborate with stakeholders outside academia and to bridge the gap between HEIs and organizations providing services, such as local and international NGOs and service providers. Creating opportunities for and mobilizing the expertise outside the HEIs and willingness to share and contribute were very positive experiences. Such projects can be a very important learning environment for health care students in seeing their expanded role within the society and for individual patients/users.



One challenge can be to manage to engage people in the network who are interested in being involved, a solution might be expanding project participants to share the burden. However, a clear distribution of workload and work assignments must be established beforehand for this to work.

### ***Stakeholder mapping***

A close collaboration is important for ensuring that HEIs build competence that is needed within the society, it also provides engagement which is a core element for successful implementation. In this, a proper stakeholder mapping is central. All stakeholders important for the project should be identified. Stakeholders can be direct users, someone who gives the project input, someone needed for performing specific tasks, and even those who have the potential of inhibiting implementation of the project. Note that this might change during a longer project period.

## **Management**

### ***Change making***

Management is an important success factor for projects. This involves good and clear communication of implementation plan and facilitation of teamwork. Throughout the project period, contexts and needs can change, this demand flexibility and that the project leader is competent and experienced. The confidence on place in the project impacts the implementation process of that project. Project management is also about being an entrepreneur, starting projects also when funding is not in place (do what you can do). It is advisable to be "the creator of change" to deal with the difficulties encountered in the projects. At the same time, it is necessary to be passionate about the realization of the project and to realize its importance. Be open for new ideas that can positively impact the project.

### ***Project design to meet key needs***

One important experience is that professionals can get too caught up in their projects and tasks that the user needs become neglected. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the human aspect of such interactions so that there is no exploitation of individuals in search of data and further knowledge. This is a responsibility that also lies on the project management. The challenge of time allocated for the project and the workload for individual team members can get high and often, project work is an add-on to everything else. For several projects, the importance of providing enough time to achieve the desired outcomes from the projects was emphasized. In designing projects, pay attention to the project implementation period and human resources available, and that this corresponds with the desired outcomes.

## Sustainability

When designing and implementing a project it is important to consider what happens after the project period. Here, evaluation of the user groups is essential. Bonds and relations are made in projects and if the project involves treatment, this can be difficult to follow up. When working on-site the involvement of the project team can disturb the regular practice. This points back to a proper user involvement, communication, and the importance of having a good understanding of all stakeholders involved in the project.

In projects involving cooperation with several institutions or individuals, maintaining all project partners in the most active manner, and ensuring continuity of communication has a positive impact on the sustainability of projects. Project design should include such coordination. For HEIs, emphasis should be placed on organizing projects in the curriculum in accordance with the necessary requirements. By setting up a basic structure in which students and lecturers can work together, projects can be included in a more productive and sustainable way.

## Conclusions

Projects targeting migrant and refugee populations can provide a well-received support. A fundamental aspect is to keep the user in center and pay attention to the different, and sometimes, contradictory needs of the various user groups. Projects involving multiple stakeholders from different sectors can be fruitful learning environments and we advise developing interprofessional projects. Special attention should be kept on using time and building safe spaces to ensure active participation of all users / stakeholders. It is also of high importance that the project group has a plan for how to end the project or how to follow up individual participants after the project period. This should be clearly communicated both within the project group and to users / stakeholders. Such projects have the force to make a change and project groups to be changemakers.