



On Refugees Needs: Italian Report from the Qualitative Questionnaire

Ferrari Lea, Teresa M. Sgaramella, Ilaria Di Maggio and Laura Nota

University of Padova

This report provides the view of both experts and lecturers, that is the needs of professionals from the side of those who everyday face complex requests and those who are entitled of providing education and training both for the professionals of the future and those who search for a deeper understanding of their professional role.

Given the specificity of the Italian context which is characterized by a high variability in the needs and requests of migrants and refugees, it can help providing a glance of the main trends that characterize career counseling for migrants and refugees in Europe.

Participants

As regards the Italian experts, 6 of them were involved. All of them have a master degree in psychology (n=5) or education (n=1). They also attended a post graduate master course in career counselling at the university of Padova. Age ranged from 30 to 47 years and they experience with migrants lasts from one to five years. All of them are working in the North of Italy and are involved in career counselling projects for migrants and refugees implemented by private organizations that are founded by and collaborate with public administration.

As regards the Italian lecturers and researchers, 5 of them were involved. All have a master degree in psychology (n=5). Two of them also attended a post graduate master course in career counselling at the University of Padova. Their age ranges from 28 to 70 years and their experience with migration topics lasts from one to ten years. All of them are involved in

research and teaching activities related to career counselling or social inclusion and health for migrants and refugees.

Methodology

As regard the experts, they were contacted by telephone in order to describe them the aims of the project and the research modalities, then the questionnaire was sent by e-mail. After the analyses of the collected answers, a first draft of the report was sent to all of them asking to add comments, suggestions and changes. Participants thank the researchers for the work done and asserted this work enriched their awareness about their strengths and needs. Only one comment was added. Results of the conducted analyses are here reported.

A content analysis of the collected answers was done following the suggestions provided by Hill et al., (2005). Two researchers of the team first independently analyzed interviewee responses to determine categories for each question. The two judges then met together, in order to present each other the identified categories, with the aim of analyzing their extent of agreement/disagreement and of reaching a consensus in drawing up a single category list. This list was then presented to a third researcher, together with any doubts the judges had had, all of which were then discussed until a consensus on the categories was reached. Once the final category list had been prepared, the two judges individually codified each participant response. These coding were then re-examined by the two judges together and then with the research consultant in order to reach a final consensus.

Report of the answers provided by Italian experts

1. What are main or typical concerns refugee consultants bring into settings of career guidance and counselling (CGC)?

As regards the first question that aims to list the main or typical concerns refugee consultants bring into settings of career guidance and counselling (CGC) answers referred to two main domains. In the domain we labeled as *'intraindividual weaknesses and characteristics of migrants and refugees'* Italian experts listed the main barriers due to the complex condition

of deprivation, poverty, low levels of education and individual psychosocial difficulties that negatively impact the life of this people. More specifically they included, first of all, limited economic resources, worsening and motivating job search (n=3), than limited knowledge of labour market (n=2); limited knowledge of habits of the hosting country (n=2); limited education, language and informatics (n=2); difficulties in expressing personal educational and work history, in highlighting competences, skills and expectancies hence difficulties in passing examinations when needed (n=2), and finally, behavioral problems (n=1).

The domain of '*external threats*' refers to the barriers that migrants and refugees could find in the Italian context. Specifically, one of the experts questioned the skills in CGC of counselors emphasizing their difficulties in developing support relationships and their limited ability to transfer a deep understanding of refugees and migrants' problems (n=1).

2. What would you wish to learn or train to help you tackle counselling topics and challenges in CGC settings with refugees like

As known, this question included many domains to be discussed.

As regards **the knowledge gap for consultants and counsellors (respective educational system, professions, labour market, ...)** the answers refer to three main domains. The first focuses on the '*educational system across the countries*'. Almost all of the responders referred to the limited knowledge of the educational system in the countries of origin of migrants and refugees as well as the similarities and differences between the two systems. According to this, Italian experts underscored the necessity of better knowing the modalities for recognizing qualifications and diplomas, the service that are in charge of this, but also of having an idea of the learned competences and skills that could be useful in our context (n=5).

The second domain refers to the '*assessment tool*'. Experts in fact mentioned the necessity to know better tools for assessment and intervention (n=4). Specifically they highlight the need of becoming more competent in using narrative modalities that allow them to expand the migrants and refugees' concept of work, study and leisure time. At this regard one of the respondents reported the importance of discuss '*the origin of the meaning of work from travaj, meaning fatigue, as well as the concept of work as referring to the place where we*

spend most of our time and of our life. It cannot be considered as consuming physical and mental energies but also as a place of nurture and nourishment’.

The third domain refers to the importance of *‘European and cross cultural approaches to people life’*. Two experts reported the necessity of knowing more about services capable of providing information on the national and European work context. One counselor reported the necessity of a multicultural approach to wellbeing.

As regards **the foreign language as a means of counselling (in one-to-one settings and in groups)** all the answers refer to *‘communication issues’*. Almost all of the experts underscored the importance of speaking and communicate directly with migrants and refugees without mediators and interpreters. The language that they listed are English, France and Spanish. Moreover they emphasized the necessity of knowing a specific lexicon related to work and job descriptions (n=5). According to this, one counselor explained the importance of knowing how career guidance and counseling is provided across the world and in the countries of origins of migrants and refugees. The aim is *‘not only provide a literal translation of vocational and guidance but having a common understanding that facilitates communication and stimulates the reflexivity on the meanings’*. At the same time they emphasized the necessity to increase their skill on conducting career counseling with interpreters and mediators.

As regards **the language as prerequisite for the integration into the educational system and into the labour market** experts referred to the importance for their work to learn about a variety of aspects related to *‘language learning processes’*. They mentioned the necessity to know what kind of Italian language courses are provided (n=1), be aware of possible barriers that obstacle the new language learning process (n=1) and, consequently, to know specific strategies that they can use to empower and value efforts during the language learning process (n=2). They also mentioned the necessity to know how to assess learning of both oral and written language (n=1) and how to conduct group activities useful to improve oral and written language (n=1).

As regards **the access to the educational and vocational system and to the labour market** Italian experts ask for more training that focuses on knowledge of the systems from diverse perspectives in order to *‘facilitate accessing to education and work’*. More specifically they

emphasized the necessity of more knowledge about laws, contractual rules and recruitment tools (n=3) as well as a knowledge of useful services (n=3). Half of them also expected to know better barriers to access and use services as well as the strategies to simplify and make understandable the systems to de people (n=3). At this regard for example one expert asserts *'how to make it easy to understand the opportunities offered by the educational system'*. One counselor also asked for a specific training to improve his knowledge of strategies for valuing personal skills and make wider the range of people career option (n=1). As regards **the recognition of foreign qualifications**, Italian experts asked for more knowledge on *'services and procedures'*. Specifically they would like to know more on local services responsible for qualification recognition (n=5) and to be trained on procedures for qualifications' recognition (n=4). The importance of disentagling the relevance and opportunity of persecuting on a previous choice or to addressing and work for a new one is also addressed (n=1).

As regards **discrimination and traumatisation** Italian experts asked to be trained in order to better support their clients. In the first domain answers included refer to *'acquire knowledge and strategies that could help them in supporting individuals in their career when they have to face the many challenges, discriminations and traumatic experiences that the condition of migrant and refugees involves'*. This includes having knowledge and skills to help people recognize and develop their resources, to promote their self-determination and to cultivate more decent career goals (n=4). At this regard one expert asserted *'I am interested in deepening discrimination especially the veiled and undeclared one, how to help people recognize and manage it. How to support self-determination and endure not decent work by cultivating more dignified desires and goals'*. Experts also mentioned the importance of a basic knowledge on psychosocial aspects of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorders, on constructs related to discrimination as stereotypes, barriers, inclusion issues as well as strategies to provide a more effective career help in these situation. They also pointed out the necessity to know services that offer a specific psychological help and how to persuade people to take advantage of them.

In a second domain there are *'other knowledge and skills of professionals'* that do not require a relationship with the clients. Experts mentioned the skills of networking with other

professionals in order to develop a common inclusive view and suggest effective delivery (n=3), the knowledge of the main migration issues and contextual specificity of countries of origin (n=2), the knowledge of the main Charters and International Conventions on Human Rights (civil, economic, social and cultural) (n=1).

As regards **assessing clients` potential and empowerment** answers highlighted the necessity of *‘theoretical and practical knowledge’*. Italian experts would like to be trained about theoretical approaches they could refer to (n=3) as well as to have assessment tools that could be used with diverse groups and ideas on how to adapt existing tools without reducing their psychometric requisites (n=4). One expert for instance mentioned *‘simplifying language, making more explicit concepts which in their culture do not exist or have different meaning’*. Also intervention strategies to promote empowerment were mentioned (n=1).

As regards **the supportive measures and labour market schemes** answers refer to the *‘knowledge that career counselors should have to better perform their tasks’*. Counselors would like to be trained on diversity management and inclusion issues and also to acquire civil economy notions (n=2). More knowledge about projects active in the country aimed at facilitating welcoming, inclusion and supports (n=2) was mentioned as well as knowing rules and norms that should be followed to facilitate the access (n=2). At this regard on expert mentioned the importance of taking care of his own knowledge in order to *‘transmit correct ad updated knowledge’*.

3. What other topics would you wish to be addressed in tuition and training for refugees` counsellors?

For the Italian experts a training course should address two main domains. In the first, *‘theoretical knowledge’* they listed theories and approaches they could refer to in their activities. They mentioned Life Design and Inclusion Models, and their use in specific contexts of actions (n= 3). Explicit reference was made here to research data, experiences and also *‘basic knowledge of cultural anthropology and culture-specific discomfort’* (n=1) was reported. In the second, *‘assessment and intervention strategies’* they explicitly refer to qualitative and quantitative procedures for assessment and intervention. They for example listed techniques for interviewing migrants and refugees (n=1), how to recognize traumatic

experiences and signs to keep under attention (n=1), useful strategies and support services available in case of need (n=1). One experts also asked for tools useful in assessing the efficacy of actions proposed in everyday practice (n=1).

Report of the answers provided by Italian Lecturers

The version of the Qualitative Questionnaire proposed to this group addressed to large extent similar issues.

1. What kind of tuition or training would help students of career guidance and counselling tackle the following topics and challenges in their later work for refugees?

Please give your answers referring to content as well as to didactics.

As far as **knowledge gap** is concerned, questions focus on the kind of tuition or training would help students of career guidance and counselling tackle the following topics and challenges in their later work with refugees. Answers are required referring to content as well as to didactics.

As regards *content*, answers focused on the need of deepening knowledge of cross-cultural models in analyzing relevant themes such as developmental trajectories in adolescence, educational systems, and representations of work (n=3). With the same emphasis they address the relevance of developing knowledge on stereotypes related to *the world of work* which can negatively affect career design and on specificity within the different cultures and those more frequent in Italy as of people that have other ideas and stereotypes related to work (n=3), especially those related to work (n=1).

As regards *didactics* more interactive modalities are proposed (n=2), as a model of the position counselor should undertake with their clients (namely *get and give*). *Specifically, one participant mentioned the relevance of moving from abstract knowledge to concrete competencies*. "In this way, working on a skill-promotion plan, the gap of knowledge can be avoided at least in some instances" (n=1).

As regards **the foreign language as a means of counselling** all the answers refer to two distinct aspects. On one side they underscored the importance of *increasing consultants' language skills* (n=2), for which more specifically a participant mentioned Arabic and French.

Besides given the diversity of languages spoken by migrants and refugees in the Italian context, 2 participants underlined the relevance of overcoming these differences and stressed the opportunity of “building useful strategies for that goal beyond the sharing of the same language” (n=1) by *sharing basic communication codes* (n=1). On the other side, participants reported the difficulties emerging in *referring to intermediate figures/professionals* involved only for communication purposes, and suggested the usefulness of providing training on counseling issues and professional design to individuals sharing the same culture of refugees (n=1) so that they can more effectively support counselor in counseling session (n=1).

As regards **the language as prerequisite for the integration into the educational system and into the labour market** some suggestions came from participants as related to relevance of supporting development of Italian language amongst refugees and migrants with courses soon after their arrival in the country (n=2) and support them along the guidance phases (n=2). Additionally, they suggested to integrate them with modules on resources available in the area, both formal and informal (n=1) and on modalities to refer to them (n=1), thus underlining the specificity and relevance of taking care of communication besides supporting development of skills in the Italian language.

As regards **the access to the educational and vocational system and to the labour market** some points clearly emerge from the answers: the need of *strengthening the idea of networking* between services and associations that can offer opportunities or contacts to intercept employment opportunities (n=1), increasing knowledge about legal aspects and laws (n=2). One participant underlined the relevance of adopting an approach aimed at providing them the same opportunities either in education and training thought of for Italian (n=1).

As regards **the recognition of foreign qualifications** the need of a deeper “*knowledge of laws and recognition procedures*” currently available is underlined by 3 participants, besides a detailed and adherent “*knowledge about educational systems in the countries of origin*” (n=2), starting from the most represented countries (n=1).

As regards **discrimination and traumatization**, the need of specific education and training in underlined (n=4) dealing more specifically with development of *psychological skills* on how

to establish supportive relationships (n=2) and of *knowledge about services and referrals* addressing specific psychological issues (n=2). In order to promote inclusion processes one participant suggested also the relevance of promoting skills about planning and creating meeting opportunities between migrants and community members aimed at fostering the idea of *“migrants as resource available to the territory, focusing the attention on contribution and value that the immigrants can represent for the community”*.

As regards **assessing clients` potential and empowerment**, from the answers three levels of suggestions can be identified. The first deals with the need of *referring to recent accredited theoretical models* (n=1), *“without distinguishing between Italians and migrants”* (n=1). In this historical moment where there is an emerging tendency to parceling and categorizing, it seems particularly relevant adopting approaches that emphasize equity and inclusion and could be a useful framework for many groups of people. The second is related to the choice of a positive approach, where a space is given to resources, in particular to psycho-social resources of the immigrant (n=1), to self-esteem (n=1) but also to prejudice management. A third one is related to qualitative assessment procedures. Here the relevance of using interactive modalities in the assessment (n=1) as well as narratives facilitate the emerging of previous formal and informal skills, of which migrants often do not have awareness" (n=1) were mentioned. Finally, the relevance of referring to the most recent European guidelines available was mentioned. One participant, in fact, mentioned the documents and guidelines available as a result of European projects, namely *“the NICE Guidelines and documents, as common background and starting point for further steps”*.

As regard **the supportive measures and labour market schemes** answers referred to the need of adopting non special measures, conveying differences in the approaches and goals (n=2) Access to labor market is related to knowledge about of work market, hence this knowledge should be developed to help individuals *“face requirements* (n=1) and benefit from possibilities offered by the hosting country (n=1).

2. What other topics would you wish to be addressed in tuition and training for refugees` counsellors?

As regards **other topics** participants would like to add to tuition and training courses, they addressed two main domains. First of all, they propose to analyze positive models as "virtuous cases of refugee management, so that we can reflect and learn more about possibilities of intervention (n=2) and determinants of successful actions (n=1), together with a functional analysis of challenging situations in order to provide a guiding method to face complex situations (n=2).

A second topic to be addressed in these courses should be knowledge of the monitoring process and skills relevant to provide consultants supports in their actions (n=1) but also to work on stereotypical ideas which can limit the effectiveness of the interventions.

Additionally, two participants, addressed the issue of damages and deficits following dramatic experiences they have lived in their countries and the long and unsafe journeys they go through before arriving in Italy, thus suggesting the need of education and training on disability issues, which means both developing knowledge on advanced models and approaches to disability as well as assessment procedures and effective actions to value their skills and limit the possible barriers to inclusion.

Furthermore, one participant underlined the relevance of paying attention to unaccompanied refugee minors, both for the increasing numbers of these children and adolescents and for the relevance in terms of long term articulated and promising career counseling and vocational guidance projects which can be constructed with them. This in turn poses requests in terms of contents to be addressed in formal education and training.

Finally, the importance of creating and supporting a network of professionals was also underlined (n=1).

Final Comments and suggestions

Some key points, among several interesting elements, emerge from the analysis that underscore the urgency of a high qualified training that calls for an assumption of responsibility from higher education institutions.

Professionals and lectures interviewed underlined the need of developments in knowledge related to:

- the most recent theoretical models, as well as already existing guidelines in career counseling and vocational guidance, to which refer to with the aim of providing high quality interventions that abandon simplistic matching paradigm and profiling purposes;
- interdisciplinary themes in order to develop knowledge about the complexity of issues and critical aspects to take into account (namely laws and regulations, as well as sociological, anthropological, and psychological aspects).

This second aspect should be addressed from a general and European level and from a national and local level in order to highlight rights and duties, services and networks relevant for concrete and appropriate actions, and programs' developments.

At the same time, participants underscored the need of qualitative and quantitative assessment procedures and strategies, based on a positive approach and useful in:

- supporting professionals in facing the challenge of addressing increasingly diverse clients and becoming competent in personalizing their activities that cannot be anymore standardized;
- overcoming barriers deriving from linguistic and cultural differences but also
- addressing clients' subjectivity, age specific needs, identifying and valuing personal resources and experiences from their personal history.

Cultural competence, awareness, sensitivity, and guidelines for behaviors through formal courses and practical experiences are then suggested by both groups thus supporting the necessity of an effective building and benefiting of professional networking for achieving career goals with their clients as well as for their own work performance and satisfaction. It could include, for example, finding other experts that could counsel them as professionals as well as could help directly the clients for issues that CGC are not trained to or licensed to. One particularly tricky aspect concerns traumatization and mental health issues that required specific psychotherapeutic training to be managed. Also adhering to a code of ethics promoted by accredited national or international associations seem to be a point to consider to guarantee a CGC of quality. From our point of view the complexity of career and life issues of migrants and refugees emerged both from the first report on the literature review and here from the opinions of privileged testimonies allow us to say that a post

graduate master training is recommended if we want to increase the probability of changing the already written story endings of these people.

Finally, it seems worth mentioning the notion of inclusion referred to by some persons interviewed which moves the final goal of these professionals of the present and of the next future beyond the level of access to the labour market, from placement to an active participation and inclusion of migrants and refugees. This means, also for career guidance and counselors who work with migrants and refugees, choose to facilitate their personal flourishing in our society in a journey where job and work are just one step but also to enlarge their own visions by adopting contextual way of working. This, in turn requires them being capable of and developing effectiveness in approaching and interacting with employers, colleagues, significant people in the community and policy makers with the aim of finding allies, co-constructing projects and undertaking actions to make society more inclusive, equal and decent.

Suggested references

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