

# Title: Developing New Approaches to Mentoring through the Participation of Migrants and Refugees

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Number of participants: 5

## Sequence of content:

The facilitator started the workshop by introducing herself and then letting the participants introduce themselves and the organisations they are involved in. She then gave a short input on “Landing Bridges for Refugees”, an organisation based in Hamburg, Germany. The workshop continued with a group discussion about different approaches for working with refugees in mentoring programmes.

## The toolbox developed by “Landing Bridges for Refugees” and special approaches to organise mentoring programmes with refugees:

During the workshop the toolbox by “Landing Bridges for Refugees” has been presented. “Landing Bridges for Refugees” is a project seeking to support volunteers in their role as mentors in the many different mentoring programmes for refugees in Hamburg. The toolbox contains different materials on mentoring programmes with refugees. The toolbox contains for example:

- checklists you might need while being involved in mentoring relationship,
- reports on the impact of mentoring,
- structures and project management tools for mentoring programmes as well as
- a topic-orientated collection of links to various useful website and contact addresses in Germany.

Landing bridges has a “3 Step programme” consisting of 1) information and consultancy, 2) qualification and networking and 3) final project funding.

The facilitator presented a “special approach” for mentoring refugees: former refugees (mentees) work together with the project coordinator at the organisational level. Therefore the organisation has:

- translation on a linguistical and cultural level available,
- a contact person for the volunteers in case of misunderstandings between the mentor and the family,
- a contact person for refugees who they can identify with as part of the organisation,
- the opportunity to help someone to gain intercultural competence, increase their self-confidence and improve their language skills.

## Three main outcomes from the group discussion:

Furthermore, **mentoring refugees is a very successful tool for integrating people into society**. Participating in a mentoring programme is a possibility to learn the language and be involved in society, for example by gathering information about the culture. For the mentoring match it is necessary to find out what is most important in the current situation of the refugee – language, internship, friendship, etc.

**Mentoring a refugee is a two way relationship** as the mentor gets a deeper understanding of a lifestyle different from their own and has the benefit of having intercultural face to face encounters while friendships develop. Both, the mentor and mentee, have the opportunity to network.

Additionally, the group discussed about **how to include refugees in mentoring programmes, for example, in the role of the mentor.** Families/People with similar experiences can be matched. Hence, families/people that are already residing longer in the specific country will be matched with new arriving families/people to guide them through the process. Starting off projects like this could be a lot easier if one person highly involved in the community or part of the community would distribute the information about the project and spread some excitement. This would open the doors for other community members to get interested and join the project.

### **Results of the Workshop:**

Volunteers need support throughout the mentoring process. As for now there are only organisations offering training for mentoring children, but **volunteers mentoring adults are also in need of training** because of various reasons: While mentoring can be very satisfying, it can also be exhausting, because the volunteer can be overwhelmed easily by the deep issues some of the refugees carry with them. Being a mentor also means facing existential needs, for example the risk that the refugees is forced to leave the country again. This is, of course, highly stressful for the mentor and the mentee. A growing group of volunteers are troubled finding their role as a mentor and start to act like a mother figure or like other family members. The mentors take on too much responsibility and dominate their mentees despite the fact that they are just trying to help. Instead of helping the mentees to be able to help themselves, they try to help fast and effective without their mentees being equally involved in decisions.

Another result of the workshop was related to **the challenge of mentoring programmes finding enough mentors.** The participants discussed the idea that mentoring programmes searching for volunteers could cooperate with universities to get students of social work studies. They could do their mandatory internships as mentors. The organisation would get new mentors, while the mentors would be offered good training opportunities by the organisation.

### **Main statements highlighting the results of the discussion:**

“Mentoring organisations have to be connected with each other; a mentoring network, especially for small cities and rural areas, should be created.”

“Families should be more aware of child protection issues and volunteers should not take over parental roles – families are really trustworthy, almost too much at some point. Parental involvement to a certain extent should be made a condition for a mentoring relationship.”

“For a successful involvement of families in mentoring programmes we need to find out who the key figures in the family/community are and who makes the decisions at first. After gaining their trust and getting them involved, a “snowball” effect starts and the other families in the community get involved too.”

### **One thing that was laughed about:**

While introducing themselves the participants made associations to their names so they would be remembered better by the others, this turned out to be quite funny.

### **Further questions/issues:**

The discussion during the workshop raised several questions where ongoing discussion is needed:

- How can migrants be more involved in the process of creating programmes?
- How can social services make a bigger effort to match the expectations and experiences of unemployed refugees with the available jobs at the labour market?
- How can possible unnoticed traumata be taken into account in the relationship between mentor and mentee (regarding volunteers trying to integrate refugees into the labour market via internships/vocational training, etc.)?

- How can volunteers mentoring a refugee be assisted? How can boundaries in the relationship between them be defined? What possibilities does a volunteer even have?
- What does integration in the mentoring context mean?
- Who is able to connect refugees with companies that are willing to employ refugees?