



MODULE 6

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION FOR PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH FLIGHT EXPERIENCE

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION



Ladder of Participation
Democratic engagement

This module focuses on the long-term civic empowerment of those with refugee experience. Recognizing that integration is the active presence of voice and influence within a democratic structure, this section guides practitioners in facilitating societal participation.

The primary framework utilized is the "Ladder of Participation," which ensures that every step toward community engagement is grounded in emotional preparedness. Practitioners will learn to guide refugees through identity reconstruction, shifting from a "victim" narrative to an active "survivor" identity capable of engaging in community-based entrepreneurship and local decision-making. The ultimate goal is to foster democratic engagement, ensuring refugees understand that their influence is a right rooted in European Common Values.



The theoretical background for societal empowerment represents a strategic shift from the "inner world" of emotional regulation to the "outer world" of societal participation. Integration is not merely the absence of crisis, but the presence of voice and influence within the democratic structure.

THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

To achieve this, the curriculum utilizes the **Ladder of Participation** as a step-by-step approach to increase refugee engagement:

- **Rung 1: Information & Inclusion (The Foundation):** The journey starts by providing clear pathways for understanding rights and host community values. This initial stage is crucial for reducing alienation and ensuring individuals do not feel like passive recipients of support.
- **Rung 2: Consultation & Dialogue (The Transition):** Practitioners facilitate "Safe Spaces" where refugees can voice their needs and perspectives. At this level, the focus is on building a new identity that moves beyond the limiting label of "refugee" toward that of a valued community member.
- **Rung 3: Joint Action & Partnership (Active Engagement):** Refugees are empowered to build "bridging" social capital—forming connections with the host community that facilitate actual influence. This includes promoting community-based entrepreneurship, where survivors use internal strengths to initiate economic and social projects.
- **Rung 4: Citizen Control & Leadership (Empowerment):** The ultimate goal is for refugees to exercise full voice and influence in local decision-making.



DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION: THE STORY OF MOUSSA

The Context: Moussa recognized the power of voice and systemic influence. He advocated:

“What I want people to understand is: They could also become refugees or migrants tomorrow. If they understand that, they’ll have a different view and a different approach.”

The Practitioner's Lens: This is Rung 4 in action. The practitioner's goal is to help refugees reach a state of emotional preparedness where they can engage the host community and advocate for a change in the collective narrative, viewing themselves as active citizens with a valid public voice.

EMOTIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

The Core Pillars: Emotional Preparedness and Identity Reconstruction

To ensure this climb is sustainable, engagement must be rooted in two psychological pillars:

1. **Emotional Preparedness:** Before engaging in the complex "outer world" of public life, practitioners must ensure the survivor is regulated and mentally strengthened to navigate cultural encounters without experiencing overwhelming stress or minority taxation.
2. **Building a New Identity:** Practitioners support the reconstruction of identity by helping individuals identify their internal strengths. By moving from a "victim" narrative to a "survivor" identity as someone who shines out of the challenges, refugees gain the necessary agency and self confidence to participate fully in civic life.

COMMUNITY-BASED ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE STORY OF MARYAM & MOUDI

The Context: Maryam joined Refugee.Info as a social media moderator, using her lived experience and language skills to help others access vital resources.

Moudi used his passion for basketball to build bridging social capital, recognizing that while his dream of being a pro player changed, he could still coach and build networks.

The Practitioner's Lens: Practitioners use these examples to demonstrate "Strength Harvesting." Maryam and Moudi did not invent new identities; they mapped their existing internal assets (language, sports knowledge, empathy) to external community needs, creating economic and social agency.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY

Community-Based Entrepreneurship is framed as a critical method to avoid minority taxation and alienation by allowing refugees to define their own professional narratives and economic agency. Furthermore, engagement in democratic structures is deeply rooted in European Common Values like equality and dignity. Practitioners must guide individuals to navigate legal frameworks, ensuring they understand that their influence is a right, not a privilege. This unified path to empowerment bridges survival and leadership, treating every refugee as a potential active citizen.



1 SCENARIO SIMULATION (LADDER MAPPING)

- **The Concept:** Moving from passive recipient to active leader requires practice. Simulations help visualize how engagement increases step-by-step.
- **The Practical Application:** Using real-world community issues (like a park renovation), practitioners guide participants to understand the difference between being told about an issue versus proposing a design.



CLIMBING THE LADDER: THE STORY OF FAWAD & ELISHA

The Context: Fawad and Elisha both face the gap between Rung 1 (Inclusion) and Rung 2 (Dialogue). Fawad notes, "I live in Denmark, I go to school here... but I find it hard to feel Danish when I don't feel welcome here."

Elisha feels a strong sense of identity but struggles with structural uncertainty: "It's not a nice feeling not having a residence permit, because it reminds you that even though you're here, you don't belong."

The Practitioner's Lens: These stories highlight the tension of identity reconstruction. Practitioners must acknowledge this structural alienation and use "Safe Spaces" to help participants validate these feelings, shift away from self-pity, and focus on the agency they do possess, as Elisha did by deciding to "stop feeling sorry for myself."

2 ASSET MAPPING AND NETWORK BUILDING:

- **The Concept:** Framing the individual not as someone needing resources, but as someone possessing internal strengths that can be transformed into economic and social agency.
- **The Practical Application:** Practitioners guide refugees in harvesting their core strengths and mapping them to specific gaps in the local community to build "bridging" social capital.

3 FACILITATED DEMOCRATIC DEBATE

- **The Concept:** Rehearsing democratic equality to build emotional preparedness for public life.
- **The Practical Application:** Creating mock councils where participants use norm-critical language to debate solutions and hold formal votes as equal citizens.

KEEP IN MIND



1. WHERE (The Physical and Psychological Space)

- **Collaborative Layouts:** Move away from hierarchical seating (rows of desks) and use roundtables, mock council setups, or incubator-style arrangements that reflect equality and partnership.
- **Community Integration Spaces:** Whenever possible, host these modules in actual community spaces (libraries, local council rooms, co-working spaces) rather than clinical or charity-focused buildings to foster a sense of external belonging.

2. HOW (The Relational and Methodological Space)

- **De-colonial and Norm-Critical Language:** Practitioners must actively use language that treats participants as equal citizens, dismantling the "charity" dynamic to avoid minority taxation.
- **Sustaining Co-regulation:** Even in civic discussions, the practitioner must remain biologically anchored. When participants practice sharing business ideas or debating community issues, the practitioner utilizes co-regulation to ensure they stay within their Zone of Resilience.

6 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Road to Resilience

ACTIVITY 'STEPPING UP' SIMULATION

PURPOSE

01.

To practice the transition from listening to leading in a community setting, helping refugees understand that involvement is a progressive journey toward leadership.



PRACTICING

02.

Participants are presented with a local scenario, such as a local park renovation.

Using norm-critical language, practitioners guide a discussion on the difference between just being "told" about the park (Rung 1) versus "proposing" a design (Rung 3).



PROPOSAL

03.

Groups collaboratively draft a short, actionable proposal to present to a mock local council.

EVALUATION

04.

Evaluation Insight: Did the participant successfully shift their self-description from 'what happened to them' to 'what they can contribute'?

6 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION Road to Resilience

ACTIVITY 'THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ASSET MAP'

PURPOSE

01.

To identify personal skills and internal strengths that can meet local community needs and foster economic agency, avoiding minority taxation.



VALUE-BASED ROADMAP

02.



Participants use a Value-Based Roadmap to connect a core value or harvested strength (e.g., Knowledge, specific trade skill) to a business or community project idea.

PITCH

03.



They visualize a "Mini-Project" pitch, identifying exactly which local networks they would need to build "bridging" social capital with to influence the outcome.

SHARE IDEAS

04.



Participants share their ideas. Practitioners actively utilize co-regulation to ensure participants stay within their Zone of Resilience while taking the social risk of sharing.

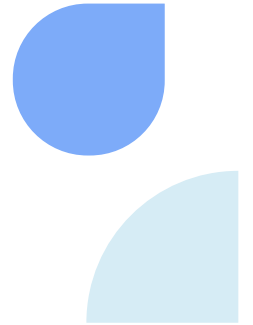
EVALUATION

05.

Does the refugee demonstrate the psychological fitness to take risks and engage in economic dialogue without feeling overwhelmed?



CURRICULUM



Links, references and further investigation

The Ladder of Citizen Participation: Sherry R. Arnstein's original framework.

UNHCR Livelihoods and Economic

Inclusion: Resources on refugee entrepreneurship.

<http://unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/livelihoods-and-economic-inclusion>

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/63565bc94.pdf>

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights:

Frameworks on European Common Values.





RESILIENCE FOR REFUGEES

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