



Emotional Intelligence & Soft Skills as a tool for migrants and refugees' work integration



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Introduction

Migration itself has the capacity to have a long-lasting impact on a person's mental state. Therefore, it is essential and relevant to ascertain the impact of emotional intelligence on the improvement of mental health among migrants.

Refugees and migrants typically come to Europe in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families, yet they usually face barriers to accessing employment and financial resources. Employers and labour market segments often focus immigration on particular, often low-paying vocations, assuming that immigrants have (soft) talents that make them uniquely prepared for those duties.

The vagueness around abilities is particularly apparent when talking about non-formalized or "soft" skills. Soft or informal skills are often the only relevant abilities in the low-paying and less regulated sectors of the labour market, where a large number of immigrant workers are employed.

Organisations are starting to recognise how important emotions are in influencing an individual's motivation and engagement at work. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a set of soft skills that includes the capacity to regulate and manage unpleasant emotions in oneself and others as well as the capacity to cultivate and enhance good emotions.

Migration & Mental Health

The process of migration can potentially exert an enduring influence on an individual's mental health. Determining the influence of emotional intelligence is thus crucial and pertinent for the advancement of mental health among migrants. In 2017, international migrants constituted an estimated 258 million individuals, which is equivalent to 3.4% of the global population. Despite their significant social, political, and economic importance, migrants frequently find themselves employed in hazardous, labor-intensive, and unclean occupations where they endure substandard working conditions, accept lower wages, or assume greater risks without adequate training. There has been a notable rise in the quantity of migrants who have been subjected to human rights violations, persecution, discrimination, or maltreatment over the past decade.

Acculturative stress may result from the personal, social, and contextual changes that accompany international migration, despite the fact that it may be an innovative experience that improves an individual's economic or social standing and potential. The potential for distress prevalence to be greater among migrants compared to native-born populations can be attributed to various individual, social, and economic factors that manifest throughout the process of acculturation. A variety of mental health consequences may result from this form of stress, such as anxiety, affective disorders, and adjustment difficulties. A considerable body of empirical research has also uncovered inconclusive, favourable, or contradictory impacts of acculturation on psychological well-being and health.

Emotional acculturation refers to a sequence of alterations in an immigrant's emotional patterns that occur due to their exposure to a foreign culture. Archuleta and Lakwani argue that emotional regulation is essential for environmental mastery; thus, it acts as a protective factor that mediates the significance of depressive symptoms. The study of

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is presently one of the most significant variables being investigated in the analysis of emotions and their regulation.

Soft Skills

Migrants and refugees often arrive in Europe in pursuit of improved circumstances for themselves and their families; however, their access to economic and occupational resources is frequently restricted. Without speaking the local language, they are forced to construct lives and professions, as well as devise methods of adaptation, after arriving in a foreign country with a distinct culture. Amidst this challenging transition, vocational challenges emerge as a significant source of stress. (Maria Tountopoulou, 2022)

Clusters of immigrant workers in specific industries and vocations, known as "immigrant niches," are prevalent in the Western world. Although not limited to low-wage labour markets, immigrant niches are also observed in the manufacturing and service sectors. There is a tendency for employers and labour market segments to concentrate immigrants in specific, frequently low-paying occupations, presuming that immigrants possess (soft) skills that render them exceptionally qualified for particular tasks. Ethnic groups are frequently assigned to distinct job positions, which establishes a distinct hierarchy in the perception of employers. The concept of "ethnicity as skill," which refers to the tendency of employers to confuse membership in an ethnic group with a collection of informal qualifications, is another quite frequent occurrence. (Midtbøen, 2017)

When discussing non-formalized or "soft" skills, the ambiguity of abilities becomes especially. Many immigrant workers are situated in the low-paying and less-regulated sectors of the labour market, where soft or informal skills frequently constitute the sole relevant competencies. Soft or informal skills may pertain to an individual's compliance and tendency to submit to workplace control and discipline, or they may refer to the capability of performing specific tasks (e.g., physical strength, endurance, or dexterity). Soft skills encompass more than just the interpersonal and communication abilities required to engage with clients, employers, and colleagues; they also include intangible personal qualities that contribute to an individual's acceptance and compatibility within a specific work environment and role, including pleasantness, discreteness, and sociability. (Midtbøen, 2017)

As stated in the "Skills Panorama Glossary" published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the term "soft skills" refers to general-purpose competencies applicable across various sectors and occupations. These competencies are distinct from "hard skills," which are specialized, or sector-specific competencies required to perform particular jobs within those sectors. Soft skills comprise social competencies as well as personal qualities (e.g., self-control, trustworthiness, and discipline)—e.g., communication, emotional intelligence, and collaboration. These skills could have been honed not only in structured educational environments (e.g., academic institutions, training programmes), but also in informal settings (e.g., work environments, volunteer activities) or life experiences.

Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills in the Workplace

Organisations are becoming more aware of the significance that feelings play in determining a person's level of motivation and engagement while they are on the job. A collection of soft skills that includes the ability to control and cope with negative emotions in oneself and others, as well as the ability to harness and build on positive emotions, is referred to as emotional intelligence (EQ). The following are components of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness:** To begin developing emotional intelligence, one must first increase one's self-awareness. Think about your communication style, emotional triggers, and areas of strength and weakness. You can use this to pinpoint areas that need work and have a better understanding of how you come across to other people.
- **Work Ethic:** In every sector, employers desire a strong work ethic. Demonstrating the principles of a strong work ethic can improve your employability and place you in a position to take advantage of greater career prospects. Employers frequently consider employees with exceptional work ethics for special initiatives because they are seen as dependable, disciplined, and committed.
- **Teamwork & Collaboration:** The ability to work in teams is a fundamental skill for many employers when hiring new employees. Being able to work effectively in teams helps immigrants and refugees integrate into the workforce by fostering positive relationships and understanding among colleagues. It can also help them adapt to these cultural differences by learning how to communicate, collaborate, and resolve conflicts within diverse teams.
- **Communication:** The capacity to convey oneself both verbally and nonverbally with clarity and effectiveness is known as communication skills. Effective body language, precise articulation, and attentive listening are all components of good communication. For immigrants and refugees seeking employment in their new host country, mastering teamwork is crucial.

References

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