



INCLUDE ME

Practical Guide to Resilience



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Contributing Partners:

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INFORMATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The IncludeME Practical Guide to Resilience is part of the IncludeME project, a European Union-funded initiative dedicated to promoting the inclusion of migrants and refugees with disrupted or limited educational backgrounds. The project aims to empower young people by providing tools and resources that support their personal development, mental health, and integration into society.

This guide focuses on building resilience—helping young migrants and refugees navigate the challenges of adapting to a new country, overcoming cultural and social barriers, and addressing the emotional impact of their experiences. By equipping them with practical strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, this guide supports their journey toward becoming confident, active participants in their communities.

As a resource designed for ease of use and effectiveness, the guide will also undergo review by mental health experts to ensure it is evidence-based and culturally appropriate. It is our hope that this tool will serve not only young migrants and refugees but also educators, youth workers, and community stakeholders who work to create inclusive environments.

The IncludeME project is a testament to the EU's commitment to fostering social inclusion, equity, and opportunity for all, especially for those facing significant life challenges. Together, we can build a more resilient, inclusive, and supportive society.

STEPS TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS GUIDE

1. Guide Read at Your Own Pace

- The guide is structured in clear, straightforward sections, allowing you to focus on the topics most relevant to you. Whether you're looking for ways to manage stress, improve your mood, or establish healthy habits, you can explore the sections in any order that suits your needs.

2. Practice the Strategies Regularly

- Resilience and mental well-being are skills that grow over time with consistent practice. Try the exercises and techniques shared in the guide, such as breathing exercises, mindfulness practices, or reframing negative thoughts. Incorporate these into your daily routine to see lasting benefits.

3. Reflect and Take Notes

- Use a journal to reflect on your progress as you apply the strategies. Write about the challenges you're facing, the steps you've taken, and the positive changes you notice. This process will help you track your growth and build confidence.

4. Adapt the Tools to Your Needs

- Every individual's journey is unique. Adjust the exercises and strategies to fit your personal experiences, cultural background, and current situation. For example, you might modify mindfulness exercises to align with your religious or cultural practices.

5. Seek Support When Needed

- If a challenge feels overwhelming, use this guide as a starting point but don't hesitate to reach out to trusted individuals, community organizations, or professional mental health services. Remember, asking for help is a sign of strength.

6. Share the Guide with Others

- This guide is not just for personal use—it's also a resource for communities. Share it with friends, family, or mentors who may benefit from the strategies, or use it as a tool in workshops and group activities.

7. Engage with the Community

- The IncludeME project encourages collaboration and shared learning. Discuss your experiences with others in the IncludeME community or similar groups, as this can foster a sense of connection and mutual support.

8. A Journey, Not a Destination

- The IncludeME Practical Guide to Resilience is not a one-time solution but a companion on your journey to building a stronger and more confident self. Each small step you take, whether it's trying a new exercise or talking about your challenges, is a victory. Use this guide as a trusted resource to help you overcome obstacles and thrive in your new environment.

By following the strategies and adapting them to your life, you'll not only improve your own well-being but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive community for everyone.

RESILIENCE

GUIDE

1. READ AT YOUR OWN PACE

Explore the topics based on your interests and current needs. You don't need to follow a specific order - choose the sections that are most relevant to you.



2. PRACTISE THE STRATEGIES REGULARLY

Incorporate the suggested exercises (such as breathing techniques and stress management tools) into your daily routine. Regular practice will help you strengthen resilience over time.



3. REFLECT AND RECORD YOUR PROGRESS

Use a journal to write about your challenges, achievements, and positive changes. Reflection helps you consolidate your learning and build self-confidence.



4. ADAPT THE TOOLS TO YOUR NEEDS

Personalise the exercises to respect your cultural background, values, and current life situation. Modify the practices to make them more meaningful and relevant to you.



5. SEEK SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED

Do not face difficulties alone. Reaching out to friends, family, community organisations, or professional support services is a sign of strength.



6. SHARE THE GUIDE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Use this guide in group activities, workshops, or mentoring sessions. Sharing knowledge helps to strengthen community bonds.



7. ENGAGE WITH THE INCLUDEME COMMUNITY

Take part in discussions, share your experiences, and learn from others. Mutual support is essential to building a more inclusive and connected community.



8. REMEMBER: THIS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

The path to resilience is built through small, continuous steps. Celebrate each victory and keep moving forward, contributing to a more supportive and inclusive society.



2. Understanding Common Challenges

Migrating to a new country is a transformative journey, often accompanied by the hope of a fresh start but also marked by profound challenges. For young migrants and refugees, especially those with disrupted or limited educational backgrounds, the integration process becomes even more complex. Separation from family and emotional support networks, communication difficulties caused by language, cultural, and social barriers, and a persistent sense of not belonging frequently contribute to intense feelings of loneliness and isolation.

These emotional struggles are often intensified by uncertainty about the future, the pressure to achieve economic and emotional stability, and the need to adapt to unfamiliar social norms. Cultural and social barriers manifest through differing practices, values, and expectations, making it harder to establish interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging. When not properly understood and managed, these factors can have a lasting impact on mental health, increasing levels of stress and anxiety and making adaptation and well-being more difficult in a new environment.

Many young migrants and refugees have experienced significant life adversities - including violence, neglect, family separation, or forced displacement - often conceptualized as **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** (Felitti et al., 1998). These early traumas can undermine emotional regulation, self-esteem, and long-term mental health (Anda et al., 2006). However, resilience is not merely the absence of trauma but the presence of protective and healing experiences. Research by Bethell et al. (2019) emphasizes the role of **Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)**, such as having a trusted adult, feeling a sense of belonging in school or community, and experiencing emotional security at home. These experiences can mitigate the negative effects of ACEs and promote psychological well-being, even in high-risk populations.

Building upon this, the concept of **Protective and Compensatory**

Experiences (PACES), proposed by Sege and Harper Browne (2017), integrates both developmental supports (e.g., education, safe housing, emotional guidance) and culturally affirming relationships that counterbalance early adversity. PACEs provide a proactive approach to resilience by focusing not only on reducing risk but on actively building strengths and restoring hope. For displaced youth, who often carry the burden of accumulated trauma, promoting PCEs and PACEs is essential. Interventions should therefore aim not only to address trauma but to create conditions in which healing relationships, stable environments, and opportunities for meaningful engagement are consistently available (Ungar, 2013). This comprehensive perspective encourages a shift from deficit-based to strength-based approaches in working with migrant and refugee populations.

This holistic understanding of trauma and resilience lays the groundwork for practical, evidence-based strategies. In this context, the book *Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness* by Rick Hanson emerges as an inspiring and complementary resource for this guide. Hanson offers a practical and accessible approach to developing a stable inner core—an emotional foundation capable of facing life’s adversities without losing serenity. For young migrants and refugees, who often live in situations of profound uncertainty and emotional vulnerability and encounter daily cultural and social barriers, *Resilient* teaches that true strength lies not only in resisting difficulties but also in cultivating an inner state of calm, acceptance of reality, and hope for the future.

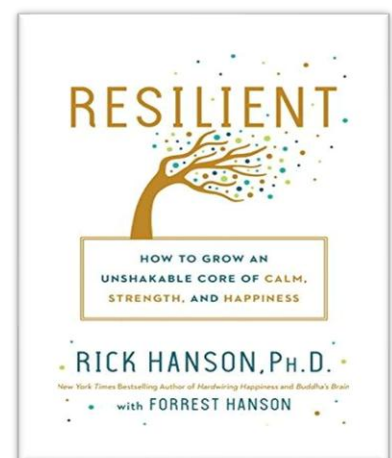
Introducing key concepts such as mindfulness, detachment from outcomes, and self-compassion, Hanson demonstrates how it is possible to respond to adversity in a more balanced and constructive way, reduce the impact of fear and anxiety, and rebuild emotional well-being. More than just surviving life’s storms, *Resilient* inspires the rediscovery of emotional balance even during times of great instability, helping individuals strengthen the psychological resources needed to build a new life with confidence. This chapter, as part of the IncludeME Practical Guide to Resilience,

is specifically designed to introduce and contextualize these complex realities, offering an initial reflection on the key emotional, social, and cultural challenges faced by young migrants and refugees. While this section focuses on raising awareness and deepening understanding of these issues, the following chapter will provide practical exercises and concrete strategies to actively address these challenges—such as managing stress and anxiety, overcoming cultural and social barriers, developing healthy coping mechanisms to deal with loneliness and isolation, and strengthening resilience.

By promoting personal development, mental well-being, and positive social integration, this guide supports their journey toward becoming confident and active participants in their new communities. Grounded in evidence-based approaches and a deep understanding of ACEs, PCEs, and PACEs, this guide is also a valuable resource for educators, youth workers, and community stakeholders committed to creating more inclusive, supportive, and welcoming environments. Together, through resilience and empowerment, we can contribute to building a more just, equitable, and hopeful future for all.

How can the concept of resilience be defined?

By Rick Hanson:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPvTb9MQhpM>

https://youtu.be/_gfKcoUCaB8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nqR9XNU7Wk>

Understanding Common Challenges...

Activity 2.1.1 – “My Journey: Mapping Challenges and Strengths” (Narrative and Emotional Expression)

- **Objective:**

Help participants recognise and give voice not only to the challenges they have faced during their migration journey but also to the personal strengths and inner resources they developed along the way, fostering a resilient mindset.

- **How to Do It:**

1. Invite each participant to create a visual or written representation of their migration experience. They can choose from:

- *A Timeline* of significant events.
- *A Personal Map* tracing their emotional and physical journey.
- *A Reflective Diary Entry* focused on emotional experiences.

2. Encourage participants to highlight both *difficult moments* and *positive turning points*, identifying what personal resources helped them move forward (e.g., patience, hope, support from others, moments of courage).

3. Before sharing, lead a brief *grounding exercise* (inspired by mindfulness practices) to help participants feel present and emotionally safe.

4. In small groups, participants are invited (voluntarily) to share their stories, focusing not only on hardships but also on how they overcome them.

- **Guided Reflection Questions:**

- What were the most challenging moments of your journey?
- Which personal qualities or strengths did you rely on to

overcome those difficulties?

- Can you recognise any small victories or moments of peace during that time?
- How do you feel today when you look back on those experiences?
- What would you say now to the “past you” during the most difficult moment? (*Encouraging self-compassion*)

Activity 2.1.2 – “Invisible Barriers: Recognising and Reframing Challenges” (Forum Theatre and Emotional Awareness)

- Objective:

Help participants identify and understand cultural, social, and emotional barriers, explore healthier emotional responses, and practice alternative coping strategies based on resilience principles such as emotional regulation, reframing negative thoughts, and self-compassion.

- How to Do It:

1. Divide participants into small groups. Ask each group to create and act out a short scene that illustrates a real-life situation involving an *invisible barrier* (e.g., language difficulties, prejudice, feelings of homesickness, cultural misunderstandings, emotional isolation).

2. After each performance, facilitate a group discussion:

- How did the characters feel during the scene?
- What negative thoughts might have arisen in those moments? (*Introduce the concept of reframing thoughts from the book*)
- What alternative, healthier emotional responses could have been used?
- What internal resources (calm, patience, compassion, mindfulness) could the character have accessed?
- What external support might have been helpful in this situation?

3. Lead a brief mindfulness or breathing exercise before participants attempt to *replay* the scenes using healthier coping strategies, promoting emotional awareness and regulation.

- Optional Enhancement:

Introduce a "*Spect-Actor*" *Moment* (inspired by Forum Theatre), allowing audience members to step into the scene, try different approaches, and explore the emotional impact of alternative reactions. This encourages experiential learning and the development of resilience skills in a safe environment.

3. Practical Strategies to Build Resilience

Resilience is not an abstract concept - it can be strengthened through practical, everyday actions that support emotional balance, reduce stress, and improve mental well-being. This chapter presents a series of easy-to-apply activities that help young migrants and refugees develop tools to face adversity, reconnect with themselves, and cultivate inner strength.

3.1 Managing Stress and Anxiety: Building Resilience

Activity 3.1.1 – "*Stress Thermometer: Recognising and Regulating Emotions*"

- Objective:

Help participants develop emotional awareness by recognising early signs of stress and learning how to self-regulate before reaching overwhelming levels.

- How to Do It:

1. Provide each participant with a simple visual "*Stress*

Thermometer” ranging from 0 (Calm) to 10 (High Stress).

2. Throughout the day (or during specific situations), ask them to pause and rate their current stress level.

3. Encourage reflection on:

- *What physical sensations am I feeling?* (e.g., tight chest, rapid heartbeat)
- *What thoughts are occupying my mind?* (e.g., negative self-talk, worries)
- *What triggered this reaction?*

4. Introduce simple regulation techniques inspired by Resilient:

- Deep breathing (see activity 3.3.1 or video: [4-4-4 Breathing Technique – YouTube](#))
- Grounding (e.g., name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste)
- Reframing thoughts (see activity 3.4.1)

5. In group discussions, invite participants to share what strategies helped lower their “temperature” and regain calm.

- Key Reflection Questions:
- At what point did you notice your stress level rising?
- Which strategies helped you calm down?
- How can you act earlier next time to prevent reaching higher stress levels?

Activity 3.1.2 – “Personal SOS Resilience Kit”

- Objective:

Help participants create a personalised set of positive coping strategies to manage stress and anxiety effectively, fostering emotional resilience.

- How to Do It:

STRESS THERMOMETER



1. Invite participants to reflect on and write down *five healthy and realistic actions* they can take when feeling stressed or anxious. Encourage them to choose activities that help cultivate calm, strength, and emotional balance (aligned with the practices in *Resilient*). Examples:

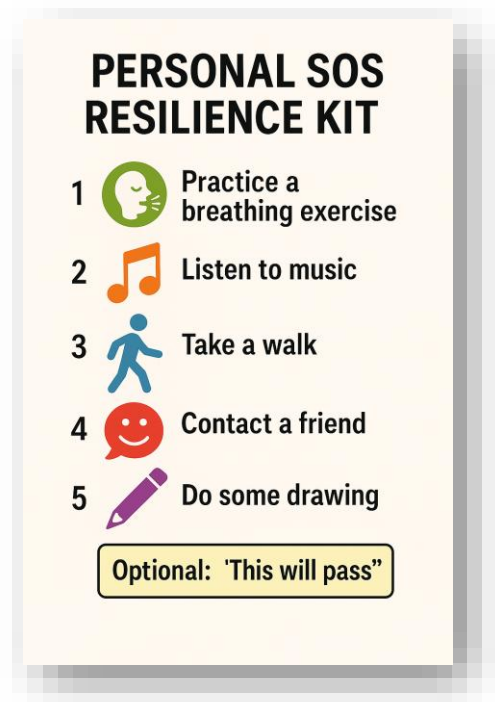
- Practice breathing (e.g., 4-7-8: Inhale for 4 sec, hold for 7, exhale for 8 – see [video](#))
- Listen to uplifting music or calming nature sounds.
- Take a short walk outdoors to connect with nature.
- Contact a trusted friend or family member.
- Engage in creative activities like drawing or writing.

2. Ask participants to create a small *visual or written version* of their SOS Kit (e.g., a decorated card or a phone note) that they can easily access when needed.

3. Organise a sharing session where participants exchange ideas and discuss which strategies have worked best for them in the past.

- Optional Enhancement:

Encourage participants to add one "*Inner Resource*" to their kit - this could be a positive affirmation, a reminder of their personal strengths, or a calming phrase (e.g., "*This will pass,*" or "*I have overcome difficult moments before.*").



3.2 Establishing Healthy Routines

Activity 3.2.1 – "*Life Balance Wheel: Focusing on Healthy Habits and Nature Connection*"

- Objective:

Encourage participants to reflect on their current lifestyle habits and identify realistic actions to build healthier and more balanced

daily routines, emphasizing the importance of regular physical activity and spending time in nature.

- How to Do It:

1. Provide each participant with a blank *Life Balance Wheel* divided into key areas of life:

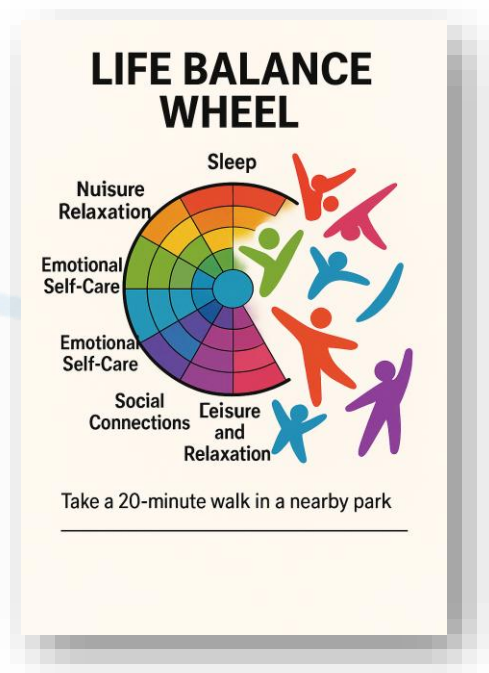
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Physical Activity and Movement
- Work/Study
- Leisure and Relaxation
- Emotional Self-Care
- Social Connections
- Connection with Nature

Template - **Life Balance Wheel:**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_VPQXIRUOotUnKZukIQXZoXTPXlvZ_jl/view?usp=drive_link

The Wheel of Life - A Self-Assessment Tool:

<https://youtu.be/nx6ejldUHUw>



2. Ask participants to rate their current satisfaction in each area on a scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 10 (fully satisfied), colouring the wheel accordingly to visualize which areas need more attention.

3. Invite participants to choose *one area* where they feel most motivated to make a small, positive change in the coming week. Encourage them to reflect specifically on how incorporating physical activity or spending time in natural environments could improve their well-being.

4. Have them write down a specific, realistic action they can commit to (e.g., "*Take a 20-minute walk in a nearby park,*" "*Try a beginner yoga session outdoors,*" "*Spend time by the sea or in the mountains once this week*").

5. In a group discussion, participants can (voluntarily) share which area they chose and the small step they plan to take.

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- Optional Enhancement:

Encourage participants to pair up and act as “accountability partners,” checking in with each other at the end of the week to discuss their progress and motivate each other to maintain the new habit.

Activity 3.2.2 – “My Ideal Day: Visualization and Action Plan with a Focus on Movement and Nature”

- Objective:

Help participants envision what a balanced and fulfilling day looks like for them and identify practical steps to integrate physical activity and contact with nature into their daily routines.

- How to Do It:

1. Lead participants through a short *guided visualization* exercise:

- Invite them to close their eyes and imagine waking up feeling rested and calm.
- Guide them through the entire day, visualizing healthy habits such as nourishing meals, positive social interactions, time for rest, moments of physical movement (e.g., a relaxing walk, stretching, or exercise they enjoy), and time spent outdoors in nature (e.g., feeling the warmth of the sun, the sound of birds, the smell of fresh air).
- Ask them to notice how these experiences affect their emotional and physical state throughout the day.

2. After the visualization, ask participants to write or draw their “Ideal Day,” including morning, afternoon, and evening routines. Encourage them to explicitly include at least one physical activity and one outdoor or nature-related activity.

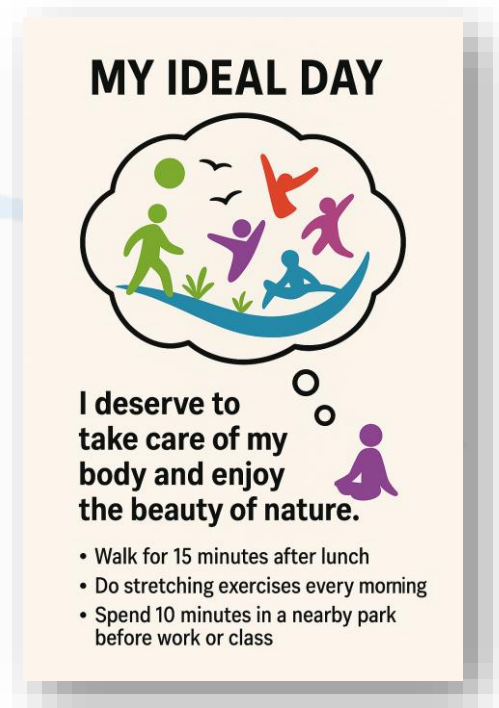
3. Invite them to highlight 2–3 *small, realistic actions* they can start implementing immediately (e.g., “Walk for 15 minutes after lunch,” “Do stretching exercises every morning,” “Spend 10

minutes in a nearby park before work or class”).

4. Encourage sharing ideas within the group to inspire and motivate each other.

- Optional Enhancement:

Ask participants to write a motivational reminder or affirmation linked to their ideal day (e.g., “*I deserve to take care of my body and enjoy the beauty of nature*”) and keep it somewhere visible throughout the week.



3.3 Practicing Mindfulness

Activity 3.3.1 – “4-4-4 Breathing: Calming the Mind through Conscious Breathing”

- Objective:

Help participants quickly reduce anxiety and increase emotional calm through conscious, controlled breathing.

- How to Do It:

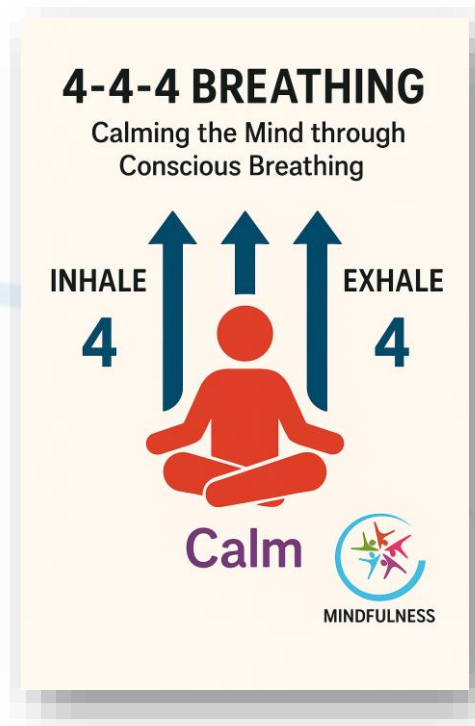
1. Invite participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor and hands relaxed. If they feel comfortable, they can close their eyes or soften their gaze.
2. Guide them through the 4-4-4 breathing technique:
 - Inhale deeply through the nose for *4 seconds*.
 - Hold the breath gently for *4 seconds*.
 - Exhale slowly through the mouth for *4 seconds*.

3. Repeat this breathing cycle for 2 to 3 minutes, either in silence or with soft, calming background music.

4. After the exercise, ask participants how they feel and discuss how this technique could be used in moments of anxiety or stress.

- Optional Enhancement:

Encourage participants to choose a personal calming word or affirmation to silently repeat during each exhale (e.g., "Calm", "I am safe").



Activity 3.3.2 – "Mindful Eating: Engaging the Senses with Full Attention"

- Objective:

Develop the ability to stay present in the moment by focusing attention fully on a simple daily activity—eating.

- How to Do It:

1. Provide participants with a simple snack (e.g., a piece of fruit, a nut, or a small piece of chocolate).

2. Before eating, ask them to observe the food carefully:

- What is its *texture*?
- How does it *smell*?
- What *colors and shapes* do they notice?

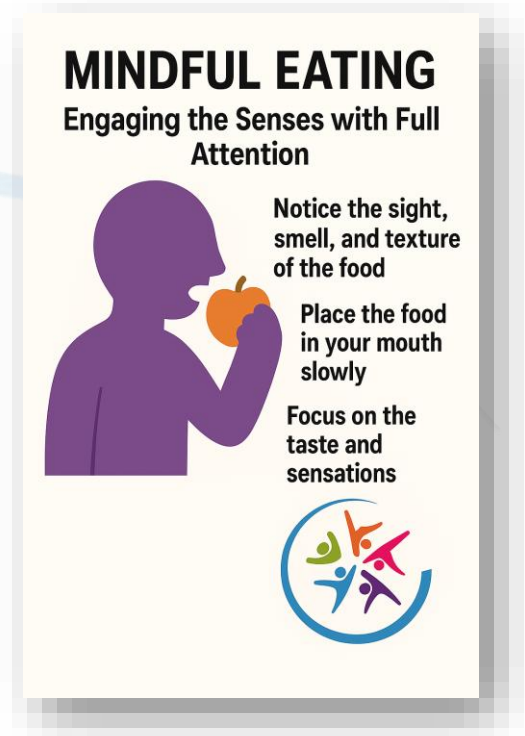
3. Encourage them to place the food in their mouth slowly, focusing entirely on the *taste, texture, and sensations* without rushing. Ask them to chew slowly and notice every detail of the experience.

4. After finishing, facilitate a brief reflection:

- How did it feel to slow down and focus entirely on this simple experience?
- Was it different from how they normally eat?
- How could this mindful attention be applied to other daily activities?

- Optional Enhancement:

Invite participants to write down one small daily activity where they can intentionally practice mindfulness (e.g., brushing their teeth, walking, or drinking tea).



3.4 Reframing Negative Thoughts

Activity 3.4.1 – “Thought Detective: Investigating Negative Patterns”

- Objective:

Help participants identify and challenge automatic negative thoughts, developing healthier and more balanced thinking patterns.

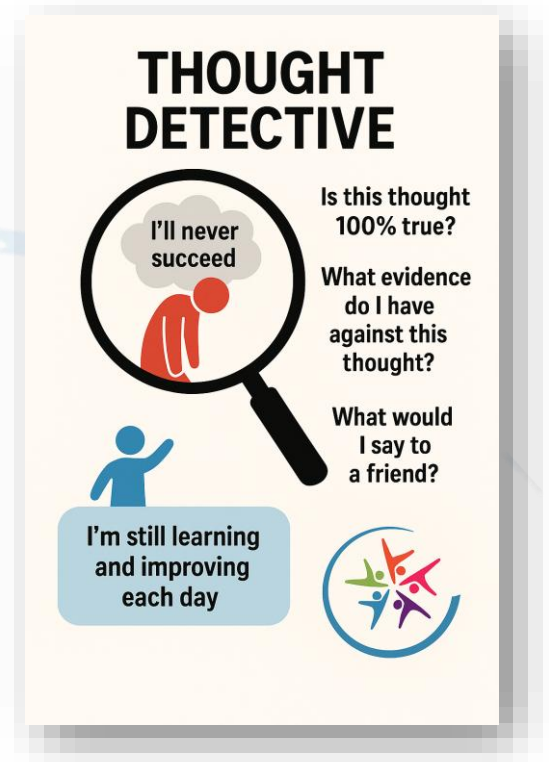
- How to Do It:

1. Provide participants with a worksheet or ask them to write in their journals.
2. Ask them to recall and write down a recent negative thought or situation that caused distress.
3. Guide them through the following reflective questions:
 - *Is this thought 100% true?*
 - *What evidence do I have against this thought?*
 - *What would I say to a close friend if they were in this situation?*

4. Encourage participants to reframe the negative thought into a more compassionate and realistic perspective (e.g., from *"I'll never succeed"* to *"I'm still learning and improving each day"*).

- Optional Enhancement:

Introduce the concept of "Inner Coach vs. Inner Critic" and invite participants to write a final supportive statement to themselves, acting as their own "inner coach."



Activity 3.4.2 – "Letters to Myself: Cultivating Self-Compassion"

- Objective:

Promote self-compassion by encouraging participants to offer themselves the same kindness and understanding they would extend to a loved one.

- How to Do It:

1. Ask participants to write a personal letter to themselves, as if they were a dear friend going through a difficult time.
2. In the letter, they should:
 - Acknowledge their struggles with empathy.
 - Offer words of encouragement and support.
 - Remind themselves of their strengths and past moments of resilience.
3. Encourage participants to keep this letter



and revisit it whenever they face challenging situations.

- Optional Enhancement:

Invite participants to decorate their letters or place them in a special envelope as a reminder of their commitment to practicing kindness toward themselves.

3.5 The Role of Art Therapy in Promoting Mental Health

Art therapy utilizes creative expression as a powerful tool for emotional healing, especially valuable for migrants who may struggle with language barriers or find it difficult to verbalize complex emotions. Through symbolic representation, participants can explore feelings of vulnerability, trauma, hope, and identity in a safe and supportive environment.

Activity 3.5.1 – “*Drawing My Emotions: Expressing the Inexpressible*”

- Objective:

Support participants in expressing difficult emotions through symbolic and non-verbal creative forms.

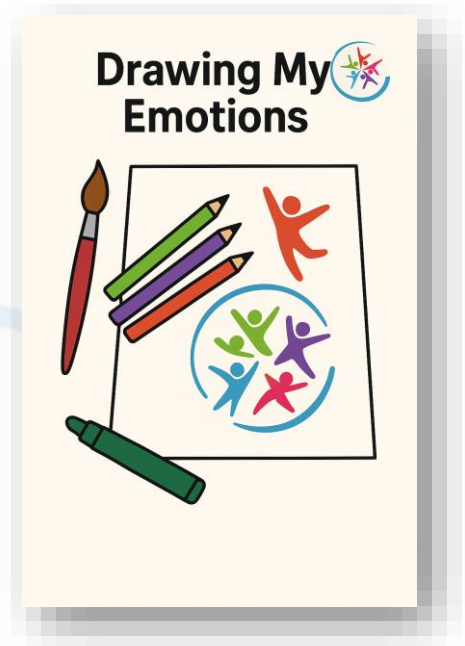
- How to Do It:

1. Provide materials such as paper, coloured pencils, markers, or paints.
2. Ask participants to create a drawing that represents their current emotional state. Remind them that this is not about

artistic skill but about expression.

3. After the exercise, offer participants the opportunity (voluntarily) to share and discuss their drawings.

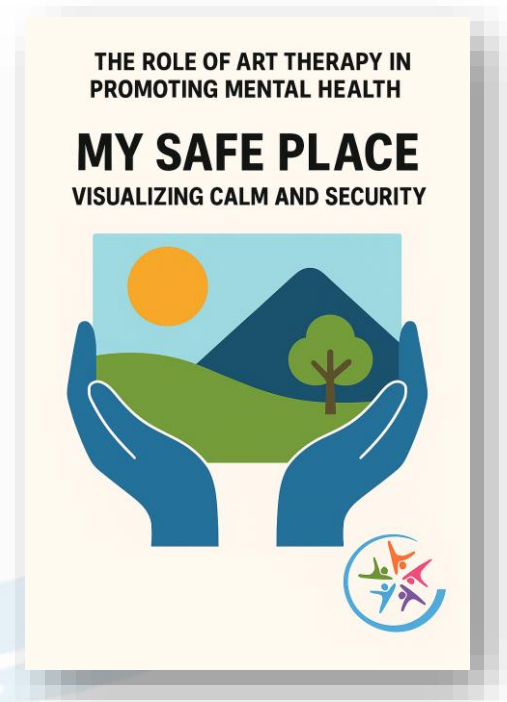
- Reflection Questions:
- What does this drawing reveal about how you're feeling today?
- Which colour in your drawing represents hope?
- If this image could speak, what message would it have for you?
-



Activity 3.5.2 – “My Safe Place: Visualizing Calm and Security”

- Objective:
Help participants create a visual representation of an internal place of peace and safety that they can mentally return to during moments of distress.

- How to Do It:
 1. Provide materials for collage (magazines, coloured paper, glue) or painting/drawing supplies.
 2. Ask participants to visually create a “safe place”, either real or imagined. This could be a peaceful room, a natural landscape, or a comforting memory.
 3. Once finished, invite participants to describe what makes this place feel safe and calming.
- Reflection Questions:
- When you feel overwhelmed, can you imagine returning to this place?



- What makes this place special and comforting?
- How can you carry a part of this safe space with you in daily life?

Activity 3.5.3 – “The Mask I Wear: Exploring Visible and Hidden Emotions”

- Objective:

Facilitate exploration of personal identity, social roles, and hidden emotions through creative expression.

- How to Do It:

1. Provide materials to create masks (cardboard, paper plates, string, markers, paints).

2. Instruct participants to design two sides of the mask:

- The *front side* represents the image they show to the world.

- The *back side* represents hidden feelings, fears, or parts of themselves that are rarely expressed.

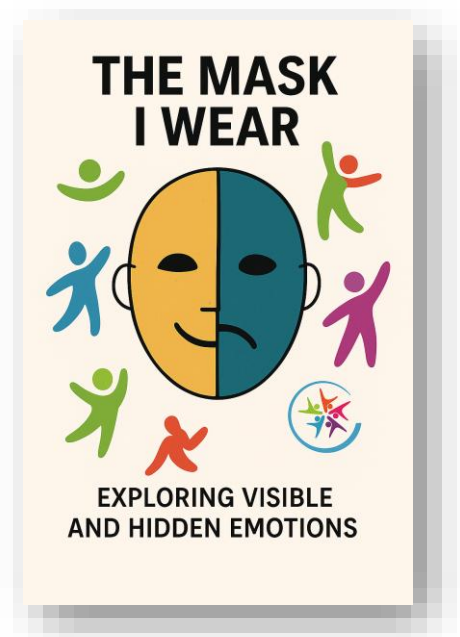
3. After completing the masks, lead a group discussion about the experience of carrying these two aspects of self.

- Reflection Questions:

- How does it feel to hold these two sides of yourself?

- Are there hidden aspects you would like to integrate more into your life?

- What steps could help you express your authentic self-more freely?



4. Building Connections and Seeking Support

For migrants and refugees, particularly those with limited educational backgrounds or disrupted life trajectories, establishing social connections and accessing support networks are essential for resilience and integration. It is recommended to:

4.1 Building Connections and Seeking Support

- Seek community groups, migrant associations, and local organisations that offer support, information, and opportunities for social interaction.

Examples:

- [European Website on Integration \(EWSI\) – European Commission](#)
- [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#)
- [UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)

- Participate in cultural, educational, or voluntary activities, which help to build relationships, develop skills, and strengthen the sense of belonging.

Examples:

- [European Solidarity Corps – Official Portal](#)
- [United Nations Volunteers \(UNV\) Programme](#)

- Maintain and re-establish contact with family and friends, whether in person or through digital means, as these relationships are vital for emotional stability. Recommended applications: WhatsApp, Signal, Skype, Zoom.

Identify and seek professional psychosocial support services when necessary.

Resources:

- [Psychosocial Support Guide – Portuguese Red Cross \(PDF\)](#)
- [Mental Health Europe – Psychological Support in Europe](#)

Peer support is a powerful tool for emotional recovery and social integration. Connecting with others who have experienced similar challenges—such as migration, cultural transition, or educational disruption—can reduce feelings of isolation and build a sense of trust, empathy, and shared resilience. Peer groups, buddy systems, and mentoring relationships among migrants and refugees offer opportunities for mutual learning, emotional validation, and community-building. Evidence shows that peer support not only enhances psychological well-being but also empowers individuals to take active roles in their integration journey (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001).

4.2 Emergency Strategies for Difficult Times

- Seek medical assistance or contact emergency services in cases of immediate danger.

Resources:

- European Emergency Number: [112](#)
- UNHCR Help – Official Support for Refugees
- Recognise symptoms of panic, extreme fear, or grief, and seek urgent psychological support when needed.

Services:

- [**World Health Organization \(WHO\) – Mental Health Support**](#)
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Health Services**

- Practise Psychological First Aid (PFA).

Official Training:

- [**WHO Psychological First Aid Guide \(Official PDF\)**](#)
- Ensure access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and communication.

Services:

- [**EUAA – European Union Agency for Asylum**](#)
- **UNHCR – Humanitarian Assistance**

- Promote psychoeducation by explaining that intense emotional reactions are natural when facing adverse situations.
Official Materials:

- [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\) – Psychosocial Support](#)

4.3 Review and Improvement

- Regularly review actions and the support received, identifying what has worked well and what could be improved.

Assessment Tools:

- [European Commission – Social Inclusion Policies](#)

- Request feedback from other migrants and professionals to promote collective learning and improve inclusion practices.

Good Practices:

- [European Website on Integration – Good Practices](#)

- Adapt strategies according to evolving individual and community needs, remaining open to new approaches and resources.

Consultation:

- [OECD – Migration and Integration Policies](#)

- Value personal and community development by celebrating achievements and acknowledging progress, however small, as a fundamental part of strengthening resilience.

Capacity-Building Programmes:

- [EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals](#)

4.4 Free Training and Recognised Online Certifications

- [EU Academy – Official Platform of the European Union](#)
Free courses on human rights, social inclusion, digital skills, environmental topics, and European citizenship. Certificates issued by the European Commission.

- [Coursera – Free and Certified Courses \(Some Fully Funded Scholarships Available\)](#)

Includes courses from prestigious universities such as Yale,

Stanford, and Université de Genève. Use the "Audit" option for free access to content and check availability of financial aid for certificates.

- **FutureLearn – Free Courses by the Open University and Other European Institutions**

Offers courses in mental health, social inclusion, wellbeing, and professional skills. Digital certificates are available.

- **edX – Courses from Renowned Universities (Harvard, MIT, etc.)**

Attend courses for free under the "Audit Track" and purchase a certificate if desired.

- **UNHCR – Connected Learning Hubs** (For Refugees)
Specialised programmes for migrants and refugees, offering certified courses and guidance for higher education opportunities.

- **OpenLearn – Open University**

Free online courses with the option to obtain digital certificates of participation.

5. Emergency Strategies for Difficult Moments

In crisis situations-such as conflicts, losses, discrimination, or unexpected difficulties-knowing where to seek help and how to act is crucial for your safety and well-being. Below are practical steps, real examples, and trusted resources to guide you.

5.1 Find a Safe Place:

Move away from danger and seek shelter with trusted people or organizations. Reception centers, churches, support associations, and public services can help. In Portugal, the Portuguese Red Cross provides emergency accommodation and integration support for refugees and migrants
<https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/apoio-social/grupos-vulner%C3%A1veis/migrantes-e-refugiados.html>.

Across Europe, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) offers information on rights and available services <https://euaa.europa.eu>.

During the Ukraine crisis, organizations like UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies> and IOM <https://www.iom.int/protection-emergencies> set up emergency shelters and assistance points in countries bordering conflict zones.

5.2 Take a Deep Breath and Try to Calm Down:

Use simple breathing techniques (inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth) to manage fear and anxiety. The Red Cross offers psychosocial support and guides to help migrants and refugees cope with stress and trauma: <https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/apoio-social/grupos-vulner%C3%A1veis/migrantes-e-refugiados.html>.

For further guidance on psychological first aid, you can also consult the Portuguese Red Cross's mental health and psychosocial support manual https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/images/pdf/Portuguese_mhpss_guidance.pdf.

5.3 Seek Support:

Talk to someone you trust—a friend, family member, religious leader, or community member. If you need specialized support, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies> and national platforms like the Portuguese Refugee Support Platform (PAR) <https://www.refugiados.pt/a-par/> can connect you to local organizations, legal help, and psychological care.

For immediate assistance in Portugal, the Migrant Support Line (Linha de Apoio a Migrantes) is available at 808 257 257 or 218 106 191 <https://www.acm.gov.pt/ru/-/linha-sos-imigrante>.

5.4 Maintain Basic Routines:

Try to keep up daily habits-eating, sleeping, and personal hygiene-even in difficult times. This helps maintain a sense of normality and control. The AMURT Guide for Refugee Reception <https://amurt.pt/guia-refugiados-pair/> offers checklists and tips for daily organization and well-being.

5.5 Ask for Help:

If you feel overwhelmed, reach out to health professionals, social services, or NGOs. The AIDA database, managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), provides country-specific information on asylum procedures and support services <https://asylumineurope.org>.

Local organizations like the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation have provided emergency funds and support to Ukrainian refugees and associations in Portugal <https://gulbenkian.pt/noticias/fundacao-gulbenkian-atribui-apoios-de-emergencia-a-refugiados-da-ucrania/>). Internationally, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) <https://www.rescue.org> and UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies> offer emergency relief, child protection, and family reunification services.

5.5.1 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:

Mental health is as important as physical safety. UNHCR and partners work to provide mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), reduce stigma, and improve access to care <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/events/online-ngo-dialogue-mainstreaming-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-across-refugee>. In Portugal, there are agreements between the Portuguese Psychologists' Association and the High Commission for Migration to provide free psychological support for refugees

https://repositorio.ulisboa.pt/bitstream/10451/41664/1/ulfpie053596_tm.pdf.

5.6 Coping Strategies and Community Examples:

Civil society platforms like PAR <https://www.refugiados.pt/a-par/> unite dozens of organizations to coordinate emergency responses, legal assistance, and integration support for refugees. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) <https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu> coordinates humanitarian aid across the EU, focusing on saving lives, alleviating suffering, and maintaining human dignity. The AMURT Guide <https://amurt.pt/guia-refugiados-paair/> also includes practical checklists for emergency situations and integration.

5.7 Preparedness and Planning:

Being prepared can make a difference. UNHCR's Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE) provides tools and checklists for risk analysis and contingency planning https://sswm.info/sites/default/files/reference_attachments/UNHCR%202014%20PPRE.pdf.

For up-to-date information on migration crises, the UNHCR Mediterranean Portal <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> and MHPSS.net <https://www.mhpss.net/> offer resources in English and other languages.

5.8 Key Emergency Resources (all available in English and often in other languages):

- European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA): <https://euaa.europa.eu>
- UNHCR Emergencies:

<https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies>

- IOM Protection for Migrants:

<https://www.iom.int/protection-emergencies>

- AIDA (ECRE):

<https://asylumineurope.org>

- Portuguese Red Cross:

<https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/apoio-social/grupos-vulner%C3%A1veis/migrantes-e-refugiados.html>

- PAR (Portuguese Refugee Support Platform):

<https://www.refugiados.pt/a-par/>

- Migrant Support Line (Portugal): 808 257 257 / 218 106 191

<https://www.acm.gov.pt/ru/-/linha-sos-imigrante>

- International Rescue Committee (IRC):

<https://www.rescue.org>

- UNICEF Emergencies:

<https://www.unicef.org/emergencies>

- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation:

<https://gulbenkian.pt/noticias/fundacao-gulbenkian-atribui-apoios-de-emergencia-a-refugiados-da-ucrania/>

- AMURT Guide for Refugees:

<https://amurt.pt/guia-refugiados-pair/>

These resources ensure access to reliable information and immediate assistance for refugees and migrants in Europe and beyond.

6. Review and Refinement

Resilience, as defined in scientific literature, is the capacity to adapt positively despite adversity, trauma, or significant stress. For refugees and migrants, especially those with limited or interrupted education, resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic

process that evolves over time and with changing circumstances. Continuous review and refinement of coping strategies are essential for maintaining and strengthening resilience in the face of ongoing challenges.

Why Review and Refine?

Research shows that resilience is enhanced when individuals and communities regularly assess their coping mechanisms, learn from experiences, and remain open to new strategies (Ungar, 2011; Masten & Reed, 2002). This process not only helps maintain mental health but also fosters a sense of agency and empowerment.

6.1 Reflect on What Worked

Evidence-based practice:

Reflective practice is a core component of resilience-building (Schön, 1983). Regularly take time to consider which strategies have been effective. For example, did seeking support from a local NGO help you feel safer? Did participating in language classes improve your confidence?

Practical tip:

Keep a simple journal or use a mobile app to note down what actions helped you cope with stress or solve problems. This reflection can be individual or shared with a trusted person.

Further reading:

- [UNHCR Resilience-Based Approaches](#)
- [WHO: Building resilience](#)

6.2 Look for New Solutions

Scientific insight:

Adaptability is a hallmark of resilient individuals (Masten, 2014). If a certain strategy is no longer effective, seek alternative approaches. This may involve reaching out to new support networks, trying different self-care activities, or accessing new resources.

Where to find help:

- [ECRE Members Directory](#) – Connect with local organizations across Europe for tailored support.
- [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#) – Information on legal rights and available services for migrants and refugees.
- [Mental Health Europe](#) – Resources on mental health support and advocacy.

6.3 Share Experiences

Scientific basis:

Social support is a key protective factor in resilience (Southwick et al., 2014). Sharing experiences with others who have faced similar challenges can foster a sense of belonging, reduce isolation, and provide practical advice.

How to connect:

- Join local or online support groups, such as those listed by [Refugee Council UK](#).
- Participate in community forums, workshops, or peer mentoring programs.
- [UNHCR Community-Based Protection](#) – Learn about community-driven approaches to protection and support.

6.4 Participate in Community Activities

Research evidence:

Engagement in community activities is linked to improved well-being, social integration, and resilience (Berry, 1997; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Community involvement can take many forms, such as volunteering, attending cultural events, or joining sports teams.

Where to start:

- [European Website on Integration \(EWSI\)](#) – Find integration projects and activities in your country.
- [Red Cross EU Volunteering](#) – Opportunities to get involved and build local connections.

6.5 Regularly Update Your Plan

Scientific recommendation:

Resilience requires flexibility. As your situation changes, so do your needs and resources. Set aside time every few months to review your strategies, seek feedback, and learn about new

programs or services.

Stay informed:

- [InfoMigrants](#) – News and practical advice for migrants and refugees in Europe.
- [European Resettlement Network](#) – Updates on resettlement programs and best practices.

7. Closing Remarks

The journey of immigrants and refugees with limited or interrupted education is marked by a unique set of challenges, but also by remarkable opportunities for growth and resilience. Scientific research highlights that resilience is not simply an individual trait but a dynamic, multi-layered process shaped by personal, social, and structural factors

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10749365/>

https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/DM/M/Migration-Health/Vulnerability%20and%20Resilience%20paper%20excerpts%20final.pdf

This manual has addressed key challenges and practical strategies, offering a holistic perspective rooted in evidence and best practices.

7.1 Understanding Common Challenges

Migrants and refugees often face significant **stress and anxiety** due to displacement, uncertainty, and past trauma. These psychological burdens are compounded by **cultural and social barriers**, such as language difficulties, unfamiliar social norms, and experiences of discrimination, which can hinder integration and access to services

<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/21/11/1409>

https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/our_work/DM/M/Migration-Health/Vulnerability%20and%20Resilience%20paper%20excerpts%20final.pdf

https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Projetos/Agenda_Europeia_Migracoes/Documentos/manual_apoio_psicossocial_a_migrantes.pdf

7.2 Loneliness and isolation are frequent, especially when family and community ties are disrupted, further impacting mental health and well-being

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2266146>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8470365/>

7.3 Practical Strategies to Build Resilience

Managing Stress and Anxiety:

Evidence shows that regular stress management techniques- such as breathing exercises, mindfulness, and seeking psychosocial support-can reduce anxiety and foster emotional stability

www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Projetos/Agenda_Europeia_Migracoes/Documentos/manual_apoio_psicossocial_a_migrante_s.pdf

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8470365/>

Access to culturally and linguistically adapted mental health resources is essential. Community-based interventions, such as self-help groups and safe spaces, have proven effective in supporting psychosocial health

[Cwww.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/DMM/Migration-Health/Vulnerability%20and%20Resilience%20paper%20excerpts%20final.pdf](http://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/DMM/Migration-Health/Vulnerability%20and%20Resilience%20paper%20excerpts%20final.pdf)

Establishing Healthy Routines:

Maintaining daily routines, including healthy eating, sleep, and hygiene, is crucial for restoring a sense of normality and control. Participation in educational activities and work, when possible, helps rebuild confidence and structure, which are central to resilience https://together.pixel-online.org/files/guidelines/Guidelines_Portuguese%20Version.pdf

Practicing Mindfulness:

Mindfulness and cognitive strategies, such as reframing negative thoughts and focusing on present-moment awareness, have been identified as key enablers of well-being among migrants and refugees (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10749365/>)

These practices can be learned through community workshops or online resources and are supported by organizations such as the WHO and UNHCR.

Reframing Negative Thoughts:

Cognitive restructuring-challenging and changing negative thought patterns-has a strong evidence base for improving mental health outcomes in forced migration contexts. Encouraging hope, future orientation, and a sense of purpose are particularly important for resilience <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2266146>

7.4 The Role of Community and Opportunity

Research emphasizes that **social support, faith, opportunities for learning and employment, and the ability to help others** are more influential for resilience than institutional care alone. Community resilience is fostered when individuals participate in collective activities, access education, and are empowered to contribute to their new society. Programs that promote inclusion, such as language courses, buddy systems in schools, and community events, are vital for reducing isolation and building trust. www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/EBasico/PLNM/inclusao_de_alunos_migrantes_em_meio_educativo.pdf

7.5 Policy and Structural Support

Resilience is also shaped by policies that ensure access to rights, services, and opportunities. Effective interventions include:

- **Access to education and vocational training** for all ages

- **Anti-discrimination measures** and culturally sensitive services
- **Community empowerment initiatives** that involve refugees in decision-making and program design

7.6 Final Recommendations

- **Never hesitate to seek help.** Trusted sources such as the [UNHCR Europe portal](#), [EUAA](#), and [ECRE](#) provide multilingual information and contacts for support.
- **Value your experiences and knowledge**, even if they are informal or not recognized by formal systems.
- **Asking for support is a sign of strength**, not weakness. Social support and community engagement are scientifically proven to enhance resilience and well-being
- **Integration and well-being are possible** through unity, sharing, and mutual respect. Both host communities and newcomers benefit from inclusive, collaborative approaches

For Further Support

- [UNHCR Europe](#)
- [European Union Agency for Asylum \(EUAA\)](#)
- [European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(ECRE\)](#)
- [InfoMigrants](#)
- [WHO Mental Health Resources](#)

Resilience for migrants and refugees is built through a combination of individual strategies, supportive communities, and inclusive policies. By understanding common challenges, applying practical coping methods, and engaging with community and institutional resources, newcomers can overcome adversity and contribute positively to their new environments. The evidence underscores that resilience is not only possible but can be strengthened at every stage of the migration journey.