

Refugees find work faster thanks to preventive mental health care

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Job market participation of refugees lags significantly behind that of other migrant groups and Dutch natives. To ensure better participation among this group, we must also focus on their mental health. So argues

José Muller-Dugic, who will receive her Ph.D. at Radboud University on 26 February. She developed Mosaic, a positive psychology course for refugees.

Refugees go through an incredibly stressful time: fleeing from their home country, and finding their way in a new country where they also have to deal with all sorts of stressors. And yet, little attention is paid to the mental health of status holders. Muller-Dugic says, "If this is addressed at all, it is with traditional treatments aimed at trauma and depression, for example. That is and remains important, but a focus on mental well-being is just as important, and that has been lacking until now."

Syrian refugees

As part of her Ph.D. project, Muller-Dugic not only researched the mental well-being of Syrian refugees, but also developed Mosaic, a course aimed at strengthening mental well-being and improving participation opportunities. Research clearly shows that the two often go hand in hand: Someone who feels good about themselves is more likely to have a job, and conversely, a good job at your own level improves your mood. The course was developed together with experts by experience and partner organizations such as the Dutch Council for Refugees and Pro Persona.

Mosaic comprises six sessions, in which a group of 10 to 12 participants engage in conversation in their own language with a trainer and an expert by experience. "The first sessions focus primarily on things like what is meaningful to you, and what you do that makes you feel valuable for those around you," Muller-Dugic explains.

"Later on, we also practice talking about life values, setting goals around work and study, social contacts and [self-care](#), and using your strengths on

your path towards employment. These are all things that contribute to mental well-being, and therefore also to how a person feels about a potential job."

A job at your own level

Mosaic has now been offered to 180 refugees in six municipalities, including Arnhem and Nijmegen. "Compared to the [control group](#), participants scored higher on mental well-being factors, such as overall and emotional well-being and a sense of purpose," Muller-Dugic says about her [research](#).

"They were also significantly more confident about their ability to find a job and finding a job at their own level, and they spent more hours on an internship after the course, compared to the control group. These are all factors that make it easier to find a job at your own level."

Muller-Dugic says her research not only underlines the importance of devoting attention to refugees' [mental health](#) and the effectiveness of positive psychology for refugees in doing so, but also how much there is still to be gained.

"In this project, we brought together organizations that do not normally work together, and this produced many new insights. It is important that an intervention or course like this is really developed with the target group, rather than just for the target group. This requires investing more time and money, but it also helps to take important steps in reducing the distance to the job market for this vulnerable group," says Muller-Dugic.

Provided by Radboud University

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