Mentors Reflection Workshops Report

I.   General Information

Country and Institution: Portugal, Proportional Message.

Title of the event: Mentees' Reflection Workshop – "Vamos Falar Sobre Integração?" (transl.

"Let's talk about integration?")

Date of the event: 04/07/2024

Location of the event: Rua Costa Cabral, n 167, Porto

II.   Participants

Number of participants: 8

Country of origin: Brazil, Ecuador and Ukraine

For how long they have been in the country: 10 – 3 years

What is their official status (Asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented etc): 1 refugee and 7 migrants.

Age range (here you can use an average age of the group): 27 - 60

Gender: 7 woman and 1 man

III. Summary of the exchanges during the event

Summarize the main points from the workshop including interesting findings or anything that is worth mentioning for report.

We began by welcoming the participants via Zoom, explaining the need to hold the workshop online due to the lack of face-to-face participation and scheduling conflicts between all the mentors.

The facilitator was introduced and presented the project and the agenda.

We proceeded with the activity of Introducing the Mentors and Discussing their Expectations orally. Most participants were enthusiastic and showed motivation, as they had the expectation of providing the help they did not receive when they first arrived in Portugal. The most repeated keywords were 'help' and 'teach'.

Next, a brief presentation was given on the project's objectives and the context in which it is set.

When we moved on to defining the word 'mentor,' we noticed some hesitation about its meaning. However, after the explanation was given, the participants showed understanding and motivation.

One of the activities the mentors enjoyed the most was creating the Empathy Map, as it allowed them to relive their past and put themselves in the shoes of the mentees, making it the most emotional part of the workshop. It was interesting to observe that the mentors reflected their own insecurities and past experiences onto the persona that the facilitator created for them.

During the presentation of the mentors' responsibilities and boundaries, they were receptive and aligned with the project's values. They expressed the respect they felt for the mentees' position.

When we discussed the definition and various forms of violence, the mentors from countries with a higher rate of insecurity, such as Brazil, admitted that while there is still a strong awareness of physical violence, there is a lack of attention to emotional violence and child neglect. The mentors made a connection between violence and the lack of information.

All participants agreed that the dysfunctional public education system leads to misinformation in poorer social classes, which results in a greater tolerance for violent behaviors, as these are considered "normal." Additionally, abuse of power is not recognized as a form of violence, perpetuating structural and systemic violence. Most of the mentors present in this online workshop admitted that they left their countries due to violence, and this is a topic that deeply resonates with them.

Next, we discussed the importance of setting boundaries regarding the mentors' availability to the mentees and maintaining a balance between a distance and a closeness approach. During the interactive exercise, it was observed that the mentors had more experiences of distancing in their professional relationships than of closeness. The mentors also showed an excessive flexibility in their schedules, as they believe they should make themselves available and provide the help they didn't receive when they first arrived in Portugal. They noted that the need for this help often arises from situations that occur outside the stipulated hours, and they find it unethical to refuse assistance in such cases.

Subsequently, instructions were given regarding the respect for cultural diversity within the project. The mentors were very sensitive and open to this topic.

In the "Navigating Local Systems" activity, our facilitator was assisted by a specialist from the JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service in Porto. They shared successful case studies, allowing mentors to express their needs and discuss the potential challenges they might face when collaborating with mentees. The main need identified by the mentors was the lack of consistent information from competent authorities. Participants noted that when they have questions, the staff at these institutions often do not provide clear answers, presenting multiple solutions to the same problem, leaving mentors unsure of which is correct. Additionally, mentors expressed concern about mentees' fear of seeking help when in illegal situations in the country, due to the risk of reprisals or deportation.

Next, we encouraged the mentors to create a self-care plan and conducted a virtual body scan meditation session.

Finally, we spent additional time on communication skills, focusing on how to handle difficult conversations and crisis situations. The only area where mentors felt less confident was in dealing with potential mental health issues of the mentees. However, they were soon reassured and encouraged to guide the mentees in seeking help from professional specialists in this area.

Since it was not possible to provide feedback as originally planned in person, the mentors gave their feedback orally. It was a unanimous opinion that the information provided in the workshop was clear and very useful. Participants indicated that they felt more prepared and confident to perform their roles in the project. The workshop met their expectations. Everyone felt comfortable, although most would have preferred an in-person workshop.

III.   Workshop development

1. Did you include all the activities from the Agenda? If not, which ones did you excluded and why?

We could include all the activities except the Survey Violence Protection activity, because the participants were having difficulty accessing the Mentimeter through the QR code.

2. Did any issues arise during the workshop? If yes, what kind of problems appeared from the participant point of view?

Yes, we encountered issues with in-person attendance. On the day we scheduled the meeting with the mentors, we received late notice that most of them would not be able to attend. Therefore, we had to switch to conduct the workshop online.

In the Survey Violence Protection activity, we did not use Mentimeter because participants were having difficulty accessing the platform through the QR code.

Since the workshop was held online, we were unable to obtain the attendance list with physical signatures and the feedback as originally planned.

3. Did you, as an organizer, faced any issues? If yes, what kind of problems did you face during the workshop?

Conducting the in-person workshop was problematic. Initially, we agreed on a date with the participants. However, we had to change the date twice because not all mentors could attend. On the scheduled day, several people could not be present due to illness or vacation, so we were forced to hold it via Zoom.

We were unable to get the participants to sign the attendance list and provide feedback as planned due to the last-minute change, the workshop was conducted online.

V. Evaluation of the participants' satisfaction

We were unable to conduct the assessment as planned due to the last-minute change. The workshop was supposed to be in-person with an evaluation method of different stations related to the topics covered in the workshop, but it was not possible to carry it out online.