

FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

ORGANIZATION NAME	Crisalis
PROJECT TITLE	Promoting Refugee Women Integration and Empowerment through Photovoice
EXECUTION PROJECT BEGINNING AND END DATE	March 2020-July 2020
DATE OF REPORT	September 2020
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1. Introduction to the Project

In the last two decades, Europe has seen an important increase on the influx of migrants from all over the world. The Syrian crisis, along with other less acknowledged conflicts and situations of extreme poverty have forced many people to seek refuge in the region, of which Italy is one of the most important entry points. As in September of 2019, according to the UNHCR, Italy has received almost 100.000 asylum seekers who have been distributed in numerous reception facilities, most of them situated in the country's northern areas.

The long and difficult journey to Europe is especially dangerous for women and children, who become particularly vulnerable populations. With little economic resources and lack of social networking outside their areas of origins, women are easy prey of smugglers and traffickers. Once in Europe, the risk does not disappear: according to the UN, migrants in general but refugees in particular are more susceptible of sexual and labor exploitation in Europe than national citizens.

With this in mind, the labor and social integration of refugee women becomes a key factor to protect them from abuse and to promote their general well-being. Integration, however, is a long and complex process which requires multiple resources and a multidisciplinary approach. This workshop represented a small but important step to foster the participants' empowerment and their integration in the community. The strategy used was photovoice: through a Participatory Action Research, the participants captured images and co-constructed reflexive narratives about photographs that they took and that were going to be shared with the outside community. During our encounters, we wanted to highlight not only the meaningful aspects and problematics of their experience as migrant women in Italy, but also the participants' power to generate change. In order to achieved this, the activities of our workshop centered around the following objectives:

- To provide a safe and secure space for participants to express themselves and construct a solid and supportive web with other women in the same situation
- To identify the participants' needs, requests, and expectations regarding their experiences as migrants and as workers. What issues most impacted their life and why?
- To enable participants to reflect on their personal experiences and situate them at the public and social level in their communities

- To promote leadership among participants to encourage mentoring other women in similar situations

2. Structure of the workshop and activities

The workshop developed along three phases of two days each, with the following organization:

Phase	Days	Activities
1. Collaborative introduction to photovoice (8 hours)	Day 1 (4 hours) Seminar on photovoice: General theory and activity I	Let's get to know each other
		Participant's introduction to PV
		Choosing a theme to practice
		Reflexive Walking
	Day 2 (4 hours) Practical activity II and project theme selection	Photograph's presentation
		Review of PV
		Learning to develop cooperative narratives (SHOWeD method)
		Preparing a mural for the photographs
2. Photovoice project (8 hours)	Day 3 (4 hours) Project presentation	Let's be creative
		Selecting the theme for next project
		Focus group: First impressions about the project
	Day 4 (4 hours) Co-construction of narratives	Presentation of photographs taken during the month
		Group discussion of the meaning and significance of pictures for participants
		Selecting the pictures for the exhibit and elaborating the narratives around the pictures selected
3. Exhibit and assessment of the project	Day 5	Pairing the narratives with the photographs
		Organizing the exhibit
		Learning how to present the project to others
	Day 6	Qualitative semi-structured individual interviews with participants

Day 1:

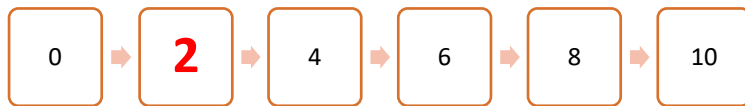
Participants attending the workshop: six participants plus a master student in training

Activity 1: *"how well we know each other"*

Development: Because the women already knew each other from working at Quid, I conducted a small activity to introduce each other and to understand the level of cohesion and confidence existing among the members of the group.

On a slip of paper, each woman had to respond individually to some simple questions, such as favorite color, food, hobbies and so on. Then they had to guess who responded what.

Results: The women know very little about each other. This is interesting considering that some even live together. The most popular girl was actually the one that participants knew the least. Based on the activity, "how well do you know your mates?", the results indicate a level of 2, where 0 means "I know nothing about my workmates present at this workshop" and 10 "I know very well my workmates"



Activity 2 “*Reflexive walking*”

After explaining the technique of Photovoice the participants and I went for a walk in the neighborhood, the scope was to take pictures about things that could help us explain who we are. The only directions I gave for the activity were: a) the photographs had to be individual, b) they had to walk together, or at least following the same direction.

Walking few steps behind the women, I could observe the interactions that participants had among them: who was acting as a leader and who preferred to remain in the shadow. Because of that somebody had to choose what route to follow, at each crossroad the women engaged in a debate whether to go one side or the other. Most women actively participated of these discussions with the exception of two who preferred to take their pictures distanced from the group. One of the participants brought her small son, all of the others were amused by it and seemed very protective of the child. In general, it was a fun activity to do together, and the participants seemed to enjoy taking pictures.

Back to the facilities, each participant exposed one photograph and discussed how it related to her experience as migrant. The images provoked a passionate exchange of opinions, and the participants were able to relate to each other thanks to their shared experiences. The major themes that emerged were:

- The importance of having a job: a job stability means to have money to send home, to be able to help their families, and in some cases to bring their children to Italy
- The journey: memories of crossing the desert, of jumping into a boat not knowing how to swim, the fear of the unknown. Almost all of the women had similar journeys to Italy and this was a moment of intense conversation.
- Food: One participant mentioned the importance of having an orchard back in the village, because it assured food even in harder times. Food was many times linked to freedom. To have food implied to have freedom
- Urban-rural life in their own countries: the pros and cons of living in the city. For some of the women, the city represented a dangerous place, and a place where they could not farm. For two of the women, instead, farming was not a valid option, and the city was an opportunity to become more independent by finding a job other than farming.

Day 2

Participants present at the workshop: six participants plus a master student in training

Activity 1: “The SHOWeD method”

Development: The women learned how to apply the SHOWeD method (Wang and Burris, 1994) to the photographs they took the day before.

- What do you *see* here?
- What is really *happening* here?
- How does this relate to *our* lives?
- *Why* does this concern, situation, or strength exist?
- How can we become *empowered* through our new understanding?
- And, what can we *do*?

Like the day before, the conversation leads towards their memories of the past, in particular their journey to Italy, and the feelings of leaving their families and villages. The participants have to co-operatively choose a short narrative that summarized the discussions that each photograph triggered.

Activity 2: *“The mural”*

Participants delineated the figure of one of the participants who laid on the floor over a paper. Then they chose where to place each picture over the sketched figure. For instance, the picture of the road is placed near the feet to symbolize the road they still have ahead, or the picture of the participant walking with her child is placed in the belly because of the family they left and that they want to have in the future.

I invited participants to be creative and to decorate the figure with their own drawings, and to talk about them. One participant painted a backpack which was very interesting. They then described to me the things they brought with them for their trip to Europe and they related it with the difficult choices they had to face in their life.

Activity 3: *“Let’s be creative”*

To start talking about the present and to acknowledge that the participants worked in a clothing factory, we took colorful pieces of fabric and invented outfits. The purpose was for the women to do a fun and collaborative activity, more rooted in their present life. The participants were very creative and loved taking pictures of them and their outfits. It was a nice activity to ease the heaviness of past conversation about their past.

We ended the day with a discussion to choose the theme for our project “Let’s talk about us, solutions for the future” (parliamo di noi, soluzioni per il futuro)

Day 3:

Participants present at the workshop: eight participants: two new women from Quid (the master student has left)

Development: Because of the Corona virus pandemic, we had to postpone our March meeting to July. This created an issue for the continuity of the project, even if we kept in touch through WhatsApp. Because of the confinement situation and in order to facilitate participants to relate with the situation in a more reflexive way, I proposed the women to change our project to the new topic of: “Being a migrant woman in times of COVID”

Activity 1: *Focus group*

We did a short presentation of each of us, because we had 2 new women from Quid. I asked participants to explain what we did during our first encounter to the newcomers and to summarize the PV technique. Then we talked about our experiences during confinement and going back to work. The women were talkative, in particular the new ones.

Activity 2: The choice of photographs and SHOWeD method

Each participant had to choose a picture taken during confinement and to explain it using the SHOWeD method that they learned in the previous workshop. This was extremely difficult for them and it took the whole session time.

Day 4

Participants present at the workshop: seven participants

Activity 1: *“my narrative your narrative”*

Development: We dedicated all of the time to select the pictures that would go to the exhibit and to write down the narratives that complemented each image. This was exhausting for the women: they had a very hard time collaborating, expressing themselves, and saying something about the pictures. The dynamic among the participants was completely different from the first workshop.

Day 5

Participants present at the workshop: eight participants, plus 9 workmates who assisted at the exhibit opening

Activity 1: “*images and words*”

Development: After 3 weeks, we met again for our last workshop. To start this last stage we did a small game: we had to pair the photographs with the narratives we elaborated. It was a way to review all of the narratives together and to see it as a whole in the exhibit.

Activity 2: “*the right place for each picture*”

We talked about the logic of exhibits, the importance of the space. They had to choose the best place for the pictures taking into consideration the space, light, the size of the pictures, the order of the story and so on. Then we hanged them out and attach their narratives and my reflection for each picture. We rehearsed how to present to the public the project, what was PV, the theme, and the meaning of the photographs.

Activity 3: “*Exhibit*”

At turns, three of the women volunteered to present the photographs and project to their colleagues.

Day 6

Development: Individual semi-structured interviews around the topic of the photovoice to measure the success of the project. The interviews were conducted among the eight participants, even if one did not fully participate in the workshop.

3. Planned versus actual performance

Outcomes	Indicators	Completion
Incentive to explore and share experiences through images	Number of pictures taken by each participant	Achieved: Participants took the photographs required for the project according to the chosen topic.
	Level of involvement of participants on giving insights about particular pictures	Achieved: All of the participants but one were able to relate the photographs they took with their own personal experiences during confinement and projects for the future. It took more time than expected, however.
	Personal perceptions about the advantages of knowing the photovoice technique	Achieved: In the final interview 5 out of the 8 women agreed that the photovoice was a useful tool for them. The main comment was that the project allowed them to talk about issues they do not generally talk

		among them. And that it helped them to understand better their situation.
Working towards empowerment and leadership	Number of women they have introduced to photovoice formally or informally	Not achieved: This part of the workshop “teaching to teach” had to be abandoned since developing the narratives for their pictures took more time than expected.
	Level of willingness to continue to form other women into the photovoice technique after the project ends	Achieved: During the interviews, participants expressed their willingness to show photovoice to other people
Increasing community building	Number of times participants have met to talk about the project outside of the scheduled workshops	Not achieved: None of the women did so
	Level of motivation to attend the workshops	Achieved: All of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the workshop and expressed their willingness to attend another workshop relating photography in the future.
	Personal perceptions about learning along with and teaching to other women	Achieved: All of the participants showed interest on learning and on being with other women in their community.
	Intentions to keep meeting with the women in the group after the project ends	Partially achieved: Although, in general, all of the women affirmed that the workshop helped to get to know each other a bit better, five of them expressed no interest to meet each other outside work, with the exception of those who already did so before the workshop.

4. Challenges and recommendations for the future

Time between workshops: the irruption of the COVID-19 and the confinement generated a time-lapse between the first and the second stage of 4 months. Because of this, the skills and information learned during the first two sessions had to be repeated and practiced again with the participants.

Adequate space: The meeting space was important. Each stage was conducted at a different location and sometimes the conditions were not the best. In particular, our third encounter occurred in a very hot day in a room with no ventilation and no AC. Participants, who came directly from work were tired, and had difficulties to focus. They kept complaining about the heat in the room and made up frequent excuses to leave the room.

Consistency in attendance: One participant attended only half of the full workshop, which made it impossible to present her photographs in the exhibit. She did not work with the other women on the narratives and could not learn about the main idea and goals of the PV. Another participant left the workshop early twice because she had pick up her son. This disrupted the flow of the workshop. Some sort of commitment should be required on the side of participants, if they really want to take advantages of the activities organized for them, they should attend the full length of the organized activity.

Community visibility

Because of time constrains, we could not open the exhibit to the public. I believe this workshop can still produce outcomes that would help to such visibility. In the interviews with the women, different options emerged like a book, postcards, another exhibit, and so on. The important message was that they were willing to do more to connect with the locals.

Writing and reading skills

Not all of the women knew how to read or write, not even in their own language. This was a challenge since some activities required some writing. We managed it by organizing groups where one person took the role of the writer. It is important for future activities and workshops to know in advance the literacy level of participants since this might influence the kind of actions undertaken.

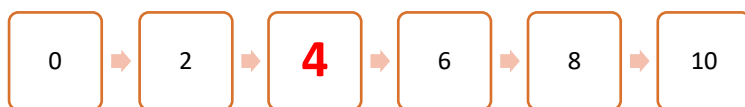
Language barriers

This was the most difficult challenge to overcome since one participant had no knowledge of English and little knowledge of Italian. This isolated her from many of the activities we conducted, and although the rest of participants tried to help with translations and additional explanations. it was almost impossible for her to follow the activities together with the other participants. I believe it is important for future workshops to organize women in more homogenous groups. A possible solution is also pairing women with other women from the same country and with a better level of Italian.

5. Additional comments and Recommendations

Although they have serious trust issues, under the right conditions, the women were able to talk and open to the other attendees. Some of the participants showed a deep level of reflexivity and ability to process the concepts learned during the workshop. They were able to link the activities with their own experiences and personal ambitions.

To the interview question “did this workshop helped you to know better your mates?” the results indicate this time a level of 4 where 0 means “I have learned nothing about my workmates present at this workshop” and 10 “I have learned a lot about my workmates present at this workshop”



I believe that the level of mistrust in other women and the fear of “what others could think” responded more to a cultural effect rather than to personal characteristics or direct experiences among each other. Because of that, this particular community of Nigerian women needed more

time to open and more time to establish common goals for the future, which is key in order to empower them and to construct a solid and supportive community. Without such social capital, the integration into the new society will be limited and slow.

Another important aspect to discuss is the level of willingness of all of the women to be in the workshop. Despite their positive answers and comments about the workshop, in some occasions the participants did not seem to be there because they wanted but because they had. The level of commitment must be clear before any workshop. To attend a workshop as a way of saving time from work does compromise the success of any activity and represents also an ethical concern, in particular in workshops that require personal disclosure, address delicate topics, and aim to encourage empowerment, independence, and active participation in the community.

To finish, I do believe that the organization and the team did an excellent work in facilitating this workshop, and that they showed a genuine interest in supporting the women's social integration beyond work. The care and attention the participants received was impeccable. I recommend dedicating more time and effort to motivate these women before further actions. For future workshops, I recommend the organization to fully inform potential participants about the purpose of any activity outside work, so they understand the requirements, and see the advantages of participating. Also, it is primordial to encourage literacy among some of the women. Without a basic level of reading and writing skills, their self-confidence is highly compromised, and their social and civil participation will always be partial.