



Resilience-building Art Therapy with Forcibly Displaced People

Poster presentation

Liliana Montoya De La Cruz and Natacha Pirotte

Forced migration remains a pressing humanitarian concern in Europe, with asylum seekers often exposed, throughout their odyssey toward a safer and more stable future, to cumulative stress, trauma, and disrupted life trajectories. These experiences often compromise mental health, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive interventions that foster resilience and psychosocial integration.

In this context, art therapy provides a non-verbal, culturally attuned space in which individuals can engage in processes of return and transformation — revisiting past experiences and personal resources to reconfigure identity and bounce back within a changing cultural environment.

The poster presents a pilot study conducted with a group of adult asylum seekers residing in reception centers operated by the Spanish Red Cross in Malaga. The study aims to examine both the changes produced by the intervention and the mechanisms underlying these changes, incorporating perspectives from multiple sources: participants' experiences, captured through semi-structured interviews conducted at the conclusion of the programme, and the art therapist's observations, systematically recorded using an observation grid after each session.

This pilot study builds upon a preliminary study published in 2024 and is part of a multi-year programme led by The Red Pencil, a humanitarian organisation with expertise in art therapy, in Malaga. For the purposes of this pilot, a research partnership was also established with Brunel University of London and the Complutense University of Madrid, which was able to draw on its experience developed within the Brundibar project to design the observation grid, enabling the integration of additional evaluation tools and methodological rigor to strengthen



the investigation of changes and mechanisms of change in resilience-building art therapy with forcibly displaced people.

Biography

Liliana Montoya De La Cruz, MA, is a British–Colombian Art Therapist, Visual Artist, and Art Educator based in Europe, who has lived in the UK, France, and Spain. She is Programme Lead and Senior Lecturer for the MA in Art Psychotherapy at Brunel University London. Liliana serves on the boards of the Spanish Federation of Professional Art Therapy Associations and the British Art Therapy Association, and is a member of the European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT) and the Andalusian Art Therapy Association. With extensive experience in educational, social, and humanitarian contexts, she advocates for art and creativity as foundations for education, health, and social change.

Natacha Pirotte is a certified Art Therapist with a master's degree from HAN University in Nijmegen, Netherlands. In 2016, she joined The Red Pencil Humanitarian Mission and established its Belgian office, where she now coordinates activities across Europe, India, Lebanon, and beyond. Natacha contributed to the founding of the European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT), serving as its first General Secretary. Her clinical work includes supporting people seeking international protection, youth at risk of social exclusion, and cancer patients. Originally trained as a civil engineer, she integrates scientific and creative approaches, bridging analytical and artistic perspectives in her art therapy practice.

Recent Publications

Pirotte, N., Montoya De La Cruz, L., Rodriguez Gonzalez, V., de Witte, M., Joosten, E. (2025). **Forcibly displaced adults' perspectives on change mechanisms after a resilience-building art therapy intervention**, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 92, ISSN 0197-4556, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2024.102229>.