

EMPOWERING ASYLUM SEEKERS TO INTEGRATE IN EUROPE:

a transnational report
based on experiences in
Hungary, France and England



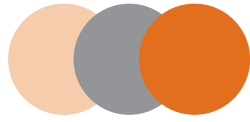
EQUAL



Fonds Social Européen

Cimade

“When I started this programme, I really wanted to learn things. If you live in a foreign country, you have to know what goes on around you. (...) Now I know many things, and I can speak Hungarian. When somebody tells me about a job opportunity, I am able to understand it. This is very important.”



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based on experiences in
Hungary, France and England

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Abbreviations

AFPA	Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes
CAFDA	Coordination pour l'Accueil des Familles de Demandeurs d'Asile
CASP	Centre d'Action Sociale Protestant
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CIMADE	Service Oecuménique d'Entraide
CEFRL	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
DP	Development Partnership
EASI	Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate
EEA	European Economic Area
ESELY	Munkaer Piaci Orientacio Menedekker Knek
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
FAAR	Formation, Accueil des Demandeurs d'Asile et des Réfugiés
LORECA	London Refugee Economic Action
NGO	Non governmental organisation
RAGU	Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit
RCO	Refugee community organisation
RETAS	Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service
TCA	Transnational Cooperation Agreement



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary

This report summarises the learning of the partners in Hungary, France and England that came together to form the EXCHANGES partnerships, from 2004 to 2007. The work of EXCHANGES focussed on the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers. This report sets out the wide range of initiatives which took place with regard to volunteering.

The EXCHANGES partnership

'EXCHANGES' was an EQUAL Theme I transnational partnership involving three development partnerships (DPs) in different European countries : the FAAR DP in France (Paris), the EASI DP in England (London, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle) and the ESELY DP in Hungary (Budapest, Bekescsaba, Debrecen).

The partnership focused on three key issues:

- language teaching and training
- orientation and preparation for the labour market
- capacity building for refugee community organisation (RCOs)

Each DP led on a particular issue:

- > the FAAR DP led the work on language training,
- > the EASI DP led the work on volunteering and capacity building,
- > the ESELY DP led the work on preparation for the labour market.

Partners developed numerous initiatives aiming at empowering individuals as well as organizations (partner organizations and RCOs) and DPs. In addition, there were transnational visits and conferences to enable partners to exchange ideas and experiences, and explore issues in more depth.

The notion of empowerment cuts across all areas of work. It was therefore addressed during the transnational visits and particularly at the three transnational conferences that were organised by EXCHANGES:

- > November 2005, Exchanges for an Equal Europe: asylum seekers and volunteering, London
- > October 2006, Empowerment through voice, Paris
- > October 2007, Policy conference on reception standards for asylum seekers in Europe, Budapest

The notion of empowerment

Empowerment has been defined so that its place is at the centre of developing measures to tackle social exclusion and marginalisation from the labour market. In terms of the Equal programme, empowerment at its best will mean that the intended beneficiaries of the activity – people facing discrimination in the labour market - will also take part in developing the project and making decisions at all levels.

Within Equal, empowerment is closely linked with innovation, as the programme aims to join strategies for employment with strategies for social inclusion. This is a challenging task that requires new thinking and approaches.



Executive Summary

If empowerment is a difficult concept to define precisely, it is even more challenging to put into practice in projects. As the EQUAL guide on empowerment states: “Empowerment requires a change in the balance of power - away from the ‘expert’ to the ‘beneficiary’. So, it signals a major change which needs fresh thinking and new approaches”¹.

Practical experience and good practice

The report provides accounts of a wide range of practical initiatives on language training, employment and capacity building that have aimed at empowering participants of the EXCHANGES DPs. These include the setting up of language training courses in London, Paris and Debrecen; the organisation of theatre workshops in Paris and London; a vocational language training course in Paris; employment orientation and guidance in Debrecen, Paris and London; a vocational training in London; volunteer work experiences in London and Debrecen; getting involved in the running of projects in London and Paris; leading radio broadcasts in Paris; performing on stage in Paris and London; taking part in transnational events.

Recommendations

Based on the wide range of practical experience, and on numerous other policy meetings, transnational visits and exchanges, the EXCHANGES partners have drawn up recommendations which they see as key to good practice at European, national and local level. These are listed in section 7. Six recommendations stand out:

- **On language training**
 - › Asylum seekers should have full and free access to mainstream language training provision, from arrival in the host society.
 - › Language training provision should cover a sufficient number of hours in order for asylum seekers to progress significantly in the host society’s language, with a minimal provision of 400 hours.
- **On employment**
 - › Asylum seekers should have the full legal right to work on entry into the host country and full access to the labour market.
 - › Asylum seekers should have access to mainstream vocational training provision (including work placement) as well as tailor-made courses in order to cater for special needs if needed.
- **On capacity building**
 - › Capacity building resource persons have to convey an attitude of respect, empathy, generosity and hospitality towards asylum seekers,
 - › Capacity building projects have to connect adequate partner organisations into an intelligent coherent reactive and complementary network of services and activities to implement a holistic approach towards asylum seekers,

¹- EQUAL 2004, Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships, GB Equal Support Unit, London.

Présentation synthétique

Ce rapport présente la synthèse des travaux des projets partenaires de Hongrie, de France et d'Angleterre qui se sont réunis pour former le partenariat EXCHANGES, de 2004 à 2007. Le travail du partenariat EXCHANGES s'est concentré sur l'insertion sociale et professionnelle des demandeurs d'asile. Ce rapport expose l'ensemble des actions développées sur la question du bénévolat.

Le partenariat EXCHANGES

'EXCHANGES' est un partenariat transnational du programme EQUAL (Thème I) regroupant trois partenariats locaux de trois pays européens : le partenariat FAAR en France (Paris), le partenariat EASI en Angleterre (Londres, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle) et le partenariat ESELY en Hongrie (Budapest, Bekescsaba, Debrecen).

Le partenariat transnational a ciblé trois questions essentielles :

- l'orientation et la préparation au marché du travail
- l'aide au développement associatif des réfugiés
- l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue

Chaque partenariat local a travaillé sur l'une de ces questions en particulier:

- > FAAR > l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue,
- > EASI > le bénévolat des demandeurs d'asile et l'aide au développement associatif,
- > ESELY > l'orientation et la préparation au marché du travail.

Les partenaires ont développé de nombreuses actions visant au développement en capacité, à l'autonomie et à la prise de confiance² des individus ainsi que des structures collectives (organisations partenaires, associations de réfugiés) et des partenariats Equal. Pour ce faire, plusieurs visites et conférences transnationales ont été organisées pour permettre aux partenaires d'échanger leurs idées et leurs expériences et d'approfondir ensemble leurs analyses communes.

La notion d'empowerment croise toutes les questions traitées par le partenariat Exchanges. Elle a donc été au cœur des travaux réalisés lors des visites transnationales, et notamment pendant les trois conférences européennes:

- > Novembre 2005, Les demandeurs d'asile et le travail bénévole, Londres
- > Octobre 2006, Quelle(s) parole(s) pour quelle(s) autonomie(s)?, Paris
- > Octobre 2007, Conférence finale sur la politique d'accueil des demandeurs d'asile en Europe, Budapest

La notion d'empowerment ou prise d'autonomie et de confiance

La notion d'empowerment se trouve au cœur des mesures prévues pour combattre l'exclusion sociale et le processus de marginalisation par rapport au marché du travail. Dans le cadre du programme Equal, la notion d'empowerment, dans sa dimension la plus achevée, signifie que les bénéficiaires des activités développées – les personnes devant faire face à des discriminations sur le marché du travail – prennent entièrement part au développement du projet et aux prises de décisions à tous les niveaux.

²- Le terme empowerment est difficilement traduisible en français par un seul mot équivalent. Ici, nous utilisons trois des termes qui recourent partiellement ce que recouvre cette notion : développement en capacité, autonomie, prise de confiance.



Présentation synthétique

Dans Equal, la notion d'empowerment est proche de celle d'innovation, car le programme a pour but de faire se rejoindre les stratégies pour l'emploi des stratégies d'inclusion sociale. Ceci constitue un défi pour lequel il convient de développer des nouvelles idées et approches.

Si la notion d'empowerment est difficile à définir, elle est encore plus difficile à mettre en pratique. Comme le souligne le guide Equal sur l'empowerment : « la notion d'empowerment exige un changement dans les rapports de force – loin de l'attitude de l'expert par rapport au bénéficiaire. C'est bien le signe d'un changement majeur qui nécessite des idées neuves et de nouvelles approches ».

Expériences et pratiques pertinentes

Ce rapport présente un large éventail d'initiatives pratiques sur l'apprentissage de la langue, l'emploi et l'aide au développement personnel ou associatif qui ont toutes eu pour objectif de tendre à la prise d'autonomie et de confiance des participants des projets du partenariat EXCHANGES. Celles-ci incluent l'organisation de cours de langue à Londres, Paris et Debrecen ; la mise en place d'ateliers théâtre à Paris et à Londres ; un atelier de langage professionnel à Paris ; des ateliers d'orientation professionnelle à Debrecen, Paris et Londres ; une formation professionnalisante à Londres ; des expériences de bénévolat à Londres et Debrecen ; s'impliquer dans la gestion des projets à Londres et à Paris ; animer des émissions de radio à Paris ; jouer sur scène à Paris et à Londres ; participer à des événements transnationaux.

Recommandations

A partir de l'ensemble des expériences pratiques et des nombreuses réunions, visites et échanges transnationaux, les partenaires d'EXCHANGES ont élaboré des recommandations qu'ils considèrent comme l'essentiel des pratiques pertinentes à mettre en place à l'échelon européen, national et local. Elles sont répertoriées dans la section 7. Six recommandations se distinguent :

- Sur l'apprentissage de la langue
 - Les demandeurs d'asile doivent avoir entièrement accès aux dispositifs de formation linguistique du droit commun, dès leur arrivée dans le pays d'accueil.
 - Les dispositifs de formation linguistique doivent prévoir un nombre suffisant d'heures d'apprentissage pour assurer une progression significative des compétences de communication dans la langue du pays d'accueil, avec a minima 400 heures d'apprentissage.
- Sur l'emploi
 - Les demandeurs d'asile doivent avoir le droit au travail et la possibilité effective d'accéder au marché de l'emploi dès leur arrivée dans le pays d'accueil.
 - Les demandeurs d'asile doivent avoir le droit d'accéder aux dispositifs de formation professionnelles du droit commun (y compris pour des stages pratiques) ainsi qu'à des formations sur-mesure en fonction de besoins spécifiques identifiés.
- Sur l'aide au développement personnel et associatif
 - Les personnes ressources doivent avoir une attitude de respect, d'empathie, de générosité, d'accueil et d'hospitalité envers les demandeurs d'asile.
 - Les projets d'accompagnement doivent être construits dans des réseaux de partenariat intelligents, cohérents, réactifs et complémentaires afin de mettre en oeuvre une approche holistique des personnes demandeurs d'asile.

Vezetői összefoglaló

Jelen beszámoló a magyarországi, franciaországi és angliai partnerek által alkotott EXCHANGES együttműködés 2004 és 2007 közötti tapasztalatainak összefoglalója. Az EXCHANGES tevékenysége a menedékkérők társadalmi és szakmai integrációjára koncentrál. Jelen riport az önkéntességgel összefüggő számos kezdeményezést mutatja be.

Az EXCHANGES együttműködés

Az 'EXCHANGES' program az EQUAL I. program keretén belül létrejött nemzetközi partnerség három nemzeti fejlesztési partnerséget (röv: FP) foglalt magában különböző európai országokban: a FAAR FP-t Franciaországban, az EASI FP-t Angliában és az ESÉLY FP-t Magyarországon.

Az együttműködés három fő kérdést érintett:

- nyelvi oktatás és tréning
- munkaerő-piaci orientáció és felkészítés
- a menekült közösségi szervezetek (RCO) kapacitásának növelése

Mindegyik fejlesztési partnerség egy speciális kérdéskört vezetett:

- > a FAAR FP a nyelvi tréningek munkáját vezette,
- > az EASI FP az önkéntességgel és a képesség fejlesztésével kapcsolatos tevékenységeket vezette,
- > az ESÉLY FP a munkaerő-piaci felkészítés munkáját vezette.

A partnerek számos kezdeményezést dolgoztak ki, melyek nemcsak az egyének, de a szervezetek (partner szervezetek és menekült közösségi szervezetek) és FP-k felkészítését, megerősítését is célul tűzték ki. Ezen kívül nemzetközi látogatások és konferenciák segítették az együttműködő partnereket az ötletek és tapasztalatok mélyebb szintű cseréjében.

A megerősítés (empowerment) fogalma minden munkaterületet érint. Ezért kapott kiemelt figyelmet a nemzetközi látogatások és különösképpen az EXCHANGES által szervezett három nemzetközi konferencia során.

- > 2005. november: Tapasztalatcsere egy egyenlő Európáért: menedékkérők és önkéntesek (Exchanges for an Equal Europe: asylum seekers and volunteers), London.
- > 2006. október: Megerősítés a hangodon keresztül (Empowerment through voice), Párizs
- > 2007. október: Szakpolitikai konferencia az Európában menedéket kérők befogadását érintő egységességről, Budapest

A megerősítés (empowerment) fogalma

A felzárkóztatás, megerősítés fogalma áll a munkaerő-piaci társadalmi kirekesztés és perifériára szorítás ellen küzdő intézkedések kialakításának középpontjában. Az EQUAL program értelmében a megerősítés azt jelenti, hogy az adott tevékenység jövőbeni kedvezményezettjei – a munkaerőpiaci diszkriminációval szembesülő emberek – is részt vesznek a projektek fejlesztésében és a döntéshozatalban, minden szinten.

Az EQUAL keretén belül a megerősítés szorosan kapcsolódik az innovációhoz, minthogy a programok célja az, hogy a munkaerő-piaci foglalkoztatással kapcsolatos stratégiákat összekapcsolja a társadalmi befogadással kapcsolatos stratégiákkal. Ez egy kihívásokkal teli feladat, mely újszerű gondolkodásmódot és felfogást igényel.



Vezetői összefoglaló

A megerősítés egy pontosan nehezen meghatározható koncepció, s ennél még nehezebb a projektekbe illesztve a gyakorlatban is megvalósítani. Az EQUAL irányelvek a megerősítést a következőképp határozzák meg: "A megerősítés a hatalmi egyensúlyban kíván változást létrehozni – eltávolodik a „szakértőktől”, közeledik a „kedvezményezettekhez”. Egy jelentős változásra utal tehát, mely újszerű gondolkodást és felfogást igényel."

Tapasztalatok és gyakorlatok

A beszámoló számos példával szolgál a nyelvi képzéssel, a foglalkoztatással és a képességek fejlesztésével összefüggő gyakorlati kezdeményezésekkel kapcsolatban. Ezek a kezdeményezések azt a célt tűzték ki maguk elé, hogy felkészítsék, megerősítsék az EXCHANGES program résztvevőit. A program részét képezte: nyelvi képzési program felállítása Londonban, Párizsban, Debrecenben és Békéscsabán; színházi műhelyek szervezése Párizsban és Londonban; egy szakmai nyelvi tréning Párizsban; foglalkoztatási orientáció és tanácsadás Debrecenben, Békéscsabán, Párizsban és Londonban; szakmai tréning Londonban; az önkéntes munka tapasztalatai Londonban és Debrecenben; részvétel az aktuálisan futó projektekben Londonban és Párizsban; rádió adások vezetése Párizsban; színpadi előadóművészet Párizsban és Londonban, illetve nemzetközi rendezvényeken való részvétel.

Javaslatok

A széles gyakorlati tapasztalat, a számos szakpolitikai megbeszélés, nemzetközi látogatások és tapasztalatcserék alapján az EXCHANGES program együttműködő partnerei olyan javaslatokat fogalmaztak meg, melyeket a gyakorlati megvalósításban kulcsfontosságúnak tekintenek mind európai, mind nemzeti, mind helyi szinten. Ezek listája a 7. részben található. Hat javaslat rajzolódott ki:

- **A nyelvi tréningek esetében:**
 - A menedékkérőknek teljes és szabad bejárással kell rendelkezniük az alapvető nyelvi tréningekre, a befogadó társadalomba történő érkezésük pillanatától.
 - A nyelvi képzéseket a megfelelő óraszámban kell biztosítani ahhoz, hogy a menedékkérők jelentős fejlődést tudjanak elérni a befogadó ország nyelvének elsajátításában, azaz minimum 400 nyelvórát kell biztosítani számukra.
- **A foglalkoztatás esetében**
 - A menedékkérőknek teljes körű munkajogokat kell biztosítani már a befogadó országba történő belépéskor és teljeskörű bejárást a munkaerőpiacra.
 - A menedékkérőknek biztosítani kell alapvető szakmai képzéseket (beleértve a munkába állást) éppúgy, mint személyre szabott képzéseket is az esetleges speciális igények kiszolgálása érdekében.
- **A képességfejlesztés esetében**
 - A képesség fejlesztését végző személy viselkedésének tiszteletet, empátiát, nagylelkűséget és a vendégszeretetet kell tükröznie a menedékkérő felé.
 - A képességfejlesztési projekteknek megfelelő partnerszervezetekhez kell csatlakoznia egy intelligens, koherens és kiegészítő szerviz és tevékenységi hálózatot létrehozva annak érdekében, hogy megvalósíthassák a menedékkérőkkel szembeni holisztikus szemléletmódot.



2. BACKGROUND

Background 2. Background

This report summarises the learning of the Development Partnerships in France, Hungary and England that came together to form the EXCHANGES partnership, from 2004 to the end of 2007. This section provides background on the EXCHANGES partnership and on the EQUAL programme, of which it was a part.

2.1 The EQUAL programme

The EQUAL programme was a European Social Fund (ESF) Community Initiative programme which operated across all the Member States of the European Union from 2001 to the end of 2007. The programme aimed to develop and test new ways of challenging discrimination and inequalities in the Labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work.

Equal was based on a partnership approach, enabling DPs with common interests and different expertise to work collaboratively at both national and transnational level. The programme was divided into a number of areas, called 'themes', each with a different focus but all with the shared purpose of identifying innovative practice, and with an underlying commitment to equality. Theme I had a focus on asylum seekers, and it is in this theme that the EXCHANGES partnership was located.

2.2 The EXCHANGES partnership

'EXCHANGES' is the name of an EQUAL Theme I transnational partnership involving three national development partnerships (DPs) which worked together to promote the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers in Europe.

- The three development partnerships in EXCHANGES were from France, Hungary and the UK:
- The FAAR DP in France, led by Cimade (a national non-governmental organization (NGO))
 - The EASI DP in the UK, led by Islington Training Network (a London-based NGO)
 - The ESELY DP in Hungary, led by Menedek (a national NGO)

The names of partners making up each partnership are listed in Appendix 2.

EXCHANGES: aims and activities

Over a three year period, the EXCHANGES partnership piloted and shared good practice, disseminated information, and worked to develop common policies with European partners. EXCHANGES focussed on three key issues:

- Orientation and preparation for the labour market
- Capacity building for refugee community Organisation (RCOs)
- Language teaching and training

The issue of empowerment, along with diversity and equality cut across all areas of work. Each development partnership (DP) led on a particular area or theme: the FAAR DP (France) led on language teaching and training, the ESELY DP (Hungary) on preparation for employment, and the EASI DP (UK) on capacity building and volunteering.



Background

In addition to practical projects, policy work and dissemination activities within each of the three countries, a series of transnational exchanges and study visits took place during 2005-7 involving partner agencies from all three DPs. These included a number of visits which enabled partners to learn about each others' work and share good practice, and three transnational conferences:

- Exchanges for an Equal Europe: asylum seekers and volunteering London 2005
- Empowerment Through Voice, Paris 2006
- Policy conference, Budapest, 2007

2.3 Policy context

In the context of each country, the three DPs face the inequality and barriers to social and vocational integration of asylum seekers who, as well as suffering in a similar way as other disadvantaged groups who are socially excluded, have particular problems associated with seeking asylum. The alienation which being an asylum seeker entails – living in society without being part of it – limits the individual's possibilities for action. The long, uncertain waiting period of the application process, often marked by inactivity and isolation has a significant bearing on the asylum seeker's future ability to integrate into the host society.

Limitation, uncertainty and isolation entail that asylum seekers are probably the least empowered of all the disadvantaged groups targeted through the EQUAL programmes.

For the last two years, all three DPs have been exploring the possibilities for facilitating asylum seekers' eventual social and vocational integration and / or for maintaining and improving their individual skills and competences during the asylum procedure. The aim has been to demonstrate that the asylum period can and should be used more positively.

2.3.1 The European Union Reception Directive

In February 2003, all Member States (with the exception of Denmark and Ireland) signed up to developing an EU-wide system for hosting asylum seekers throughout Europe, known as the Reception Directive (Council Directive 2003/9/EC). They agreed to guarantee a common quality of reception, services and opportunities for asylum seekers, to enable them to integrate into their new society while waiting for a decision on their application.

The Reception Directive is part of the much wider EU policy remit called the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which also includes legislative measures ensuring common procedures for requesting asylum and minimum standards for the qualification and status of persons as refugees.

The Reception Directive was one of the first legislative instruments to be officially agreed as part of the CEAS. After its official adoption in 2003, Member States had two years to 'transpose' the Directive into their national legislation. One of the EU programmes used to assist the implementation of the Reception Directive was the EQUAL Community Initiative, with one of its main themes focusing specifically on the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers.

2.3.2 Reception Directive Articles 11 and 12

As part of the minimum standards included in the Reception Directive, two articles refer to access to the labour market and to vocational training for asylum seekers. Article 11 establishes that Asylum Seekers have the right to access the labour market at the latest one year after they lodged their asylum application. However Member States may give priority to EU citizens and nationals of the EEA and legally resident third country nationals for 'national labour market' reasons.

Background

Article 12 refers to vocational training and establishes that Member States ‘can allow asylum seekers to participate in vocational training whether they have access to the labour market or not’ (but only if the vocational training is not linked to an employment contract).

2.3.3 Reception conditions in France

Before a status is either granted or denied, no service is provided during what is considered to be a waiting phase (whatever its length), during which the asylum seeker is not worth the least provision that could facilitate a hypothetical future integration in the host country. Consequently, since 1991, the French Government has concentrated on shortening the length of the procedure rather than on anticipating on the integration process during the waiting phase. Access to work is denied, no language or vocational training is provided, no support in the preparation for employment is granted, so that the time of the procedure is merely wasted and the integration process is both delayed and thwarted.

2.3.4 Reception conditions in Hungary

There has not been any comprehensive integration policy formulated yet. There is a policy paper on immigration policy in general: This mentions the importance of supporting the integration of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection but does not include asylum seekers.

The biggest obstacle the asylum seekers face in Hungary is the fact that they are not allowed to work outside the reception centres. After staying in the country for more than one year, they can obtain a work permit as other foreigners. Obviously the opportunity to attend Hungarian language courses free of charge would be essential for asylum seekers as well, language competency being the first step to further social integration.

2.3.5 Reception conditions in the UK

Asylum status restricts training and learning opportunities, and access to work has been denied to asylum seekers since 2002. Asylum seekers also experience long periods of uncertainty, inactivity and mental stress while their applications for asylum seeking are being processed. The asylum seeking process is not currently included into the Government’s wider refugee integration and employment strategy. The Government’s broader aims for refugee integration are set out in *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration* published in March 2005.¹ This states that ‘integration can only begin in its fullest sense when an asylum seeker becomes a refugee.’² The focus on the integration strategy will be on those who have been given leave to remain following an asylum claim.

Through innovative and experimental programmes targeting a selected number of beneficiaries, all three DPs have advocated and promoted a better vision and a more coherent approach to the reception of asylum seekers.

Within the current legal framework in the three countries, all three DPs have pursued the same objective : making sure that empowerment is an essential and central part of all activities targeted at asylum seekers.

1- The full Strategy can be viewed at http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws___policy/refugee_integrationo.Maincontent.0002.file.tmp/267218_RefugeeFinal_240205.pdf, last searched 14th February 2006.

2- *ibid* p.4



3. THE NOTION OF EMPOWERMENT

3. The notion of *empowerment*

An important added value of transnational work lies in the necessity of exchanging concepts, and the necessary words to name those concepts. The concept of *empowerment* has been quite an interesting example of how a whole concept could travel and be imported from a national context into two others; namely from the UK into France and Hungary. In French or Hungarian, no word in itself embodies all the meanings the word ‘empowerment’ has in English. In French, process and output, autonomy and confidence, opportunity and capacity are complementary words needed to approach the full meaning of empowerment.

If empowerment is a difficult concept to define precisely, it is even more challenging to put into practice in projects. *Empowerment requires a change in the balance of power - away from the ‘expert’ to the ‘beneficiary’. So, it signals a major change which needs fresh thinking and new approaches.*¹

A first way to approach empowerment is through the angle of the degree of involvement of members of the target group in the projects.

What is the part of actual consultation carried out in our projects? How far are the beneficiaries involved in developing projects or in making decisions? Are people passively receiving services intended for them without choosing to take part in them after taking part in the design of projects.

Another central dimension of empowerment lies in the degree of autonomy, confidence, skills, opportunities, access to a range of choices gained by an individual through activities carried out in a project.

3.1 Definitions

Different ways to define empowerment² :

- Verb (empowered, empowering) (empower someone to do something): to give them authority or permission to do it. [Chambers Encyclopaedic English Dictionary (1994)].
- Empowerment is the development of capacity and the opportunity for individuals and groups to play a full role in society in general, not only in economic terms but also in social, psychological and political terms.
- Empowerment means that those involved in the implementation of activities should also take part in the decision making.
- Empowerment is an enabling process that removes unnecessary restrictions from staff at all levels. It moves the responsibility for control from the manager to the team - a move from reliance on control through systems and bureaucracy, towards control through trusting.

Empowerment can be seen at both individual and collective level.

Promoting individual empowerment in projects involves:

- establishing and respecting the choices of target groups;
- recognising their achievements and experiences;
- confidence building by developing skills and therefore allowing for more choices and opportunities.

1- “Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships”, Sharing practice from the Equal programme, GB Equal support unit, p.5.

2- Ibid., p.5-6.



The notion of empowerment

The focus of collective empowerment is on working with target groups and promoting joint ownership of activities and projects.

Empowerment can be seen either as an 'output' or a 'process'.

As an output, empowerment constitutes the outcome expected from the activities of the project. For example, providing education and training on basic skills to help people to find work.

As a process, empowerment regards the way beneficiaries are involved in developing, designing and managing the activities in the project. For instance, using involvement mechanisms such as focus groups, management boards, to involve beneficiaries in managing and monitoring the activity.

3.2 Empowerment in Equal programmes

For Equal DPs, empowerment has been defined as³:

" (...) the development of capacity and the opportunity for individuals and groups to play a full role in society in general, not only in economic terms but also in social, psychological and political terms, with those involved in the activities also taking part in decision making (...)"

Empowerment has been defined so that its place is at the centre of developing measures to tackle social exclusion and marginalisation from the labour market. In terms of the Equal programme, empowerment at its best will mean that the intended beneficiaries of the activity – people facing discrimination in the labour market - will also take part in developing the project and making decisions at all levels.

Within Equal, empowerment is closely linked with innovation, as the programme aims to join strategies for employment with strategies for social inclusion. This is a challenging task that requires new thinking and approaches.

As stated in the Equal Initial Guidance:

"The idea of empowerment is that those who have little or no influence, such as excluded people, are able to acquire the capacity to have informed opinions, to take initiatives, make independent choices and influence change. It also means that those with influence actively change their attitudes and rules and change the way decisions are made through engaging with excluded people. The aim of projects based on the principle of empowerment is to encourage excluded people to take more responsibility and get more control over their lives. At the same time, they aim to change systems and rules to enable excluded people and groups to get fully involved in the labour market and in society"

3.3 Empowerment, integration and equality

Empowerment is key to integration.

Developing the capacity and opportunity of asylum seekers through meaningful activities during the waiting phase is doubtless a key element to integration. This means empowering individuals to play a full role in society in general, not only in economic terms but also in social, psychological and political terms.

³- Ibid., p. 6.

The notion of empowerment

Integration starts on day one

Static assumptions of integration, culture, displacement and migration ought to be challenged. The pathway to integration starts on the very day the asylum seeker arrives in the host country. The whole process of empowerment begins at this period and should be facilitated through adequate and specific provision.

The critical mass of examples and case studies collected by partners illustrate different approaches to good practice. In the fields of language training, preparation for employment and capacity building for community organizations, activities in the three projects show the utmost importance of the empowerment dimension, both individual and collective.

As a product, empowerment will increase the confidence, self-esteem and skills of individuals and communities. As a process, empowerment will create more accessible and focused services, based in actual rather than perceived needs.

Meeting the target of Equality

All the project activities and results are implementation of policy priorities such as Equality Directives. All three projects have carried out activities that should enable the policy makers to meet their own targets.



4. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LANGUAGE TRAINING

4. Empowerment through language training

4.1 Legal context regarding access to language training for asylum seekers in England, France and Hungary

According to the Geneva Convention, the best possible treatment should be reserved to a person seeking asylum in a host country. Such a person should be considered a refugee as long as the host country has not proved otherwise, the refugee status being a recognitive status.

Access to language training in the host society should be part of a package of measures ensuring the best reception conditions for Asylum seekers in Europe. However, that is not the case in the three European countries represented in the Exchanges partnership. These three countries, like many others in the EU, do not organise mainstream access to language training for asylum seekers on the ground that these people have a temporary right to stay in the host countries examining their claims and also because of the fear of the infamous “pull factor”.

The comparative summary of the Baseline Survey produced by the Exchanges Transnational Partnership on the access to language training for asylum seekers in France, Hungary and the UK describes that:

“(...) legislation makes it difficult for asylum seekers to (...) integrate themselves into society while they wait for their applications to be processed. Since their legal status is itself being decided upon, they are not entitled to many of the things that those with recognised refugee status are entitled to (...). In Hungary, while recognised refugees are entitled to a 360-hour-long language course, asylum seekers are not entitled to any language or other training at all (...). Similarly in France, those with refugee status are required to attend French classes while those waiting to receive this status are not entitled to any sort of language or other training. In Britain, asylum seekers are allowed to enrol on government-funded ESOL and other English language courses, but are not permitted to take up any sort of vocational training or higher-level free English courses. Training courses for asylum seekers have been set up in the UK using European Social Fund funding, but these courses are not allowed to include any vocational element”.

Source: “Comparative Baseline Survey”, Exchanges / Esely, Budapest, 2007

In this respect, the three countries are not officially in breach of the EU Reception Directive as it does not make any specific recommendation on language training. However, it seems obvious that the mastering of the host society’s language is essential to implement effective access to vocational training and/or employment, two possibilities specified in articles 11 and 12 of the directive, besides the other obvious positive aspect of making it possible for asylum seekers to interact with the host society at large as early as possible on their arrival in the host country.

This position is common to all Equal projects that have taken place in Europe for the benefit of asylum seekers and is summarised as such:

Advice, education and training

“The learning of at least one of the official languages of the host country represents an essential starting point for asylum seekers to be able to act and interact with their new host society, to access and effectively use health and social care services, to enter employment and to establish relationships with host members. This primary condition has been well established in the literature for some time. In spite of this, many asylum seekers still have minimal access to language courses. In some cases, their legal status does not match the national or regional requirements for further education or training; in others, the demand for language classes outstretches what is currently on offer and asylum seekers find themselves on long waiting lists. This in turn has a negative impact on the employment of asylum seekers (...).



Empowerment through language training

In response to this problem, several EQUAL projects have set up language courses for asylum seekers and/or opted for a hand-holding approach, informing them on what kinds of training are available to them within the Member State, how they can access it and providing them with practical and moral support throughout the process. Furthermore, offering civic education, including intercultural learning, has helped asylum seekers to better understand and orientate themselves in the new society. The events organised in the framework of civic education, and the interactions and dialogues that these have sparked off between asylum seekers and members of the local community, have succeeded in fostering mutual understanding and respect.

The powerful commentary that EQUAL projects offer in relation to the Reception Directive is that language training constitutes an essential element of the reception of asylum seekers. It therefore needs to be incorporated into the minimum standards enshrined in the Directive. In addition, the EQUAL experience has demonstrated that training courses which combine language with vocational training speed up the process of socio-vocational integration. It ensures that the period during which asylum seekers await the decision regarding their asylum application can be purposefully used to kick-start their integration process. In those Member States, where a waiting period before entry to the labour market is in operation, EQUAL projects provide asylum seekers with the skills, knowledge and instruments to proceed with their integration once a permit to reside and work within the national territory has been granted. This not only reduces the feelings of being ‘in limbo’ that asylum seekers are otherwise exposed to, but it also accelerates their entry into the labour market and their contribution to the host society. Even if their application for asylum is turned down, it could be argued that the economic profile of the asylum seekers has been strengthened, as they gained skills and competences which might ultimately benefit them upon return to their home country or onward journey”.

Source: “Minimum standards – and beyond: the contribution of EQUAL to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers”, EQUAL European Policy Forum, Malmö 2007, pp10-11.

In coherence with the position described above, the FAAR DP in France, the ESELY DP in Hungary and the EASI DP in England chose to organise access to language training and complementary activities for the asylum seekers who took part in the projects, language proficiency being the primary condition to be empowered to function as any other citizen in the host society. These activities comprised :

- languages classes following mainstream and tailor-made approaches,
- activities in the city mixing language and socio-cultural awareness,
- theatre workshops,
- vocational language training.

4.2 Learning the language of the host society

4.2.1 A learner-centered approach

Learning English : accelerated learning method (SEAL – Society for Effective Affective Learning) and ESOL approach
Refugee Women’s Association, partner of the EASI DP, London

The Refugee Women’s Association was established in 1993 to provide advice and guidance on education, training and employment to refugee and asylum seeking women as well as the delivery of training and capacity building programmes.

In the EASI project, language training was provided according to the following objective:

Empowerment through language training

To test the SEAL (Accelerated) and Skills for Life blended methods of delivering ESOL to asylum seekers with particular focus on ways of overcoming potential barriers which include the following:

- Insufficient fluency in English.
- Lack of information about the host country regarding integration.
- Lack of motivation and confidence following moves from their home countries.
- Isolation, especially if families are still at risk
- Uncertainty of immigration status
- Being a lone parent and lack of childcare
- Living in a neighbourhood with high level of deprivation.
- Racial discrimination.

RWA uses Accelerated Learning Techniques in the provision of ESOL to asylum seeking women. It has been found by RWA that the use of Accelerated Learning Techniques make integration of women with very different communication needs and abilities, backgrounds, languages and culture easier. Tutors of ESOL courses for asylum seeking women are aware that a huge problem for the majority of this client base is that of low self esteem and dispersal. The need to empower them to read, write, listen, speak and develop computer skills, in addition to embedding English into the course materials and building confidence, has created a difficult dichotomy because many of the women have never had jobs, higher education or training and instead have been caring for their families or helping in their communities. Some are not literate in their own language which creates an even more difficult barrier to learning. Many asylum seeking women find it culturally difficult to speak publicly about themselves, even in all women classes, so the use of Accelerated Learning techniques in order to overcome this initial barrier has been invaluable.

The techniques of Accelerated Learning that we have adopted are as follows:

- a) teaching kinaesthetically by using touch and textures
- b) teaching physically by using dance and physical exercise
- c) teaching visually by using coloured paper or coloured print and images for hand-outs
- d) teaching aurally by using sound, music and songs
- e) teaching orally by encouraging the learner to speak, voice opinions, explore language and ideas, bounce ideas off each other and by using stories
- f) teaching aromatically by using oils, incense etc. for relaxation or stimulation, in the learning environment.
- g) using taste e.g. having fruit, biscuits or sweets, and water, tea and coffee freely available during the class
- h) teaching imaginatively by using stories, visualisation, guided meditation and affirmations

One good thing about accelerated learning is that tutors can have their own teaching preference which should be according to SEAL (Society for Effective Affective Learning).

RWA has provided 4 courses to asylum seeking women in the London area. They have been able to move beneficiaries from the Accelerated English courses to the capacity building training which will provide them the opportunity to volunteer in their community organisations.

Even though the aforementioned barriers cannot be removed over a short period of time, the provision of Accelerated English Language, volunteering opportunities through the capacity building training will go a long way in alleviating some of these barriers. The provision of childcare will give women asylum seekers the motivation to attend training courses more regularly because some of them are not entitled to any benefit. RWA has also embedded orientation and integration into the Accelerated English course and they found the skills for life materials useful in covering these topics.



Empowerment through language training

My name is Rahma Abdullah. I came from Sudan on 26th October 2004. When I arrived in the UK, in South Humberside, I felt alone but after two or three months, I went to school to study English. That helped me not to think too much about what happened to me in my country.

When I came to London, I carried on learning English and passed Entry one, two and three levels of the ESOL programme. I was referred by RWA to Elthorne Learning Centre where I studied “Introduction to Community Development” and “Health Care” courses. These courses were very interesting and useful. I am currently studying Information Technology because, if I want to work, I must know how to use a computer.

I consider myself successful because when I came here, I did not know what I could do since everything was unknown to me but, step by step, I found myself on the right way to start a new life. I am more confident now and positive about my future. My English and my life skills have improved. I have been supported by Refugee Women’s Association since I came to London.

Finally I would like to say something about my future. I would like to finish my study, speak English well and I will find a voluntary job until my claim is treated by the authorities. Then I will go to university to study further and do good things for this country.

The ESELY programme: how to get on with Hungarian Menedek, lead partner of the ESELY DP, Budapest/Debrecen/Bekescsaba

The training part of Equal “CHANCE” programme started with a Hungarian language course, which acted as the base of an integrated methodology with asylum seekers. On one hand, it meant, that the language module provided the base for the other modules’ success, and on the other hand, it also meant a strong cooperation of all partners for achieving the set goal, helping asylum seekers’ labour-market orientation, for their successful future integration.

The language module included the following:

- the psychotherapists made the language teacher aware of the symptoms of trauma and of other psychiatric problems,
- the social worker informed the language teacher on refugee issues, and called her attention to the cultural differences,
- trainers, experts consulted the language teacher on regular bases for the accurate preparation of the capacity building module’s vocabulary.

The frame of the language module

According to the experimental profile of Equal „CHANCE” programme, it provided opportunity for putting into practice different models. Among others, there were experiments on the place of the language course (in or outside the reception centre), on the time and duration of daily language classes.

Experiences concerning the frame of the language module

- The set 170 hours language course can only contribute to the acquisition of a basic elementary level.
- The daily 4X45 minutes are enough for a well-balanced learning process.
- Studying in the morning serves for a better-structured day than studying in the afternoon.

Empowerment through language training

- Having the language course outside of the reception centre provides more efficient development in language learning, than having it inside the reception centre (language knowledge, net of contacts, daily routine...).

“It was also very good to leave the camp for the training. If you are in the town, you get to know more people.”

Motivation

The language course days were started and finished with acknowledging the objects and goals of language learning. Concerning asylum seeker group of participants, the acknowledgement made a strong motivation: the future, their opportunities for integration depend on the acquired language knowledge. The daily routine, getting used to learning (again), as opposed to the monotony of reception centre, revitalised the participants. Getting up, getting ready on time, taking part in the language class, having lunch, practicing the language in its natural setting, all play an important role in the preparation of asylum seekers' integration.

“We knew, when we get up, we will go to the course, and we will meet people. We knew, that there will be something new tomorrow, we will learn something new.”

Methodological experiences

- Language games are helpful to enhance relaxation as well as memorisation. They help diminish the trauma of exile as well as the monotony of the reception centre and the stress of continuous uncertainty.
- In a classical teaching situation, it is often the language teacher who leads questions and answers. With groups of asylum seeker learners, it is more efficient to allow for a student-oriented class dynamics. It is up to the asylum seekers to decide how much they are willing to open up in the language classroom. The teacher can force neither questions, nor answers, especially regarding issues concerning family matters and past life.
- The daily consultation between psycho-social experts and the language teacher is very useful for the close follow-up of participants' development and for recognising appearing problems at an early stage.
- Concerning the participants' different cultural, social and psychological states, the language teacher's community building capacity plays a crucial role in socializing participants for cooperation, and for helping one another.

“The participants – while keeping their characteristics - learnt to appreciate the others' characteristics, moreover these differences were taken as advantages, as sources of personal positive attributions.”
“Our group was great, fantastic, and very much united. There were Nigerians, Sudanese and Cameroonians. (...) I am still in good relation with my ex-group members, all of them live here close to me, in the camp.”

The contents

Given the small number of language classes, the contents concentrated on identity, being able to talk about one's interests (socially and professionally), interacting in basic daily-life situations and meeting with others.

Here are a few recommendations about learning situations with asylum seekers:

- The work on individuals' identity has to be driven carefully so not as to add to asylum seekers' trauma with unwanted questions on their family.
- Themes were chosen according to students' interest. For example, the theme of professions provided opportunity for acquiring professions' names that were interesting, important for them. This was a preparatory exercise also for the following labour-market training.



Empowerment through language training

- The hobbies' theme followed the above-described logic. To avoid critical discussion about their financial deprivation, expensive hobbies, like some sports, were avoided.
- The shopping theme provided another opportunity for breaking out from reception centre's routine, and tuning into real life (with the help of real shopping experience).
- An emphasis was put on health-related vocabulary, based on the asylum seekers' special needs. Besides of the traumatic events' effects, they generally had problems in adapting to the new climate and eating habits.
- The daily and the weekly agenda, the norms, the meals, and the religious and family holidays' vocabulary also contributed to the next module, indeed the asylum seekers' acculturation process.

The integrated methodology is strengthened by the fact that the language, acquiring a language proved to be personality strengthening for asylum seekers. This is how the language module can be really linked to the other services – psychosocial support and labour-market training - of the project.

B was a student in economics at university when he fled from Guinea. He did not have the time to complete his schooling at university in his country. He first fled to the Ukraine, where he learnt Russian, before arriving in Hungary to ask for asylum within the European Union.

B spent seven months in the refugee camp of Debrecen before joining the EQUAL programme. The program gave him the opportunity to begin learning Hungarian with three weeks of intensive Hungarian classes in an institute, located in Debrecen town centre. This course represented the first opportunity to go outside of the camp. B found Hungarian to be a really difficult language but he enjoyed the challenge, as well as the course about Hungarian history. The language institute also gave him the opportunity to meet with Hungarian people, who were attending an English course in the institute. Teachers used to organise exchanges between Hungarians and asylum seekers so that everybody could practice the language they were learning. B believes that his educational background helped him to make the most of this programme and adapt himself to the Hungarian way of life. B is now confident in Hungarian and that confidence feeds into his constant progress in the language. He never hesitates to speak and take part in conversations with others.

Even if Debrecen is the country's second largest city after Budapest, people on the whole may be reluctant to get in touch with foreigners and it is therefore a place where it is not easy to insert as an asylum seeker. Thus mastering the host-society's language is essential if one is determined to live with the local population.

4.2.2 From the classroom to the city

Becoming a citizen of Paris : learning French in and out of the classroom Cimade, lead partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

The French language classes were the pivotal activity of the FAAR DP project developed in Paris. For four reasons:

- they were the asylum seekers' main interest for joining the project as they all expressed the essential need to communicate in French in order to function in the host society;
- they represented the main activity of the project with sessions organized for periods of three months at a time, at a pace of 12 hours a week (in 4 periods of 3 hours each);
- they provided for an almost daily contact with the participants of the project, and it is around the language classes that all other activities were organised (judicial help, social assistance, theatre workshop, vocational language training, job discovery workshop, job counselling);
- they became the symbolic and real social living space where all participants felt they had a place where they were welcomed and where they could meet with others and do things together that made sense.

French was taught with the communicative approach, developed in language teaching methodology since the 80s. The teaching was learner-centered and asylum seekers were considered, like any language learner, as *“social agents, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action”* (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment, Council of Europe, Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg – 2001).

The teaching/learning progression and the organisation of the contents were based on the acquisition of pragmatic, linguistic and socio-cultural skills. A balance was established between oral and written work, with an emphasis on oral competency, especially with beginners.

A lesson would develop as follows:

- spoken or written comprehension (preparation of the listening or the reading / general and detailed comprehension),
- focus on pragmatic and linguistic aspects of oral or written French,
- spoken and/or written practice and expression, rooted in contextualised real-life situations.

A significant number of the varied learning activities used in the French courses were aimed not only at French language itself but also at broadening the participants' understanding of their administrative situation, or getting to know the Parisian social and cultural environment as well as the broader French societal context. These specific activities enhancing the use of language in its social, cultural and political dimensions allowed for the participants to become gradually more and more autonomous in their daily life in the host city/country, thus being empowered, growing in confidence and building one's place in the host society individually and collectively.

Here are five examples of these activities, ranging from knowing about emergency services telephone numbers to understanding a political debate on French immigration policy and taking part in it.

Emergency services telephone numbers

- Support document : a leaflet distributed by the City of Paris.
- Learners progressing from beginner's level to basic elementary level.
- Pragmatic objective: ask for/give / note a telephone number.
- Linguistic objective: numbers, names of jobs.



Empowerment through language training

Tasks:

- > Sort out the numbers according to the type of service provided (medical, domestic, transport, etc).
- > Oral pair work > A asks for an emergency service telephone number (problem presented on a flashcard) and B gives it.

Empowering aspect: participants work with the real emergency numbers and therefore learn important information for their daily life in Paris. They understand who to call and how to do it in case of a problem.

Sorting out waste

- Support document: waste selection information leaflet.
- Learners progressing from beginner's level to basic elementary level.
- Socio-cultural objective: the waste selection system in France (colour-coded bins).
- Linguistic objective: introduce the negative structure 'ne ... pas', household products names.

Tasks:

- > Written comprehension of the leaflet (vocabulary, symbols).
- > Role play with real waste to sort out correctly in different types of bins according to its nature.

Empowering aspect: this activity revealed that many participants had no idea that a waste selection system existed. Therefore it made them aware of it and also served as a first approach to the environmental issue. It also provided an opportunity to compare waste management systems in different countries.

Discovering and using the local library

- Support document: the library presentation leaflet.
- Learners progressing from basic elementary to elementary level.
- Socio-cultural objective: the Parisian local library system.
- Pragmatic objective: give personal information to register in a library.

Tasks:

- > Before the visit, in class, locating the library on the city map, understanding how to get there.
- > During the visit, finding information in the library leaflet (opening hours, prices, conditions).
- > Registering at the library desk.
- > Visiting the library, understanding its organisation and locating one's favourite sections.

Empowering aspect: participants felt welcomed in a public city place. They received an official registration card. They understood they could use this place as any other citizen. Many of them used this first opportunity to start borrowing books and carried on using this space or other libraries in the city, inviting friends or family members to do the same.

Visiting a museum: the case of Musée Carnavalet

- Support document: leaflet presenting the free museums of Paris.
- Learners progressing from basic elementary to elementary level.
- Pragmatic objective: find and understand information.
- Linguistic objective: hours, directions.
- Socio-cultural objective: the evolution of Paris.

Tasks:

- > Before the visit, in class, written comprehension of the museums' leaflet (location, opening hours, topics).
- > During the visit, directing oneself in the museum with the different panels displayed, understanding the different stages of the evolution of Paris.
- > After the visit, back in class, work on the museum map, compare findings on the evolution of Paris made in the museum with information given in the leaflet.

Empowerment through language training

Empowering aspect: visiting a museum made the participants feel like ‘normal’ citizens or visitors of a city. They understood they could use this public place like any other person. They also enjoyed learning about their host city and getting a sense of its history. Some of them went on to find information about other places of interest to them in the vicinity of Musée Carnavalet, like Victor Hugo’s house, Place des Vosges or the area of Le Marais.

Understanding and taking part in a debate about immigration in France

- Support documents: the ‘anti disposable’ immigration campaign logo, 13th May demonstration leaflet, different newspapers articles.
- Learners progressing from elementary to intermediate level.
- Pragmatic objective: find and compare information, express one’s view.
- Linguistic objective: comparative structures.

Tasks:

- > Brainstorming on the logo.
- > Finding information about the demonstration (what? when? where? who?).
- > Reading comprehension of the article “Because sub-humans do not exist”.
- > Reading comprehension of articles on immigration and the new law in different newspapers: who writes? is the article in favour or against the law? why?).

Empowering aspect: the participants were very motivated to understand the debate in France on immigration at the time of a new law proposal being discussed in Parliament. It allowed them to have a clearer vision of the French political context and make up their minds about this discussion. Some of them even chose to get more involved through contacts with other organisations.

4.2.3 From the classroom to the farm

Back to Earth – English on the farm: an innovative project with asylum seekers British Refugee Council and Hackney City Farm, partners of the EASI DP, London

- **Back to Earth** attempts to look at new ways of addressing and supporting the multiple needs of asylum seekers. It is a twelve week programme offering asylum seekers a course in English and community learning/volunteering based at an inner city farm.
- Participants are supported by helping them to improve their English skills, encouraging them to integrate with other local residents and volunteers, and teaching and involving them in other interesting and practical farm based activities.
- ESOL - Participants start each week with two days of structured, classroom-based English language lessons following the Skills for Life syllabus (entry 2 level - Elementary).
- Volunteering - The second two days of each week are spent learning new, fun and interesting practical activities and volunteering their time to support the work at Hackney City Farm.

Outcomes of the programmes

- Learners have the opportunity to practice their English skills within a practical and supportive environment whilst volunteering. They are motivated to communicate with the general public and other volunteers.
- Embedding ESOL within the volunteering has proved effective, not only in attracting learners into programmes, but in encouraging good levels of attainment.
- The programme offers those involved a unique, supportive environment in which to learn, participate, integrate with others, build confidence, and put aside problems.
- The Back to Earth programme has shown that the activities delivered have had a therapeutic effect on the participants who would otherwise be thinking about their current situation, what they have been through, and what they have had to leave behind.



Empowerment through language training

TH is a man from Ethiopia. He is in his early thirties and single. He arrived in France in March 2004. Upon arrival, he was hosted in hotels for 7 months before he was accepted in a reception centre where he could benefit from legal, social and administrative support. 7 months after he arrived in France, TH was referred to a language course provided by a charity organization and open to asylum seekers which he attended for 16 months, until February 2006. In September 2006, TH was referred to the FAAR project by the social worker of his reception centre. He entered the most advanced group since he already had some language skills. After a first training module of three months, he entered a second one from January 2007 to May 2007. In January 2007, after almost three years of waiting, he was recognised as a refugee.

When TH entered the project, he was one of the few who had already been able to attend a language class. Although he knew some French, he obviously needed more training to make use of the language in everyday basic situation. After his first language training stopped, although his social situation improved, he had nowhere to go and felt isolated. We felt he came to the project primarily to find a social life he could have nowhere else. It seemed that the more comfortable he felt within the group, the more his language learning improved. He was the only one of his country and language in the group and that may account for his willingness to go towards the others. More than a place to learn language, it seemed the language training place was for him a central point in his everyday life.

“Before, I couldn’t speak, I couldn’t speak my mind. It was difficult for me to explain myself in administrative situations, at the social security offices, at the reception centre. I couldn’t even talk to my lawyer because she couldn’t speak English. When I started with the French course in the FAAR project, I liked the approach the staff had with us. I was listened to, I could explain who I was, tell about my story. I could speak freely, even though it was in English. I arrived in France on 12th March 2004. For 5 months, until October, I couldn’t get any language classes. I was living in hotels and my situation was very unstable. Then I was sent to a reception centre where I got social and legal help. But no language training. A friend referred me to a charity organization where they had a language course open to asylum seekers. For the first 5 or 6 months it was fine, we were all beginners. Then it became more difficult because some people were not attending regularly and the levels became increasingly different.

After my very first classes I felt happy I could say something. It doesn’t mean you can actually go and talk to people in the street, because people don’t talk easily, they wouldn’t answer you. At the reception centre, I gradually felt confident enough to watch TV. At the beginning, and for a while, the place where you can really talk and communicate is the language class. Gradually, I felt less and less worried before my appointments with administrative services, with social workers, less worried to talk, not to be understood when talking.

At the reception centre, it is sometimes possible to meet and talk to people, not so often though. Residents live there but attend to their own activities, they come and go. They tend to remain within their family, in their rooms. Maybe it had something to do with my own character, the way I am with other people. Then I decided to go to a gym. I had my language classes in the mornings, I was getting on allright and I thought I needed to do something good for my health, do some sport. So I went to the gym near the reception centre. I could meet people there even though it’s not a place where you do a lot of talking! What helped me most is doubtlessly the access to language. I could meet other people, explain my views, talk about my situation, ask, claim my rights. Once you can learn the language, everything just goes fine. The second most important thing is the possibility to meet with other people. For this, you need a place, and people to talk to. This is what the project gave me: an opportunity to speak to and meet with others”.

4.3 Learning language through drama

Theatre and asylum : common stage, extra-ordinary language

Cimade, lead partner of the FAAR DP, Paris
in partnership with *Théâtre du Soleil* and *L'Instant d'une Résonance* theatre companies

The origin of this activity and its development

In July 2003, Ariane Mnouchkine's *Théâtre du Soleil* theatre company offered to organise theatre workshops with newly-arrived migrants and suggested to form a partnership with Cimade and its long experience of organising French learning courses with migrants. It was agreed to set up a theatre workshop with asylum seekers taking part in the first Cimade-led Equal round 1 project (Euraccueil DP).

The experience proved so useful, unique and empowering for the participants, especially thanks to the inspiring attitude and work of the actress/director leading the workshop (Hélène Cinque, former *Théâtre du Soleil's* actress and presently in charge of *L'Instant d'une Résonance's* theatre company), that it was decided to carry on with this particular activity for the following years, within the scope of the Cimade-run Equal projects (first Euraccueil DP – 2003/2005, then FAAR DP – 2005/2007). Hence the organisation that followed of three further workshops, thus accounting for four creations in total, from 2004 to 2007.

The two shows created in 2006 and 2007 were part of the FAAR DP project and were shared extensively within the Exchanges partnership to the point of inspiring the EASI DP in London to set up a theatre workshop of their own following on from the 2006 experience.

The shows created in 2006 and 2007 were:

- > “Where will I be tomorrow?”, 3 performances in June 2006;
- > “The first time I was told... Faces to faces”, 3 performances in Nov. 2007.

The practical organisation of the workshop

- - Duration: 6 months, split in two parts (150 to 200 hours of work).
- - Periodicity:
 - > Part 1, one session of three hours, on a weekly basis for one or two months, in the French course venue.
 - > Part 2, sessions of consecutive three, four or five full days of work per month, at Theatre du Soleil venue, until the performances.

Why the choice of theatre as empowering?

- > because it creates the desire to express oneself in a new language, to experience pleasure with this new language thanks to the playful aspect of theatre;
- > because it offers asylum seekers the opportunity to get involved in a collective creation, to be able to tell their stories or act out what they wish to express in their own words, with what makes sense for them and what they want to communicate individually and collectively to a wider audience;
- > because it gives them the possibility to be responsible for something to achieve in their host country, even though they are in a situation where they have very little control of the direction their life may take;
- > because they may express themselves publicly, on a stage, and therefore feel recognised as a person, in the host society, which enhances their feeling of belonging to the host society.



Empowerment
through
language
training

A transferable set of activities

Work phases	Types of activities
Warming up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Body ○ Voice ○ Movement
Improvisations	<p>From guided to free improvisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ with an object ○ in a particular situation ○ from a memory
The creation of a show	<p>Writing up improvisation work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ From oral improvisations, put in writing and / or ○ From texts directly written / life stories, in French or in another language then translated into French <p>Working on the texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individual and collective readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > articulation, pronunciation, intonation, voice projection ○ Memorizing the texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > individual, pair or group work <p>Putting the show together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rehearsals ○ Complementary improvisations if needed ○ Fixing moving and timing on stage ○ Organising backstage work (all done by the actors)

An account of the 2006 experience

Each year, the workshop sessions may vary from humorous times of practice to critical points of tensions (mainly due to linguistic or cultural misunderstandings or necessary adjustments) to positive creative moments. In that respect, the 2006 edition conformed to this recurrent trait of the theatre workshops and finished in a very positive climax with the final performances on 29th and 30th June, through which everyone felt moved, strong, re-energised, empowered.

These final performances were indeed a great success, with a total audience of about 200 people. This success happened despite the various difficulties that had emerged throughout the workshop from January to June. At times, there were many resistances, fears, blockages, but in the end, the show created was an explosion of life, of dreams, of wills to express oneself and to appear as normal men and women with desires, ambitions, projects, anxieties and hopes. Participants achieved the challenge they had set for themselves: showing that they are ordinary people and, in so doing, they contributed to deconstruct the ways in which foreigners (considered here as alter egos) are considered on a day-to-day basis by the general public.

Empowerment through language training

Here are three extracts from “Where will I be tomorrow?”, 2006’s creation:

“What is a life without joy, without tears, without any problem, without Galeries Lafayette ?”

“We are not afraid. We stay here in this country. This just shows how much we love life. We hope to win and we are going to try”.

“This is my friend Valery. He was always very serious, always thinking. He would often wander:”What will I do tomorrow?“, “Where will I be tomorrow?”... And today, he is in prison, because of the war. This world is neither just nor faithful. We don’t know where we will be tomorrow... But whatever will be will be!”

Language through drama : a pilot workshop in London Innovative Enterprise Action, partner of the EASI DP, London

Objectives

- To empower the students through voice and movement.
 - To introduce the students to drama and performance skills.
 - To enrich the students’ English learning experience.
 - To develop their confidence and communication skills through drama exercises and performance skills.

Background

This programme of drama workshops was modeled on Cimade’s project with Théâtre du Soleil company in Paris. Observation of a drama workshop in Cimade and attendance of their final performance in June 2006 inspired the development of a series of pilot workshops in London.

The programme

A series of 3 pilot drama workshops with each of the three ESOL levels.

Timeframe: October – December 2006

Number of students: range 10-15 per class

Countries of origin: Turkey, Congo, Somalia

Location: The Mary Magdalene Refugee & Asylum Seekers centre, Holloway Road, London.

The workshops included exercises in imagination, communication, trust, movement and teamwork. Through improvisation and other drama techniques, the students created stories and situations that mirrored their everyday lives in London and their lives before they moved to the UK.

Example:

- > Class divided into groups of three.
- > Each group had to choose 4 items from a large selection of visual stimulants (shell, mobile phone, boat, necklace...).
- > Using these items each group created a story and performed it for the class.

The experience outcome

- The students were more empowered when they were working in groups or participating in a game – especially when they were creating their own stories.
- They learnt more English words through necessity when participating in the games (i.e. when they really wanted to communicate something, they asked for the word).
- Visual stimulants really helped the group’s creativity (e.g. the exercise shown above).
- The tendency to talk too much by way of explanations and general theory hindered the process of empowerment. The students became frustrated and felt that the exercises were beyond them because of the language barrier. They understood better by example or by actually doing it themselves.



Empowerment through language training

KS is a young woman from Azerbaijan, in her early twenties. She arrived in France in May 2005, with her mother and her younger sister. She entered the project in September 2005, three months after arriving in France. Upon arrival, she applied for refugee status, was hosted in a hotel by CAFDA, a platform in charge of the orientation, accommodation, social and legal support of asylum seekers in Paris. The organization running this platform was in the FAAR partnership which accounts for how Kristina was referred to the project.

In November 2005, she left the hotel and was accommodated with her family in a reception centre, housing residents in flats. Housing conditions were incomparably better even if the family had to move away from Paris into the suburb, about one hour from central Paris (where FAAR activities take place).

She benefited from a language course, 12 hours a day and was a total beginner when she began the course. She went through 3 language course modules: September-December 2005, January to April 2006 and April to July 2006 (around 400 hours of French), which allowed her to progress to intermediate level.

Alongside the language course she took part in the theatre workshop which started in January and ended with three public performances in June 2006. She was a very active participant of the workshop, writing up many scenes, creating the show's poster, being very inspiring on stage during rehearsals for herself and the others.

KS gradually gained confidence throughout the language course. When she started the theatre workshop, she proved to be increasingly confident, independent and her language skills improved a lot. It looked as though she was turning into a different person from the one we knew a few months before.

Following on from her participation in the theatre workshop, she was offered to continue working at the theatre venue as a volunteer, helping out with the organisation of a theatre festival. Her volunteering experience was not organized for her. She was given this opportunity all by herself, by showing how available, effective and sociable she was during the theatre course. Her getting a volunteer placement herself probably played an important part in her empowering experience.

“In my country, I used to go to the theatre, not often, but I did sometimes, in the audience though...Here in France, I performed three times, for an audience, and I am grateful to the FAAR project which allowed me to do theatre, it was great! The theatre workshop gave me a lot of energy, positive energy. At the theatre, I met lots of nice and interesting people. It is so enjoyable to talk to people”.

“When I worked as a volunteer for the theatre, it was difficult to speak French because there were only French speaking people there, unlike before, in the French class, where people were all learning French, with them it was easier. At the theatre, it was difficult, they spoke so quickly. But people were nice to me. They would tell me: if you don't get it, we can repeat two or three times, no problem! Everyone was nice at the theatre”.

Empowerment through language training

- Entry 1 ESOL students required very basic explanations, a lot more movement and visual stimulants rather than words. It helped to use words and situations they had learnt that day or week in class. This boosted their confidence and gave them the opportunity to practice these new words.
- Entry 2 & 3 ESOL students were able to use their imaginations and play much more. They especially enjoyed the opportunity to create dramas and stories in groups.

“The classes have really helped my English and my confidence as they make me push myself to speak and to use my imagination”.
Elif (participant)

“The drama workshops have been an invaluable part of our enrichment programme. I believe that the combination of exercises for mind and body can be particularly empowering for the students”.
Andrew Ruiz Palma (Head of English language training)

4.4 Vocational language training

Communicating about one’s professional skills in French GRETA PMS, partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

GRETA (*Groupement d’établissement*) is an adult education organisation, which is part of the French National Education system. Its main activities concern the setting up of vocational courses for young adults. GRETA PMS (*Para Médical et Social*) is specialised in health related vocational courses. It has a long tradition of organising language training courses for recognised refugees and has worked as a partner of Cimade in the past fifteen years.

GRETA PMS offered to set up a vocational language workshop within the scope of activities of the FAAR project to enhance the preparation of future professional integration by developing participants’ ability to use the accurate vocabulary when talking about their past and present professional skills. The workshop was based first of all on the vocabulary known by participants in order to broaden and precise its scope. It allowed for a cultural analysis of the language used at work. It made participants able to discuss and value their professional experiences.

A side-line objective also consisted in incorporating the work on vocational language training within the main French language course organised by Cimade. A common booklet of learning activities will be published in 2008.

GRETA PMS offered to set up this workshop with the use of two dedicated IT programmes : *U-Map* used to classify the different words worked on in the forms of vocational lexical “trees”, and *Mindman* used to sort out the lexical items and expressions per categories of actions.

The workshop was organised once or twice a year. Five to twelve FAAR project participants took part in the workshops. Their level of French was at least elementary (level A1 of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*). It consisted of 4 consecutive weekly three-hour sessions and two full days of work.

In between these sessions, participants were invited to produce lists of words, expressions or phrases based on the description of their past professional activity or any other activity they had a particular interest in. For every session, their lists were processed by the two IT programmes and their words were classified by frequency of use (U-map) or type (Mindman). The classifications lead to discussions and clarifications in pair work or small groups during the collective sessions and enabled participants to broaden the vocabulary at their disposal to talk about their professional skills and experiences.



5. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

5. Empowerment through employment

5.1 Legal context regarding access to vocational training and employment

According to the Geneva Convention, the best possible treatment should be reserved to a person seeking asylum in a host country. Such a person should be considered a refugee as long as the host country has not proved otherwise, the refugee status being a recognitive status.

Access to vocational training and employment in the host society should be part of a package of measures ensuring the best reception conditions for Asylum seekers in Europe.

However, that is not necessarily the case in the three European countries represented in the Exchanges partnership. These three countries, like many others in the EU, do not readily organise mainstream access to vocational training and employment for asylum seekers on the ground that these people have a temporary right to stay in the host countries examining their claims and also because of the fear of the infamous “pull factor”.

The comparative summary of the Baseline Survey produced by the Exchanges Transnational Partnership on the access to vocational training and employment for asylum seekers in France, Hungary and the UK describes that:

“The legal status of asylum seekers with regards to employment is somewhat complicated in all cases. On arrival, asylum seekers now are effectively not allowed to do paid work in any of the three countries. In Britain and Hungary, this is because legislation explicitly prohibits it. In France, they can apply for permission to work but are routinely denied it.

The European Council Directive 2003/9/EC, which laid down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, states that:

‘If a decision at first instance has not been taken within one year of the presentation of an application for asylum and this delay cannot be attributed to the applicant, Member States shall decide the conditions for granting access to the labour market for the applicant.’

Each of the three countries have taken up this directive but its implications are various. At the time of the UK report’s preparation, it was still unclear how applications to work were to be processed or by whom, so we cannot know to what extent the presentation of a work-permit application actually results in the ability to take up legal employment. In France, asylum seekers are allowed to claim the right to work after one year, but are only actually given authorisation to do so if it seems as though the demand for workers in a particular field or geographic area is greater than the supply of workers. Hungarian legislation also aims to ensure that asylum seekers do not take jobs that might be filled by citizens. After one year, asylum seekers are allowed to take up paid employment, but only if the particular job in question has been advertised in a Labour Centre for over 60 days and there has been no suitable Hungarian applicant.

Thus, however we look at it, legislation in all three countries makes it difficult for asylum seekers to secure employment, even once they have been resident in the host country, waiting for their applications to be processed, for over a year. As a result, many of them may take up jobs on the black market, which benefits no one except the employers. Black market employment is harmful to the economy of the country in which it takes place, since no tax is paid on the profits, and since there is no regulation, people can be paid below the minimum wage, undercutting other workers. Perhaps more importantly, illegal workers are vulnerable to exploitation since they have no rights, and no means to redress abuses. Given its illicit nature, it is almost impossible to get any data on exactly how many asylum seekers are employed on the black market in the three countries concerned, but it is undubitable that legislation which stops them working legally can only serve to greatly increase the numbers who work illegally”.

Source: “Comparative Baseline Survey”, Exchanges / Esely, Budapest, 2007



Empowerment through employment

Whereas the Exchanges partnership's Baseline survey puts the emphasis on the legal constraints in regard to access to employment for asylum seekers, the Equal programme final European Policy Forum paper also points out a series of potential obstacles for asylum seekers in their ability to access employment. Some of these obstacles (such as language difficulties) are the direct consequence of exile and are not catered for properly by the host countries:

"The EQUAL partnerships have shown that although the Reception Directive allows asylum seekers to take on a job or access training one year after they have filed their applications – and in some Member States much earlier – it is usually not a very straightforward process for asylum seekers to actually get a job. Obstacles include language difficulties, not being able to provide certifications of competences and skills, lack of relevant education and training necessary for professions practised in the new country etc. In a few countries, such as Austria, Germany and Luxembourg, the 'Community preference' principle obliges employers in certain employment areas to demonstrate that vacant positions cannot be filled by members of the national work force. This situation significantly constrains the employment of asylum seekers".

Source: "Minimum standards – and beyond: the contribution of EQUAL to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers", EQUAL European Policy Forum, Malmö 2007, pp10-11.

In order to make it possible for asylum seekers to access employment, Equal projects have organised a range of activities, thus enhancing new prospects for employment of asylum seekers, by creating and improving relations with employers and national labour markets for the benefit of host countries as well :

"(...) Partnerships have generated new types of work experience and jobs for asylum seekers in Member States with a tight labour market and restricted access to the labour market. The creation of new vocational profiles and/or the uncovering of niches in the labour market has proven a particularly successful strategy of integrating asylum seekers into the national labour force while avoiding competition with, and apprehension from, the national workforce. As asylum seekers bring skills and competences to jobs that nationals or other EU citizens struggle to provide, it also becomes easier for the employer to show that reverting to the national labour market force is not an option. Furthermore, in countries where access to gainful employment is limited or denied, one in five Asylum Seekers DPs have approached potential employers to explore the possibility of offering job placements, volunteering or work-shadowing opportunities to asylum seekers and the benefits that could be gained. Establishing and strengthening relationships with employers has been a second, successful approach of EQUAL Partnerships to promote the employment of asylum seekers. Collaboration agreements between asylum seekers, NGOs who act as mediators and mentors, and training organisations and employers have been established. Through such agreements, a special vocational 'pathway' can be developed for asylum seekers including orientation, vocational preparation and eventual employment. Results of such schemes which customise training for asylum seekers to the needs of employers have been positive. Through on-going mediation, employers have been able to overcome initial reluctance to hire asylum seekers and benefit from such schemes. They are provided with highly motivated staff with relevant, tailor-fitted skills and benefit from the process of intercultural learning and understanding. At the same time, asylum seekers have been able to learn new skills and gain valuable experience. In summary, the experience of EQUAL partnerships in the area of employment helps to make the case both implementing and going beyond the minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, as laid down in Article 11 of the Directive. The experience of Development Partnerships illustrates the advantages that this can bring not only to individuals but also to the host society. Rather than making asylum seekers dependent on benefit systems, Member States can actually draw upon asylum seekers as a resource to respond to gaps in their national and international labour markets and add value to the host community".

Source: "Minimum standards – and beyond: the contribution of EQUAL to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers", EQUAL European Policy Forum, Malmö 2007, pp12-14.

In keeping with Equal partnerships in Europe, the three DPs forming the Exchanges partnership have devised a number of activities which aim at paving the way towards employment for and with asylum seekers. These activities comprise three main themes:

- orientation and guidance
- vocational training
- volunteer work experience

5.2 The pathway to employment

5.2.1 Orientation and guidance

Orientation and guidance work has been developed in the following ways, according to the needs of asylum seekers:

- presentation of the labour market and the work laws
- presentation of vocational training courses available
- assessment of skills based on previous training, qualifications and professional experience
- counselling on training and job search

Here are a sample of activities conducted by Exchanges partners and relevant testimonies of beneficiaries of these programmes.

Living London: a short orientation programme RAGU, partner of the EASI DP, London

Living London is a short orientation programme for asylum seekers with a professional or graduate background and with intermediate English or above, developed by RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University. The four week course aims to help asylum seekers explore cultural and social issues in the UK whilst providing useful information about their rights and entitlements. During the course students learn about useful organisations and services and identify training and volunteering opportunities, whilst developing their communication skills in a focused way.

RAGU have successfully recruited for and delivered 2 pilots of Living London, developing 6 modules in total on a variety of topics. RAGU consulted the EASI Advisory Group during the development of the course who provided very useful feedback and helped to shape the course content.

“My favourite part of the course was on volunteering – it is the only way for asylum seekers to find themselves useful and not marginalised”.

Student on RAGU’s ‘Living London Orientation’ Programme.

“I learnt a lot about how to improve on my communication”.

Student on RAGU’s ‘Living London Orientation’ Programme.

Discovering the French labour market AFPA, partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

AFPA is an adult further education organisation that organises tailor-made courses for people with no prior qualifications or for people whose project is to have a carrier change or further their professional skills. Before becoming a partner in Cimade-led Equal projects, AFPA had no prior experience of working with asylum seekers and refugees. Their willingness to take part in the FAAR DP was based on their curiosity to discover the professional backgrounds and skills brought by asylum seekers and refugees in France as well as lead them to discover and understand the French labour market.



Empowerment through employment

AFPA set up this workshop, within FAAR, as a preparation for potential future training, and in so doing included both asylum seekers and refugees, even though only refugees with a resident / work permit can officially enter AFPA courses.

The workshop was organised once or twice a year, depending on the number of participants interested. It consisted of a series of meetings, collective and individual, to work on:

- presenting the different possibilities of further education training courses available in France and the present situation of the French labour market;
- listing and evaluating individual professional skills;
- organising visits of AFPA further education centres on courses of interest for participants.

This workshop enabled participants :

- to reflect on their motivations, aspirations and skills;
- to understand work conditions and availabilities in France;
- to meet with professionals of further education in AFPA centres, in order to clarify their professional future project.

Labour-market training

**Menedek, lead partner of ESELY DP, Budapest
and Northern Great Plain Regional Labour Centre, Debrecen/Bekescsaba**

ESELY DP organised a special kind of training dedicated to the question of job-hunting and getting to know the Hungarian job market. This specific training followed on from the language training and the knowledge gained from cultural orientation.

Experiences on the labour-market training's frame

According to the experiences, the 5 days long training contains special job-finding techniques, which help participant asylum seekers to integrate into the Hungarian labour market.

Methodological experiences

Based on the results of the training, the training crowded with job finding techniques are not as effective as the more playful and relaxed ones. The following aspects supported the playful way.

- It helped to create a relaxed group environment, and resulted in strong group cohesion.
- •The strong group cohesion served not only at the playful exercises based on mutuality, but helped also in overcoming language barriers (the participants with better Hungarian knowledge assisted, translated automatically for the rest of the group).
- The playfulness, the shared experience had a great effect on the learning process as well. The participants were motivated by the good atmosphere and success for accomplishing the exercises.
- As it came to light later on, the playfulness and the variety made a positive impact on participants with psychological problems.

Comparing to the earlier training run in English, the ones held in Hungarian were more effective. The effectiveness was especially in those groups apparent:

- where there were more participants with a reasonable Hungarian knowledge,
- where there were more participants with higher qualification,
- where there was strong group cohesion, thus those understanding more could help the others,
- where the training methodology was adapted to the changes (the most important elements of the changed methodology were the above described playfulness, and other non-verbal tools).

Contents

The main acquired job finding techniques were the following:

- why work is important to the participants;
- defining key competences that can be used in the Hungarian labour market as well;
- acknowledging knowledge and methods that are necessary for finding a job;
- exploring features, abilities, and preparing the introduction card;
- introducing the Hungarian qualifications and opportunities for further trainings, qualifications;
- preparing for the personal job interview (outfit, communication, behaviour);
- acquiring the most important labour-market definitions, and the most common interview questions and answers.

Experiences based on the contents

The above-described contents became complete with the playful exercises. The games not only relaxed and coloured the themes, but they also completed it (connected to the daily job finding techniques, the games help acquiring the techniques in a playful manner).

Experiences that strengthen the integrated methodology

Acquiring new skills and knowledge was supported by the vocabulary of the language module and the cultural orientation module. Besides of the success of these courses, psychosocial support also played an important role in creating and maintaining high group cohesion.

The programme's community building potential was not only evident in between participants, but also in between the group and its leaders, its trainers. The participants' trust, confidence in the labour centres and the trainers can help in their later labour-market integration.

"At the labour centre, I was told that I should contact them when I have my paper. I am bilingual, I also speak French, and I have a good CV, I worked at a hotel. I could immediately start working at a hotel, because I know how it works. I could be housekeeper and au pair as well. These are my skills. I was told that once I have my papers, they could help me to find a job."

Short summary of the programme's results

- During the programme, the asylum seeker participants' abilities and capacities were not only maintained but also developed.
- The acquired knowledge of the participants can be converted, thus it can be used in Europe.
- Those partners, experts who have not had personal experience with the target group, became responsive to issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees.
- Raising awareness of the society was accomplished through media events.
- Capitalising on the programme's experiences and methods will be done through the production of manuals.
- Long term development goal is that the methodological material based on Equal "CHANCE" programme serves as a model and is used regularly for asylum seekers' labour-market orientation.

Job counselling: building one's professional path CASP, partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

Within the FAAR project, the employment department of CASP (*Centre d'action social protestant* – a protestant organisation specialised in the development of services for deprived populations) specialises in providing a job counselling service for recognised refugees.



Empowerment through employment

Objectives

CASP employment department works towards :

- promoting an efficient access to the labour market for refugees,
- limit the destructive effects on asylum seekers of the forced idle waiting period of the asylum claim.

Methodology

The professional integration of refugees is envisaged in an innovative way prior to the granting of official refugee status in order to:

- identify personal and professional skills,
- confirm the future professional project.

F has been in France since 2003. He gained refugee status in 2005. He is in his mid-thirties, married with three children. He is a qualified pharmacist. He became a beneficiary of FAAR in May 2006. The first interview revealed that F had never practised his profession in his home country and had therefore no professional experience to value. This added difficulty to the fact that he also had to learn about the types of medicines used in France. Despite these obstacles, F was adamant that he would work as a pharmacist in France, thus using the qualifications obtained in his home country for which he had invested so many years of his life.

First of all, F was referred to a language training school to keep improving his language skills. In parallel, the service helped him draw a professional integration plan with its different stages of development.

The first stage consisted in validating his degree and obtaining the authorisation to practise as a pharmacist in France. This proved to be a fairly long administrative process (filling the application form, seeking the scientific validation of the degree, having the application processed by the Health Ministry services and applying to the Superior Advise Pharmacy Bureau). F was determined to go through with this procedure. He proved resistant and patient during this long unnerving process.

The second stage concerned the job search. F applied to work in state-run hospitals and private clinics but with no success. He also prospected medicine firms with no more success, mainly because of the lack of prior professional experience.

F chose then to resort to further education and he applied to enter a university course preparing students to work as pharmacist assistant. This application required a special discussion with the university admission services in order to explain F's situation. He was finally accepted and CASP employment department assisted him in looking for a job placement, compulsory for the achievement of the training course. F then started the work placement in a Parisian pharmacy for a period of 6 months to a full year and attends the university course since January 2007.

This success story was made possible thanks to a close follow-up of F's demands and actions by CASP employment department as well as the resort to a period of vocational training to make up for the lack of professional experience, and finally by F's determination to succeed.

Empowerment through employment

As soon as asylum seekers become refugees and therefore have gained the full right to work, the counselling work continues within the mainstream legal framework of the labour market. The aims are then to:

- analyse the professional project in regard to the skills acquired originally,
- adapt the individual project to the labour market (adjustment of skills, official recognition of original qualifications),
- reinforce the autonomy of refugees in the labour market by promoting the understanding of the French labour market (institutions, networks, tools),
- guide each person in coherence with their project towards mainstream vocational and/or language training courses or towards job-hunting through the learning of the appropriate techniques.

5.2.2 Vocational training

Access to vocational training is impossible most of the time, beneficiaries of vocational training course having to be entitled to work legally in order to be eligible for this type of training.

However, UK legislation in this respect is more flexible than in other European countries, and it was possible for partners in England to organise access to vocational training in health-related jobs. Hence the case of childcare training related by Fatemeh, a beneficiary of the EASI DP with the organisation 'Refugee Women Association'.

Childcare training RWA, partner of the EASI DP, London

"My name is Mimi. I am Iranian and I am 32 years old. I am disabled. I claimed asylum in 2001, my case had been processed and I had been refused. I did not know what to do for my life and my expenses. I was so depressed. I tried lots of different organisations to find even a basic job but because of my disability, it was very hard. I could not find any job.

I found Refugee Women's Association through a community organisation based in London. Since then, my life has changed a lot. I believe that RWA is an angel of my life. They offered me a place in a course and trained me (CACHE II) in childcare. The course helped me to find a job easily. Even my travel expenses were paid.

At present, I am working as a supply teacher assistant. I have never ever found any organisation as good and helpful also supportive since I came to United Kingdom. I introduce RWA to everybody. I hope the government will support this organisation to be more facilitated and extended".

5.2.3 Working as a volunteer

Volunteer work represents a positive temporary alternative to the non access to the labour market or difficult access to vocational training. It serves a specific purpose during the asylum claim, enhancing individuals' future possibilities of accessing employment. This method has been widely used in the UK and partners of the EASI DP developed different actions in this respect¹.

Volunteer Placement Portfolio Training RAGU, partner of the EASI DP, London

This is a short course for asylum seekers with intermediate English or above who are starting a volunteer placement, or interested in volunteering. It was developed by RAGU (Refugee

1- For more information, see EASI/EXCHANGES publication (2007): Asylum seekers and volunteering in Europe: a transnational report based on experience in Hungary, France and England. Downloadable from: www.itn.org.uk/easi.html



Empowerment through employment

Assessment and Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University. The course aims to help asylum seekers maximise their experience as a volunteer by fully documenting their volunteering, helping them reflect on their past experience and future development and improving their skills in speaking, reading and writing. The course introduces the students to the concept of building a portfolio of their skills and experiences. After the course the students will create their own Volunteer Placement Portfolio which they can use as evidence of experience in a UK work environment, to show a UK reference and to present their skills effectively to employers (in the UK or abroad).

Volunteer work as part of a training period RWA, partner of the EASI DP, London

The Refugee Women's Association was established in 1993 to provide advice and guidance on education, training and employment to refugee and asylum seeking women as well as the delivery of training and capacity building programmes.

Our choice of volunteer work is done to create volunteering opportunities to give asylum seeking women the basic work experience they need whilst waiting for a decision and expose themselves to employers and the labour market.

It also serves to develop models of good practice and standards for volunteering or asylum seeking women in form of a volunteer pack in refugee community organisations.

A volunteering pack has been produced and is disseminated to service providers who have asylum seekers as volunteers or organisations setting up volunteering schemes for asylum seekers. This product is also used to influence policies locally, nationally and transnationally as well as addressing issues relating to racism and discrimination as it affects asylum seeking women. The product brings awareness and new methodologies of volunteering to employers as well as making asylum seeking women realise what it takes to integrate and volunteer in the host country through training.

Volunteering experiences Menedek, lead partner of ESELY DP, Budapest/Debrecen

Although the ESELY DP like the FAAR DP had not planned to use the possibility of volunteer work, their plan of action evolved thanks to the common work done through transnational seminars. Here is a testimony of an ESELY beneficiary who has resorted to volunteer work while waiting for better opportunities of training or work in the future.

P has been in Hungary since September 2006 and has since been waiting for his refugee status. He really enjoyed the EQUAL training and especially the Hungarian classes. He found it useful and very important to learn Hungarian to integrate within the local population. He underlined the fact that being an asylum seeker is difficult in daily life. In his country, he was an accountant, and would like to do this job in Hungary too, even if he knows that the accountancy is different in Hungary. He is motivated to learn the Hungarian accountancy and thus pleads for recognition of his foreign diploma. He speaks a lot of his wish to be "recycled". That means he is ready to take part in any practical training to learn a new job and then to be able to work in any sector. According to him, having a professional activity as an asylum seeker is very important. Without this, the life in the camp is very hard to bear. He is motivated to be more involved in any kind of activity. That is why he is presently working as a volunteer in a centre in Debrecen twice a week.

5.3 From original qualification and experience to proper work in the host country

Being settled in proper employment takes an infinitely long time for refugees, let alone asylum seekers. When people are recognised as refugees, they have a full right to work and access employment and vocational training facilitating services. Even in these legal conditions, the road to full proper employment is paved with numerous obstacles.

Here are three testimonies showing the interrelation between the legal aspect of work entitlement, the need of vocational training offers, the interest of volunteer work experience and job opportunities. Settling in a European country with access to mainstream employment as an asylum seeker or a refugee takes people on a long whining road. This requires absolute determination and a strong sense of purpose that Rodica's testimony demonstrates in particular.

From training to job hunting: a hurdle race

Testimonies by Menedek, lead partner of the ESELY DP, Budapest/Debrecen/Bekescsaba

B followed the labour market training and went on to try job-hunting.

At the same time, he was granted the “person authorised to stay” status, valid for a two-year period and allowing him to work on condition of gaining a job permit. The procedure to get a job permit takes at least one month. This administrative task shows how it is difficult for a “person authorised to stay” to get a job. As a result, B missed several job opportunities, mainly because employers need employees quickly and do not wish to undertake long and uncertain procedures. For an employer, it is easier to employ a Hungarian citizen or a refugee with full right to work. B is currently employed in a Hungarian company as a workman. This job does not really match his skills but he is happy to work within a Hungarian team.

B wishes to settle down in Hungary because it's a “peaceful country” where he feels good and where “people are nice”. He is still waiting for his refugee status and hopes to find a job corresponding to his skills. He tries also to put forward his diploma and plans to continue his study.

S was a farmer in his country of origin. He spent more than two years in the refugee camp in Debrecen.

Three months after he had completed the EQUAL program, S left Debrecen to settle down in Budapest. To get a job, it is better to have a residence outside of the camp. Moreover, he thought he might find a job more easily in the capital city. Unfortunately, job-hunting turned out to be much more complicated than he thought. Even though he had sent a lot of CVs and even took part in many interviews, S has not been able to find a job. According to him, it is necessary to have a network of contacts to find a job, but since he does not know anybody in Budapest, he has so far been unsuccessful.

These difficulties in finding a job are very hard to deal with and S says it makes him feel depressed. He speaks also about xenophobia he feels everywhere.

S is ready to work hard in any kind of job. He is also ready to take part in other training schemes to learn new skills. But he finds it really difficult to keep motivated and enthusiastic after such a long period of unemployment.



Empowerment through employment

The important interrelationship between work experience, vocational training, volunteer work, legal status and one's determination to succeed. A testimony by RWA, partner of the EASI DP, London

Rodica was a paediatric nurse in Romania. She came to the UK in 1991 and applied for asylum. She immediately started learning English and within 5 years, her level of English was high enough to work. Despite the fact that she had a work permit, she could not find any paid job but she was so determined to contribute to the society that she lived in that she found a voluntary job and worked with disabled people as an interpreter for two years at the Healthy Islington 2000.

She gained BTEC National Diploma (Level 3) in Nursery Nursing in 1996, thinking that if she could not work as a nurse, she could work with children in nurseries. However, she could not find a job.

While trying to gain experience and qualification, her main aim was going back to paediatric nursing. She attended a two-week course, run by RETAS for health professionals in re-qualification and job search. Yet she found out that as an asylum seeker, she was not eligible for any further training which would lead her to re-qualification.

She did not lose any hope and attended another two-week course thinking that "setting up a small business is the most possible option, considering the previous experience in job search". She was disappointed at the end of the two weeks that, as an asylum seeker, she would not get any kind of business start-up grant.

Rodica carried on volunteering which was the only option for her to be job ready. She became a management committee member of the Crusaders Housing Co-op in 1998 and in 2000, she volunteered for Lewisham Refugee Network for two years as receptionists, administrative worker and as interpreter/translator.

Rodica was referred to Refugee Women's Association by her solicitor in 2005 for advice and guidance and she was informed about the CACHE II Childcare Course with two days a week work placement. Rodica successfully completed the course and gained the qualification in 2006. Since then, she has been a part-time voluntary play worker at the same playgroup, Rockingham Pre-School.

During all those years, Rodica has not been granted a refugee status. She appealed the Home Office decisions and re-appealed, eventually in May 2007, her solicitor informed her that she had been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. Now she is looking forward to find a paid job.



6. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING

6. Empowerment through capacity building

6.1 What is capacity building about?

The expression 'capacity building' is commonly used in English although it does not translate easily in other languages. It can be obviously explained by stating that it qualifies any product, mean, work method, attitude that contribute to building the capacity of an individual or a group or an organisation or a partnership or a network. In that respect, this expression is close and complementary to the notion of 'empowerment'. It is used at individual and collective levels.

Equal partnerships have all implemented the notion of capacity building through a number of activities aimed at mainstream organisations and services as well as individual asylum seekers.

"As set out in Article 24 of the Reception Directive, a key priority for Equal Partnerships has been to ensure that those who are expected to support the socio-vocational integration of asylum seekers in the labour market and the society at large have the necessary skills and resources to do so. The work undertaken by the EQUAL Partnerships has uncovered a high level of need for capacity building among organisations whose target group includes (or is supposed to include) asylum seekers. The lack of qualified personnel is a recurring problem. In general, employers, local policy-makers and members of the community were often found to have a limited, and distorted, understanding of the situation and legal rights of asylum seekers. These biased, negative images of asylum seekers, and the reserved and often hostile attitudes that these feed, serve only too often as an excuse to avoid confronting the issues that emerge as asylum seekers arrive in the territory and seek to integrate in their new host communities. For example, many employers are unaware of asylum seekers' right to work, are unfamiliar with the work permits that they are granted and/or are sceptical towards hiring asylum seekers.

Yet again, the Equal initiative has played an important role in assisting the effective implementation of this article of the Reception Directive. Equal partnerships have underscored the importance of raising awareness among, building the capacity of and cooperating with strategic partners, other organisations and the wider population. Partnerships have encouraged providers of healthcare and social services to critically reflect on the diversity management of their institution or organisation. The increasing competition with the European Union enlargement and the continuing migration flows may provide challenges as well as business opportunities that imply rethinking the service orientation strategies and human resources management approaches within healthcare and social services. Some offer courses to those working within social and pedagogical services, carers and healthcare providers, doctors, psychologists and psychotherapists, with the aim of developing a more efficient service provision for migrants in both the healthcare and social domain.

Equal Partnerships have also designed and delivered training programmes for those who work with asylum seekers in a professional capacity. The primary purpose is to increase their knowledge and understanding of this group's specific conditions and needs in terms of regulatory challenges, labour market information, cultural and psychological issues, etc, in order to improve service delivery. Practices have included coaching, workshops for outreach workers, and training sessions for university staff.

In general, promoting a more positive image of, and attitude towards, asylum seekers in host societies is a recurrent objective among Equal partnerships. They have organised several events and opportunities for the local community to meet asylum seekers and to observe what hard and committed workers they are. The positive reactions to these initiatives show that ignorance and fear of the unknown are the main factors causing hostile and xenophobic reactions to asylum seekers. Once local inhabitants get to know the asylum seekers, their attitudes often change substantially.

Another key element in Equal has been empowerment of asylum seekers. By providing them with opportunities to further develop themselves and to invest in their future, asylum seekers not only



Empowerment through capacity building

become more motivated but also more confident and self-sufficient. Several partnerships have specifically focused on activities to empower asylum seekers, through different forms of self-expression, specific socio-psychological counselling and training, and by simply involving asylum seekers in the design and management of the Equal partnerships”.

Source: “Minimum standards – and beyond: the contribution of EQUAL to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers”, EQUAL European Policy Forum, Malmö 2007, pp15-16.

Within the Exchanges partnership, capacity building activities have served the purpose of enhancing individuals’ skills, confidence, autonomy and development as well as that of RCOs and DPs involved.

6.2 Capacity building for individuals through involvement in projects

This section highlights activities illustrating the involvement of beneficiaries in our projects and in the decision making processes. These activities took different forms and the following are given as examples of good practice in capacity building at individual level:

- the setting up of an advisory group of asylum seekers
- involvement in the running of a project
- reaching out to the host society

Setting up an advisory group of Asylum seekers RAGU, partner of the EASI DP, London

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit), a specialist refugee unit based within London Metropolitan University, has established, coordinated and trained an Advisory Group of asylum seekers on behalf of the EASI Development Partnership. The Advisory Group (AG) is consulted by the EASI DP on the activities and services developed and delivered by the partners through the Equal programme. The AG has also been consulted on the policy concerns of the partnership. The aim of the AG is to involve beneficiary representatives in the design of services, so that they are targeted and appropriately meet the needs of the users. It is also designed to empower asylum seekers, develop their skills and involve them in the workings of the partnership. The AG members volunteer their time to attend AG meetings and trainings as well as DP meetings and working groups and transnational meetings (mostly in the UK but also abroad whenever possible).

Thirteen asylum seekers have joined the AG, with twelve of these continuing to play an active role. The AG have provided ten consultations to EASI DP members, as well as three policy consultations for LORECA, the Mayor of London’s working group on asylum seekers and refugees. The AG member who was granted refugee status went on to find paid employment. One other member gained permission to work and found paid employment. All other AG members participate in volunteering and education.

The impact on the individual members is increased confidence, a sense of feeling empowered and listened to, a gain in experience of working in a cross-cultural environment and of volunteering in the UK, as well as an opportunity to obtain a UK reference. There is also an increase in skills such as English language and communication, team-working, negotiation, networking, report writing, giving presentations, chairing meetings, minute-taking and many others. A positive impact on mental health and general sense of well-being is associated with these personal developments.

Empowerment through capacity building

The impact of the AG are that the activities delivered by the EASI partners are more appropriate in meeting the needs of asylum seekers through partner organisations listening to and acting on the advice given to them by the AG. In this way the AG has improved the organisational practices and structures of the DP.

Getting involved in the running of the project Cimade, lead partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

Being part of the decision making process of the DP

On a regular basis, a number of beneficiaries took part in the orientation committee meetings of the project. In order to achieve this participation, elections of representatives of each French class were organised at the beginning of every learning sessions. Hence about six representatives from the beneficiaries would take part at every orientation committee meetings, once or twice a year. These meetings gathered the different members of the FAAR DP as well as the Managing Authority and the local financial supporting bodies. It was an opportunity for the beneficiaries to meet representatives from different managing structures who supported the project “back stage” and for these people to meet with asylum seekers “in the flesh”. Usually, beneficiaries’ representatives would prepare the meeting beforehand with their fellow participants, thus gathering questions, remarks and queries about the development of the project. It was also decided to organise monthly meetings between groups’ delegates and a member of Cimade to deal with more concrete questions to do with the day-to-day running of the different activities of the project.

Taking charge of the practical organisation of the French language classes

On a day-to-day basis, beneficiaries were involved in the organisation of the breaks during French classes. That meant for instance that in turn, they were in charge of taking care of the provision for coffee, tea, biscuits, etc, ie, checking stock, shopping when needed, liaising with the secretary for money and bills.

Reaching out to the host society Cimade, lead partner of the FAAR DP, Paris

Airing it out on a local radio

Participants of the FAAR project were invited through Cimade to run two radio broadcasts on a local FM radio “Frequence protestante” in December 2006 and June 2007. On both occasions, a former participant of the FAAR project who had gained status and is a professional journalist prepared the broadcast with members of the project interested to take part.

The first broadcast on 22nd December 2006 lasted for 30 minutes and consisted of testimonies and a discussion on issues related to the living conditions of asylum seekers in Paris. Participants had agreed to talk about : access to language learning, access to decent accomodation, access to employment.

The host journalist was so impressed by this programme that the FAAR project was invited a second time in June 2007. The second broadcast focused on testimonies of participants highlighting the reasons why they had fled their countries and the need to be recognised as human beings with the same rights as everyone else. Again, both experiences made participants feel they could speak out and be heard: empowering indeed!



Empowerment through capacity building

Acting on stage

Thanks to the partnership between Cimade, Ariane Mnouchkine's *Théâtre du Soleil* theatre company and Hélène Cinque's *L'Instant d'une Résonance* theatre company, FAAR DP beneficiaries were offered to take part in a theatre workshop. Two workshops were organised within Equal round 2 programme, in 2006 and 2007. The creative work undertaken during these workshops gave way to public performances in June 2006 and in November 2007 at Théâtre du Soleil's venue, which is a renowned cultural public place in France.

Over 200 people saw the show created in 2006, called "Where will I be tomorrow?", and nearly 600 people came to watch 2007's creation "The first time, I was told... Faces to faces".

Each time, the public performances represented a unique opportunity for asylum seekers and refugees taking part in the workshop to address a large audience and tackle issues they wanted to put forward, mainly about their lives in the host society and their experience of exile. This resulted in not only workshop's participants to be greatly empowered by the experience...

"Theatre is fantastic because in the workshop we are open to others. We forget about our past or present problems and it gives us strength to continue settling in our new life".

"Usually, it's not possible to practise drama with people from so many different countries, with so many different problems, but here, in this project, it is".

This is a first for all of us because none of us had been on a stage before and we certainly never thought we would experience this in France! Our problems don't go away but the French classes and the theatre workshop, it gives us energy to go forward. And we meet new people, from everywhere. We are all inhabitants of this planet really".

... but also in raising the audiences' awareness of asylum seekers' situations as well as their great contributing potential to French society.

"I was very surprised by the quality of the performance: commitment and natural flair on stage, fluency in French. The scenes were well selected and constructed. Revisiting their experiences on stage was obviously very positive for the actors, as if they regained their dignity through the spectators' gaze. They appeared no longer as (asylum) seekers because they were creating something".

"The show is an invitation to encounters. It is also the choc of a reality. True stories, stories of exiles, stories of survival in France. Individual expression is freed on the common stage. It is a formidable way for us to listen and understand and then bear witness to the outside world, carry their voices further, against the present difficult political climate".

6.3 Capacity building for RCOs and mainstream organisations in the local contexts of EXCHANGES DPs

6.3.1 Setting up a Franco-Chechen cultural centre in Paris

Crossing over barriers: the adventure of the Franco-Chechen cultural centre in Paris Comité Tchétchénie and Centre Culturel Franco-Tchétchéne (CCFT), partners of the FAAR DP, Paris

Within the FAAR project, the Chechen Committee in Paris has served as capacity builder for the setting up of the Franco-Chechen cultural centre (CCFT).

The two organisations

- The Chechen Committee, founded in 1999, is an international solidarity organisation promoting peace initiatives in Chechnya and supporting North Caucasian populations seeking asylum in France.
- The Franco-Chechen Cultural Centre, founded in 2005, is an organisation promoting integration in French society of asylum seekers and refugees from Chechnya and North Caucasus.

Background

The Chechen Republic has suffered from two armed conflicts. The second conflict in particular was marked by intensity of combats and the installation of a terrifying repressive regime that forced a great number of the inhabitants into exile. Since 2003, Chechens have constituted one of the most important groups of asylum seekers in over 33 countries. Chechen nationals have settled in Paris in recent years only, therefore, most of the adults do not speak fluent French yet. This population comes from a community-based form of society, where family and clan links are of the utmost importance. The destruction of these structures and the experience of uprooting make adaptation to life in France particularly difficult, especially in a capital city like Paris. The need for socialising is massive. Moreover, Chechens have felt very badly about the stigmatisation led against them in Russia, that continues in France in different ways. Many of them still feel considered as belonging to a people of terrorists, bandits or radical islamists. In this context, French and Chechen volunteers involved in the Chechen Committee decided to create an organisation in order to help refugees to rebuild social links in the host society without closing in on their community.

Objectives of the setting up

With this main objective in mind, based on clearly identified shared responsibilities, leading to the autonomy of the CCFT, the Chechen Committee took part in the organisational development of the cultural centre with the realisation of 6 main activities:

- communicating about the Cultural Centre's activities to partners and wider public,
- fund-raising for the development and permanent establishment of the Centre's activities,
- searching for a place to accommodate the Centre's activities,
- supporting a group of women volunteers to set up their project of an alternative restaurant,
- support a Chechen artist singer and song writer (beneficiary of the FAAR project) to organise public performances,
- contribute to the training of Chechen volunteers on RCO's development (volunteer workers support, involving regular volunteers in the training of new ones, financial and accountancy skills).



Empowerment through capacity building

Development of the activities of CCFT

Thanks to the capacity building commitment of the Chechen Committee, CCFT has come a long way since its creation in 2005.

An increasing number of people have been able to take part in CCFT's activities: 15 adults in 2005, 30 adults and 30 children in 2006, 70 adults and 30 children in 2007.

Its activities have comprised:

- Single events like concerts, meals, ball dances
- Chechen cuisine catering service
- French language classes for complete beginners
- Russian language classes for adults
- Chechen and Russian language classes for children
- Dance classes for children
- Theatre workshop for adults

AK is a man, in his mid-thirties. He fled Chechnya with his wife and their five children and applied for asylum in France. He arrived in this country in January 2006 and entered the FAAR project in September 2006. For the time being, he has not received an answer about his status in France. With elementary language skills, he attended the French language class organised by Cimade. At the same time, he began to work as a volunteer in the Franco-Chechen cultural Centre. He is now particularly involved, as co-manager, in the creation of a Chechen restaurant by a group of asylum seekers and refugees. With the help of the Chechnya Committee, he has taken part into two training courses in January and March 2007. In the framework of the second training, which dealt with hygiene rules in a restaurant, he served as an interpreter for four hours, in order to help his Chechen colleagues to understand. His purpose: to come back to his previous job, to open a bakery business in Paris.

"First of all, the very important thing is that in CCFT, we met other asylum seekers, refugees and French citizens; and now we are friends, we are not alone any more. Volunteering in CCFT gives people the opportunity to begin living normally; because it is normal for people to work. I take part in this project in order to be ready to work when I will be authorised to do so. For most of us, this is the first time we are able to get a professional experience after war times in Chechnya and a long period of wait. Being committed into the project FAAR gives us the opportunity to learn French, to know professional requirements in our host country and French habits. In a restaurant, for instance, French costumers want to be served with simplicity, and this is not exactly the same thing in Chechnya, where people look for something like a ceremony. Besides, working together with our French colleagues, I felt that they stood by us; we were more self-confident, as we saw we were useful and efficient. We thought that we would realize our own projects. One day, we felt particularly proud. By chance, Iranian tourists came in the place we were cooking Chechen cuisine. They had eaten in several places in Paris before, but after the diner they said that they had never eaten better food in all their stay. This was a great encouragement".

AK's experience in CCFT provided a great "plus" to the organisation; but it also proves the fact that helping the people at the beginning of their stay in the host country not only helps the person herself, but also empowers RCOs and communities. In FAAR, links between trainings provide a wide range of opportunities. Participants can go from one training to another very easily. It helps them to empower faster. At the same time, the RCO and the community (the diaspora) can develop itself in an easier way. The project helps some people to help their own RCO to set up. Besides, the training of migrant volunteers helps the RCO to develop in relation to the host society and not apart from it, which is a great guarantee of integration.

Evolution of the capacity building support from 2005 to 2007

It is important to note that the Chechen Committee became a partner of the FAAR DP at the request of the founding members of CCFT. Thanks to the experience of the Chechen Committee on questions relative to the creation of an organisation such as CCFT and thanks to the existing links between the Chechen Committee and the Chechen diaspora, it seemed fit to entrust the RCO capacity building work of the FAAR project with the Chechen Committee.

CCFT was registered as an RCO in 2005. A huge financial and volunteer commitment of active members of both organisations (Chechen Committee and CCFT) was necessary due to lack of other funds. This initial effort built the base for CCFT's development. The positive outcome of the first activities encouraged volunteers to commit themselves to longer term projects. It also served as a guaranty for negotiations with potential fundraisers.

Since September 2006, CCFT has chosen to plan out the development of its main activities and events every year. Many contacts have been taken to keep looking for new sources of fundraising and locations. Results of these efforts have been on the whole positive. The team has been consolidated (although there is a need to reinforce participation of French volunteers in the organisation to work as capacity builders for newly-arrived Chechens and to ensure that CCFT becomes more and more autonomous, as was planned). Some activities, like the Chechen cuisine catering, have developed significantly. And new space has been found.

6.3.2 Contributing to women's capacity building in London

Capacity building dedicated to women RWA, partner of the EASI DP, London

The Refugee Women's Association was established in 1993 to provide advice and guidance on education, training and employment to refugee and asylum seeking women as well as the delivery of training and capacity building programmes.

On the issue of capacity building, our work is developed along the following objective:

To improve asylum seekers skills and capability by providing training in advocacy, community mentoring, fundraising, IT technical support skills, developing and piloting the assessment framework for people entering and progressing in learning & employment.

We provide capacity building training to 30 beneficiaries who are asylum seeking women covering the topics above which will enable them gain experience in supporting their community organisations.

The results of the training is disseminated to other capacity building training providers. We aim at influencing policies locally, nationally and transnationally. The training enables beneficiaries to gain the needed skills to compete in the labour market when granted full refugee status.

6.3.3 Empowering asylum seekers and their advisers

Guides for refugees and asylum seekers RAGU, partner of the EASI DP, London

RAGU (Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University, has produced 2 new comprehensive guides for refugees and asylum seekers in England on education, training and employment, one aimed at adult refugees and asylum seekers and the second for advisers working with this client group. The guides are updated regularly to allow



for changes to legislation and to incorporate feedback. Although hard copies of the guides have not been produced to allow for this regular updating, the guides can be downloaded from the RAGU website at www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu and the advice-resources website at: www.advice-resources.co.uk.

The guide for refugees and asylum seekers has been translated into 9 refugee community languages – Arabic, Farsi, French, Kurdish Sorani, Pashto, Somali, Turkish, Tigrinian and Urdu. The guide covers information on education, training, volunteering and employment with some further information on the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers. The guide for advisers will be particularly useful for mainstream advisers working with refugee and asylum seeker clients. The guide provides useful definitions for different immigration status and highlights the specific barriers to education, training and employment experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. It also clarifies the rights and entitlements of this group to education, training and employment and addresses issues relating to overseas qualifications and requalification.

6.4 Capacity building through transnational work

6.4.1 From one DP to another: empowering one another

6.4.1.1 On language learning methodology

From EASI to ESELY: the implementation of effective affective learning (SEAL)

Hungary is a new European country and in this respect has a short tradition of welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. As Hungarian colleagues explained, the teaching material developed for the learning of Hungarian is small in comparison with languages like French or English and no material is suited to the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

It is thanks to the first transnational visit organised on the theme of language training in March 2006 in Paris that Hungarian colleagues of the ESELY DP were able to go back to Debrecen and adapt their ways of teaching Magyar to the asylum seekers they were working with in the camp. Indeed, the particular encounter with colleagues from London using the ‘Effective Affective Learning’ method enlightened their ideas on learning activities and materials. They were then able to develop their own ways and have planned to publish a booklet dedicated to the teaching of Hungarian to asylum seekers and refugees, with the hope that it will be of use with other migrant groups.

6.4.1.2 On the use of theatre

From FAAR to EASI: inspiring stage work for ‘Innovative Enterprise Action’

By the time the EXCHANGES partnership was created, Cimade had already resorted to the organisation of a theatre workshop for the beneficiaries of its Equal round I project (Euraccueil). Hence, when colleagues from the EASI DP (and more specifically the partner organisation ‘Innovative Enterprise Action’) came to Paris to watch the undergoing rehearsal work and performances of the show in June 2006, they were inspired by what was then a well established activity.

Colleagues at ‘Innovative Enterprise Action’ chose in turn to set up a workshop in London using similar techniques. They came back to watch the French 2007’s production in November and performed their own show called “Journey” in December 2007 in London. The setting up of this first workshop has led them to establish a programme specifically designed to train drama facilitators and to teach asylum seekers the English language through drama: ‘*Streetwise Language Live*’. They have also launched the manual for this programme.

6.4.1.3 On volunteer work

From EASI to ESELY: a good practice transferred

As a good practice, learnt at a seminar on asylum seekers' volunteer work organised by one of the EXCHANGES partners, the EASI DP, volunteer work became an additional element of Equal "CHANCE" programme.

Participants who chose to volunteer at the local labour centre not only experienced progress in their language knowledge, and growth in their net of relations but they also contributed to other asylum seekers, refugees' future labour-market integration, while raising colleagues' awareness at the labour centre.

The additional, experimental element of volunteer work proved to be effective in supporting asylum seekers' labour-market orientation, thus it could be used as a valuable element in future programmes.

From EASI to FAAR : from misapprehension to a change of view

The first position of FAAR DP partners was to affirm that volunteer work done by asylum seekers amounted to mere exploitation of skilled people denied the right to work and full access to employment.

Positive use of volunteering experienced by partners of the EASI DP in different activities led FAAR partners to reconsider their first position in order to envisage volunteering as a relevant alternative to forced idleness and a means to organise work experience for asylum seekers and refugees on their path to professional integration.

This reviewed position was also strengthened by the fact that a few FAAR beneficiaries managed to get meaningful experiences as volunteer workers in other NGOs in Paris and spoke very highly of these empowering occupations.

Unfortunately, due to the unclear legal status of volunteer work in France, it has not been possible yet to resort to volunteering on a wider scale but this good practice may develop in future projects in France.

6.4.1.4 On capacity building for RCOs

From EASI to FAAR : from community-based model to a mixed set-up

Members of the Chechen Committee and CCFT took part in several EXCHANGES' transnational meetings on the theme of capacity building, in London and Paris. Both organisations drew interesting observations from these working visits:

- Many RCOs have known similar phases of development. For example,
 - setting up the first activities is very dependent on local authorities or partner organisations;
 - cultural activities are emphasized because they value migrants' identity, they bring people together and they advertise for migrants' contributions to the host society;
 - the primary factor of an RCO's emancipation lies in its capacity to organise fundraising on its own.
- In order to enhance RCOs, capacity building organisations have to run training courses to improve the autonomy of RCOs members so that they, in turn, organise their management team and ensure their material and moral autonomy.



Empowerment through capacity building

- Ways of responding to the challenges of the different phases of development may differ: organisations may choose to establish links mainly within their communities, to the detriment of links with mainstream organisations. Others, on the other hand, choose to keep in close touch with mainstream organisations, whilst growing in autonomy.

CCFT has established its mixed vocation right from the start, it does not want to be exclusively centred on the Chechen community. Its members' aim is to maximise exchange activities between the Chechen community and Parisians and people residing in France at large. The encounter with RCOs based in England made CCFT and the Chechen Committee aware of this specificity and therefore helped them to understand better the nature of their objectives and the reasons for certain obstacles. CCFT continues its adventure by settling in more and more in Parisian life, fighting the risk of isolation from the host society through enhancement of mutual respect, understanding and enrichment of all involved in an intercultural approach.

6.4.2 Empowering transnational experiences for DPs' beneficiaries

Getting a feel of Europe through participation in transnational work Cimade, lead partner of FAAR DP, Paris

In March 2006, colleagues from the partner DPs in the UK and Hungary joined the team of the FAAR project in Paris for a transnational exchange visit on language learning. This was the first occasion for all the participants in the FAAR project to meet for real the European dimension of the project through the encounter with colleagues from these two other countries. This meeting thus provided for an opportunity for participants in the FAAR DP to communicate with people from other European countries in languages they know like English or German. It made them feel valued and recognised as full participants of a project on European scale and not mere beneficiaries.

Among many activities, a discussion was organised between participants of the FAAR project and colleagues from EASI and ESELY DPs focusing on their experience of learning French in France (ie in a situation of immersion) with Cimade. Cimade uses the communicative approach as a language teaching method and some participants expressed how they were disturbed by this approach to start with because it was different from the way they had been taught languages in their home countries. They were expecting traditional vocabulary and grammar exercises and they were immersed in situations where they had to practise their oral skills on a large scale and their written skills in specific situations related to their needs in every day life. They felt they needed more input on written skills, and that was noted by Cimade staff for the continuation of the language training programme. At the same time, they recognised that they had made great progress in spoken French. One participant summed it all up by saying: *"I don't know how the teacher does it. When I arrived, I couldn't say a word in French. Now I can speak and express myself in every situation!"*

In October 2006, a transnational conference was organised in Paris on the theme of empowerment through language learning ("Empowerment through Voice", Hotel de Ville, Paris, 11th October 2006). Two participants of the FAAR project took part in a panel discussion, thus giving testimonies of their experience as asylum seekers in Paris and the importance of having access to a language learning course while waiting for the asylum claim to be processed. Many more participants prepared and ran the stalls for the afternoon forum of activities. They had chosen, with Cimade staff, to organise stalls on language learning activities targeted towards integration in the city, the theatre workshop, the vocational language workshop and the job discovery workshop. The participants of the theatre workshop selected pictures taken during the rehearsals and the performances and made up a computer slide show and also showed a film of the production of 2006, the show called "Where will I be tomorrow?". They were very active in laying out pictures and texts at the stall and discussed the experience with many visitors. Again this was a great opportunity for participants of the FAAR project to feel a full part of a collective organisation and feel part of the host society through the encounter with professionals or interested individuals who took part in the transnational conference.

Empowerment through capacity building

Empowerment and capacity building through participation at a transnational event: a testimony

RAGU, partner of the EASI DP, London

“The opportunity I had to attend the Paris Conference, was one of the greatest events that happened to me since I left my country. I felt empowered in many ways. First of all, due to restriction of movement applied to me as an asylum seeker, such as reporting to immigration every week, I experienced hard moments, feeling almost like a prisoner. It is beyond imagination the way this trip abroad had a positive impact on my morale and psychology. Furthermore, the conference itself enabled me, giving me more power and recharging my batteries to challenge life in the U.K. Indeed, I had the opportunity to express myself and to tell my personal experience in front of a respectful audience. Again, it was a valuable remedy for my loss of confidence. Finally, I met asylum seekers from different countries, exchanged experiences with them and made contact with several organisations working within the refugee sector both in France and Hungary. I made a friendship with a colleague from France with whom I am still in contact. Returned to the UK, my confidence built up, my morale on top, I started hunting for a job and found one. In fact, I realised that I was able but simply not confident. This event was a great example of the multiple ways such projects as EASI can empower someone”.
RAGU Advisory Group Member



7. MAIN FINDINGS

7. Main findings

7.1 Key messages regarding empowerment

> Empowerment is not easy to measure.

If it shows, empowerment will not always be the direct result of activities or services carried out in a given project. Other external factors can exert strong influences on beneficiaries' attitudes and achievements like, for instance positive changes in their personal life.

Empowerment could be measured in terms of distance travelled, thanks to the individual's representation of the amount of improvement he or she has made. The outcome of empowerment may then result from realising how much their feeling of autonomy, opportunity and confidence has improved.

> No single standard can measure empowerment.

Confidence, personal development, assertiveness, independence, objective access to a range of choices and opportunities are indicators which all play a role in the process of empowerment. In the case of asylum seekers, no possible further integration is possible without those indicators of success.

> Designing and developing empowering services.

If empowerment is not easy to measure, its indicators varying according to the individuals, an empowering service should meet with some key indicators:

The quality of the reception of beneficiaries, positive attitude of staff;

Accessibility of services and activities;

Effective organisational policies, including involvement of beneficiaries in the decision making;

Empowering nature of services provided, adapted to the target group;

Active follow-up, including monitoring people who have left and giving further support;

In terms of empowerment, service providers have an obligation of means rather than an obligation of result or measurable outcome.

7.1.1 Empowerment through language training

Fluency in the host society's language is essential for the empowerment of asylum seekers on their way to integration, in the original sense of the word 'essential', i.e. integration can not happen if people are not able to communicate in the host society's language. Language learning is therefore the first pivotal activity that makes sense for asylum seekers.

Recommendations

- Asylum seekers should have full and free access to mainstream language training provision, from arrival in the host society.
- Language training provision should cover a sufficient number of hours in order for asylum seekers to progress significantly in the host society's language, with a minimal provision of 400 hours.
- A methodology suited to asylum seekers' needs and situations should be implemented, with concrete learning activities useful for daily life in all its dimensions (social, cultural, domestic, economical, administrative).
- Language should also be practiced through the realization of collective projects (theatre production, magazine).
- Whenever possible and necessary, language training should be done in relation and coherence with vocational training.



Main findings

7.1.2 Empowerment through employment

Preparation for employment is particularly empowering if it starts on arrival in the host country and is undertaken during the waiting period of the asylum claim. Access to employment is also the main condition for financial autonomy and for a life to rebuild away from the stigmatizing benefit system.

Recommendations

- Asylum seekers should have the full legal right to work on entry in the host country and full access to the labour market.
- Asylum seekers should have access to mainstream vocational training provision (including work placement) as well tailor-made courses in order to cater for special needs if needed.
- All combinations of practical work experiences should be made available to asylum seekers in order to enhance their professional skills and build their new professional experience in the host country, i.e., via volunteer work or vocational training including work placement.

7.1.3 Empowerment through capacity building

Capacity building is empowering at individual and collective levels.

In order to be successful,

- capacity building resource persons have to convey an attitude of respect, empathy, generosity and hospitality towards asylum seekers,
- capacity building projects have to connect adequate partner organisations into an intelligent coherent reactive complementary network of services and activities to implement a holistic approach of asylum seekers,
- capacity building products have to be suited to the asylum seekers' needs, user-friendly, inspiring and encouraging.

7.2 Recommendations to policy makers

The experimentation of projects and activities carried out thanks to the EQUAL initiative programme have demonstrated the strong link between empowerment of asylum seekers, integration, and the subsequent benefits for both the beneficiaries and the host society.

Empowering asylum seekers entails designing a mainstream provision leading to independence, a wide range of opportunities, access to information and advice, education, vocational training and preparation for employment. Equal projects under theme I have demonstrated the benefits of allowing asylum seekers access to such a provision.

The directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, adopted in January 2003, should not only be implemented – in that it may allow access to vocational training whether or not asylum seekers have access to work – but should be exceeded.

EQUAL Asylum Seekers programmes have shown that specific projects for asylum seekers can be highly successful in promoting integration and that these specific activities should be mainstreamed. As illustrated in the examples and case studies of this report, the provision should include a combination services in which language training, preparation for employment and capacity building play a central part.

Empowerment should be an essential part of the reception and integration process of asylum seekers.



APPENDICES



- **Appendix 1**

Useful publications

- **Appendix 2**

EXCHANGES contact details

- **Appendix 3**

Access to language/vocational training and employment: regulations in Hungary, France and the UK

- **Appendix 4**

EXCHANGES recommendations, Policy Conference, Budapest, October 2007.

- **Appendix 5**

Equal programme final recommendations on the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, Malmö, May 2007.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Useful publications

British Refugee Council, 2007, *Social Exclusion, Refugee Integration and Entitlement to Work for Asylum Seekers: a policy response*.

Downloadable from: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

CIMADE, 2004, *Rapport d'expertise sur la formation des réfugiés*, Paris.

Downloadable from : www.cimade.org

CIMADE, 2007, *Théâtre et apprentissage du français, expériences de formations avec des adultes primo-arrivants en France*, Paris.

Downloadable from : www.cimade.org

EQUAL, 2004, *Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships*, GB Equal Support Unit, London.

Downloadable from: www.equal.ecotec.co.uk/resources/gpg

EASI DP, 2007, *Asylum Seekers and Volunteering in Europe, a transnational report based on experiences in Hungary, France and England*, London.

Downloadable from: www.itn.org.uk/easi.html

ESELY DP, 2007, *A Baseline Survey*, outlining the changing context in Hungary, France and England, Budapest.

Downloadable from: www.menedek.hu

European Policy Forum, 2007, *Minimum standards and beyond – the contribution of Equal to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers in Europe*, Malmö.

Downloadable from: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/o705-malmo-paper.pdf

RAGU, 2007, *Making Changes Together – The Experiences of the EASI and PRESTO Advisory Group*, Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), London.

Downloadable from: www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu

Appendix 2 EXCHANGES contact details

Contact details of the three lead partners

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Appendices EXCHANGES partners

FAAR DP partners (France)

CIMADE (NGO)
AFPA – National Association of Adult Vocational Training
CASP – the Protestant Social Action Centre (NGO)
Chechen Committee (NGO)
DASS – Directorate of Health and Social Action (public sector organisation)
Franco-Chechen Cultural Centre (a newly set up RCO, supported by the Chechen Committee)
GRETA – adult continuing training (public sector organisation)
Mairie of Paris (Paris Council – public sector)

ESELY DP partners (Hungary)

Menedek – Hungarian Association of Migrants (NGO)
Cordelia Foundation (dealing with psycho-social issues - NGO)
International Language School Debrecen Ltd (ILS) (private sector organisation)
Southern Great Plain Regional Labour Centre, Bekescsaba (public sector organisation)
Northern Great Plain Regional Labour Centre, Branch Office and Service Centre, Debrecen (public sector organisation)

EASI DP partners (England)

Islington Training Network, London (NGO)
British Refugee Council, UK (NGO)
Education Action International (RETAS), Leeds (NGO)
Elthorne Learning Centre, London (NGO)
Hackney City Farm, London (NGO)
Innovative Enterprise Action, London (NGO)
Islington Refugee Integration Service, London Borough of Islington (public sector organisation)
Kurdish Disability Organisation, London (NGO)
London Advice Services Alliance, London (NGO)
North of England Refugee Service, Newcastle (NGO)
Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), London Metropolitan University (public sector organisation)
Refugee Women's Association, London (NGO)
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Appendices Contact details of EXCHANGES partners profiled in this report

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Appendix 3

Access to language / vocational training and employment: regulations in Hungary, France and UK

This section summarises the situation in France, Hungary and the UK with regard to Articles 11 and 12 of the Reception Directive. The term ‘transposition’ is used to describe the adoption of the Directive in 2003. ‘Pre transposition’ therefore refers to the regulations and procedures in place before the Directive came into force.

- See section 2.3 of this report for an explanation of the Reception Directive
- See ‘A Baseline Survey’ outlining the changing context in Hungary, France and England, downloadable from www.menedek.hu or www.cimade.org or www.easidp.org.uk for more detailed information on the three different national situations.

France

Access to language/vocational training

No particular arrangement. De facto language or vocational training is not accessible to asylum seekers – having only short-term residence permits they cannot enter formal training / public training or education. May attend vocational and/or language training organised by associations without public funding. Hence, this is done purely on voluntary basis by associations.

Access to employment

> Pre Transposition (2003)

Since 1991, asylum seekers have not been allowed to work. In some regions, permission to work may be granted based on either the employment situation in the region or the sector concerned.

> Post Transposition

Asylum seekers can apply for a work permit after one year of stay in the country. The demand for a work permit requires approval from the departmental labour office, as for any other non EU foreigner. The condition for obtaining this agreement consists in the fact that the national labour supply can not fill the vacancy in accordance with the job description. Hence the work permit is almost impossible to obtain.

Hungary

Access to language/vocational training

Adult asylum seekers have access to education and training but have to pay fees, unless an organisation or institution makes the decision to finance the training from other funds.

Access to employment

> Pre and post Transposition

Asylum seekers are in theory allowed to work in Hungary after one year of procedure, with a facilitated work permit. Up to that time, asylum seekers can only work in reception centres, but the chances of that are slim.

Work permits are issued at the employer’s request to the job centre. The job has to then to be advertised for 15 days, after which, if the job is still vacant, the employer must make the request again.

Appendices **UK**

Access to language/vocational training

Asylum seekers have the following access to vocational training and post-school higher education. They:

- can access higher education if they satisfy entry requirements and are able to pay fees 'usually set at overseas student rate). Universities have discretion to waive fees or charge at home student rate;
- can attend further education courses if they satisfy entry requirements and are able to pay fees;
- will be charged overseas student rate in first six months;
- if asylum claim not decided after this, eligible for funding and home student fee;
- refused asylum seekers eligible for Section 4 support can access further education funding;
- eligible for funding if 16-18 years old;
- are eligible for vocational college courses which have a work placement, provided that the work part is unpaid.

Access to employment

> **Pre Transposition (2003)**

From 1987 to 2002, asylum seekers could work after a six months wait if they had not had a decision on their claim; this permission was removed immediately before the Reception Directive's process began so that pre transposition:

- asylum seekers could not work for money
- they could not work for payment in kind (eg where they are given free board and lodging) unless they had received permission from the Home Office.

> **Post Transposition**

Asylum seekers can apply for permission to work if:

- they have waited more than 12 months for an initial decision by the Home Office on their asylum claim, even if now at appeal stage, and
- the delay in the Home Office's decision was not asylum seeker's fault, or
- the asylum claim is ongoing.

They must apply for permission to work from Home Office. There is no time limit for when the decision needs to be made and applications are not routinely processed.

They must receive written permission from Home Office before taking employment. They then receive a new Application Registration Card (ARC) and have the same access to employment as UK nationals.



Appendix 4

EXCHANGES recommendations, Policy Conference, Budapest, October 2007

EXCHANGES FOR A BETTER EUROPE

- EXCHANGES recommends that policy makers recognise that the integration process for asylum seekers begins from the day of arrival. This includes social and vocational aspects.
- EXCHANGES recommends that asylum seekers have access to high quality and appropriate language provision upon arrival. This should be included in the European Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers in the Member States.
- EXCHANGES recommends that the European Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers is amended so that Member States permit access to the labour market as soon as possible after arrival. At a minimum, permission to work should be granted automatically and unconditionally after a six month period in the asylum process.
- EXCHANGES recommends that the European Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers is amended to require Member States to permit access to vocational training for asylum seekers, including work placements, building on their skills and experience for their benefit and that of the wider community.
- EXCHANGES recommends that policy makers and service providers consult and engage asylum seekers directly in the design and implementation of services and policy development.
- EXCHANGES recommends that all EU Member States positively encourage access to the European Social Fund 2007 – 2013 for programmes targeting asylum seekers, and this should include a transnational element.

Appendix 5

Equal programme final recommendations on the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, Malmö, 2007

Advice, Education and Training

- Upon arrival, asylum seekers should have the right to and be informed about: (1) skills audit process, (2) access to language training and (3) access to vocational training incorporating a practical component. The needs of disadvantaged groups of asylum seekers should be taken into account.
- Asylum seekers must have the possibility to have their professional and academic skills recognised. Vocational training should preferably be provided in mainstream programmes with nationals.

Employment and Employer Relations

- Employer organisations and trade unions should become involved in opening the labour market for the creation of new jobs based on diversity, and influence policy makers to revise reception conditions.
- Article 11 should be amended. Asylum seekers should have direct access to employment unless Member States can prove that this will substantially disturb their labour markets. Issues of social inclusion are to be taken into account.

Capacity Building

- Article 24 should be amended. Member States should give clear guidance on the necessary qualifications for support staff. The empowerment of asylum seekers should be an essential part of all activities targeted at asylum seekers (e.g. setting up an advisory group of asylum seekers).
- The instruments for dissemination and policy impact used and developed in the EQUAL Initiative should be further developed, adapted and transferred to the new ESF programme.

Empowerment through

language ...

“When I was able to speak, it changed everything, people would want to talk to me. I think the language comes first. If you can’t speak the language, it’s very difficult to make friends or to communicate or to find a job”.

employment ...

“ I like working, I can’t stay on my own at home. Now, I can’t work because I am not allowed to. Volunteer or not, I don’t mind, I just want to work. When I worked as a volunteer, I could see that people around me needed me. I showed them I could help, that I was not here doing nothing, that I could do something and contribute”.

and capacity building ...

“The very important thing is that through the setting up of the Franco-Chechen cultural centre, we met asylum seekers, refugees and French citizens, and now we are friends, we are not alone any more. Volunteering in FCCC gives people the opportunity to begin living normally and grow in capacity and skills, because it is normal for people to work. I take part in this project in order to be ready to work when I will be authorised to do so. For most of us, this is the first time we are able to get a professional experience after war times in Chechnya and a long period of wait. Being involved in the project gives us the opportunity to learn French, to learn about the professional and cultural environment of our host society.

Besides, thanks to working together with French colleagues, I feel that they stand by us, we grow more self-confident, as we see we are useful and efficient. We believe we can realize our own projects”.

Further copies of this report (English only)
can be obtained from Cimade,
or can be downloaded from Cimade website: www.cimade.org

A separate executive summary is available in English, French and Hungarian.
This can be also downloaded from Cimade website.

