

## NETWORKING FOR INTERCULTURAL GUIDANCE AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION CREATING NEW SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BERLIN

About 14% of the 3.4 million citizens of Berlin have a foreign nationality. The large majority are immigrants from non-EU countries and many experience severe employment problems, as their unemployment rate is 42% - a level twice as high as that of German nationals. Public services feel that they are inadequately equipped to offer effective guidance and placement to these individuals who often have little fluency in German and are unfamiliar with the procedures to access this type of support. An EQUAL Development Partnership, KUMULUS-PLUS, is bridging this gap through a network of experienced NGOs and other organisations that work with immigrant communities.



More than two thirds of the 464.000 non-German residents of Berlin originate from countries outside the European Union. Together they represent more than 150 different nationalities and, in some districts of the city, they make up more than one fifth of the population. The most significant groups come from Turkey (117.000), the former Yugoslavia (52.000), Russia and other former USSR states (33.000) and from Vietnam (12.000). Many immigrants were recruited, in the 1970s-80s, to work in industrial sectors that traditionally provided jobs for an unskilled or semi-skilled workforce. Many others arrived later, after the fall of the wall or during the war in the Balkans. However, since the 1990s, Berlin has lost three quarters of its 400.000 jobs in these sectors and this has affected immigrant workers much more than others. Losing their jobs also meant less contact with German colleagues and a retreat into their own cultural communities and mother tongues, and this had a very negative effect on their German language skills. Similar isolation from the "host" society is experienced by those who have never found employment since their arrival in Berlin and as a result, the social and employment situation of immigrants and ethnic minorities deteriorates continuously, creating complex and entrenched problems of integration.



Stefan Nowack, coordinator of the KUMULUS-PLUS DP

The [KUMULUS-PLUS](#) Development Partnership (DP) has pioneered new ways of tackling these problems. "Policy makers and administrations recognise that the issue of integration must be addressed more effectively. But they tend to see immigrant citizens as a homogeneous group, whereas in reality the immigrant population is very heterogeneous," explains Stefan Nowack of the Work and Education association ([Arbeit und Bildung](#), or A&B for short), which coordinates the 11 sub-projects of the DP. He adds that "differentiated approaches and special expertise are required to reach out to the different immigrant communities. Public services have often neither the experience nor the flexibility to meet these requirements. On the other hand, there are many initiatives and projects in Berlin that work very closely with these diverse groups, but they usually operated in parallel with little coordination. Our DP started with the ambitious objective of linking

together these actors in a structured network that provides target group oriented guidance, qualification measures and help with job placements for adult immigrants, in close cooperation with the responsible public services. We believe that we have made good progress towards this aim."

KUMULUS-PLUS is the younger sister of [KUMULUS](#), a separate project which was initiated by the Berlin Senate as long ago as 1993, to assist young immigrants in their transition from school to working life. This project is assisted by the European Social Fund outside the framework of EQUAL but is also managed by A&B alongside the work of the DP

## AN INTEGRATION NETWORK WITH A STRONG INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Most of the 11 partners in the network are NGOs, including immigrant self-help organisations, but the DP also involves other actors working in the social economy and in the private sector. Each member offers a particular type of experience, which complements that of the other partners, such as the capacity to communicate with different immigrant communities in their mother tongue and/or expertise in a specific field, for instance the training or the assessment of individual competences and skills. *"This range of complementary experience enables us to take account of the individual biographies and the very diverse needs of our client,"* says Fatoş Topaç, who is a member of the DP's coordination team, and she further explains that *"our target groups include people with no qualifications, but there are also individuals with valuable skills and work experience but no formal vocational qualification and even many highly qualified immigrants whose certificates and degrees are not recognised in Germany. Different types of advice and support are required to respond to these different situations and the composition of our network reflects these requirements."*

**KUMULUS-PLUS: Operational partners involved in the EQUAL DP**



Thus, the network can provide a comprehensive and coherent package of services that none of the partners (see box on the right [\[1\]](#)) could offer on their own.

### Providing guidance adapted to the needs of different immigrant communities

The KUMULUS\_PLUS network offers intercultural career guidance which includes:

- Individual and group counselling;
- Information on the labour market and on possibilities of obtaining formal recognition of qualifications acquired in the country of origin;
- Referrals to placement services, offers of on the job training, vocational training courses and German language courses; and
- Assistance in the preparation of job applications.

In Berlin, three members of the network specialise in the above activities. These are [Club Dialog](#) (a non-profit organisation assisting Russian speaking immigrants), [RAA Berlin](#)<sup>[2]</sup> (a DP partner with particular experience of working with [Sinti and Roma](#)) and [TBB](#) (the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg, which offers intercultural vocational guidance for Turkish immigrants). A further member operates outside Berlin and this is [Diên Hồng](#), an NGO that provides support to immigrant communities in the region of Rostock, on the Baltic coast in the north-east of Germany. Diên Hồng also brings to the network its particular experience of working with Vietnamese immigrants.

## Assessing individual skills, competences and potential

Two partners of the DP offer particular expertise in running skills assessments for immigrant job seekers - [Gfbm](#), an intercultural training organisation, and [LIFE](#), a charitable association with considerable experience of promoting women's access to training and careers in non-traditional vocational fields. Gfbm provides different assessment modules for immigrants who have already been involved in initial counselling but need further assistance to ascertain their vocational interests, their potential for personal and professional development or their competences and experience related to a specific job or vocational field. LIFE offers similar assessment services for women with qualifications in a technical subject. It works with these women to determine their personal strengths and to explore new employment and career options for them. LIFE mainly caters for immigrants from the former Soviet Union, but it also assists women from the Polish community which is the largest grouping of foreign EU citizens in Berlin.

Each assessment can last up to five days and involves individual and team work to solve a problem or complete a task, role playing and behavioural training, simulations of job interviews or counselling sessions, feed back and self-evaluation. One of the aspects that participants really appreciate is the sensitive way in which these processes address intercultural issues. Vera Maerzke, who spent many unsuccessful years trying to find a use for her professional qualifications in Germany, remembers that *"in our Soviet socialist context, a job interview was something completely different from what it is here and for us Russian speaking people the word 'counselling' evoked negative rather than positive connotations"*. However, she then adds that *"in the case of LIFE, I now sing the praises of good counselling. Assessment, soft skills, self-marketing – initially all these terms meant nothing to us and now we are familiar with them. We were even offered special training to act as observers in the assessments and to provide feedback to the participants. This training has been quite important for our future work as intercultural vocational counsellors."*

## Training intercultural vocational counsellors



A jam-packed session of the RESPEKT training course

RESPEKT, a non-profit corporation that promotes intercultural integration, has developed a new curriculum for training highly qualified Russian speaking immigrants as intercultural vocational counsellors. *"This special focus on **vocational** guidance is something new and different from other intercultural work,"* emphasises Elvira Yevtushenko, who coordinates the programme. *"Most of our participants have a degree in pedagogy or psychology but these qualifications are not recognised in Germany",* she explains and adds that *"many of them do voluntary work in social organisations where they can use their knowledge and experience. Our programme and its final certificate offer them a chance to qualify for professional intercultural guidance work, for instance in job centres, public or private agencies, schools or training organisations."*

This training initiative has attracted great interest from the target groups but places are limited. Only 36 of the 150 applicants could be admitted to the two courses that RESPEKT has organised to date. The programme involves a five month, full-time course, followed by a three month, work experience placement in a non-profit SME, a social economy enterprise or an NGO working with immigrants. After the work experience, the last seven months of the programme are dedicated to self-study, with supervision and tutoring being offered by the RESPEKT team. During this final period, participants familiarise themselves with autodidactic methods to deepen and develop the knowledge that they have acquired during the course. They also organise workshops on specific themes, carry out research and perform other tasks related to the practice of intercultural vocational counselling.

## Adding an intercultural dimension to vocational training

These new approaches, which combine the development of occupational and specific job related language skills, are being piloted in two specific vocational sectors. Qualification modules in the

field of metalwork are offered by [KHS](#), a non-profit crafts enterprise, and a training programme in office and management skills is being provided by [genius](#), a company for human resource development. The genius programme also includes basic training modules for immigrants who want to set up their own business.

### Exploring new employment opportunities

Obviously, the activities of all partners in the network are aimed at facilitating access to employment but two sub-projects have a direct focus on unlocking potential job opportunities in the labour market through the provision of consultancy services for SMEs and training for business start-up.

One of them is [BWK](#), an independent qualification and learning centre offering a broad range of training courses for socially disadvantaged or unemployed people. In the context of KUMULUS-PLUS, BWK organises information seminars and training workshops for immigrants who want to find employment by setting up their own businesses. The programme involves individual and group coaching during the start-up period, including arranging contacts with business and support networks.

The other sub-project is run by A&B and provides consultancy services to SMEs, and especially those managed by immigrants, on human resource and employment issues. The overall objective of the consultancy is to encourage them to create new jobs that can be offered to the clients of the KUMULUS-PLUS network. The A&B consultants help in the recruitment process and offer advice on training opportunities for potential candidates and on available grants or employment subsidies.

## NETWORK COACHING

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Efficient coordination, good communication and feed back, management tools and the active support of the operational partners are the lubricants which ensure that the network runs smoothly. The DP's managing organisation, A&B, is well aware of the need to allocate resources to the effective functioning of the network. *"Network coaching is one of our main activities and the glue that keeps the network together,"* emphasises Stefan Nowack and he explains that *"some members of our central team devote a lot of their time to this task. They operate as consultants to the individual network partners and organise the flow of information between them. We have produced a handbook that sets out common rules for the operation of the network and describes the roles and responsibilities of each individual partner. The handbook is updated regularly and adjusted to emerging needs, so that our network can develop as a learning system. We have also introduced a number of organisational tools that are used by all partners. We see all this as an important part of our approach to network coaching."*



The steering group of KUMULUS-PLUS in front of the A&B premises

The consultants from the central coordination unit meet the individual network partners twice a month. They are also the first contact points for individuals who are referred to the network by the public employment agency. The coordination unit offers initial guidance and counselling to these clients and then directs them toward the network partner that can provide the most appropriate form of support.

The network's organisational tools serve two main purposes. In the first instance, they ensure that all clients seeking advice and support from the network are referred to the partner that is best

placed to respond to their identified needs, and that this partner then receives all the relevant information from the initial counselling interview. A common system of registration and referral sheets has been introduced to achieve this aim. The second purpose is to document the process and the results of the services that have been offered to clients through the network, so that the partners can take account of each individual's case history in tailoring their support. This information is stored in a common counselling database.

All the operational partners are members of the KUMULUS-PLUS steering group, which meets every month to evaluate and review the progress of the DP's work and to take decisions about emerging issues.

The achievements of the DP are impressive. In the course of 2006:

- 2500 individuals called on the network for advice and support;
- 800 of them participated in training or programmes to assess their competences and skills
- 43 were placed in permanent employment; and
- Many others were offered work experience placements that may eventually lead on to a part time or full time job.

In addition, KUMULUS-PLUS has also demonstrated how intercultural elements can be effectively integrated into vocational training programmes to create better opportunities for immigrants to develop their occupational skills, and it offers new experience in training intercultural vocational counsellors. This experience is fed back regularly to the other members of the [New Labour Market Possibilities](#) TP (Transnational Partnership) in which the DP is involved. Together with these partners, Kumulus-PLUS is preparing a transnational [conference](#) that will be held in November 2007, in Brussels, to present the outcomes from the work of the TP. These include a guide on approaches and good practice that have proved to be successful in improving immigrants' access to employment.

## **TRANSFERRING AND MAINSTREAMING SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE**

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Arguably, the DP's most significant achievement is the design and testing of a network structure for inter-agency cooperation that opens up new resources by tapping into the specific expertise of its different partners. This new approach has already demonstrated its positive impact on current practices in Berlin, but there are still important gaps in the mainstream provision for immigrants and ethnic minorities. Therefore, disseminating the positive outcomes of the DP, not only within the network but also through links with other actors on the labour market, continues to be a priority for the KUMULUS-PLUS team. Members of the network are convinced that major progress would be achieved if some of the DP's successful practices could be transferred and integrated into the daily work of the regular employment services and that this progress would be sustained if structured links could be established with these services. Özcan Ayanoglu from the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg considers that stronger efforts are required to achieve this objective. He regrets that the public services *"sometimes call on us just to step into the breach if there is a problem,"* and he stresses that *"cooperation between NGOs and the job centres must be better structured, in fact, it should be obligatory. As many of our clients have no trust in the statutory agencies, we can play an important role as an intermediary."*

However, the composition of the DP's Advisory Board is an important lever that can be used to promote new forms of inter-agency cooperation and a better delivery of policies for labour market integration. As Berlin is not only the capital city but also one of the 16 Federal States of Germany, KUMULUS-PLUS was keen to ensure, from the outset, that this Advisory Board included representatives of the relevant public authorities and agencies operating in the different boroughs, as well as those with responsibilities at central government level. Trade Unions, the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Chamber of Crafts are also represented on the board. Together, these Strategic Partners follow the progress of DP and offer both constructive criticism and policy support, when these appear to be needed. Equally, if not more important, is the crucial role they can play in ensuring that practices that have proved successful in KUMULUS-PLUS will be continued after the completion of EQUAL.

The new network approach also has an obvious potential for being replicated to tackle similar problems in other areas, which is reflected in the interest that the outcomes of KUMULUS-PLUS have generated in Germany and abroad. The DP never misses an opportunity to share its

experience and recommendations with other practitioners and with decision makers. In this context, it plays an active role in the national network "[Integration through Qualification](#)" (IQ-network) which was launched, in June 2005, by the Federal Ministry of Labour and the Federal Employment Agency, with financial support from EQUAL. The remit of the IQ-network is to develop models of guidance, information and qualification for immigrants and to test these new approaches in about 70 sub-projects, throughout the country. Also individual operational partners in the DP are well placed to bring their experience to bear at a strategic level, as it is the case for Phuong Kollath, who is a member of the board of Diên Hồng. She was invited to the first national Integration Summit that took place, in July 2006. This was an initiative of the Chancellor Angela Merkel to launch a broad dialogue amongst a wide range of stakeholders and experts on effective approaches to improve the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities. *"It's an honour and a challenge for me to make an active contribution, through our special experience, to increasing mutual understanding and appreciation between people of migrant origin and those with no such background,"* says Phuong Kollath, who also participated in the second Integration Summit in July 2007, at which the Chancellor presented the [National Integration Plan](#) that resulted from the dialogue.

At the EU level, KUMULUS-PLUS is actively involved in the European Programme for Mainstreaming the outcomes of EQUAL that combat discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities. The DP contributed to two of the five peer review seminars that were organised, during the first half of 2007, to analyse progress achieved through the work of EQUAL and draw out the appropriate lessons. The conclusions from these seminars will be presented at a Policy Forum at the end of November 2007, in Paris, which will bring together European, national and territorial decision makers to discuss strategic recommendations that can inform the implementation of the 2007/2013 ESF programmes and the main EU employment, anti-discrimination and inclusion policies.

### Three Important Conclusions from KUMULUS-PLUS

The operators in the KUMULUS-PLUS team consider that:

1. "The partners operating in our network have demonstrated how organisations that are in close touch with immigrant communities can effectively complement and support the work of the public employment services and help them to reach out to these target groups. Public services should be urged to engage in more structured forms of cooperation with such organisations;
2. The KUMULUS-PLUS approach to systematic network coaching was the master key to successful inter-agency cooperation within our intercultural guidance network. We therefore advocate the idea of setting up a sustainable network centre that could ensure the continuation and further development of this work;
3. In addition, KUMULUS-PLUS has generated a pool of practical experience that can be drawn upon in developing the inter-cultural competence of guidance counsellors and staff working in public or private employment services. Actors responsible for designing and delivering programmes for training and capacity building within these services should be encouraged to capitalise on this experience."

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[Link to EQUAL database description of the Development Partnership](#)  
[Link to EQUAL database description of the Transnational Partnership](#)