

## PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS ASYLUM SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Although asylum seekers can work in Spain, they face numerous obstacles when looking for a job. A work permit is required, which can only be applied for six months after lodging an asylum application. The application process can take several months, and once a permit is granted, it is only valid for a specific time period and job. Asylum seekers also face the problem that their diplomas and qualifications are often not officially recognised. These obstacles discourage potential employers from considering asylum seekers for jobs despite the fact that in some sectors, such as the hotel and restaurant industry, there is high staff turnover and labour shortages.

The ENEAS-EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) has implemented a range of innovative projects which help asylum seekers gain useful skills and find work. The DP has national coverage and has involved all key actors in the area of asylum and employment as partners in their project. Key actors include the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, ACCEM (Asociación Comisión Católica Española de Migración), the Red Cross, CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado) and FEHR (the Spanish Federation of the Hotel and Restaurant Industry), as well as different regional and local authorities.

For Emilio Gallego Zuazo, the General Secretary of FEHR the benefits of employing asylum seekers and the wider community are clear: "From a social corporate responsibility perspective, the creation of a multicultural working environment also brings positive impacts, both for the employers as well as their clients who benefit from the added value the asylum seekers bring." He hoped that the positive experiences from the hotel and restaurant sector would spread to other sectors.

### ASYLUM SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS SEE THE BENEFITS

The ENEAS-EQUAL DP has achieved successful results which have helped to improve the employability of asylum seekers and enhance their social and vocational integration into Spanish society. Results have shown that participation in such programmes greatly enhances participants' chances of finding employment. At the same time, this increases awareness and intercultural exchange in the wider society.



*Informing asylum seekers on work opportunities in Spain*

Success has been achieved through a range of activities. These have included activities such as training programmes focussing on language, vocational and professional training, individualised mediation and advice counselling, as well as establishing contact with employers to inform them of the benefits of hiring asylum seekers. Over 60 asylum seekers successfully took part in 4 series of courses aimed at making their entry into the labour market easier, while nearly 50 managed to find a job or a work placement as a direct result of their training.

One innovative activity the ENEAS-EQUAL DP has developed is the setting up of collaboration agreements with public and private organisations located at local and regional levels (such as local and regional authorities and training institutions) to get asylum seekers into employment. Such an agreement was established with the FEHR and the Spanish Commission for Assistance to Refugees (CEAR) who are partners in the DP. The partners developed training activities with a focus on the hospitality sector which needs qualified staff. The aim was to train asylum seekers for work in the hotel and restaurant industry and assist them with finding a job and obtaining a

work permit. Asylum seekers follow a training programme which combines modules such as language classes, dealing with clients and mediation. At the end of the programme, participants obtain a qualification which is recognised and can assist with finding a job in the sector. The FEHR establishes contact with potential employers among its membership in order to find jobs for asylum seekers.



*Training that leads to a recognised*

experience and qualification I gained by the end of the training programme opened the doors to getting an employment contract.”

One of the participants in this activity was Gabriel<sup>1</sup>, an asylum seeker from Colombia, where he had worked in the coffee industry. For Gabriel, the ENEAS-EQUAL programme, which focused on qualifying asylum seekers for work in the hotel and restaurant sector, was an excellent opportunity to gain a recognised qualification and move out of the black economy and find legal work in an area which was related to his previous experience. Thanks to the training course, Gabriel was not only able to upgrade his skills and get a qualification, but also to participate in an internship, which provided him with useful references. Gabriel explained the benefits he gained by stating that: “The

## **SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS WORK**

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The collaboration agreements established by the ENEAS-EQUAL DP show how partnerships set up between different actors to tackle a specific problem and find effective solutions which benefit all. The actors participating in the agreements have been able to work together and share their expertise and experience.

One example of a partnership based on such a collaboration agreement is that between Reception Centres for Refugees (CAR) from Sevilla, the regional department responsible for training and employment promotion and Andalucía Orienta, a regional authority that focuses on the provision of vocational training and the promotion of self-employment. The agreement stipulates that 1-2 asylum seekers selected by CAR are allowed to participate in each vocational training programme organised. Participation in the programme greatly enhances the asylum seekers’ chances of accessing employment. In some cases, the collaboration agreement also included a commitment to contracting the asylum seekers. Other employment offers were accessed indirectly through internships in companies, which enabled the employers to get to know the asylum seeker on a personal basis. The process of getting to know the asylum seekers personally, both in training activities and on the work floor, greatly contributed to raising awareness. As regards the benefits for the partners, the asylum seekers provide an intercultural dimension to the courses organised by Andalucía Orienta. In addition, CAR contributes to the capacity building of Andalucía Orienta by providing training to their teachers.

Furthermore, the collaboration agreement previously highlighted in the example of Gabriel’s work experience, including CEAR and FEHR also provided benefits to all parties involved. CEAR was responsible for selecting course participants and teaching the modules related to vocational training and orientation. The FEHR coordinated job interviews and acted as an intermediary between the asylum seeker and employers. CEAR and FEHR were also involved in coordinating follow-up and monitoring activities (looking at results of job interviews, sending asylum seekers to new interviews etc).

The concrete results of such collaboration agreements have facilitated the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers, while increasing cultural awareness on the part of employers and Spanish society. All partners agreed that the collaboration agreements were very important for starting a dialogue between the different actors. Since the partnership had been so successful

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<sup>1</sup> The name has been changed.

and had brought so many benefits to all, all actors involved expressed that they wanted to make the collaboration permanent.

## DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

The activities implemented by the ENEAS-EQUAL DP have brought together a variety of stakeholders who had never had any form of structural collaboration before EQUAL. This has included, not only asylum seekers, the main beneficiaries, but also local and regional authorities and employers and employer organisations.

By participating in the training organised by ENEAS-EQUAL, asylum seekers can obtain a Spanish qualification which would be useful for future work in for example the hotel and restaurant sector. There were several reasons to focus on this sector. Firstly, it provides many different types of jobs. Secondly, with tourism being the motor of Spanish economy there is growing demand for qualified staff. By providing asylum seekers with a Spanish qualification, it is easier for them to access the Spanish labour market. As the sector deals with tourists from many different countries asylum seekers with other linguistic backgrounds provide an asset to the companies when dealing with clients. It has also been a very good way to decrease the number of persons working in the informal economy, a common feature of the hotel and restaurant sector.



**Hotels and restaurants can always use skilled and motivated workers**

The tourism sector has proven to be a very good field for asylum seekers to get jobs since the skills and experiences they get can be used internationally. This means that the qualification provided through ENEAS-EQUAL could be useful also in case of repatriation. Many of the hotels are part of chains, which means that the asylum seekers can get valid references and possibly a new job within the same hotel chain if they return to their country of origin. The certificate the asylum seekers receive through EQUAL has increased their labour

mobility. Previously they mainly found manual jobs where they were less visible, but the courses have helped asylum seekers access more qualified work.

“Asylum seekers that get employed are more visible to the rest of the society and have a better chance of integrating and making their own living. Many asylum seekers have for instance obtained work for VIVS, a chain of cafés and stores, where they are in direct contact with the Spanish citizens. The better people get to know asylum seekers, and the less they confuse this group of people with illegal immigrants, the higher are the chances of reduced racism and xenophobia”, concludes Carlos Peléaz, previously the CEAR coordinator of ENEAS.

Asylum seekers are referred to the project through many different channels including asylum centres and the Red Cross. They are referred to different entities depending on their needs (finding jobs, improving their language skills, etc.). Since ENEAS-EQUAL covers all of Spain, the project needed to take account of different regional contexts and possibilities to provide asylum seekers with activation. The sectors in which it is possible to find work varied accordingly, and stretched from work in the tourism sector as in the example of Gabriel in Madrid, to agricultural, industrial, building and service sectors in other parts of the country.

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[Link to EQUAL database description](#)

A short version of this "Success story" and other "Success stories" are available on the [EQUAL website](#)