

EQUAL EUROPEAN THEMATIC GROUP - ETG5 ASYLUM SEEKERS – GREEK MANAGING AUTHORITY

REPORT ON THE EVENT:

”GETTING ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO EMPLOYMENT – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES”

CHANIA (CRETE – GREECE), 1 AND 2 JUNE 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

Over 100 participants from 22 EU Member States attended the EQUAL Exchange Event ‘Getting Asylum Seekers into Employment – Challenges and Opportunities’ in Chania, on the island of Crete (Greece) on 1-2 June 2006. Participants included representatives from 10 Round 1 and 42 Round 2 DPs EQUAL partnerships under the Asylum Seeker Theme, representatives from national Managing Authorities and National Support Structures, the European Commission, the UNHCR and employers and other actors from the Greek corporate sector.

This event provided the opportunity for Development Partnerships from both rounds of EQUAL who have implemented projects aimed at getting asylum seekers into employment to meet, and identify, discuss and exchange their experiences and the successful and promising practices they have developed. The purpose of the Exchange Event was:

- To illustrate EQUAL examples of practice, methods and processes concerning Employer Relations and Employment in the area of asylum and asylum seekers that have proven to be successful (Round 1).
- To enable the communication and exchanges of good and promising practices between actors in the theme, with a particular focus on ensuring learning between EQUAL Round 1 and Round 2 partnerships.
- To provide a ‘reality-check’ of the EQUAL practices through the involvement of external actors.
- To identify complementarities and synergies between the work of actors in the Asylum Seekers theme.
- To identify policy lessons with regard to the vocational integration of asylum seekers with a view to informing the Policy Forum planned in Sweden.

The objectives of the Exchange Event were:

- To present EQUAL Round 1 good practices benefits and lessons from DPs concerning Employer Relations and Employment of Asylum Seekers in their own national contexts
- To identify promising practices in this area in Round 2
- To ensure that the actors developing promising practices can gain maximum learning from Round 1 experiences

- To identify lessons that are transferable from one DP to others and from one national context to others, and to discuss the feasibility and possibility of such transfers with actors external to EQUAL
- To inform the overall work programme and communications of the European Thematic Group on Asylum Seekers, and in particular the Policy Forum planned end 2006 led by Sweden
- To produce a paper to inform the Policy Forum on the key messages emerging in the area of employment and employer relations (especially in relation to the future Structural Funds and in relation to the asylum and migration policy, such as the Reception Directive and funding)

Before the event, all EQUAL partnerships were requested to fill in a general questionnaire on their activities in the area of employment and employer relations and to put forward a promising practice. A background paper distributed to all participants summarised the main outcomes of this exercise.

The full list of participants is attached as Annex A to this report, and the programme as Annex B.

2. OPENING – PLENARY SESSION

Welcome and introduction

Ms Fotini Tsiller, Head of the Greek Managing Authority welcomed the participants and introduced the speakers and the conference programme. The Deputy Mayor of Chania addressed the participants by welcoming them to Crete and to Chania. A representative of the prefecture of Chania told participants that Chania is a suitable place to hold such a conference as it has always welcomed migrants throughout its history. Pavel Pinkava of European Commission thanked the Greek Managing Authority and GHK for the organisation of the conference.

Employment and the Reception Directive – Maria Stavropoulou, UNHCR

Ms Maria Stavropoulou from the UNHCR started her presentation by emphasising that the conference was dealing with asylum seekers and not refugees or immigrants, and that the specific position and legal status of asylum seekers had to be taken into account. After a general introduction to the EU Reception Directive, she highlighted some of its most important Articles.

The Reception Directive was to be transposed by Member States by February 2005. There is a need to improve standards for asylum seekers in most Member States. Article 5 of the Directive pertains to legal assistance for asylum seekers. Asylum seekers do not often know about their legal rights or access to education, training and employment. In Greece, asylum seekers are granted a document declaring their status as an asylum seeker. This gives them the right to free movement within the host country. This is important for employment as they can move in search of work.

Two important Articles of the Directive are Articles 11 and 12. Article 11 requires Member States to determine a period of time during which asylum seekers do not have access to the labour market. Greece had tried to change this requirement during negotiations as access to employment during the entire asylum period is vital and there shouldn't be any time limits. Under Article 12, Member States can permit access to vocational training for asylum seekers. Such access to training is also important for asylum seekers.

Article 24 states that training should be offered to authorities and organisations with respect to the needs of asylum seekers and that Member States must allocate the resources necessary to implement the Directive. Ms Stavropoulou added that the specific needs of asylum seeking women needed to be taken into account.

KEMMEPAP- IFESTOS – A good EQUAL practice – Daniel Esdras, IOM Greece

Mr Daniel Esdras from IOM presented an example of a successful EQUAL project that was implemented under Round 1. The project addressed the reception needs of asylum seekers. An information centre was created which provided information, counselling, support and guidance as well as accreditation of the technical knowledge and qualifications of asylum seekers. This is necessary because asylum seekers often have to leave in haste and do not take their diplomas and certificates with them. The project also aims to raise awareness among the local population and employers and change mentalities. For example, many do not know the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee.

The project was implemented in Northern Greece and Athens, which is the municipality with the most asylum seekers. The target group was provided with information which would help them to adapt to the new society, integrate into the local community and enter the labour market. Many asylum seekers are not aware of their rights and experience difficult working conditions and exploitation in the labour market. Language training programmes and courses in technical skills were offered, as well classes in journalism and publishing in the mass media. Training was also provided in professions for which there is a particular demand on the labour market, for example, nursing.

Corporate Social Responsibility and vulnerable groups – Dimitrios Papadopoulos, Greek Corporate Social Responsibility Network

Mr Dimitrios Papadopoulos introduced the Greek network for Corporate Social Responsibility and told participants how the network has made a difference through its participation in the Ithaca DP.

This network was established six years ago and is made up of 13 Greek corporations, 6 business associations and 80 companies as members. It is also part of a European network called CSR Europe which is a network of European partners.

Business inevitably affects society and the environment. CSR is about companies integrating social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders such as employers, NGOs, the local community and general public. There are expectations on the role of companies in modern society. Businesses can contribute to the improvement of society and local communities in a number of areas such as: decreasing poverty and homelessness, contributing to a better environment, improving health services and education, art and culture, and addressing criminality.

The network is dedicated to providing equal opportunities for 'socially sensitive' groups by promoting dialogue, sensitising employers, publishing good practices, promoting vocational training and the training of employers and employees. This network is part of the Ithaca DP and has access to the Estia network set up by the Greek Round 1 DP. It has produced videos of success stories and organised a visit to the camp in Lavrion. Representatives from 25 companies took part in the visit, which is part of the 'seeing is believing' approach. They were able to witness and see the problems faced in the camp.

How to convince employers – a case study – Sotiris Stamatiou, Shell Greece

A presentation by a representative of an employer, Mr Sotiris Stamatiou from the human resources department of Shell Greece, revealed Shell's experience with employing asylum seekers. An employment project was implemented 3-4 years ago which offered employment opportunities to asylum seekers in cooperation with the UNHCR and NGOs. The aim was to provide help to the local community and promote a diverse working environment while enriching staff resources.

The following criteria were agreed on for the selection of participants: a minimum knowledge of the Greek language, possession of a legal work permit and a driving licence. The managers and other employees had to be prepared first by telling them about the aims of the project and explaining the difference between asylum seekers and refugees. As first there were some

difficulties faced, but afterwards the old and 'new' employees were able to work together in harmony.

More than 40 candidates were interviewed and 8 were selected to work as pump and car wash attendants for periods of 3 months to 3 years. The participants were all men from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan and between 20 and 40 years of age. Many were educated: 1 in 3 had a university degree.

The ESTIA database – A good EQUAL practice – Lora Pappas, National Youth Foundation

Ms Lora Pappas from the Ithaca DP introduced the ESTIA database which was initially developed by the DP under Round 1 and is being further expanded and improved under Round 2. The ESTIA database has taken its name from the Greek goddess who protects the family and home. It is an electronic network based on a common database system. It was set up in response to the existence of several databases maintained by different organisations. These have been integrated via the database into a network of connected agencies. At the beginning, other EQUAL partners were connected to the database and then access was extended to other NGOs.

Asylum seekers go through a registration procedure which creates a profile of his/her level of education, marital status, etc. All the agencies connected to the database are able to see the asylum seekers' profiles. The database is used as a 'one-stop-shop' which links different agencies with different structures and operates on a common basis. Referrals are made electronically from one agency to another which limits the overlap of services. It is also a tool for collaboration and cooperation between agencies. The Ministry of Health was helpful in offering access to other bodies.

In Round 2 an attempt is being made to widen the network and give limited access to ESTIA to employers in order to promote the matching of persons with jobs. New partners who have joined the DP under Round 2 include the Greek CSR network, the UNHCR and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Helping young asylum seekers to access the labour market – The role of employers – Afroditi Gorantonaki, Heraklion Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Ms Afroditi Gorantonaki of the Heraklion Chamber of Commerce and Industry told participants about the enthusiastic response the Ithaca project received by employers interested in offering jobs to asylum seekers.

Ms Gorantonaki explained that 90% of asylum seekers in Greece live in Athens which puts pressure on the socio-economic situation. One of the objectives of the Ithaca project is to encourage asylum seekers to integrate into local communities and find work outside of Athens. It also aims to raise awareness among the business community about the problems faced by asylum seekers.

Vacant jobs are registered in the ESTIA database. The Chamber acts as an intermediary, supporting the target group as well as employers. The qualifications of asylum seekers are matched with employment opportunities. It works closely with the reception centre of Anogia, keeping in close contact with the staff and asylum seekers living there, registering their qualifications and work experience, providing them with information on stay and work permits, etc., helping them prepare to leave the centre and start a new life in Heraklion by helping them find accommodation, and following up on their integration into the labour market.

Through the members of the chamber of commerce, the project helps to raise awareness by publishing articles in their magazine, contacting potential employers interested in employing asylum seekers, and publishing employers' experiences of employing asylum seekers in newspapers and other publications.

Debate:

Question for IOM:

How can the good practice be transferred and address the information deficit? Can the databases be matched?

The practice cited ran during Round 1 and has not continued. It was a large partnership made up of the Red Cross, national educational agencies and others. Its' experiences and good practices can inform others so that they can implement similar activities. The effects have been not only on the target group but also on society as a whole.

Question for Lora Pappas:

Were there problems processing personal information? How did you deal with data protection issues?

Permission was sought and received from the Hellenic data agency. Medical and legal information is restricted and some fields are locked and can only be accessed with special access. All the participating NGOs agreed for their information to be used. Each asylum seeker signs a paper in his/her own language stating the purpose of the database and authorising use of the data collected from them. There haven't been any problems as all have signed.

Question to CSR network:

How do you persuade employers? What argument do you use? Are these issues discussed within CSR Europe?

Meetings of CSR Europe are held three times a year. Issues concerning companies are discussed, such as socially sensitive groups, but not specifically asylum seekers. Some countries are more advanced when it comes to these issues than others. As for the arguments used to persuade employers, this depends on the company. Some are more open than others. For example, one member is a company producing mattresses in Northern Greece. 1 in 3 employees belong to socially sensitive groups. Most are refugees or immigrants and the manager is Pakistani. We organised a visit to a camp and got a very good response: one third sent people. We take each case individually through direct contact with employers.

EQUAL and asylum seeker integration - An overview of Round 1 and 2, Petra van Nierop, GHK.

Petra van Nierop from GHK, the company providing thematic expertise to the EQUAL Asylum Seeker theme on behalf of the European Commission, presented a quick overview of EQUAL Rounds 1 and 2. She showed total number of EQUAL partnerships financed had risen from 38 under Round 1 to 64 under Round 2. Part of this increase was due to the participation of the New Member States in Round 2. When looking at the thematic focus of DPs, it became evident that partnerships were multi-thematic, addressing all aspects of asylum seeker integration. It was interesting to notice that the proportion of EQUAL projects addressing access to employment had not changed between Round 1 and 2 (63%).

With the employment theme, more than half of the EQUAL partnerships from Round 2 had placed a high focus on providing advice, orientation and counselling on employment-related themes to asylum seekers. More than one third included mediation and employer relations in their package of activities. A much lower share (around 10%) concentrated their efforts on getting asylum seekers in employment or self-employed activity. Petra van Nierop subsequently introduced the workshop themes and provided some first considerations as to the type of practices that would be discussed as part of the workshop sessions.

Purpose of the meeting – introduction to the workshops, Vassilili Staikou, Greek EQUAL Managing Authority

Vassilili Staikou from the Greek EQUAL Managing Authority stressed that the main purpose of the event was to offer EQUAL partnerships from both Rounds of EQUAL to meet each other, to exchange their experiences and promising practices and to jointly identify and explore possibilities for transferring these to other contexts. It was also hoped that the workshop sessions would come up with good recommendations for the upcoming Swedish Policy event, ESF programming and asylum and migration policy and programmes.

3. WORKSHOP FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

The group split into five workshops on the following themes:

- I. Employer relations
- II. Preparing asylum seekers for the labour market
- IV. Creating new employment profiles
- V. Creating work experiences where formal access to the labour market is restricted
- VI. Other activities to get asylum seekers into work

Each workshop was structured as follows:

Introduction by the facilitators and round of introduction of the participants

The facilitators provided a short review of the aims and objectives of the workshop and some general considerations with regard to the theme for discussion. The participants were then requested to briefly introduce themselves.

Key lessons from Round 1

One or two DPs from Round 1 per workshop made a short presentation of the key lessons of their good practice, focusing on the context in which they developed their activity, the method and approach used, the main success factors and obstacles and the recommendations for Round 2 EQUAL partnerships.

Round of questioning

Before the event, all participants had prepared an example of a promising practice within their DP. These were circulated to all other persons participating in the workshop with the request to prepare questions on those projects that they were most interested in. Round 2 participants were therefore not requested to present their practice, but they were invited to “question” the practices of others, thus ensuring a lively discussion.

Mapping the activities

Following the round of questioning, the facilitators invited the participants to discuss similarities and possible typologies of practices in terms of a) context, b) method / approaches taken, c) the target group addressed and d) key success factors. Each participant was asked to write down a one-phrase message summarising the key characteristics of their practice with regard to each of the issues listed above. The mapping helped to explore the potential and conditions for transfer.

Discussing the workshop key questions

On the basis of the mapping exercise the facilitators encouraged the workshop participants to formulate initial responses to the key questions of the workshop, namely: What works? How does it work? For whom? Why is it beneficial? Where does it work and Where else could it work?

Conclusions and recommendations

At the end of the workshop, the rapporteur prepared the overall conclusions and recommendations of the session, together with the participants and the facilitator. These were then presented to the Plenary, focusing on:

- Opportunities to influence the current programming of the Structural Funds and the European Social Fund in particular. The Member States are at present preparing their National Strategic Reference Frameworks and some EQUAL partnerships have addressed the relevant authorities directly to argue for the insertion of asylum seekers as a particular target group. This approach could also be adopted by projects in other countries.
- Ways to inform other policies in the area of asylum and migration, such as the Reception Directive, and opportunities to access other funding, such as the European Refugee Fund and the other financial instruments included in the Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows programme which is currently being negotiated.
- Other relevant policy areas, such as the social inclusion process, anti-discrimination and relations with civil society.

3.1. WORKSHOP I – EMPLOYER RELATIONS

3.1.1. Introduction to the Workshop theme

A key element for increasing asylum seekers' employment prospects is the development of good relations with potential public and private employers. Very often employers are hesitant to offer jobs to asylum seekers as they are afraid of a too heavy administrative burden while dealing with this group. Even more frequently employers are not even aware of the benefits asylum seekers can bring to their organisation.

3.1.2. Workshop participants

THEME I – Employer relations

Facilitators: Katarina Granath and Rania Oikonomou

Rapporteurs: Louiza Papaloizou

COUNTRY AND DP	ROUND	TITLE	Last name	First name
ROUND 1				
ES	1	ENEAS EQUAL 1	Herrera Inaraja	Fernando
FI	1	Becoming Visible	Sinkkonen	Paivi

ROUND 2				
CY-5	2	Equality and Solidarity for Asylum Seekers, Social Rights for All	Papaloizou	Louiza
CZ-68	2	Human Step	Götz	Václav

DE-XB4-76051-20-20/205	2	SAGA - Selbsthilfe, Arbeitsmarktzugang und Gesundheit von Asylsuchenden	Grehl-Schmitt	Norbert
GR-232375	2	Ithaca	Siganou	Maria
IT-IT-S2-MDL-074	2	Orizzonti	Benatti	Diego
ES-ES20040664	2	ENEAS EQUAL 2	Rodriguez Jimenez	Silvia

OTHER				
DE		NSS	SCHMIDT	BARBARA
PT		MA	NUNES	MARIA
GR		EQUAL MA	Oikonomou	Rania
GR		EQUAL MA	Andreou	Maria
GR		EQUAL MA	Vasiliou	Nikos
GR		EQUAL MA	Tsolka	Efi
GR		Greek Social Corporate Responsibility Network	Papadopoulos	Dimitrios
GR		Heraklion Chamber	Gorantonaki	Afroditi
GR		UNHCR	Stavropoulou	Maria
GR		Shell Hellas	Stamatiou	Sotiris
GR		National Youth Foundation	Tsourlaki	Artemisia

3.1.3. Key points discussed

Context and target groups

Despite the fact that the Workshop participants came from countries with very different legislation in terms of restricted or direct access to the labour market for asylum seekers, all participants agreed that employers need to be informed about the national laws in relation to access to work for asylum seekers. Moreover, across the Member States there seems to be a general lack of awareness amongst employers of 'who' asylum seekers are. Such information therefore also needs to be provided to them.

In terms of accessing jobs, unemployment rates and lack of staff in specific sectors to some extent provide the direction of which employers are approached by the Partnerships to find jobs for asylum seekers. Other important factors that impact on what types of work are possible to access are language barriers and the requirement of specific types of skills. Therefore, not only legal restrictions to work but also regulations on access to vocational training and language education are important for the work of the Partnerships.

The most evident target groups are naturally asylum seekers and employers. In particular the Shell representative emphasised, though, that not only employers, but also other staff members who work and interact with asylum seekers on a daily basis need to be informed of issues that can arise. Other relevant persons for the Partnerships to establish contacts with and inform about 'who asylum seekers are' include in larger companies human resource managers and supervisors. In small companies the participants agreed that it was most important to find an open-minded person who would be willing to listen and take on board the asylum seeker. CSR, employer organisations and trade unions were also highlighted as important interest groups, as well as media and the general society, as it is difficult to change attitudes of individuals if there is an overall negative view of asylum seekers in the society.

Getting employers on board

All Partnerships who participated in the Workshop had worked through establishing direct (personal) contacts with employers, which were found very important to create a trust relationship and getting the employer to offer a job or work experience to an asylum seeker. Close contacts with companies were also important for the Partnerships for another reason, which was to find out what vocational training or specific skills were needed in companies. This helped them better

prepare the asylum seekers according to labour market needs. Training asylum seekers on specific skills according to employers' needs could then be used as an argument to get the employer to take the asylum seeker on board. Other arguments used include asylum seekers' language skills and specific skills from their country of origin.

Spreading a positive image of asylum seekers as good and highly motivated workers by 'advertising asylum seekers' through testimonies from employers who had already hired asylum seekers was, though, seen as one of the best way to get employers on board. Other successful instruments used included awareness raising campaigns targeted at enterprises according to the different regional contexts and the regional labour market characteristics.

It was also highlighted in the Workshop that building trust between companies and asylum seekers is extremely important for employers to hire asylum seekers. In fact, many Partnerships had experienced that short-term work experiences was a very good way to build trust between the company and asylum seeker, which in several cases led to a permanent contract for the asylum seeker.

Maintaining good relations with employers

In terms of keeping the good relations with employers, managing expectations of asylum seekers and employers alike were important success factors. The employer might expect cheap, hard-working labour whereas the asylum seeker might expect to be able to undertake more qualified work than is possible. Therefore it is important to prepare both the asylum seeker and the employers on what they can expect and what their rights and obligations are already before the asylum seeker starts the work. Also during the work it is, though, important that the Partnership acts as an intermediary that the employers can contact to get advice in case of difficulties.

The role of the Partnership also includes follow-up on how the asylum seeker is doing. This also builds trust between company and NGO. Also in cases when the asylum seeker is not hired after an interview or trainee period it is important that the Partnerships get feedback on why an asylum seeker was not hired. This could provide important pointers for the Partnership to change their approach as maybe other skills were needed, there were language obstacles etc.

3.1.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The main benefits of the promising practices discussed are for asylum seekers getting a job, which leads to empowerment, better health, social inclusion, autonomy / independence etc. The Partnerships testified that employers, on the other hand, get well-motivated staff with specific skills and language skills, an increased social and intercultural profile, cultural diversity at the workplace, staff members who come from another context and can bring new ideas and new ways of thinking to the local context. Benefits for local communities include increased human rights sensitiveness and for the host country decreased costs as the asylum seekers can gain their own living. This often also leads to improved health of the asylum seeker, which in turn leads to lower health care costs for the host society.

For the Partnerships to be able to spread their good practices, both to other organisations that work with asylum seekers and to impact on policy makers, it was considered extremely important to document the main benefits through follow-up of both asylum seekers and employers, undertake research on cost-benefits etc. Increasing the visibility of the results by publishing the good practices and spreading the news in media, as well as inviting employers, media and people in the local community to discussions was seen as imperative to raise the awareness of asylum seekers' challenges and successful approaches to getting employment. The best way to challenge the views of people was, though, agreed to be through 'seeing is believing', i.e. organising visits to employers to be able to see the real practice oneself.

In terms of spreading the practice to other organisations that work with asylum seekers, the participants considered it very useful to organise meetings with staff from these organisations and possibly even training the personnel of other NGOs on the practice and preparing them to work with it. Another important learning lesson was to not franchise a practice, but always adapt it

to new context. The adopting organisation should also be prepared that it might have to change structure and working of the organisation in order to be able to work with the practice.

Using employers as a pressure group to impact on policy makers was considered as a very effective tool. Closer contacts and personal meetings between policy makers and staff from the Partnerships, already from the beginning of the development and implementation of a practice, were also seen as strategically very important. If possible, policy makers should even be involved in the Partnership to help create an ownership of the practice developed.

Recommendations:

For the Swedish Policy Forum

- Invite companies with positive experiences of hiring asylum seekers.
- Minimum standards for asylum seekers to access the labour market should be changed from one year to three months.

For influencing ESF programming

- Use existing networks with employers that have been established by EQUAL partnerships.
- Use existing transnational networks created under EQUAL.
- Create a catalogue on good employment practices.

For other policy areas

- Link to the area of entrepreneurship.

3.2. WORKSHOP II – PREPARING ASYLUM SEEKERS FOR THE LABOUR MARKET

3.2.1. Introduction to the Workshop theme

When living in a new country, with often a very different culture and habits, asylum seekers may be very eager to work, but find the new labour market too complicated or difficult to access. EQUAL partnerships are organising vocational training to adjust skills and competencies of the asylum seekers to match the local requirements or set out to train them in a completely new profession. These activities are aimed at facilitating the beneficiary’s entry into the labour market of the host country and/or to increase the prospects of employment after repatriation. Projects also provide counselling and advice to help asylum seekers on how to prepare a CV, where to find job openings and how to prepare for a job interview.

3.2.2. Workshop participants

Facilitators: Petra van Nierop, Katarina Nilsson and Joanna Busalacchi
Rapporteurs: Melanie Pohner

COUNTRY AND DP / Organisation	ROUND	TITLE	Last name	First name
ROUND 1				
NL	1	Restoring Trust in the Future (HIT) - NL	Bastiaens	Frans
GR	1	Anadrasis-Istos	Pappas	Lora

ROUND 2				
AT-6-11/261	2	First Aid in Integration	Konieczny	Elke
BEIn-11	2	Right to learn	Van den Nest	Willy
CZ-66	2	Net 2005	Medkova	Lucie
FR-IDF-2004-43486	2	FAAR , FORMATION, ACCUEIL DES DEMANDEURS D'ASILE ET REFUGIES	Ebrard	Carl
FR-RAL-2004-42564	2	ACTES	Décret	Catherine
DE-XB4-76051-20-20/260	2	Arbeit und Bildung International	Melanie	Pohner
GR-232252	2	AKTINERGIA (Ακτινεργία)	Xylouri	Ourania
HU-25	2	Önállóan - egyenlő esélyekkel	Ronto	Robert
HU-26	2	ESÉLY Munkaerőpiaci orientáció menedékkérőknek	Kováts	András
IT-IT-S2-MDL-147	2	INTEGRA 2004 - Integrazione sociale dei richiedenti asilo	Maglione	Ada
IT-IT-S2-MDL-350	2	INCLUSION REFUGEES NETWORK	Boschin	Antonio
MT-5	2	ASYLUM SEEKERS PARTNERSHIP	Vella	Stephen Christopher
UKgb-150	2	Haringey ASPIRE DP	Nansukusa	Sarah

OTHER				
CY		NSS	Kyprianos	Nicolaidis
IE		MA	LANDERS	VINCENT
PL		MA	Lublinska	Malgorzata
SE		MA	Jansson	Sven
SK		NSS	Kuruc	Andrej

3.2.3. Key points discussed

The activities developed by the participants and discussed during the workshops varied between specific training programmes to job orientation and counselling, including CV and portfolio development. It was interesting to see how most had integrated language acquisition into the training courses. For example, the Dutch Round 1 DP Restoring Trust in the Future presented the short-term integrated “learn-work” pathways they had set up for their beneficiaries. The methodology placed a high focus on practical vocational learning combined with language acquisition focusing on words and expressions relevant to the subject that was being taught. The individualised pathways covered professional areas such as car mechanics, hairdressing, administration, computers and electronics.

The DPs that were represented in the workshop could be broadly divided into the following three subgroups:

- Practices placing a high focus on the empowerment of asylum seekers, and on giving them the right skills to act as leaders or to become more active in their community
- Practices developing approaches and methods to train asylum seekers and to increase their chances on the labour market
- Practices focusing on networking and involving stakeholders that can help asylum seekers to find employment.

The workshop discussions showed that the different legal and institutional contexts did not strongly impact on the extent to which the preparatory activities to prepare asylum seekers for the labour market were being developed in the different Member States. Clearly, in a few countries the approaches which the EQUAL partnerships were putting in place had never been undertaken before whilst in other contexts already some form of tradition existed in terms of training asylum

seekers and helping them to better understand the labour market. What did matter, however, was the regional or national economic situation. In Member States with buoyant labour markets it was much easier to “make the case” for implementing initiatives that would help asylum seekers to find employment.

EQUAL partnerships understood the importance of changing the perception of employers and the wider community. Often they were faced with little public awareness of the plight of asylum seekers. Especially the New Member States had little tradition with immigration. Raising awareness of the potential of asylum seekers and the benefits that they could bring to society increased their chances to labour market insertion (where this was allowed). Activities used to introduce asylum seekers to the wider community included the development of meeting places, inserting asylum seekers in “mainstream” education and training, and promoting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and diversity management with bigger companies.

The target groups addressed by the EQUAL partnerships were mostly mixed. In a few cases DPs focused on particular groups of asylum seekers, such as women, young people, low-skilled asylum seekers and in one case victims of trafficking. The participants discussed whether it was best to focus on specific groups or whether initiatives should address all asylum seekers. There was overall agreement that when working with groups, it was best to ensure that these were heterogeneous in terms of educational and skills levels, so that people would less easily lag behind or feel that the pace of the courses and other activities was too slow. In terms of nationality and gender, groups could instead be very heterogeneous.

Another important target group of the approaches that the participants were setting up concerned those that may contribute to the creation of employment opportunities after the asylum seekers had been prepared for labour market access. These included employers, employment agencies, chambers of commerce and other relevant stakeholders. The group stressed that it was important to develop good links with the latter from the very start.

3.2.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Successful approaches to empowerment and motivating asylum seekers included the assessment of formal and informal skills (including recognition), and building approaches around the client’s skills and competences, as opposed to providing standard services and training. What also proved to increase the independence and self-esteem of asylum seekers, was including them in “mainstream” courses, so that they could meet people living in the new society. Finally, language was considered one of the most important tools to empower asylum seekers.

The main benefits of the activities to empower asylum seekers were that they took away the feeling that they were reduced to “just a person waiting for a decision on their asylum application”. By providing training, counselling, or any other type of activity, asylum seekers felt like they were becoming “human beings” again with other interests. Empowerment also encouraged people to become active members of the new society, and even leaders of their community. Another important benefit of empowering asylum seekers was that it encouraged them to approach employers.

Promising practices in relation to the development and provision of training included the individualised approaches based on a “mapping” of asylum seekers skills, competences and educational needs. It had proved to be very useful to involve asylum seekers in the development of training to enable more effective teaching, and to combine vocational training with language acquisition and social support. It also proved extremely useful undertake a demand / needs analysis of the local or wider labour market as a tool to select vocational areas for training.

The workshop agreed that the main success factors of the development and provision of training packages and programmes were the modular and individualised approaches, focusing on both the needs and potential of the asylum seekers and the demand of the labour market. The insertion of personal development and cultural expression in training helped to increase the self-confidence and motivation of asylum seekers.

With regard to network and stakeholder involvement, activities that worked well in contexts with little awareness and a higher degree of reluctance included the creation of informal networking and meeting opportunities. Other successful approaches included the linking of agencies and other relevant actors in one-stop-shops bringing together all relevant partners to ensure a full package of services from social support to employment mediation. The cost-effectiveness of such services was an important argument for their set up. As mentioned earlier, bigger enterprises proved to be more open to CSR and diversity management considerations. Any networking had to take into account the importance of raising political interest with a view on mainstreaming.

Key success factors for involving stakeholders included the use of “passionate” and committed professionals to convince actors to take part in meetings and other forms of networking. It was considered useful to have a clear strategy to promote the employment of asylum seekers, especially when addressing CSR and diversity management with public and private employers. Participants felt it was important that asylum seekers were integrated into “normal” public services (social care, employment) as soon as possible, even if they did have access to the labour market.

The main conditions for mainstreaming and transferring successful practices identified included: the use of media relations and direct contact with policy makers, close links to education and training institutes and setting up a “marketing strategy” for promoting the good practice from the very start. In order to increase mainstreaming, it was also considered essential to involve “higher-level” partners (such as regional authorities, chambers or commerce) in an operational way in the EQUAL partnership, and not just as strategic partners who would only come to meetings.

Recommendations

For the Swedish Policy Forum

- The implementation of Article 11 of the Reception Directive should be monitored and discussed at the event. Which Member States have gone beyond the minimum requirements and which are still inhibiting access to the labour market for asylum seekers?
- The event should show the good practices of the EQUAL initiative from both Rounds 1 and 2.

For influencing ESF programming

- Pressure should be put on the responsible authorities to insert asylum seekers as a specific target group
- The ESF advisory committee to clarify and recommend their inclusion into national programming
- Successful EQUAL partnerships should be offered some form of “continuation” under mainstream ESF actions

Form informing asylum and migration policy areas and funding

- The potential between EQUAL, mainstream ESF and new funding of DG Justice, Freedom and Security (Refugee Fund, Integration Fund and Return Fund) should be explored
- Higher focus should be placed on “double” target groups (e.g. minor asylum seekers – victims of trafficking – women)

3.3. WORKSHOP IV – CREATING NEW EMPLOYMENT PROFILES

3.3.1. Introduction to the Workshop theme

The theme of this workshop was 'Creating new employment profiles'. The focus was on the particular skills and competencies that asylum seekers have and how these can best be put to use. Participants in the workshop included EQUAL partnerships that have successfully created new vocational profiles for asylum seekers in countries, cities and regions with very competitive labour markets or where there are policies restricting access to employment for asylum seekers.

The approach taken by many DPs was to deconstruct the argument that AS are undesired competitors in the labour market or that they have little to offer. Several DPs have developed innovative activities which have given asylum seekers the opportunity to work in their communities as language and/or cultural mediators in the health and social services, or in professions where there is a high demand for workers, for example, nursing.

3.3.2. Workshop participants

Facilitators: Isabel Putinja (GHK) and Christian Råbergh (Swedish NTN Coordinator)
Rapporteurs: Birgit Behrensen and Katarina Löthberg

COUNTRY AND DP	ROUND	TITLE	Last name	First name
ROUND 1				
DE-SPUK	1	(Continuation Round 2: SAGA)	Behrensen	Birgit
SE-RE-KOMP	1	RE-KOMP	Lothberg	Katarina

ROUND 2				
AT-6-18/342	2	Inpower	Mayrhofer	Max
FI-93	2	Becoming More Visible	Heikkinen	Pauli
DE-XB4-76051-20-20/298	2	TransKom gesund & sozial	Rashid	Sedika
DE-XB4-76051-20-20/359	2	Süddeutsche Entwicklungspartnerschaft Asylbewerber und Flüchtlinge - SEPA in EQUAL II	Erben	Reiner
HU-25	2	Önallóan	Ronto	Robert
IE-43	2	Roma Cultural Mediation Project	Calvo-Martin	Maria Teresa

OTHER				
HU		Managing Authority	Minnei	Gabriella

3.3.3. Key points discussed

Workshop participants discussed and exchanged the approaches taken within their respective projects which have aimed at facilitating the integration of asylum seekers into the labour market through a variety of innovative methods. Such methods have included: creating new job profiles (such as working as language and/or cultural mediators in the health and social services, peer tutors in the IT field), developing training programmes which allow asylum seekers to gain new qualifications and access new professional fields, and opening up access for asylum seekers to professions with a high demand for workers (for example, in the nursing field, craft sector and catering industry).

The common approach taken by all DPs was to give asylum seekers, by means of their own resources, the chance to contribute to society and be active and visible members. Such an

approach has been necessary because of the policy context many DPs have to work in. In most of the Member States, there are obstacles to asylum seekers accessing jobs. In many cases, they are excluded for a certain time period or face severe restrictions in the form of requirements for a work authorisation or permit. When employment is permitted, it is often difficult to convince employers to employ asylum seekers because of prejudices or misconceptions they may have. Unfortunately asylum seekers are often forced into the informal labour market as a result, where they are at risk of exploitation. By creating new job profiles and training programmes specifically for asylum seekers, DPs have been able to create new 'niches' for asylum seekers in the labour market where they can make a contribution to the host society while developing their own skills and competencies. Participants agreed that innovative such activities have empowered and benefited not only asylum seekers but also the service providers and employers they worked in collaboration with and the users who were able to benefit from the services they provided.

3.3.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Activities which were implemented by DPs under Round 1 have proved to be sustainable: a majority of beneficiaries supported by projects were able to enter the labour market in some form. Networks which were set up to provide opportunities for exchange and support have continued. Dialogue has been initiated between actors and important contacts with employers have been created and sustained. Many projects have been able to benefit from support on the highest level and by influential organisations. Several best practice models developed under Round 1 have been recognised. There are also a number of promising practices emerging under Round 2.

The approach taken by these DPs has resulted in a 'win-win situation': asylum seekers benefit from the activities promoting their participation in the labour market. Society also benefits from the skills and competencies asylum seekers have to offer. The costs of social and health services have decreased as a result. At the same time, interaction with the local community has resulted in trust-building and the combating of discrimination and prejudices.

Recommendations

Workshop participants formulated several recommendations which can be taken on board at several levels:

At a general level, it is crucial to open access to the labour market, education and training for asylum seekers so that they may be able to use and develop their skills and abilities while making a contribution to the host society. A tried-and-tested approach has been to provide innovative opportunities for asylum seekers to use their skills and competencies in specific labour market niches where they could make a contribution. DPs have provided such opportunities by creating new job profiles (such as language and/or cultural mediators in the health and social services, or peer tutors in the IT field), developing training programmes which have allowed asylum seekers to access new professional fields, and opening up access to professions with a high demand for workers such as nursing.

The good practices developed by DPs through the training of asylum seekers as health and cultural mediators benefit not only the participants but also the target group they provide their services to, while improving the quality of health and social services provided in the respective communities. These practices, along with the other experiences and competencies developed by DPs and through the TCAs should be duly taken into account.

Recommendations formulated for the upcoming Swedish Policy Forum:

Representation from the business world at the forum is crucial. Representatives from CSR Europe and companies from Sweden and other Member States could be invited as well as employers from the public sector so that they could share their good practices and experiences with employing asylum seekers.

Good practices can be presented which illustrate how to find or create labour market niches and new employment profiles for asylum seekers. There are several DPs under Round 1 and 2 that have been successful in this area. References can also be made to studies on the development of new employment profiles, and the costs and benefits of employing asylum seekers.

Recommending for future ESF programming:

Asylum seekers should be included as a target group in the new ESF programme with special reference to the dimension of social inclusion, anti-discrimination and the European social model. Results from Round 1 and 2 of the EQUAL programme can provide several examples of successful practices which highlight the pressing need to promote the socio-economic integration of this target group. The transnational aspect and good practices which have come out of the TCAs in the asylum theme should be taken into account in the new programme. Reference to the Lisbon strategy and the European Employment Strategy should be made.

Recommendations for other policy areas:

Ways to communicate, cooperate and share experiences with projects and programme managers/managing authorities from ERF (and other relevant programmes such as the new funds under the Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows Programme, and the European networks on migration and integration should be established on the national and EU levels, especially concerning the improvement/implementation of the Reception Directive.

New ways should be found to incorporate the knowledge and findings from research and studies on employment policy, and developments and changes in vocational and professional fields in cooperation with job observatories.

3.4. WORKSHOP V – CREATING WORK EXPERIENCES WHERE FORMAL ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET IS RESTRICTED

3.4.1. Introduction to the Workshop theme

This workshop had its focus on the innovative and alternative ways DPs have developed towards providing asylum seekers with work experiences in Member States where access to employment is limited or not allowed. Several of the participating partnerships have shown how they have been able to convince employers to offer volunteering, on-the-job training or work shadowing opportunities to asylum seekers. Key to these alternative work experiences is the combination with other activities such as for example language and communication skills.

A crucial element in the approaches adopted is that asylum seekers gain work experiences for raising self-esteem, language acquisition, improved motivation and confidence, improved mental and physical health as well as, if granted status, they have more access to the labour market. Alternatively, recognising that the majority of asylum seekers will not be granted status, they develop their skills and provide evidence of their vocational engagement while in Europe which will assist their re-integration and development wherever they go.

3.4.2. Workshop participants

Facilitators: Eliza Kritikos (GHKI) and David Hudson (ECRE)
Rapporteurs: Karen-Inger Thorsen and Maggie Lennon

COUNTRY AND DP	ROUND	TITLE	Last name	First name
ROUND 1				
Want2work	1	Want2work	Thorsen	Karen-Inger
ATLAS	1	ATLAS	Moran	Breda

ROUND 2				
AT-6-01/318	2	EPIMA 2	Freithofer	Elizabeth
AT-6-15/283	2	FLUEQUAL	Stadlmair	Andrea
DE-XB4-76051-20-20/221	2	Fluchttort Hamburg - Berufliche Qualifizierung für Flüchtlinge passage gGmbH	Beckmann-Schulz	Iris
IE-42	2	Transition Supports Project	Moreno	Manuela
IT-IT-S2-MDL-098	2	AGORA	Perfetti	Sandra

IT-IT-S2-MDL-334	2	IntegRARsi - Reti locali per l'integrazione dei richiedenti asilo e rifugiati	Di Capua	Daniela
NL-2004/EQI/0001	2	Project "Mobilé"	Dijkers	Greetje (Grietje Jacoba)
PL-95	2	Integracja społ. i zawod. cudzoziemców "Możesz uczyć się rozumieć" i MUR	Bartis	Anna
SI-26	2	PROGRES	Šlibar	Urška
UKgb-146	2	ASPIRE (Asylum Seekers Pursuing Integration, Refuge & Empowerment)	Finegan	Gerard
UKgb-93	2	Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate (EASI)	Payne	Richard
UKgb-94	2	ATLAS Scotland	Lennon	Maggie

OTHER				
AT		NSS	Pichler	Irene
IE		NSS	Jackson	Sinead

3.4.3. Key points discussed

The workshop participants discussed the methods of approach developed towards providing asylum seekers with work experiences as well as the key issues surrounding these methods. The participating DPs explained that they had to operate in countries where access to training and employment is very restricted and that it is generally very difficult to motivate employers to give the asylum seekers the opportunity to gain work experience. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that asylum seekers have the need to have their qualifications and experience recognised and expanded.

In terms of general issues surrounding their developed approaches, it became clear during the discussions that two important distinctions have to be made to the different country contexts in which the DPs operate. A first distinction to be made is between work experience which is linked to certified qualifications and work experience which is being of value to the asylum seekers but is not certified. The second distinction concerns paid and unpaid work experiences. Concerning this second distinction, the discussions took place around the risk of asylum seekers being used as "cheap labour".

Another general issue discussed concerned the general lack of awareness of employers on the rules of hiring and engaging with asylum seekers which makes employers reluctant to employ asylum seekers to employ or offer them work experiences. A few DPs are therefore focussing their efforts on awareness raising towards employers especially in those instances where more formal information channels are not effective or lacking.

Additionally, in the New Member States efforts have to be targeted at awareness raising towards governments in terms of the needs of asylum seekers.

3.4.4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

In terms of the good practices and promising practices the DPs have been working on a variety of approaches. A first example given was the use of a portfolio to build up, as part of the work experience, in order to make skills visible and validate the experience gained by keeping track of the skills acquired through the work experience placement. A second set of approaches targeted at combining vocational and language training concern work shadowing, volunteering and traineeships. In order to provide asylum seekers with work experience the majority of DPs mentioned focussing on building networks between relevant stakeholders such as NGOs, governments and employers organisations.

All these approaches are being developed by DPs which focus on the general group of asylum seekers with, in some instances a special focus on young asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. The benefits for this target group are seen as providing them with work experience and at the same time raising their self-esteem as well as giving them more chances to access the labour market in the country of origin, or if granted status, in Europe.

The DPs pointed out several conditions in order to achieve a successful approach. First of all, efforts have to be targeted at cooperation with relevant actors as well as creating new cooperation where possible especially between NGOs and local authorities. Crucial in providing asylum seekers with work experiences is building up positive and successful engagements with employers. Additionally, it is important that the work experience offered to the asylum seeker reflects and adds to the asylum seeker's existing skills.

The DPs also mentioned that transnational DP cooperation, including the ETG5 events and activities are very important in terms of achieving success.

The DPs made several suggestions for transfer and mainstreaming. They agreed that EQUAL should be made more visible towards the employers and policy makers targeted and therefore it should be used as a kind of "pressure tool", making clear what the importance is. Moreover, use should be made of European, national and local events, supported by media, to make authorities and policy makers clear that they are responsible for asylum seekers and refugees' needs.

Recommendations

The work shop further focussed on formulating recommendations and issues to be further elaborated during future activities. These recommendations were made at three levels: the Swedish Policy Forum, the future ESF programming and the asylum and migration policy areas and funding.

With regard to the Swedish Policy Forum, it was suggested to work on findings ways of informing employers, via formal national and regional channels, on the legislation governing asylum seekers' employment and their rights. Additionally, it was believed that asylum seekers should be included as a specific target group in anti-discrimination policy and that they should be entitled to the same rights in terms of work experiences in order to avoid potential exploitation by employers. With regard to the work done by NGOs and Refugee Community Organisations, it was recommended that governments acknowledge their role as equal partners in policy making, consultation and service delivery.

Several recommendations were made with regard to influencing the ESF programming. Firstly, it is important that a collection is made of what has been done at the national levels during the two rounds of EQUAL and that the experiences are exchanged. Additionally, the lessons learnt should be transferred to the ETG5 which on their turn should convey clear messages at European level. Secondly, it is found very important to retain the group of asylum seekers as a separate priority within the ESF and this priority should remain obligatory. Moreover, it is important that this priority is visible even before asylum seekers have access to the labour market in recognition of the need for pre-vocational support. The DPs also strongly recommended to include a transnational dimension to their work as EQUAL has demonstrated that this is a crucial tool for informing best practices.

In terms of informing asylum and migration policy areas and funding it was recommended that future ERF funding should place even more emphasis on transnationality and that this funding should not be used to fund Member State activities but that this should be shared with the NGO sector. Additionally, the new Integration Fund (2007) should include a provision for refugees.

3.5. WORKSHOP VI – OTHER ACTIVITIES TO GET ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO WORK

3.6. WORKSHOP VI – OTHER ACTIVITIES TO GET ASYLUM SEEKERS INTO WORK

3.6.1. Introduction to the Workshop theme

EQUAL partnerships are developing several additional activities to promote the employment of asylum seekers. Examples that will be discussed in this workshop include skills assessments, which help asylum seekers to make their strengths and potential explicit, and help employers to recognise the benefits they can bring to the company. Other approaches may include, for example, awareness raising activities, studies and monitoring.

3.6.2. Workshop participants

Facilitators: Nick Bozeat and Pavel Pinkava
Rapporteurs: Sue Waddington and Tito Matos

COUNTRY AND DP	ROUND	TITLE	Last name	First name
ROUND 1				
IT	1	INTEG.R.A	Petrovic	Nadan
ASSET UK	1	ASSET UK	Waddington	Sue

ROUND 2				
DK	2	Want2work	Schmidt	Mette Norling
EE-11	2	Increasing the Readiness of the Estonian Society for Integrating Asylum Seekers	Roots	Lehte
FR-MDP-2004-44060	2	OASIS (OBSERVATOIRE POUR L'ACCUEIL DES DEMANDEURS D'ASILE)	Vetter	Elisabeth
DE-XB4-76051-20-20/308	2	bridge - Brücke zur Reintegration durch Grundlegende Kompetenz-Entwicklung	Habermann	Doris
LV-6	2	Right to All	Mičule	Inese
PT-2004-293	2	VIAA - Vias de Interculturalidade na Área do Asilo	Matos	Tito

OTHER				
LV		MA	Jansone	Antra
UK		NSS	Goga	Unus
GR		EQUAL MA	Mavraki	Lydia
GR		EQUAL MA	Pappas	Kimon
GR		EQUAL MA	Nikolaou	Haris

3.6.3. Key points discussed

The workshop discussed several activities to promote the employment and work experience of asylum seekers in addition to those covered in the other workshops. In particular, Sue Waddington outlined the approach to skills audits that had been pioneered and successfully applied by the Asset UK round one DP. The skills audits take account of non formal skills and the problems faced by asylum seekers in providing proof of qualifications. Starting the process early reinforces feelings of self worth as well as providing good information to potential employers or those able to provide opportunities for work experience. The skills audits lead to individual tailor made plans for socio-vocational integration. The experience of skills audits had also been pooled

by several DPs from different member states and the general principles have been drawn together into a guide.

The other round one DP discussed in the workshop was Integ.r.a. an Italian DP which focussed on the role and capacity building of municipalities in providing integrated services for housing and work for asylum seekers. Partnership and interagency working had been critical to the success of the project.

Awareness raising is a major challenge as the issues surrounding asylum seekers are often poorly informed and sometimes maliciously so. Employers in particular are poorly informed. The workshop learnt about two current innovative approaches. The French round two DP OASIS is addressing the issue through detailed research. The Danish WANT2WORK DP has engaged asylum seekers themselves to develop their journalistic skills through producing a publication 'New Times' which articulates the issues they face. The approach thus contributes directly to both awareness raising and socio vocational integration in a country where asylum seekers may not be employed. Awareness raising can be effective through research and though citing the cases of individuals. This approach brings the issue alive even to those who have been bombarded with adverse publicity on asylum seekers.

The workshop also touched upon issues of training and validation through the participants from Germany and Portugal. The training modules implemented by the Bridge DP in Germany are interesting because they are a form of 'vocational plus' courses including elements of language and psycho social tuition geared towards asylum seekers.

Not only did the workshop consider a wide variety of DPs, but the contrasts in the contexts in which participants are working were vivid. The participants from Estonia and Latvia have relatively few asylum seekers in their countries. Indeed the issue is fairly new and without the EQUAL Community Initiative it may not have been on the agenda. However, it was stressed that the experience of EQUAL has shown that there are benefits in involving politicians from an early stage if mainstreaming is to occur. Furthermore, transnational working went well in the theme. Although there are contrasts between contexts there were enough similarities in the issue for this to work.

3.6.4. Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendations emerging from the workshop were:

The proposed Swedish Policy Forum should debate:

- Whether there should be a reference to skills audit in a revised Reception Directive, and
- How to integrate training and wider integration needs.

With regard to the programming of ESF resources:

- Mention should be made of asylum seekers as a target group
- The funding arrangements for ESF should retain the transnational and partnership elements EQUAL which had been particularly successful in the Asylum Seekers theme.

With respect to asylum and migration policy areas and funding there should not be a distinct separation between reception and integration. Instead, there should be recognition that there is a continuum.

Finally, the workshop reflected that 2007 was the European Year of Equal Opportunities but when it comes to employment, asylum seekers have anything but equal opportunities. One participant made an ironic suggestion that there should be an event during the year entitled: '2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities' You must be kidding, the case of asylum seekers!!'

4. CLOSING - PLENARY SESSION

Ms Fotini Tsiller, Head of the Greek Managing Authority, chaired the last part of the event. She was honoured to announce the presence of Mr Constantinos Tsoutoplides, Secretary General for European Funds from the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection. The latter indicated that he regretted that he could only participate in the conference on the last day.

The first part of the closing sessions was dedicated to the conclusions and recommendations that had emerged from each of the thematic workshops, which were presented by the rapporteurs. It was then up to Nick Bozeat from the GHK thematic experts team to summarise these presentations. He started by saying that it was an impossible task to draw general conclusions on the thematic workshop outcomes, but that it was important that all participants would take the experiences and ideas home and that these would inform both their national and transnational activities. He emphasised how the small scale of the Asylum Seekers theme made it a workable theme, and made it possible for most actors to meet each other and discuss the similar challenges they are facing.

What became evident from the workshop presentations, is that solidarity and diversity are key aspect in EQUAL Asylum Seekers. In this sense, the theme links to other EQUAL thematic groups dealing with social inclusion and anti-discrimination. Another interesting point noted is the full participation of the New Member States.

When looking at the next steps after the event, Nick Bozeat stressed the importance for Round 2 Development partnerships to make use of the Round 1 experiences and mainstreaming examples, and to benefit from the personal contacts they made with Round 1 representatives during the event. With regard to the upcoming Swedish Policy Forum, this should have a strong focus on presenting on-the-ground experiences, and the Greek exchange event had provided some good evidence of successful approaches. When discussing the new ESF funding period, it was obvious that all participants were in favour of including a specific reference to asylum seekers in the national programming documents. Another interesting element to promote in the ESF concerns the transnational activities that have been so successful in the EQUAL Asylum Seekers theme.

Nick Bozeat further drew attention to the new Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows that was being put in place in the area of asylum and migration. He regretted that administrative rules inhibited to projects to “join up” funding from mixed sources, to implement truly integrated approaches. As a final message, he encouraged participants to continue making the case in order to not only reach employers and policy makers, but also the general public.

Mr Constantinos Tsoutoplides closed the Greek event by summarising that EQUAL Asylum Seekers had helped emphasise the pre-conditions for the socio-vocational integration of asylum seekers, such as decent housing, a welcome receiving society and employers who are interested in providing these newcomers with a job. He then made the very positive announcement that Greece would indeed include immigrants in the programming of the ESF, which also meant addressing asylum seekers. At present, consultation on the final texts setting the priorities of the Ministries involved is still ongoing, but already the draft programming documents include a specific paragraph on measures to improve the reception of asylum seekers and their employment. Constantinos Tsoutoplides then thanked all participants and wished them a pleasant remainder of their stay in Greece.