



Integration of Refugees¹ into the European education and labour market: Requirements for a target group-oriented approach (EduAsyl)

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General introduction

Background

Handling the political, economic and social consequences of flight and migration has been a major challenge for many countries in Europe. This challenge finds its expression in contradictions on refugee-related topics. While on the one hand it is regarded as a social security problem, as a threat to a nation's prosperity and a burden for the welfare system,

¹ The term “refugee” indicates a legal construct that is not unproblematic for its empirical relevance, since it represents a very heterogeneous extract of reality. However, the group behind the designation “refugee” as a legal status is not a homogeneous one. Rather, asylum seekers and refugees who have been categorized quite differently in the hierarchy in terms of the security of their residency and their rights in the receiving country are all subsumed under this general legal expression. The distinction between asylum seekers and refugees is thus important within the EduAsyl project since these statuses provide different rights regarding the access of these individuals to VET programmes in the project partner countries. The European commission, in this respect, also makes a distinction between asylum seekers who are submitted to the Council Directive laying down minimum standards for their reception while waiting for the decision on their request for asylum and those refugees who benefit from integration programmes.

migration – and thus flight as one form of migration – is on the other hand also viewed as a way to ensure the competitiveness and viability of these countries given the demographic change and the ageing of the population and the challenges coming along with it, such as imbalances in the pension system and a skills shortage. These contradictions to be observed in European refugee and migration policies, which are usually based on defending the security and economic interests of nation states, are intensified by the goal set by the EU member states to apply humanistic ideals such as human rights and democratic principles to the group of refugees. The requirements for equality associated with them, that is the non-discrimination against a particular group in the fight for access to and control over resources that are generally considered by the society as being of material and symbolic value – and thus as desirable – are hard to reconcile with the common practice of giving priority to the interests of the national. This narrow view adopted in migration policy, which is tailored to the interests of the EU states, tends to ignore the global interdependencies of the causes of flight. One of the main push factors for flight and migration movements worldwide is the global structural imbalance caused by the rich countries of the north through the excessive exploitation of natural and human resources to the disadvantage of the poor countries of the south.

With the EU Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003, laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers as well as for the promotion of access to education and of participation in employment and VET, at EU level an important signal was sent to the member states regarding the recognition of asylum seekers and refugees as subjects of integration, and hence subjects of education – regardless of whether they have a secure residence status. Explicitly including the group of refugees in the EQUAL programme of the European Union can, in this context, be seen as the intention to fulfil the aim as formulated in the directive to harmonize reception standards as well as to promote access to education and participation in employment and VET in the integration policies of the member states. From 2001 to 2007 EQUAL made it possible, to experiment with new ways to fight against discrimination and inequalities across Europe – in the labour market in particular. For the first time in the history of the European Union, the group of asylum seekers and refugees had been explicitly considered in an employment programme through EQUAL.

Despite the success of this programme, praised alike by the EU Commission and the individual countries involved for the implementation of its operational and strategic results (in particular, in the European Thematic Group 5, focusing on asylum seekers and refugees), EQUAL as a participant-oriented programme – i.e. one that designed its activities on basically

all levels around the direct benefit of the participants – was not restarted after 2007. It thus remained an experimental programme, much to the disadvantage of a transfer of best practices developed in the model projects in sustainable structures.

Even though one of the most important strategic programme goals was to ensure the horizontal and vertical mainstreaming of the innovations developed here for sustainability purposes, the question of what happened to the many EQUAL network initiatives, the so-called development partnerships for the promotion of vocational and educational integration of asylum seekers and refugees, remains open. Whether these networks, which had been organized on a local, regional, national and transnational level, could be transformed into sustainable structures after the experimental phase to prepare the target group for the labour market is not sure. Also, the question as to the vocational future of the many participants who benefit from the EQUAL programme remains unanswered, i.e. the question of whether they could be brought into employment and if so, in what way and in which area of the labour market their integration took place, whether it was the formal, non-formal or informal sector.

Up to today, no systematic ex-post evaluation on the sustainability of the EQUAL measures has been carried out to determine if the target group-specific integration models devised and tested in the different development partnerships of the countries could be transferred into permanent structural integration measures. Neither has there been a post-study to follow up on the participants and on the effectiveness of their career development after EQUAL.

Study questions and objectives

In this context the idea for this project was born. The project, though, is not supposed to evaluate the EQUAL programme from the perspective outlined above. It rather aims at analyzing the results achieved by EQUAL with respect to the harmonization of reception standards, as formulated by the EU Council Directive, and the promotion of access to education and participation in employment and VET in the integration policies of the member states. Based on case studies in four European cities, the question of access to education and training programmes as well as to the labour market for refugees and asylum seekers was examined, while also highlighting the conditions for the success of such measures. The project thus aims at investigating the question of in what way and under which (legal, political, structural and individual) circumstances the vocational preparation and integration of this extremely disadvantaged group of migrants can be successful in Europe. What role can be ascribed to their biographies, which are characterized by transnational mobility, and thus to

the specific competences they bring with them in the process of vocational preparation and integration? These questions follow up on the goals of the Leonardo da Vinci programme to develop innovations and assure quality in the vocational education of a group of people which is extremely marginalized in the European context that is for instance the group of refugees and asylum seekers.

Regarding the sometimes significant historical, economic and structural differences between the European cities whose VET integration structures as well as their functioning from the perspective of refugees and asylum seekers are examined and compared here, questions are raised on the countries' ability and willingness to implement such harmonization measures as laid down by the EU Council Directive in integration policies, bringing up issues of compatibility as well the gap between theoretical ambitions and the reality of harmonization. The circumstances under which harmonization is possible are thus to be investigated on an empirical basis.

All these questions are linked to specific theoretical assumptions on the vocational integration of refugees and asylum seekers, reflecting the particular perspective of the partners involved in the project. These will be summarized in the following.

Theoretical approaches

The resources approach: Regarding the extremely difficult situation of asylum seekers and refugees in basically all European countries, refugee research has, up to now, primarily focused on the legal, social and structural mechanisms of discrimination with respect to the integration in the receiving countries as well as on individual deficits as a drawback (cf. Radtke/Gomolla 2002, Neumann et al. 2003, Brekke 2004). As a matter of consequence most practical projects are deficit-oriented in their approach to integration, and the majority of the offers based on these approaches focus on compensating the deficiencies asylum seekers may have, whether linguistic, mental, physical, cognitive, cultural, social or material. This project, however, is based on a firm resources perspective towards integration structures and the group examined here.

Resources perspective on structures: This perspective has been methodologically operationalized in the project through social space analysis of the research unit "city". It is based on the theoretical assumption that the spatial distribution of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "structural capital", that is the quantitative and qualitative availability of valuable infrastructures, institutions and services, constitutes one of the most important structuring

dimensions of the social space (cf. Schroeder 2002). Due to the spatialization of the different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic), specific *capital configurations* are to be observed in urban quarters, resulting from the given local objective conditions including housing conditions and the availability of jobs, social and healthcare services etc. “As a social and physical location, residential areas provide an average probability of acquiring material and cultural goods and services available at a given time” (Bourdieu 1991, p. 31). It is these forms of capital varying across social spaces – the material conditions which are unequally distributed – that condition the residents’ development potential and their scope of action, thus their acquiring ability, and that define their access to and control over educational, vocational and labour market resources.

Based on this assumption, in all four cities examined here a comprehensive survey of the existing structural resources was conducted, focusing on VET-related institutions of integration (i.e. institutions preparing for the labour market), while also addressing the question of accessibility and usefulness of these structural resources for refugees and asylum seekers when considering the specific needs and requirements of this target group.

Resources perspective on refugees: It is mainly unfavourable associations that pervade the dominant social construction of asylum seekers, labelling them with negative, hence stigmatizing attributes such as “criminals”, “sluggards”, “parasites” or “illegitimate beneficiaries of social services”, and they are even viewed as “victims” by social and educational workers and other so-called “mentors” or “helpers”. Also, due to the fact that their biographies are usually characterized by several traumatic experiences including their precarious situation in the receiving countries as a whole, refugees tend to be essentially regarded as helpless beings and victims. The project EduAsyl, however, takes a different approach and assumes that due to their primary socialization in different contexts of their countries of origin as well as due to their transnational biographies and experiences of flight, these young people are equipped with various competences acquired in the formal, non-formal and informal education sector. Systematically considering these existing individual resources and competences shall thus be the theoretical basis for examining the success of any kind of education, social pedagogy or social work as well as labour market support programme which aims at reducing the individual effects of the structural disadvantages refugees face. This contributes among others to preventing the downgrading of refugees in the formal and non-formal education and VET systems of the receiving European countries, which is usually the result of a wrong assessment of their qualifications and competences, as

well as the unnecessary prolongation of the time this target group spends in the education system.

Lifelong learning and life-wide learning: In turn, the advantages of making use of the resources already available, inter alia by including the qualifications and competences acquired in the countries of origin and during the flight in integration-related work, are obvious. The transnational experience of flight under quite adverse conditions can thus be viewed as a biographical resource which may manifest itself in resilience capabilities regarding all the challenges which go together with the existing conditions of a refugee in everyday life.

Moreover, the capitalization of all learning experiences made by the refugee in the *course of time* in integration work also contributes to promoting lifelong learning for this target group – despite biographical breaks and disruptions related to the flight. Focusing on the plurality of (educational) places (formal, non-formal, informal), which may serve as learning locations before and during the flight, constitutes, furthermore, a contribution to *life-wide learning*.

With this term we want to highlight the localization of education, that is to say that *place* is fundamentally constitutive for educational content and for the competences resulting from it. In this way, alongside the formal and non-formal sector, the informal sector as a *place* for education, and thus for competence acquisition, gains in significance. The combination of these three educational locations or sectors is decisive in order to get a comprehensive overview of all the resources migrants bring with them in the context of their transnational biographies. As empirical studies on the relation between the formal and informal sector with regard to the issue of transfers of competencies in migration situations have shown, the distinction between different sectors (formal, non-formal, informal) in which educational experiences prior to flight were made by the refugees and thus competencies acquired is irrelevant when it comes to use of these competencies in the migration context of Europe (cf. Seukwa 2007). This is due to the fact that many competences acquired in the informal sector in the countries of origin as well as in transit countries (linguistic and calculating abilities, farming, negotiation or selling and handicraft skills etc.) are also of use in the formal education sector in Europe. This indicates that the qualitative difference between both sectors regarding their contents is less significant than commonly assumed. The decisive difference, however, lies rather in the conditions under which experiences are made and competences are acquired. The formal education sector has a legal character and is either under direct control of the state or funded most of the time at least partly by the state when under control of

independent institutions. It is usually only to be accessed through clearly regulated admission formalities, while the educational method is strictly defined and structured.

The informal sector, in contrast, tends to develop on the margins of society in many countries, especially in those of the “South”. It comprises people of all ages and both genders that have very little share in the different “forms of capital”. In the context of these countries, the informal sector is an important place of action for the disadvantaged majority of the population, which demonstrates their ability and will to survive through transgression – despite and beyond all forms of heteronomy. Since this sector requires disobedience, violations of the law and subversive creativity as paradigms of liberation, which are constantly practiced by the people “from below”, a nuanced look at the difference between the legal and the illegal as distinguishing factor between the formal and informal sector is necessary. It is the relativity of the distinction, in combination with the similarity of the educational contents in both sectors, which make the transfer from one sector to the other easy despite the change in context.

Employment biographies and life situations – the Capital theory: VET research has shown that the vocational integration of disadvantaged adolescents and adults is most successful when their whole life situation is stabilized through appropriate educational intervention (Baur et al. 2004). While previously, educational work focused on vocational qualification and training, assuming that this would create the conditions for social integration, today it is the stability in the individual life situation that is regarded as prerequisite for successful vocational integration. Thus, if the success of vocational support programmes is to be evaluated, it is simply not enough to focus exclusively on the educational pathways and the employment biographies of the participants. The successful completion of such educational programmes, along with the possibility of entering training or work, depends on the forms of handling the difficult life situations refugees have to face. Their financial situation, their residence status and other law-related issues, the stability of their social relations, their civil competences, their housing and health conditions as well as the forms of their recreational activities are significant dimensions that have an impact on the success of an educational support programme.

“The social situation of an individual is dependent on different dimensions, which are not to be reduced to the financial aspect. Apart from the material circumstances, factors such as education, employment or unemployment, housing conditions, separation, single parenthood,

social networks etc. have an impact on the life situation. The term refers to the whole social interconnections, in which people make use of their material and immaterial possibilities. The life situation determines people's development potential and the possibility to live their life the way they chose without losing self-respect". (cf. Engels 2006, p.109 ff.).

We thus assume that there is a close – albeit not causal – relation between the life situation of an individual and his/her possibilities to ask for and to acquire *education* (cf. Voges et al. 2003). With regard to considerations made by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, we understand education as a product of individual possibilities of access to and control over different forms of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1983). According to Bourdieu, the life situation of an individual is determined by the specific quantity (volume) and configuration of the types of capital: economic capital, which can directly be converted into money; cultural capital, which manifests itself in certificates or educational degrees and may pay off in the form of a well-paid job; social capital, which is made up of different types of useful social relations and also has significant influence on the social positioning and social status of the individual. From this perspective, it can be shown that the educational and employment careers of refugees develop under quite adverse conditions, since their access to “capital” is extensively restricted. Basically no form of capital can be accessed without restriction or is available without control. Their “acquisition potential” for different types of capital, i.e. their capacity to shape their educational career and to realize their aims in life, is in fact minimal, and in many cases their specific “capital configurations” allow for nothing more than to aim at individual self-realization under highly precarious conditions for years. The legal, physical, economic and social capital available to them is insufficient to be able to act “profitably” in the fields of education, training and employment. That some individuals are able, despite the most adverse conditions, to earn educational degrees and to find employment, deserves greatest respect. That others have resigned – who would blame them for it?

Methodical Approach

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the empirical data have been analyzed in the city reports on the vocational integration of the study group in the four European cities of research (Florence, Glasgow, Hamburg, Gothenburg²).

² The Swedish partner – Göteborgsinitiativet, an NGO working in the field of social support and training for asylum seekers and refugees – has, due to internal financial problems, opted out from the project in February 2011. Thanks to the intervention from a flanking EU programme, the European Social Fund, also represented as a silent partner in the partnership, a way to finance and finalize the

The city approach: As research locations, cities and metropolitan areas in the countries involved have been chosen. The decision has been made for research-pragmatic reasons, since cities and metropolitan areas are centres of attraction for refugees and migrants, for the simple reason that the possibilities to find a job or training or to study are better there. They are also destinations for asylum seekers or newly arrived immigrants which migrate in the context of family reunion. Apart from better opportunities to find employment, the existence of networks of ethnic communities plays a significant role in the cities, since these support structures serve as bridges to integration. The same is true for family connections already present in the cities. As the influx of migrants and refugees leads to an increase in the diversity of the urban population, municipal integration policies need to respond to the demands of the different population groups, providing them with equal opportunities for integration and promoting the peaceful coexistence between the local population and the migrants. In order to do so, most cities are equipped with qualitatively and quantitatively well-established integration structures (cf. Gag/Schroeder 2011).

In these four cities, data have been collected, from the structural perspective, on the VET institutions existing in the formal and non-formal sector. Following the target group-oriented approach, data have been collected, from the perspective of the study group, on the functioning of the existing structures and their accessibility for asylum seekers and refugees as well on the recognition and usefulness of their transnational biographies as a resource for vocational integration. For that purpose, problem centred face to face interviews with six asylum seekers and refugees were conducted in each city, collecting data on their transnational biographies and the competences and qualifications they bring with them. Also, data on the way these competences are utilized or not in the VET institutions of the receiving countries were of interest, including the individual expectations regarding integration and future prospects of the people interviewed. The evaluation and analysis of the data was bundled in city reports. These are coherent and consistent analyses based on the VET structures available, the individual biographies and the concrete reception and integration situation of the asylum seekers and refugees. In the analysis and presentation of the study results, each city has its own focus – depending on the contextual background with respect to relevant legal and political conditions, the institutional context of the VET systems (regarding

Swedish reporting and participating in the project was nevertheless found. Swedish participation from that on was fully financed by the Swedish ESF Council, Management Authority for the European Social Fund in Sweden, and the budget completely separated from the budget of the LdV project.

their availability and accessibility for the asylum seekers and refugees) as well as the integration practices as applied by the institutions and refugees.

Summary of the outcomes

The city report of Florence, entitled “The paradox of being a recognized refugee in Italy: living in an open prison, Florence, Tuscany”, thus focused on a very specific problem of the city and provincial territory of Florence, whose main characteristic is the absence of far-reaching policies on the right of asylum with regard to recognition of status, reception and integration. Consequently, recognised refugees (single individuals and families) face a life of precarious social and living conditions, unemployment, lack of concrete possibilities for adult education, training or professional requalification. The most visible (and *symbolic*) characteristic of this situation are the “*Occupied Public Buildings*” (abandoned public buildings – hospitals, schools, railway stations, offices, etc.), in which many people of our target group, single individuals and families, have been living for the past 10 years.

The city report of Glasgow, entitled “A life in limbo: barriers to VET and labour market integration for asylum seekers awaiting for the granting of 'Leave to Remain'”, focuses on the plight of asylum seekers as they wait for the cogs of the decision-making process to slowly come to a conclusion. The length of this wait and policies that exclude access to vocational education and paid employment deny asylum seekers full integration into Glaswegian society, with the consequence that there may be an impact on emotional and financial well-being that exacerbate the trauma of what has happened in their lives before and the trauma of finding themselves in a new country. Through the biographies of refugees and asylum-seekers featured here, the report analyzes their personal experiences and coping strategies. The report also looks at the formal and non-formal structures that are in place to support refugees and asylum-seekers with a focus on practices that try to help in the integration into VET and the labour market as well as the challenges they face. In the report, the following question is posed: Are the principles of integration in Glasgow really different from the reality of barriers to integration faced by asylum seekers in the present political climate?

The Hamburg city report, entitled “Vocational integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Hamburg – roundabout routes from model to structure” reflects exclusion and inclusion mechanisms of formal and non-formal educational programmes in Hamburg, while focussing on the factors and concepts which improve refugee-sensitive vocational integration work in that city. It shows how useful medium and/or long-term regular financial support of model

and experimental projects in the field of vocational integration of refugees and asylum seekers is for the sustainability of innovations, i.e. their transfer from experimental projects into regular structures, thus changing progressively, in a positive sense, the political discourse as well as the administrative practices regarding the vocational integration of this disadvantaged group in Hamburg. However, these positive changes also bring with them some challenges regarding, for instance, the systematic inclusion in regular VET structures where refugees and asylum seekers have been excluded until now. In order to help the local Hamburg VET institution to tackle this inclusion and diversity management challenge successfully, a concept of refugee monitoring in educational and VET systems was developed.

The city report of Gothenburg, entitled “The reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Gothenburg – Successes and Failures in the development of a new system”, describes the new national system for examining asylum applications and goes on to analyze the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Gothenburg, the second biggest city in Sweden. The system primarily supports new arrivals in finding employment, but does not sufficiently deal with the impact of needs such as housing, family reunion, medical and psychological treatment as well as specific needs of traumatized refugees on the successful integration of this target group into the VET system and the labour market. The report shows both possibilities and difficulties within the system and closes with a number of recommendations.

Based on these particularities of the VET and labour market integration systems and practices for refugees and asylum seekers in the four cities of research, bad, promising and good practices as well as recommendations for the integration of refugees into the European education and labour market have been formulated, on a local as well as on a European level.

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