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**Good practice from Germany:**

**Network *FLUCHTort Hamburg (Hamburg as a safe haven) – Vocational integration for refugees and asylum seekers***

## **1. Context of our activities**

First of all we have to take into consideration the legal framework and the policy regarding refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany:

Germany has just under 200,000 refugees who are engaged in the asylum application process, or whose applications have been rejected.<sup>1</sup> Many of those who come to Germany are not granted asylum. About one third of applications were officially recognised by final legal decision in 2009.<sup>2</sup> Without recognition, refugees are required to leave the country again. Many of them get '*tolerated*' status (limited leave to stay, subject to review), because deportation is not possible on humanitarian grounds. But this '*Duldung*' [*toleration*] does not give them a right to residence, it is only a time-limited suspension of the deportation of a person who cannot leave the country.

Compared with other member states of the EU, Germany has for many years operated a very restrictive education, social and employment policy for refugees, and that continues to have an impact today. For many years, refugees and asylum seekers had no access to education and training or to the labour market. The focus here is on the sub-group of persons who are not officially recognised as refugees, but rather as asylum seekers, tolerated persons, and persons having a right of stay for humanitarian reasons.

The first European initiatives and funding programmes, and the German Government's new regulations on leave to stay have created a turnaround – tolerated refugees are increasingly included in integration policy programmes. Political thinking has begun to change. Some major legislative barriers have been removed with the amendment to the Immigration Act and implementation of right to stay regulations. And the shortage of skilled manpower in Germany is also an important factor. Strategies for recruiting more skilled labour give priority to programmes for activation and development of potentials already in the country.

## **2. Networks are driving forces for including refugees in education and training**

The implementation of innovative promotion instruments is generating major impulses for practice and policy. One important development had been set in motion by the European Community initiative EQUAL – for the first time in Germany, it set up a range of education and employment policy tools for school and vocational support for refugees, asylum seekers and tolerated persons (2002-2007). Important pioneering work was done in Hamburg by the initiation and installation of large networks (development partnerships) (Schroeder & Seukwa 2007). As the successor programme to GI EQUAL, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social

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<sup>1</sup> Central Register of Foreigners, 2010. They have temporary residence permits under international law, humanitarian or political reasons.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2009

Affairs set up the “ESF - Federal right-to-residence programme” in 2008. The Hamburg Senate has provided exemplary support for these activities since 2002, by contributing public funds to funding these networks and by providing constructive strategic cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

Since then, FLUCHTort Hamburg [SAFE HAVEN Hamburg] network has operated as a cooperation association with a number of organisers of practical work in further vocational training and in support to refugees, together with strategic partners from the authorities, the labour administrations, and business companies. It functions as a subsystem at the interface between formal and non-formal programmes of the regular system of vocational education, and supports vocational integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Hamburg. There is a network of refugee organisations, educational providers and school establishments on the one hand and business companies, the Jobs Agency and the public authorities on the other hand; they are successfully implementing an integrated action approach which is based on the life situation of refugees. This networking and cooperation within a system is building bridges and remove barriers by optimising transitions between counselling, vocational pre-qualification and training. This is supported by new forms of cooperation tackling obstacles with the intention of generating new stimuli for change in government and administrations and giving access to the target group, and facilitating routes to training and qualification.

### **3. VET-Approach based on the life situation of refugees**

The implementation of GI EQUAL successfully tested models, and the following network projects in Hamburg showing that placement in training and jobs is possible, and that people with unsecured rights of residence can successfully contribute their wide range of potentials to the German employment market. Asylum seekers and refugees have knowledge, skills and experience which need to be recognised and promoted as resources. The models were successful because they developed systematic concepts of vocational training based on the life situations of the participants, and stabilised the life situations of the clients by appropriate interventions. The programme outcomes disproved widespread prejudices that refugees are unsuitable for training due to lack of basic education, language problems, traumatic experience, mental instability, insufficient motivation and lack of stamina.

But the logical and necessary consequence of recognition of their suitability for training is that the existing training programmes must be opened up in a manner appropriate to the target group and suitable complementary programmes must be provided (social support, additional teaching, German as a second language), since the curricula and concepts of the vocational training system are at present exclusively designed for the German majority. The vocational education system also needs to be made more permeable for vocational integration of ‘lateral entrants’, with adaptation courses to provide bridges to the regular system, in order to take up the learning and working experience of the refugees and develop it further (Schroeder/Seukwa 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> Under the leadership of passage gGmbH, a number of network projects were implemented in Hamburg – Qualification initiative for asylum seekers and refugees (2002-2005); SAFE HAVEN Hamburg – vocational integration for refugees (2005-2007); SAFE HAVEN Hamburg Plus (2008-2010), and since 2010 SAFE HAVEN Hamburg Plus II. See [www.fluchtort-hamburg.de](http://www.fluchtort-hamburg.de)

## 4. Results

Instead of facts and figures I would like to present you something about hidden treasures and limits and opportunities in vocational integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Hamburg based on a case study which we published just now in Hamburg:

The biography of *Arash* gives a good impression of the barriers for access to education under the legislation applicable until 2005. The family had to leave Afghanistan due to the war situation there. *Arash* was “selected” by his family to migrate to the West. He left his family at the age of 14 years, and travelled to Germany alone, in the hope of finding better opportunities. The rest of the family fled to Kyrgyzstan. As an unaccompanied underage refugee, he was allocated to a youth flat on arrival in Hamburg, and was given supervision. His school career was marked by major interruptions. His school attendance had been irregular even in Afghanistan due to the war situation, and here he had to catch up with the material of three school years in a short period. In Hamburg he was allocated to the preparatory class of a grammar school (“Gymnasium”), but failed there. He then went to a comprehensive school, completing it with junior high school leaving certificate. On transition to further educational programmes, he failed due to the structural barriers of German legislation. He could not get a work permit, so had to take on occasional unskilled jobs to earn a living. Thanks to the special conditions of the Hamburg networks, he was able to work his way through qualifying programmes (modularised), because participation does not require a work permit. That enabled him to get acceptance for an internship in a building company. The company was willing to take *Arash* on as a trainee, but it took many months for him to get a work permit. In the end, it proved possible to get him a work permit thanks to an agreement between the network and the job centre, because this was an additional traineeship.<sup>4</sup>

*“The best moment of all was when I got my work permit at the beginning of the year, to work eight hours a day. That was the first time for ten years that I was allowed to do real work. I have kept that document.*

*My dream was always to become an architect. But when I got the offer to take the training course in reinforced concrete construction, I said “Yes” straight away. The fact that EQUAL secured my right to stay gave me the security that I would not be deported for at least a year. At last a year of opportunity to show what I can do. Now I have the residence permit, and I want to complete my training. I want to make progress, to develop further. That’s why I want to train as a foreman or technical building site manager. Then I can take on responsibility and make decisions myself.”*

*Arash* managed to achieve his dream via roundabout routes. After completing his education, he first worked in reinforced concrete. Then he had to change his vocational direction, for health reasons. After attending a college of construction engineering, he took up studies of construction engineering at the HafenCity University in Hamburg. The company had recognised his potential, and that opened up access for him to the real world of work, and helped greatly to stabilise his life situation. That is demonstrated by his very good results in the final exams at the Chamber of Trade for his professional qualification, earning distinctions in a number of subjects. *Arash* has now started a family and lives in his own flat. The network proved to be a reliable guide throughout his educational career, helping him to overcome the

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<sup>4</sup> The network had reached an agreement with the Hamburg Employment Agency that a work permit for a tolerated refugee/asylum seeker would be granted if the network prove that an additional training place had been created in a company (company has to prove its willingness to train one young person more than in the previous year).

barriers and gain access to the next stages. The story of *Arash* shows that he was able to increase his vocational capital thanks to his motivation and perseverance, and that enabled him to live a life where he can continue his education and training on his own initiative, heading for progress and economic security, because he gained access to the funding instruments. He also makes use of his cultural capital by supporting other disadvantaged migrants by his activity as a mentor during their school education.<sup>5</sup>

## **5. A start has been made – signs of inclusion of refugees**

Even though until the beginning of 2012 Hamburg's integration policy was still based on a concept drawn up in 2006, the "Action Concept for Integration of Immigrants", which is not explicitly aimed at refugees, it is still possible to identify some indicators at the present time (during the last years) that show a change in the course of Hamburg practice, in the actions of government and administration:

- In Hamburg, up to 500 places per annum are funded for refugees in integration courses approved by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.
- The Hamburg programmes to support disadvantaged groups of young people in their training in Hamburg have also been opened for young refugees with tolerated status.
- The Hamburg ESF programme (European Social Fund) in the target area of "Regional competitiveness and employment" also implements the network project "Opportunities for refugees", which is co-financed by funds from the Hamburg budget.

The future Action Plan of the City of Hamburg – launched in February 2012 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Integration - sets out a clear change in direction in its integration policy. It defines itself as "the Global City of Hamburg", underlining enhancement of the intercultural processes of opening up in administration, and emphasising the diversity, shared values and solidarity of its people. Participation of refugees with perspectives of right to stay and asylum-seekers is likewise defined as a cross-sectional task. This policy of the City of Hamburg is exemplary for the whole of Germany. This is an example for a successful mainstreaming process. The continuity of the programs over a long period is essential for the structural change at the political and practical level.

But: Nevertheless it is clear that the area of 'Labour market integration of refugees and participation in vocational training' is still an experimental field. In practice there are still major obstacles that obstruct or prevent participation in the employment market in Hamburg, in Germany and in the European member states.

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<sup>5</sup> Arash does part-time work alongside his studies, in the project "Young Role Models", for mentors with migration background supporting other migrants at schools, in order to ensure their success at school. See [www.verikom.de](http://www.verikom.de)

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**passage** is a non-profit organisation for employment and integration in Hamburg. The organisation is implementing measures for guidance, language and vocational training for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. For many years European projects have been carried out in the department “Migration and International Cooperation” within the thematic field of migration/flight in connection with vocational training and employment market integration.

**Maren Gag** is a coordinator in the department “Migration and International Cooperation” and she is currently (since 2001) responsible for networking projects (FLUCHTort Hamburg PLUS), which works with different sub-projects and partners dealing with counselling, education, training, and placement in companies for labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers. There are also involved institutions such as vocational schools, chambers of commerce and skilled trades, and companies. This project is linked to a thematic network on a federal level to achieve exchange of good practice and generate impetus for mainstreaming.

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