



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

Recommendations on the European level by:

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Within the European partnership project of EduAsyl, various educational and professional backgrounds of refugees and asylum seekers in four European cities have been analysed and the local contexts of the respective VET systems have been evaluated as to whether they consider the particular educational needs of refugees. Based on that, a number of hurdles and success factors could be identified, which, after careful analysis, have proven crucial to the development of refugees' educational and professional careers. These case studies comprehensively explore the difficulties refugees and asylum seekers face in European cities, while also revealing that, for the most part, the cities involved in this project hardly meet the minimum standards to ensure this group's vocational integration in the European member states. This applies not only for refugees with a precarious status who have been living in the receiving countries for a long time, but is partly also true for recognised refugees (e.g. Italy). Regarding the sometimes significant historical, economic and structural differences between the European cities examined here, a certain scepticism may be justified when it comes to the question of integration and of how to achieve full harmonisation according to 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. The contexts in the research cities vary considerably and it can be shown that the provision of long-term support programmes tailored to the specific needs of refugees and asylum seekers is of particular significance in protecting an extremely marginalised and vulnerable group of people and in developing innovative project approaches on a sustainable basis.

With reference to this context, the following conclusions can be formulated as recommendations on how to facilitate access to education and employment for refugees and asylum seekers in Europe:

1. Developing target group-specific local support programmes for refugees and asylum seekers to pilot tailor-made concepts and to institutionalise and strengthen different forms of cooperation between the actors in the labour market, the VET systems and refugee organisations.

Traditionally cities and metropolitan areas have been centres of attraction for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, as they can expect to find some members of their community there, or because of already existing family networks, or just because the possibilities to find a job or training programme or to study are better there. The cities and municipalities in the member states should recognise this reality and include this extremely marginalised migrant group in their integration policies. The reconstruction of the educational careers analysed here has shown what could also be highlighted during the research period associated with EQUAL: For refugees and asylum seekers, the success of asking for education and of getting access to it depends on whether their life situation is comprehensively considered. In order for them to successfully attend training programmes, their legal status needs to be adjusted, while also ensuring their financial security. Apart from that, comprehensive social support programmes, an improvement of the living conditions and an optimum of medical care are required (Brekke 2004, Schroeder, Seukwa 2007) (holistic approach). In fighting multiple discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers, working in networks has proven efficient, as could be shown in the network approach during EQUAL. The interaction between refugee organisations, educational bodies and school institutions on one hand, and companies, employment offices and government departments on the other hand, allows the implementation of an integrated social space approach that is tailored to the life situation of refugees. This form of networking and cooperation within one system helps to build bridges to reach the target group and to facilitate access to training and qualification for them. The diversity of actors involved here contributes to handling the complex requirements, which go hand in hand with a strategy to implement the results on a sustainable basis and thus also require training programmes for multipliers and capacity building in the civil society.

2. Developing and testing monitoring concepts that will ensure a regular education- and integration-related reporting on the life situation of refugees.

As the case studies in the four cities have clearly demonstrated, the data available on the life situation of refugees – both quantitative and qualitative – are insufficient. The objectives as set by the EU in the strategy of Europe 2020 focus on the *social inclusion* of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The introduction of monitoring systems that are compatible with the interests of the EU will help uncover discrimination, improve the structure of education and support programmes in the cities and municipalities of the member states as well as educational planning, and it will also contribute to a better understanding of how education in transnational spaces could look like for this group. This allows to analyse the efficacy of European VET policies and to adapt the systems of the VET institutions in the European member states where necessary in such a way as to address the life situation and educational needs of refugees.

3. Adjusting structural imbalances in the European member states and their labour markets by means of a “fair” harmonisation strategy in order to give refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to develop their full potential and to be able to participate in education, training and employment.

According to EU statistics, about 23 million people today are unemployed and about 113 million people are living on or below the poverty line and are at risk of social exclusion. Against the background of demographic change, however, there is a growing lack of qualified personnel to be observed for the European labour market. Many problems have become worse in the course of the financial and economic crisis¹. Regarding this development, the proposed regulation for implementing the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020, thus focuses on fighting social exclusion and poverty. Since the proposed regulation, if adopted, would mean to spend at least 20% of ESF funding on social inclusion measures, for migrants and marginalised communities, for instance, while at the same time there is still considerable room for improvement when it comes to the target group-specific development of educational systems in the member states, synergy effects could be achieved when combining the support measures in the VET systems with comprehensive programmes for fighting poverty in the regions. Especially for the economically weaker countries, this would mean that even the limited financial means available could contribute to the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The imbalances in the reception of refugees, which are the result of the closed-door policy adopted by the EU towards the influx of refugees and which are

¹ European Commission (2012): Europäischer Sozialfonds (ESF)/European Social Fund 2014-2020, proposed regulation.

to be observed in some member states due to their geographical location, however, cannot be overcome with it.

4. Explicitly including the target group of refugees and asylum seekers in European support programmes of the next ESF funding period, focusing on transversal aspects, in particular.

Regarding the development of the labour market in the European countries, a polarisation of employment with rising wages for highly qualified professionals and falling wages for unskilled workers can be noticed². At the same time, demographic change and the ageing of the population in the European member states will result in a massive lack of qualified workers. In other words, the European member states cannot afford to ignore this enormous potential in (young) asylum seekers and refugees for training and employment systems. As the case studies indicate, only by explicit support measures is it possible to keep the structures developed during the experimental project of EQUAL active (example of Hamburg). Consequently, previous experience contributes to making sure that this group is explicitly supported as a target group in the member states and regions, as it is extremely marginalised and as such tends to be ignored by traditional VET and integration policies. Accepting the living costs of refugees as part of the co-financing of ESF measures may accelerate the process, while transnational cooperation on the European level may lead to a mutual learning effect and to a qualitative improvement of common European standards and benchmarks. Regardless of what exactly future EU regulations on European programmes will look like, it is also in the responsibility of the member states to ensure this group's participation. When taking into account that the minimum standards for education and employment as laid down in the directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 have barely been met in the European member states, the development of national and/or regional programmes should also address considerations as to whether the respective measures for this target group are feasible. The example of Germany has shown that there are enough possibilities for the member states to set their own focus and that the implementation of a federal programme may yield reasonable results³.

² European Commission (ibid.)

³ Lessons learned – Cooperation between stakeholders on the European level:

SaviAV (Social inclusion and vocational integration of Asylum seekers and Victims of human trafficking) – This network consists of 11 partners (ESF managing authorities and intermediate bodies) from six member states and is coordinated by the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Its aim is to enforce the human rights of trafficked people and to contribute to a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers by identifying emerging issues and policy gaps and by influencing policy take-up and structures in this field. Advice, education and vocational training are the topics under the asylum seeker strand. This network intends to promote good practices in education and training models through lobbying, exchanges and study visits.