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STRATEGIES FOR REFUGEES

Newsletter Issue 2

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What is it like to be an Asylum seeker?

Fearsome

Terror-Stricken

Shocked

Trembling

Panic-Stricken



Worried

Anxious



In this Issue...

We bring you articles and reports from all our Project Partners around Europe.

Pictured: Preparing a meal for the refugees at the charity DASH in the UK

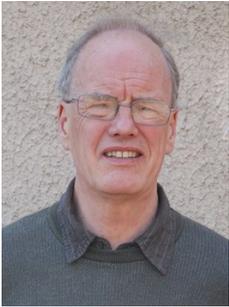
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The other side: Refugees issues can be very tough and draining on them, especially when they don't get the support they expect

By Mike Shaw, Director DASH, for KBM Consultants, UK



DASH is a charity supporting asylum-seekers in Huddersfield in the UK. In the UK, someone applying for asylum attends an interview in Croydon, London where their application will be recorded. Unless the asylum-seeker has managed to bring money with them, they will normally be given accommodation. Generally, this will be a room in a shared house for single applicants or a self-contained house for a family. Accommodation includes utilities. They also receive £37.75 per person per week. After the first interview, they will attend a longer interview. The Home Office then undertakes to make a decision on the application within 6 months. Asylum seekers are prevented from working. Accommodation and support cease once a claim is finally decided.

The following cases show what else can also happen in practice. All the characters in the examples are fictional but are based on real cases. The purpose of sharing these is to help us realise that our support is very crucial to refugees as their circumstances can vary a lot, affecting the amount of help they receive.

Mohammed from Syria

Mohammed was tortured by the Syrian regime. He and his family fled to a camp in Lebanon. Here they were selected by the United Nations as suitable for the UK's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme. Under this, Mohammed and his family were given visas to stay in the UK for five years, after which they can apply to become a British citizen. They did not have to attend any interviews once they had reached the UK. On arrival, they were provided with a rented house and were paid Universal Credit until Mohammed found a job as an engineer. They had free English classes arranged for them. Because all of the needs of Mohammed and his family were already met, he never came to DASH.

Faisal from Iraq

Faisal left Iraq when ISIS overran his village. When he reached the UK, no one told him that he could have a solicitor to help him. The Home Office did not believe his claim because he had no evidence that ISIS were anywhere near his village on the date he fled. He appealed this decision. At the appeal hearing he was unrepresented but the Home Office was represented by a solicitor. Faisal found it very difficult to answer some of the questions he was asked in court and lost his appeal. He remains in the UK but has to live with a friend and no longer receives any benefits. DASH gives Faisal £10 a week so that he can give this to his friends to help towards his keep.

Ali from Iran

Ali is gay. His case was rejected because the Home Office did not believe him. How could he prove his sexuality? One week, when he attended the Home Office he was detained and taken to an Immigration Removal Centre. He was told that he would be put on a flight to Tehran in 14 days. DASH secured a lawyer for Ali who got him released just 6 hours before he was due to fly.

Ibrahim from Libya

Ibrahim had been active in politics in Libya. He realised that he was in danger and left on a boat to Italy. From Italy, he travelled through France and eventually arrived in the UK where he claimed asylum. He came to the UK because his mother was already here. Whilst he was waiting for the Home Office to make a decision, he was arrested and told that he was being taken back to Italy. The reason was that he had been fingerprinted in Italy and that he should have claimed asylum in the first safe country he came to – Italy, despite the fact that his mother lived in Birmingham.

In 2017, 26,350 people applied for asylum in the UK and 14,767 had their applications approved but almost 35,000 people are still waiting for a decision.

Solidarity Health Centre in Thessaloniki, Greece

-By Aenao, Greece



In 2013 a group of people in Thermi, Thessaloniki (Greece) decided to construct their idea of solidarity. The lack of free health care to everyone in Greece since 2012, plus the fact that prior (2009) to austerity measures Greece was – according to OECD – ranked at the bottom of health insurance coverage, were strong motivations. This group of people believes that solidarity of citizens, autonomy and self-organization have the power to change things. ALL TOGETHER. Nobody is waiting for rescue.

The realization of the third – in Thessaloniki – Solidarity Health Center (<http://kiallithermis.gr>) is possible with the support of the Municipality of Thermi and the Committee of Thermi's Citizens. The medical Centre is provided free-of-charge by the Municipality of Thermi and the staff (doctors, nurses, psychologists, secretaries and technical staff) is all volunteers.

All the expenses of the solidarity medical Centre are covered by donations; this is the reason why this Centre is still functioning. Citizens pay for telephone bills, the municipality covers the electricity expenses and pharmacies donate drugs. Now, more than ever, its function is crucial since the need of people is dramatically increasing. Not only Greeks – where the austerity measures of the past years have increased the number of uninsured people – but also a great number of refugees who have no medical insurance are visiting the Solidarity Health Centre.

What is quite remarkable is that apart from the medical care that it provides to EVERYONE, the centre also initiates extra donations to those who are in need; gathering of first essentials in prisons, donating furniture to poor families, gathering of food and clothes for the refugees etc.

Participants of the Erasmus+ project Strate.Gees (Strategies for Refugees) had the opportunity to visit the Solidarity Health Centre during the first JSTE in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Your work is amazing! Thank you for your solidarity!





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'The fences do not contain fear'

-By Postal 3, Spain

Fear is a very powerful feeling, enough to push millions of people through migratory routes, plagued with dangers, in the hope of achieving a barely tangible goal. The refugees fled their country, knowing there would be no future for them if they stayed, they are driven by fear due to the Government not protecting them.

Asylum procedures, always loaded with bureaucratic procedures, are intended to determine whether or not the person's situation conforms to the legal definition of a refugee and only after a long period of time, between a year and a half and two, when the administration recognizes a person as a refugee, it offers international protection in substitution of the protection of their country of origin.

According to international law, being a refugee is a condition based on facts, and arises before the official and legal concession of asylum, which is the right that gives way to a new life in the host country, to a life without fear.

Fear is a heavy feeling that weighs down people's lives, that's why an asylum seeker who has left their country in search of protection, but has not yet obtained recognition as a refugee, lives in captivity, for fear of being forced to return to their country of origin, waiting while their asylum application is examined.

"Let's not pretend that what the EU and its member states are doing works. Migration is not circumstantial. Lifting fences, using tear gas and other forms of violence against migrants and asylum seekers, making arrests, preventing access to basic services such as housing, food or water, and using threatening or hate language will not prevent migrants from coming, or try to come, to Europe."

François Crépeau, UN Special Reporter on the human rights of migrants.



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‘Human Connections Are Crucial’

By MV International, Italy

MV International met Muhamed Sorah Sumbund during the preparations for focus group for an Erasmus+ project “Strategees”. Muhamed, who is originally from Gambia, started his life in Sassari nearly two years ago and he is already working as a mediator in the refugee Centre.

What does it take? “On the one hand, I was lucky”- says Muhamed. “When I arrived I met a family from Sorso, who took me in for 3 months. I could start learning Italian and make some human connections outside the regular refugee environment”. According to him, it is very important, as it gives you the feeling of reality and hope, that you can build a life in a hosting country. “The help is not money, it’s not that. We need to connect to make better our future. That is my thinking,” says Muhamed, during the interview in MV International office in Sassari. Having the assistance with documents, medical issues and other daily matters from the Centre employees is very important, however, building meaningful, long term relationships is crucial for a chance to have a stable future in a foreign country for all the newcomers.

“Europeans don’t know our culture, but also we don’t know their culture. So there should be some way to learn from each other, in order to learn about our culture, it’s better not to keep distance. We live together, we need to understand each other. And truly, a lot of European people, they are trying hard for Africa, all these things they are doing, if not for them, we would not be here today. But still, we need to learn more about each other.” Only proactive citizen involvement can instigate a profound change, and keeping the distance will never create the right environment for integration.

Another factor that played an important role in the life of Muhamed Sorah Sumbund is proactive attitude. “I got the opportunity, because I was a volunteer, I was doing it for a long time. When they opened the Centre, they invited me to become a mediator, but it’s not easy. You have to volunteer, I was doing it since Africa, and it helped me. Everything is about contacts. Volunteering is helpful. One day opportunity will reveal itself.”

Muhamed Sorah Sumbund sees NGOs and people who already are engaged with refugee community as a bridge between local societies. “You (NGOs) have more experience, you can have solutions for us and them to understand (each other)”, says he with confidence.

“Strategies for Refugees - Strategees”, is a KA2 strategic partnership funded by Erasmus+. The general

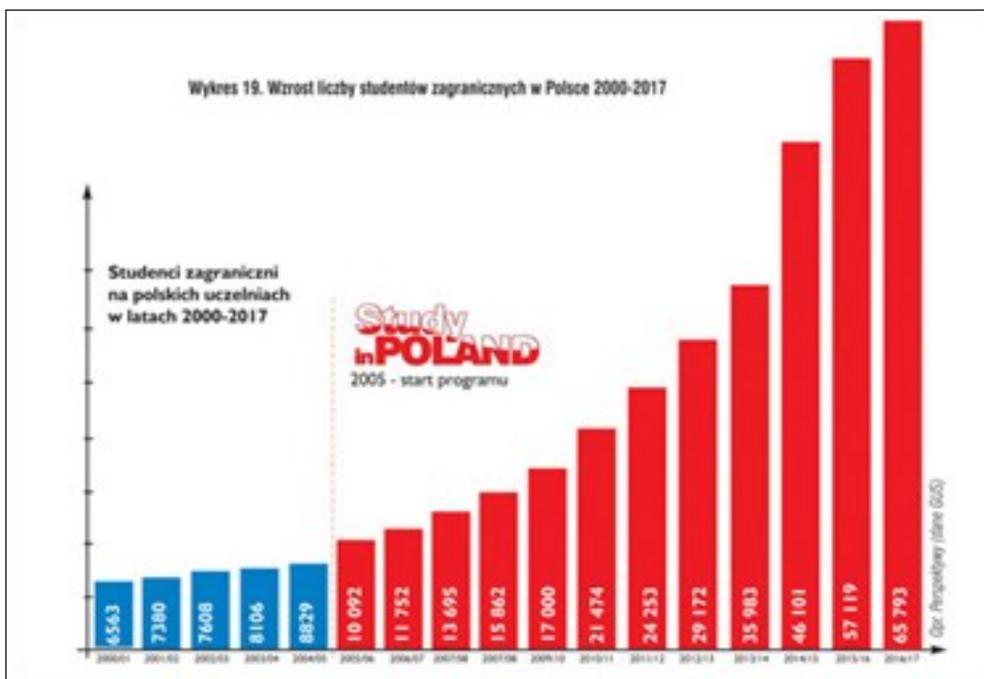
objective of the project is to develop and implement effective and concrete ways to strengthen the integration of migrants in the society and cope with a pressing need for more inclusion, according to Commissioner Crețu: “Integrating migrants is not only our duty of solidarity as European citizens, it is also a great opportunity to make our society more inclusive and cohesive as a whole, enriched by diversity. ...we need to make sure that EU citizens hear it.” (Statement 7th February 2017).



Pictured: Muhamed Sorah Sumbund (second from the right) in MV International office

Recently the number of foreign students in Poland the number has been rising sharply. In 2017 there were 65,793 foreign students from 166 countries studying in Poland and it is 15% more than in 2016 and in this year numbers are still growing.

Students from Ukraine and Belarus are the dominant group at Polish universities (over 60% of all international students). There is also a huge increase in students from India, who currently are the third largest group of international students studying in Poland. A large group of students come to Poland also from Norway, Spain, Turkey, Czech Republic and Russia. The number of students from Asia also increased, for example from Nepal, Saudi Arabia or Taiwan.



The reason why increase in the number of foreign students in Poland is so unprecedented, is connected with large influx of students from Ukraine. Such huge interest of young Ukrainians to studies in Poland is mostly connected with complicated political and economic situation of this country.

However this strong influx of Ukrainian citizens may cause conflicts in the future at Polish Universities. According to Bianka Siwinska, PhD, the author of the report "Foreign students in Poland 2015": "In connection with the constant, dynamic increase in the number of Ukrainians, Polish universities are becoming more and more Ukrainian. Regarding this, in the last year, xenophobic incidents appeared in several academic centers. Both the academic community as well as public opinion, local government authorities and persons responsible for public policy of the state in higher education should pay special attention to these moods and propose solutions supporting the proper integration of students from Ukraine into the life of the university and the local community".

Of course, the increasing number of international students has a lot of advantages for Polish higher education. Firstly, because of intercultural groups of students, study programs had to modify and adapted to needs of students with different cultural background. Also, it promotes cultural diversity among academic society. International are also very active, they participate in student associations and other organizations like NGO where they work as a volunteer to promote tolerance.

Multiple Support Centres for Refugees in Turkey



By Kirsehir Valiligi, Turkey

The Community Center Model, which SGDD has been implementing since 2013 to provide more comprehensive services to refugees and asylum seekers, has been providing basic services for language courses, social activities, psycho-social activities, basics for social workers and refugees, social and legal counseling, health counseling and psycho-social support access to more than one service from a single point by participating in courses aimed at improving living skills, activities aimed at allocating peaceful relations between local people and refugees.

English, Turkish and Arabic language courses attended by asylum seekers from all ages, computer and arts and vocational training and outdoor activities for children are organized through these centers. The main purpose of the owner of vulnerable and special needs centers for refugees and asylum seekers facilitates access to protection mechanisms in Turkey, the refugees' self-sufficiency, language in front of social integration, help in education and overcoming barriers to participation in working life. The centers also contribute to the development of inter-communal understanding and relationships through activities that bring together local people and refugees.

In order to meet the basic needs of vulnerable people, non-food aid materials (NFI) and shopping cards for various expenditures are also handed out to the beneficiary via multi-faceted support centers. The centers operate with social workers, field workers, mobile field teams, psychologists, health educators, disability specialists, compliance specialists, volunteers, interpreters, support teams and administrative staff. Multipurpose Support Centers operate in Istanbul, Sakarya and İzmir with UNHCR and PRM support and in Ankara with GIZ support. Our two centers in Gaziantep and Adana are supported by the European Union fund and UNHCR under the IPA40 project.

In 2016, SGDD started to reach non-Syrian asylum seekers and refugees with limited access to counseling services and activities provided by the centers with support from the European Union through the Stabilization and Peace Contribution Tool and more 9-way support centers. Multipurpose Support Centers, which started operations in Çankırı, Çorum, Denizli, Eskişehir, Konya, Manisa, Mardin, Nevşehir, Kırşehir and Samsun, serve all refugee groups and local people, especially non-Syrian refugees and refugees.

A SECURE ATMOSPHERE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

The United Nations Population Fund provides UNFPA support and counseling for cases of sexual and social violence based on health counseling, psycho-social counseling for women and girls, health instructors, psychologists and social workers, as well as areas established to provide training in reproductive and women's health aiming to be a follow-up center. Areas are located in three different locations in Istanbul, SGDD's Multipurpose Support Center in Fatih, Unkapanı's Child and Family Support Center and Migrant Health Center in Tarlabası, Buca and Konak in Izmir and Immigrant Health Centers in Antakya. Centers are working in business alliance with Provincial Public Health Directorates.



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