



Reception & Integration of the Asylum Seekers, Refugees.

*A EQUAL Transnational Conference in
Kista Sweden on 12–13 Feb 2003.*

A two day EQUAL transnational conference organised by the Equal project Kista Open Academy (KOA) and Open Global Learning that brought together the UK and Swedish Equal Development Partnerships. The conference enabled the transnational partnerships to exchange information about the existing situation of the Asylum seekers/Refugees in the respective countries. The Workshops highlighted the issues of Learning environments , basic skills , flexible advice methods, evaluation and testing of online curriculum . Workshops were combined with the study visits and panel discussions.

THE EQUAL PROJECT “Open Global Learning “

The EQUAL project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) is a European initiative that aims to test new ways to combat discrimination in the labour market. The conference participation included the EQUAL transnational and associate partners in Development Partnerships (DPs).

TRANSNATIONALITY

Transnationality is a guiding principle of the EQUAL programme. At project level, this means co-operation between partners in Member States. At a policy level the initiative fosters transnational sharing of diverse ideas and perspectives across national boundaries. This promotes further innovation that produces more effective outcomes and increases impact. The results can be used in different countries.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

The purpose of the conference was to find methods, ways to combat discrimination, segregation and unemployment for the Asylum seekers /Refugees and new Immigrants in our respective countries. The conference aims to develop effective methods, work plan and products to meet the burning needs of the disadvantaged people in our respective countries.

DAY 1, Wednesday 12 Feb 2003

ASSET-UK / KOA Transnational management meetings

12 February –14th February 2003 in Kista

Representing KOA: Ebba Traskelin, Rashid Chowdhury

Representing ASSET UK: Azar Sheibani, David Hudson (secretary)

Main focus of the meetings was to plan for next 2 days conference and then to review future work plan.

Programme

Changes to the programme: Danish Red Cross were unable to attend; DH agreed to make a brief presentation on Day 1 about ASSET UK's TCA with Want2Work

Workshops: UK partners to participate evenly in all 4 workshops. KOA to lead on two as agreed. UK partners agreed to write up workshops and present feed back at plenaries. Higher Education workshop to include an element on "validation/accreditation" to link in with Day 2 visit.

Workplan

Need to begin to identify partners for the five "themes" included in the TCA; UK partners need to stress that the partnership is aiming to look at "online" working in the context of networking at university level; flexible information delivery methods on line; basic skills on line; evaluation /testing of curriculum materials; on line delivery of language courses.

Evaluation

Suggested we should look at a triangular peer evaluation involving Danish Red Cross if they agree; DH to approach them to see if interested. [OK in principle]

Website

KOA site being developed for internal and external use by public and between partners

Agreed:

Need to further develop TCA work plan and evaluation plan to comply with UK need to agree a change in the TCA via ETCIM [required by UK's support unit, even if this is not required by the Swedish Unit]. KOA to remain ETCIM secretariat for this partnership.

Suggested dates for KOA partners to visit UK partners individually; 28-29 April 2003 (to propose and confirm)

Agreed KOA wish to participate in Birmingham event June 16-17. Will aim to fit this in with their other partnership in UK ["Learning Kitchen"/ Sandwell & Dudley]; also with Refugee Week activities in West Midlands over weekend of 14-15

14 Feb after the conference

To note that this conference is one outcome of the TCA agreement

Any notes from the conference to be sent to Rashid as soon as possible

DH to confirm contact with Danish Red Cross re evaluation

DH for provide details of the framework for the Birmingham June meeting and Refugee Week

KOA to develop work plan links & identify levels of interest with individual KOA partners

Summary of workshop plans (fuller notes to be prepared and sent to Rashid a soon as possible)

- "University networks" group to write up the two systems (SE and UK) for identifying flexible methods of entry to university, including NARIC and VHS
- "Flexible information" NOT advice; (Advice needs personal interaction). Both partners to report on progress of work online re information and methodologies.
- Basic Skills; BSA & KOA to report by 15 March
- Testing /evaluation: [Sheffield College and Interverbium]
- Language delivery online [Sheffield College and Interverbium]
to develop structures for a modular course looking at methodologies as well as content

DAY 2, Thursday 13 February 2003

Delegates were welcomed by Co-ordinator Rashid Chowdhury. Carin Flemström from Kista Borough and Björn Jakobson from Integration Administration described briefly the importance of transnational co-operation and highlighted the issues concerning the asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden. They also appreciated the EQUAL initiative to combat the discrimination in the labour market within the European member states.

1. Short reports from the projects.

Lynda Lawrence from the British Refugee Council presented shortly the aim & objectives of the Asset UK project (see annex 2).

Presentation of the partnership and the aims.

- Pilot new ways of delivering ESOL and Basic Skills
- Train teachers including those working for RCO's

- Provide online orientation packs
- Set up network
- Undertake baseline skills and qualification audit
- Supporting advice giving organisations
- Provide opportunities for volunteering and labour market orientation
- Work with employers

Challenges

- Media coverage and public opinion
- Asylum seekers and right to work
- Empowerment
- Mainstreaming and funding
- Partnership working

Opportunities

- Test new initiatives
- Inform policy
- Improve services for asylum seekers
- Learn from Europe
- Increase awareness

David Hudson, BRC presented shortly the Danish Red Cross project ‘Want2 work’.

David mentioned that Danish Red Cross working directly with Asylum seekers - But in Sweden Migration Board is responsible for Asylum seekers. Danish Red Cross working with the following issues:

- Auditing basic skills
- Language training
- Guidance and advice to asylum seekers
- How to work with volunteers
- Accommodation for refugees

Rashid Chowdhury, KOA

Rashid presented the Kista Open Academy project. He mentioned that KOA addresses “disadvantaged” people. He mentioned that about 80 % people living in the Kista Borough has immigrant background. He mentioned briefly the open university concept and how it relates to Kista Open Academy’s aims and objectives.

Opportunities:

- KOA is open to all people – without prerequisites
- Study where you live
- Use all the available technology
- Freedom of choice
- Realisation of the Open University
- Life long learning

- Collaboration between the popular adult education and higher education

Rashid concluded by saying ‘our journey has just started – let us overcome all barriers together’.

2. Ulla Bloom Ivarsson, Integrationsverket (Integration Board)

Ulla Bloom from the Integration Board mentioned how the Integration Board works with the Refugees and the new immigrants. She added that Integration Board is not responsible for Asylum seekers in Sweden. For further details information etc she referred to the web –site (www.integrationsverket.se).

3. Anneli Westerling, Migrationsverket (Migration Board)

Migration Board is responsible authority for the for the Asylum seekers in Sweden. They are working in 5 regions. Anneli mentioned the followings:

Asylum seekers and refugees

The Migration Board works with asylum seekers and refugees in many different respects.

- consider applications from asylum seekers who have made their own way to Sweden.
- run reception centres where asylum seekers can live while awaiting a decision on their case.
- run custodial centres where people who have been taken into custody are kept behind locked doors. Only in special cases may someone be kept in custody.

The Migration Board also has other tasks:

- We assist people wishing to return to their country of origin/domicile. Those whose applications have been turned down are required to leave Sweden. The Migration Board can assist in arranging the journey home.
- We select and resettle quota refugees in Sweden. Quota refugees are people who need a new country of domicile and are therefore brought over here, often directly from a refugee camp. Read more on

Asylum seekers arriving in Sweden contact the Migration Board. As soon as possible after asylum seekers submit their applications, we examine whether their reasons for applying are adequate. An applicant sometimes meets the case officer several times before Migration Board staff are in a position to decide whether the person’s grounds for seeking asylum are strong enough to warrant him or her being allowed to stay in Sweden.

If we judge that the asylum seeker’s application may be turned down, we ensure that he or she is provided with legal assistance in the form of a public counsel. Such counsels are paid by the Migration Board to help asylum seekers present their grounds for asylum.

Asylum seekers requiring it are also provided with an interpreter in their dealings with the authorities.

How long does it take to reach a decision?

The length of time it takes to reach a decision depends on such factors as the number of asylum seekers who have arrived in recent months and how complicated their cases are.

The Migration Board examines each case individually

If the applicant does not have strong enough grounds for asylum, the application is turned down and the person concerned refused entry. The applicant can then either accept the decision and return home or appeal to the Aliens Appeals Board (Utlänningsnämnden). The great majority of those who are refused asylum lodge appeals. This means a new period of waiting. Many asylum seekers have to wait a year or two for their cases to be settled once and for all.

If the Aliens Appeals Board also decides that the person's grounds for asylum are inadequate, the appeal is turned down. The applicant is then supposed to leave Sweden voluntarily. The Migration Board can provide certain kinds of assistance, such as arranging and paying for the journey home. If someone fails to return home of their own accord, the police are called in to ensure that they leave Sweden.

Those whose applications for asylum are granted, either by the Migration Board or by the Aliens Appeals Board, are normally given a permanent residence permit (PUT). This means that you are entitled to settle in Sweden for good.

Pending a decision

People who have applied for asylum in Sweden and are awaiting a decision can choose whether they wish to live with friends or relatives or at one of the Migration Board's reception centres. Over half choose to arrange their own accommodation.

Most reception centres consist of ordinary flats in which asylum seekers cater for themselves. Single asylum seekers have to share a room. A family may be provided with a room of their own but in that case are expected to share the flat with others.

During the wait, all asylum seekers (including those who have arranged their own accommodation) are required to take part in some form of organized activity. Such activities may include learning Swedish or English, using computers, sewing, carpentry, practical training or helping fellow-countrymen to settle in.

An asylum seeker is allowed to hold an ordinary job if the Migration Board's handling time is expected to be longer than four months.

Those with money of their own have to pay for their upkeep. But anyone without funds can receive benefit in the form of a daily allowance.

Medical care for asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are entitled to emergency medical and dental care. They pay SEK 50 of the treatment fee themselves and SEK 40 for a medical transportation. Asylum seekers are also required to pay SEK 50 for medicine on prescription.

If you have paid more than 400 kronor for doctor's appointments, medical transportation and prescription drugs within six months, you can apply for a special allowance. The Migration Board can compensate you for costs over 400 kronor.

Asylum-seeking children have the same access to medical and dental care as children resident in Sweden.

Benefit

Asylum seekers can get help with the following:

- Health checks, emergency medical and dental care. Asylum seekers pay SEK 50 of the patient's fee out of their own pockets and SEK 50 for medicine on prescription. For a medical transportation they pay a maximum of SEK 40.
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Asylum seekers who fail to turn up for interviews or who otherwise impede investigation of their cases, or who fail to take part in the activities organized for them, risk having their daily allowances reduced.

With a residence permit

Asylum seekers granted residence permits are provided with housing by a local authority. As soon as the home becomes available, the daily allowance is discontinued and the local authority takes over the responsibility.

Local authorities are required to draw up an introduction plan for each of these newcomers. To offset the costs, the local authority receives a government grant for each person it takes in.

4. David Hudson , European Integration Project Manager, British Refugee Council.

David mentioned the situation of the Asylum seekers in UK is very much similar to Sweden. He added that Asylum issues is a big political agenda in UK. This issue is now getting attention in all European member states. He describes that Swedish model is much more structured in comparison to UK model. In UK there are no any national Integration program for the refugee concerned. He referred to Immigration Asylum ACT of 1999 & 2002.

The followings are the most basic problem in UK.

- Asylum policy facing collapse
- Refugees are assumed as terrorist
- Asylum seekers flooding in
- Debate on asylum seekers issue in Britain is a soft touch?
- Long waiting period (11-13 months)
- Less priority to solve the problems of asylum seekers.

5. Eva Loftsson, European Social Fund (ESF)

Eva Loftsson from ESF describes the aims & objectives of EQUAL project. She emphasised more on transnational exchange of ideas and views within the partnership. She added that national thematic group (NTG) will be working in the national level and European Thematic group (ETG) will be working on the European level. This type of thematic work will facilitate & create an unique opportunity to disseminate the best practices with the European countries.

6. Presentations from Immigrant organisations.

The Somalian Group, Leila Hassan

Leila Hassan mentioned about her struggle for existence in Sweden and how she overcome the barriers existing in the society. Today she is quite satisfied with her profession – working as a pharmacist. She decided to be a part of the solution instead of a problem.

Kurdish National Association

Key Izol from Kurdish National Association mentioned the followings:

- there are 8000 members in Sweden. Members are Kurdish people originally came from Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq. About 600000 Kurdish people living in different European countries.
- Kurdish language is not allowed for studies in those countries. He hopes through KOA network - it will be possible to start up courses in Kurdish language.

Iranian Federation in Stockholm County council

Saied Tagavi from Iranian Federation mentioned the followings:

Main issues are

- Respect for human rights
- Empowerment and **integration**
- Build up strong Iranian organisation to combat discrimination
- 40 000 Iranian living in Sweden
- 80 local organisations are member of the Federation.
- Most of Iranians immigrants are highly qualified
- Federation working very closely with Adult education authority & Stockholm University.

A UK perspective

Azar Shibani, London Metropolitan University, RAGU

Azar Shibani mentioned briefly how the Refugee organisations working in UK.

- Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) are working with Asylum seekers issues. But in Sweden Government institutions are responsible for Asylum seekers issues.
- No of Refugee Community Organisations in London (RCO) is 284 & in UK 397.
- Refugee assisting organisation in London 127 & in UK 303.
- Volunteer organisations for asylum seekers in London 991 in UK 1 165.

RCO provides advice and practical support as

- Skills development
- Community development
- Advocacy & interpreting
- Integration
- Basic needs as food , security, housing etc

For more details see Annex 6

Thursday, 13th February

WORKSHOPS & STUDY VISIT:

Workshops focusing on work under the EQUAL programme relation to learning & information including on-line delivery. Four workshops have been arranged.

Workshop 1: University collaboration & learning environment, transnational networking Workshop was arranged at IT –University & Interverbium.

Discussions points:

- Higher education by distance
- Evaluation and testing of curriculum materials at the university
- Transnational university networks and learning centres
- Transnational study environment & collaboration for asylum seekers and early immigrants.
- Language support for immigrants students at the university

Workshop 2: Basic skills for asylum seekers and refugees. Workshop was arranged at Västertorp's Adult Education centre.

Discussion points:

- The introduction program for employment
- Metropolitan Policy Initiative
- Adult Education for Refugees & new immigrants

Workshop 3.

Flexible advice methods and demand driven learning approach.
Workshop was arranged at Sollentuna & Järfälla municipality.

Discussions points.

- How does a Municipality work with the refugees and new immigrants? Learning structure, economic system, guidance & counselling
- Flexible methods & new structure for adult education in Sollentuna municipality
- Guidance & counselling

Workshop 4: Evaluation & testing of online curriculum materials & Validation.
Workshop was arranged at Botkyrka Municipality.

Discussions points:

- How to validate informal & formal knowledge.
- What are the barriers
- To learn about validation project * CERK *